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Purity and Libertarian Politics

by Murray N.
Rothbard

When I was active in the Libertarian Party, I was a notorious advocate of pure and consistent principles and candidates, and I was the scourge of all deviationists. And yet, now that I am moving toward the Republican Party, I seem not to be mentioning, much less insisting upon, pure libertarian candidates. Isn't that a contradiction, or have I "mellowed" with maturity?

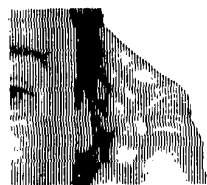
The answer: of course, I haven't mellowed. The very thought is an insult. Neither is it a contradiction, if one thinks for a moment about the purpose of political action. The main point of having a Libertarian Party was to promote libertarian ideas in the political sphere. Purity and consistency were extremely important, because if you're flying the libertarian flag, and begin to abandon or waffle on principle, you are counter-productive, and you viciously undercut libertarian doctrine, the very point of having a Libertarian Party in the first place. After all, what's the point of having a crazy third party, if you're simply going to offer modified Republican or Democratic or conservative or whatever doctrine?

As I hope to make clear in my series of "Why Paleo?" articles, the Libertarian Party did fill an historic function: spreading the name and the concept of

libertarianism throughout the media and society, so that everyone now knows what the doctrine is all about. That task has now been accomplished, and indeed has been fulfilled ever since the 1980 campaign, and the Libertarian Party, now dying, should have the satisfaction of knowing that it has already played its appointed role on the historical scene. Now that the LP has accomplished this task, and conditions have drastically changed with the end of the Cold War, the Libertarian Party only serves the purpose of being a social club for misfits and bunco artists. It is high time, to paraphrase the immortal advice of Senator Aiken on the Vietnam War, to declare victory and get the Hell out. It is

time to move on and out of the Libertarian Party: in the current cliché, "to put it all behind us."

But if we move on to the Republican Party, we have to understand that major party politics is different: it is and always has been coalition politics. To expect a Republican nominee to be a 100% libertarian, or to denounce anyone who isn't, is a species of imbecility. Moreover, since the Republican Party does not call itself "libertarian," we have no moral obligation to serve as libertarian purity testers. In coalition (Cont. page 2, col. 3)



THE EAR

By Sarah Barton

A Libertarian Party has been formed in the U.S.S.R. Great, you say? Wait till you hear their platform: nothing about privatization, property rights, or free markets. There are only two planks: legalized prostitution and free medical care for prostitutes (presumably at taxpayer expense). The inaugural gathering was punctuated by

condoms thrown into the crowd.

Tell me: Is there some crazy wilding chromosome in the make-up of every Libertarian, no matter what country or culture?

For years, billionaire Charles Koch—owner of the Cato Institute—had tried to defenestrate Bob Love. Charles resented his old mentor in libertarianism for never selling out, and could not stomach the fact that Bob earned his riches instead of inheriting them like Charles.

In particular, Charles (Cont. next page, col. 1)

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(THE EAR cont. from P.1)

wanted Bob canned as board chairman of a private school in Wichita, Kansas, that Bob had founded and which Charles's children attended. Bob refused to budge, however, leading—say insiders—to some of Charles' famous temper tantrums. Then Charles hit on a solution: offering the school \$5 million if Bob left, which he did.

Soon the cloven hoof began to show through the handmade shoe: Charles wanted the school dechristianized. His first step was firing the long-time headmaster because he was—like Bob—a Christian. The replacement was a Christaphobe socialist. But his economics didn't matter to Charles, so long as he was anti-God.

Vice-Koch Ed Crane pulled such a tantrum in the latest *Liberty*, tossing away his carefully crafted image as think-tank statesman and attacking everyone who's crossed him in the last 15 years. He's especially incensed at the two Rs because they're "very intolerant" of "sexual diversity." Hmmm. Ear, which thought Ed had finally settled down, wonders what the Cato Institute's donors would think about that.

Charles Koch's plush new \$30 million headquarters building in Wichita is financed with Kansas State revenue bonds.

Ear can see the bumper sticker now: *Russell Means Love*. Indian hysteric Russell may have lost the '88 LP presidential race, but his former manager (Honey Lanham) and chairman (Larry Dodge) are getting married. Russell, who will *not* be giving the

bride away, was last seen holding hands (literally) with Jesse Jackson on TV.

Ear hears from a Texas LP'er: "The all-too-accurate perception that the Libertarian Party is composed largely of leftover hippies, fruitcakes, and whores is a tremendous obstacle to the recruitment of decent Americans. The Ear has it right! Most of the groups targeted by the LP for outreach make me damned uncomfortable: they're all lunatic-fringe types whose bubbles are off plumb."

At a NatCom meeting, Bill Redpath—subsequently appointed ballot access chairman—said "we must avoid another un-auditable mess" with ballot access. Cliff Theis then noted that the "records have been better recently because there have been fewer transactions." Yes, it's easy to keep wonderful records if there are no transactions. In 1992, the LP will be on the fewest ballots since 1976. What a great way for the party to solve its eternal auditing and accounting problems!

Steve Givot, later fired as head of ballot access, complained that for more than a year, he'd gotten no financial records from LP headquarters, which he called as "inefficient as the Kremlin." Cliff Theis angrily denounced him for "calling [our employees] Communists." Well, you see, Cliff, Steve did not actually call Nick Dunbar & Co. "Communists." He was saying they're as inefficient as the Soviet bureaucracy. One feels embarrassed at having to point out these matters, but in the LP, every point has got to be s-p-e-l-l-e-d o-u-t. ●

(PURITY... cont. from P.1)

politics, you take the best candidate you can get and, in particular, you look for agreement on those issues or sets of issues which you hold to be most important.

But that means that libertarians, as Republicans, have to exercise judgment—a rare quality indeed in our movement. Which issues, both in the long run and in this particular time and place, are most important? In such an exercise of judgment, purity of doctrine doesn't help. Assessment of, and interest in, the real world now takes high place: and unfortunately these qualities are not exactly the hallmark of libertarians, who tend to be strong in pure theory but weak in finding their way across the street.

For me, political priorities have always been clear: first and foremost, opposition to an interventionist, pro-war U.S. foreign policy; and second, devotion to the free market and private property, and opposition to statism. At the present time, it is clear to me that, apart from foreign intervention and globaloney, the main danger both to liberty and free markets comes from the "social tyranny" that has been able to seize the high moral ground almost without opposition in the past decade: the ideological constellation of environmentalism, Left Puritanism, and Accredited Victimology.

A look then at who our natural allies are, politically and intellectually, in the coming epoch. It should be crystal-clear that they are the "paleo-conservatives" or the Republican right, many of whom have rediscovered and embraced their Old Right roots, in an "isolationist" foreign policy that

is more relevant today than it has been in half a century. The paleo-cons, of course, have always been sound on the social tyranny that is looming as an ever-greater threat to our liberties.

But inevitably, the increasing number of Libertarians who are becoming Republicans—in such organizations as the Libertarian Republican Organizing Committee—have not yet made up their mind which Republicans to ally themselves with. In the current realities, there are two choices: the “moderate,” or what used to be called “the Rockefeller” Republicans; and the right-wing paleos. Generally, the “moderates” will line up as: pro-war, pro-statist, pro-high taxes, pro-New World Order, pro-environmentalist, pro-Accredited Victimology, and pro-abortion rights.

The paleo-right will be anti-war, and anti-statist, anti-high tax, anti-New World Order, anti-environmentalist, anti-Accredited Victimology, and anti-abortion. (On the drug war, the outcome will be mixed, since the originally pro-drug war paleos have reached the point where their opposition to State tyranny is greater than their hostility to drugs, a hostility which I, for one, share.)

Scanning this list, the choice should be easy. Those Libertarians whose devotion to libertarianism was always, and above all

cultural, those who care mainly about sex and drugs, those whose opposition to the State is only a minor aspect of their adolescent rebellion against the family, society, and religion—these Libertarians will chose the Rockefeller “moderates.” The two groups richly deserve each other. Paleo-

libertarians will, of course, embrace their paleo-rightist cousins. Thus, in the course of working with different groups of Republicans, the old Libertarian movement will split along its natural fault line: and that’s all to the good.

A final consol-ing note to those paleo-libertarians who, like myself, favor abortion rights: All paleo-cons are strongly opposed to abortion on moral grounds. But most of them,

even those who consider abortion murder, do not believe in outlawing abortion and treating it in the same way as the police would treat murder-murder. Largely because they don’t want the State apparatus spying upon, and dictating to, the entire female population of child-bearing age. (Which is what a consistent anti-abortion program would amount to.) With a little goodwill on both sides, I see no reason why all groups of paleos cannot collaborate, even on this issue. ●

I Hate Max Lerner

by M.N.R.

All my life, it seems, I have hated the guts of Max Lerner. Now, make no mistake: there is nothing personal in this rancor. I have never met, nor have I ever had any personal dealings with, Max. No, my absolute loathing for Max Lerner is disinterested, cosmic in its grandeur. It’s just that ever since I was a toddler, this ugly homunculus, this pre-tentious jackass, has been *there*, towering over the American ideological scene. In the fifty-five years that I have been aware of Max’s presence, in all of his many permutations and combinations and seeming twists and turns, he has taken the totally repellent position at every step of the way. Thus:

I hated Max Lerner when he was a brilliant young editor of the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, spreading his Marxo-Veblenian poison for the decades that that publication was highly influential in American intellectual life;

I hated Max Lerner when (in 1937) he wrote an introduction to the Modern Library edition of the *Wealth of Nations*, in which he dismissed Adam Smith, in Marxo-Freudo lingo, as “an unconscious mercenary in the service of the rising capitalist class.”

I hated Max Lerner when he was a Stalinist apologist before, during, and after World War II. I hated his pompous, sing-song Stalinoid delivery when he was a radio commentator in New York just after the war.

I hated Max Lerner when,

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