

THE LIBERTARIAN PARTY OPTION

Whither or wither the "Party of Principle?"

Well, the Ron Paul phenomenon has faded from the national media. We face the prospect of choosing between a neocon man of (perpetual) war, John McCain, or an activist-government liberal for peace and some semblance of constitutional liberty, Barack Obama. [It's still conceivable Hillary will get the Dem nod; in that case we will face a choice between empire supreme and empire lite... with the lite version showing little concern for constitutional liberty.]

Most of the arguments around the dinner table will proceed as if the choice between Democrat and Republican exhausts the available options. Of course, readers of this column—as politically noncommatose Americans everywhere—know the Libertarian Party (LP) has been around and running presidential candidates every year since 1972... and this year will be no different. The LP will hold its national nominating convention in Denver, May 22-26, and the candidates for the presidential nomination are uniformly... well, let me get back to that.

Who is the Libertarian Party?

Last week, former Dem presidential candidate and fiery antiwar/anti-drugwar/anti-corporatist, codgerly US senator from Alaska, Mike Gravel, announced he was joining the LP. Gravel had this to say:

"I'm joining the Libertarian Party because it is a party that combines a commitment to freedom and peace that can't be found in the two major parties that control the government and politics of America. My libertarian views, as well as my strong stance against war, the military industrial complex and American imperialism, seem not to be tolerated by Democratic Party elites who are out of touch with the average American..."

In that news release, it's significant to note that another former federal legislator who has joined the LP, Bob Barr of Georgia (class of 2006), is from the right side of the aisle:

"Just as Senator Gravel believes Democrats have lost touch with the American public, I too concluded Republicans had lost their core principles, and [I] could no longer associate myself with the GOP."

[So someone like Gravel is able to channel his proliberty, propeace convictions into a political milieu that discourages activist government in social programs—i.e. Gravel probably concedes that government should not ideally be in the retirement (Social Security) or healthcare (Medicare) business. And someone like Barr will back off laws against victimless crimes and eschew Christianity qua theocracy.]

There is a rumor afoot that Gravel may run for president as the LP candidate. And we all—okay, maybe 10% of Americans—know that Ron Paul himself was a Republican Congressman who sought and won the Libertarian nomination for president in 1988. These higher-level legislators switching to the LP is evidence that those who founded and maintain the party were/are on to something—there's a true virtue in being principled and literally politically correct. And inquiring minds might want to know more about the party foundation work.

So who were the founders and what did they think? Technically, the national LP was founded in 1971, in Colorado Springs, by a handful of individuals in the living room of a man named David Nolan—who also created the so-called Nolan Chart, an improved political "spectrological" method. Soon thereafter several Libertarian state parties were begun. [Yer humble Web columnist was instrumental in the launch of the Michigan group (and held positions of responsibility on several occasions, running for Congress as recently as 1994).]

I feel I can give a reasonable description of how most of us early LP adopters, movers, and shakers viewed the world back then in our early 20s: basically, we were young Goldwater conservatives who had read Ayn Rand and fallen in love with rational egoism, individualism, and the Inalienable Rights of Man—or in Randian circles, laissez-faire capitalism. Ironically, by virtue of our decision to take liberty to the streets (at least in the sense of becoming tainted with third-party politics) Team Rand viciously denounced and expunged us: "The Libertarian Party is evil because it may cause Richard Nixon to lose to George McGovern."

Then Thru the Years

Obviously, I've given the shorthand view of the origins of the party. In general, anyone who believed in the nonaggression principle could find a home in and around the LP—whether opponents of the drug war, draft resisters, wage and price control victims, or income tax defilers... even religious people who disdained the immorality of "atheistic" socialism. Different lifestyles were okay with most of us, but originally there was an unfortunate tendency to give corporatism and the warfare state a pass so long as we presented a united front against the welfare state.

Through the 1970s into the early 1980s, Koch family money and personnel (led by Ed Crane) figured prominently in the leadership/ direction of the party. As a consequence the party "turned left," at least in terms of being against American imperialism and emphasizing a "strict respect for personal liberties." The high point for the LP—in terms of cultural recognition—was the campaign of Ed Clark for president in 1980, which netted Ed nearly a million votes.

And I hate to be the one to say it, but, folks, that was about all she wrote for the Libertarian Party insofar as presidential, national legislative, and state executive/legislative campaigns go—at least for the previous 28 years. The Koch money and organization left the party following a 1983 nominating convention in New York City where the "Crane Machine's" candidate lost. [I attended that convention as chair of the LP of Michigan, and have characterized that sad day as the heart people kicking out the head people, i.e. a suicidal decapitation of sorts where products of mind (ideas)—not to mention a hyperefficient reason-dominated organization—were the main thing we had going for us.]

Again, if all we focus on is central-state official success—going up against governors, state legislators, senators, Congresspeople, presidentialists —no amount of cherry picking of the election data argues for staying the course. The LP at that level has failed time and again, over and over, with percentages showing no trend upward. FOR 28 YEARS! Something tells me that dog ain't gonna hunt, Pollyanna is beating a dead horse, and that it's high time to knock over our king on the grand chessboard of the central-state political arena.

Maybe that means "run them without expectation," so as to derive the maximum satisfaction from the libertarian enterprise—sort of a Robert Ringeresque "maintaining a positive mental attitude by assumption of a negative result." But let me suggest it's time to at least consider seeking our satisfaction in actual success. If we can't have actual success it hardly seems American to keep plugging away... unless we want to see the party fade into obscurity, on a continuing basis, like the Socialists. The question becomes, how do we define success and wherein lies it?

A Success-Oriented Formula of a New Party

Apparently, national-level forces are afoot in the LP to promote just what the above heading implies: a successful party that wins elections. [I must disclaim any real knowledge of the latest workings of LP internals, because my political activism lately has been far more focused on Free State Project-related goals and objectives.] Let me add my own perspective as a longtime member and former LP leader:

For the foreseeable future [and barring any really peculiar crossing of the Ghostbuster energy streams], the LP will not have electoral success in partisan races for political office at the central-state level. On the other hand, the LP has had and will have significant success at winning local-government nonpartisan, even occasionally partisan, offices where the voters know the candidate is a Libertarian. Not only that, the track record of these remarkable Americans is uniformly admirable and in some cases damned near heroic. I'm personally familiar with several in Michigan, several city council or commission members who continue to be elected and we've had several elected Libertarian mayors throughout the country over the years —I'm sorry I'm not up to date, please check the LP Website under state parties.]

Here's my simple point. We're winning these local races with first-rate people; it's time to think long-range and fashion these real people as the new leaders of our New Party, and eventually emblematic of an American system that will devolve and distribute its central power back to the neighborhoods and communities where it belongs. [This decentralization of power is exactly what is happening in the Free State. I might also add that as libertarians we are only discussing decentralization of legitimate Constitutional power; all unConstitutional powers will be excised from the entire body politic.]

At some point, as the importance of central states to human life diminishes to the infinitesimal, our local-freedom leaders and other extraordinary citizens from all walks of life will rise to "power" in the remaining largely ceremonial central governments. In Liberty World, state or national political officials can perform a valid service in securing the heritage of freedom throughout the land. They may occasionally need to maintain some uniformity in enforcing the Bill of Rights on pockets of recalcitrant, thieving local gangs who may emerge from time to time in city governments to rip off their citizens (as for example the current Kwame Kilpatrick cabal in the City of Detroit).

Final Thoughts

In light of the above, I want to comment on the existing crop of LP presidential candidates with which I'm familiar. I heard several of them speak at last summer's Porcupine Festival in the Free State, but mostly out of the corner of my ear. I read some literature. Three of four of them are, frankly, friggin' goofy. So far, the only intellectually respectable candidate I've run into is George Phillies.

Phillies is the only candidate who at least has the good sense to acknowledge the science and the logic of global warming, i.e. that it's not some sinister plot by Al Gore and the Hollywood elites to take away your car and force everyone to use curly light bulbs:

"It is now quite certain that burning of fossil fuels is changing the weather. The earth has become markedly warmer in the last 20 years. Some areas become drier; others become damper. In colder areas, growing seasons become longer. In the long run, unchecked global warming will increase ocean levels, creating enormous property damage."

And Phillies' positions on all the other issues are rational, founded on good practical, deliberative thinking. [The national LP site seems to have a Candidates page that excludes real candidates who have not funded national petition drives or whatnot. This is disturbing news for not only the Phillies organization, but for anyone who would like to check out bona fide legitimate LP presidential candidates.] There seem to be some other qualified individuals, and I invite everyone to check them out. It's possible that whoever the LP selects at its national convention in Denver in May will be highly important... to the future of freedom. Anything is possible. But my bets on the LP are "focal local" and building freedom from the ground up... as innumerable state party affiliates are doing. [This is also more consistent with community activism and the Free State idea and ignoring the central state as best we can as living beings.]

At the central state level, the Cartel Pathocracy's (CP's) media blockade is simply far too impervious, and the mind control far too effective via the boob tube, to let freedom shine thru. And that's part of my point, too. You can look at the LP as a convenient sandbox enabled by the CP to keep the freedom people distracted and employed on hopeless causes while the power people continue to walk off with the collective cookie jar. Thus, to the extent the LP does not challenge real power or assume legitimate power, the LP represents a setback for liberty.

So that's my two or three cents on the subject of the Libertarian Party. I'm a fan, a longtime supporter, a member, often a delegate, current Webmaster of the LP of Michigan, and otherwise fellow traveler. Thousands of more words will probably be shed before the LP comes into its own. And IMHO one successful liberty and/or peace public official or legislator of any party affiliation is worth more than a thousand Libertarian paper candidacies or pow wows.

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