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Pseudo-Libertarian Tech Bros

Casey Waterman

May 13th, 2025

These days, when people say the word “libertarian,” they are thinking of Elon Musk, Peter Thiel, and other tech bros who have tried to claim the label. Because of their support for Donald Trump, and particularly Musk’s recent actions as de facto president, libertarianism has gotten a rather bad reputation. This is unfortunate, since *none* of these men are actually libertarians.

Libertarians believe in free speech, freedom of association, property rights, equality before the law, non-violence (except in self-defense), free enterprise and free trade. Even if you don’t call yourself a libertarian, you probably agree with these principles. The tech bros, on the other hand, do not believe in any of these. They are violent authoritarians who merely pay lip service to freedom.

Let’s start with Musk, the most despicable of the lot. Long before he did the Nazi salute, it was painfully obvious that he was only cosplaying as a libertarian. While he claims to be a “free speech absolutist,” that commitment only extends to racists, antisemites and other bigots of the far right. He gladly

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Retrieved 05/13/2025 from c4ss.org

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censors tweets at the behest of authoritarian governments in Turkey, India and other countries. He suspends journalists who report stories he doesn't like, and deletes Community Notes that debunk his lies. In China, his company sues reporters and customers for "defamation" when they criticize its shoddy vehicles. When a Redditor shared a post identifying his DOGE henchmen, Musk personally requested Reddit's CEO to delete the thread.

Nor does he believe in freedom of association. When advertisers fled Twitter because they did not want their ads to appear alongside Nazi tweets, he sued them in order to bring them back to his platform. He has also threatened to sue Cybertruck buyers who try to resell those expensive dumpsters. This is a blatant violation of property rights, a core tenet of libertarianism. In fact, Musk's entire fortune is built on government contracts and subsidies, and he continues to give himself more of those after his hostile government takeover. In a free market, he would have gone bankrupt because very few people want to buy what he is selling.

Nor does he believe in equality. On taking office as president, he moved to scrub government websites of the accomplishments of women and people of color, calling them "DEI" propaganda which is just a dog-whistle for right wing bigotry. Libertarians of all stripes, left, right, center, or without adjectives, agree that bigotry is against libertarian principles.

Peter Thiel, a fellow member of the PayPal mafia, is another fake libertarian. He invests in companies that rely heavily, if not exclusively, on government contracts. The most notorious of these are Palantir, which helps law enforcement and intelligence agencies conduct mass surveillance, Anduril, a company that makes autonomous weapons, and Musk's SpaceX. The CEO of Palantir, Alex Karp, celebrated Trump's mass deportations, because it resulted in more government contracts, proclaiming "Palantir is here to disrupt, and, when it's necessary, to scare our enemies and, on occasion, kill them."

In 2013, Thiel bankrolled the wrestler Hulk Hogan’s lawsuit against *Gawker* to the tune of \$10 million, causing the media outlet to go bankrupt. It is popularly believed that this was in retaliation to Gawker outing him as gay in 2007, but he was more mad about the website’s unflattering coverage of his companies and political activities (he backed anti-immigration and climate change denial groups). More recently, in 2023, he wrote a blurb for Richard Hanania’s book *The Origins of Woke* saying “DEI will never *d-i-e* from words alone—Hanania shows we need the sticks and stones of government violence to exorcise the diversity demon.” Thiel is also the main reason JD Vance, a deeply disgusting man, is the vice president of the United States.

Then there is Marc Andreessen, the infamous venture capitalist. In his *Techno-Optimist Manifesto*, he extols the virtues of free markets and how they create prosperity. When it comes to applying these principles, however, Andreessen is a hypocrite. Even though he claims to be for more housing, he opposes construction of multi-family apartment buildings in his own wealthy town of Atherton, California. He claims to support free speech, but says that advertisers boycotting Elon’s Nazi website should be prosecuted for “conspiracy in restraint of trade”.

Like Thiel, Andreessen has invested in SpaceX, Anduril and other companies that rely on government contracts. His company also has massive investments in cryptocurrency. It is not surprising, then, that he supports Donald Trump, who has announced a “strategic” cryptocurrency stockpile, where the “strategy” is simply to have government acquire and hold Bitcoin and other digital assets to pump up the price.

Our last “libertarian” crackpot for today is Balaji Srinivasan. A former general partner at Andreessen’s VC firm, he too spouts libertarian rhetoric when it suits him. But scratch the surface, and you see a fascist. Gil Duran at *The New Republic* has written a very detailed article on Balaji’s plan to purge San Francisco of “the blues,” meaning anyone who is not far-right.

He wants to form a tribe of “Grays” (basically tech bros) who would dominate city politics by allying themselves with Republicans and bribing the police force. “Blues” would not be allowed in his fascist city. Similarly, in an e-mail to far-right reactionary Curtis Yarvin, he suggested doxing journalists whose reporting they didn’t like.

Srinivasan has also invested in Próspera, a charter city in Honduras. Billed as a “libertarian” city, it is anything but. Ian MacDougall and Isabelle Simpson write how the developers made false promises to the villagers, interfered in their local elections, and set up checkpoints where their private security guards would stop people and ask for identification. This is fascism, and not a single principled libertarian supports this nonsense.

Read any libertarian authors such as Frederic Bastiat, Hayek, Roderick Long and so on, and you will find a sincere commitment to the principles stated at the beginning. There is also a shared belief among them that a free society will help the poorest and least powerful among us. The tech bros, meanwhile, cynically try to co-opt the label because they are too cowardly to admit what they really are: fascists.