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Rothbard Article Online; the Rothbardian Left Continues

Kevin Carson

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Thanks to Mises.Org, Murray Rothbard's classic "Confessions of a Right-Wing Liberal" is now online—for the first time, so far as I know.

It first appeared in the New Left journal *Ramparts* in 1968, during Rothbard's attempted strategic coalition between Old Right and New Left. The fruits of that coalition can be seen in, among other things: Rothbard's writing for *Ramparts*; his own periodical *Left and Right*; his collaboration with New Leftist Ron Radosh in editing *A New History of Leviathan* (a critique of 20th century corporate liberalism); his contributions to the James Weinstein/William Appleman Williams project *Studies on the Left*; the joint foundation of the Libertarian movement in the July Days of St. Louis, by free market dissidents from the YAF and anarchist walkouts from SDS; and some excellent writing by Rothbard and Karl Hess in the first year of *The Libertarian Forum*. It's also reflected in Hess' excellent *Community Technology, Neighborhood Government* (coauthored with David Morris) and his "Plowboy Interview" with *Mother Earth News*.

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One great irony of this Old Right/New Left collaboration is that so many of the New Leftists involved in it went on to become neocons—and, seemingly, mortally ashamed of their Old Right ties. As Stromberg comments,

To mention Rothbard is to bring to mind the lost weekend Radosh spent as a near-ally of right-libertarian anti-imperialists in the mid sixties. Bob Dylan appears in this book, but Rothbard and his associates do not. Yet Radosh wrote on FDR's foreign policy for Rothbard's *Left and Right* (3, 3 [Spring-Autumn 1967]), edited a book with Rothbard, *A New History of Leviathan* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1972), on the rise of US corporatism and empire (to which Williams contributed), and wrote a thoughtful and friendly survey of right-wing "isolationists," *Prophets on the Right* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975), with chapters on Charles Beard, Oswald Garrison Villard, Robert Taft, John T. Flynn, and Lawrence Dennis.

Of this political lost weekend there is not a trace in this memoir. Could it be that the politically shipwrecked Radosh, having washed ashore near the *New Republic*, Al Shanker, and the Olin Foundation, is more ashamed of once consorting with right-wing libertarians than of having been a Stalinist?

Stromberg refers to Radosh's neocon conversion, bitingly, as a return to the corporate center. Jesse Walker notes, similarly,

Yet Radosh's first friendly contacts with the right did not come in the '80s or '90s. They came in the '60s, when the group around the journal *Studies*

really tantalizing, as he informed the mutualist yahoo group recently, is that its board, along with New Lefties like Howard Zinn, includes a representative of the free market Independent Institute. Now that's the kind of ideological cross-pollination we need to see more of.

MLL had this goal: to develop a coherent, long-term, non-political, anti-party strategy consistent with hard-core Rothbardian theory. Sam and other New Libertarians (aka Libertarian Leftists) interacted regularly with New Leftists like Alexander Cockburn, Christopher Hitchens, Carl Oglesby, Jon Rappoport, and Noam Chomsky.

And, as Wally reminds us, Sam's elist, LeftLibertarian, is still going as strong as ever. His New Libertarian Manifesto is also available online, thanks to Black Crayon.

Tom Knapp, meanwhile, kicks off a symposium aimed at building on, extending, and applying Konkin's Left-Rothbardian thought as the basis of an ongoing agorist movement. If you want to participate, by writing a blogpost relevant to this theme, just check technorati tags under "movement of the libertarian left," and paste in the code (like this): movement of the libertarian left

Finally, while we're on the subject of free market radicals collaborating with New Left types... Larry Gambone of Porcupine Blog has called attention to the new network that's been set up, Independent World Television:

Independent World Television is building the world's first global independent news network. Online and on TV, IWTnews will deliver independent news and real debate from professional and citizen journalists -- without funding from governments, corporations or commercial advertising. Using the web to organize and raise funds across borders, IWTnews is building an international movement for democracy.

It is, as Larry says, a "left-leaning" network intended to compete with Fox News. And it's organized as a non-profit. What's

on the Left, which included Radosh, pioneered the idea of "corporate liberalism." This was the notion that, as Radosh puts it here, "the dominant worldview of American political leaders was not one of laissez faire, but rather a managerial form of liberalism." In its "cruder form," Radosh continues, the theory "was used to argue that in the United States, the true enemy of the left was not the 'reactionaries,' i.e. old-style Republicans and conservatives, but rather the liberals who comprised what they liked to call the 'vital center.'"

This stance allowed a certain measure of cooperation between the *Studies* leftists and Murray Rothbard's circle of isolationist libertarians. Rothbard contributed to *Studies on the Left*, and in 1967, Radosh in turn contributed to Rothbard's *Left and Right*. In 1972, the two co-edited *A New History of Leviathan*, with contributions from both sides of the anti-liberal aisle; three years later, Radosh published *Prophets on the Right*, a sympathetic study of the conservative critics of American imperialism.

Virtually all of this is missing from *Commies*. Perhaps Radosh felt he did not know enough gossip about the libertarians to include them. More likely, it would have unduly complicated his conversion narrative to acknowledge the existence of anti-imperialists outside the left.

As somebody once suggested on a discussion list, Ron Radosh seems to have had more respect for the Old Right back when he was a commie than he does today as a neoconservative.

Here's Rothbard's commentary on his own use of New Left historical analysis, one of the best parts of the article:

Our analysis was greatly bolstered by our becoming familiar with the new and exciting group of historians who studied under University of Wisconsin historian William Appleman Williams. From them we discovered that all of us free marketeers had erred in believing that somehow, down deep, Big Businessmen were really in favor of *laissez-faire*, and that their deviations from it, obviously clear and notorious in recent years, were either “sellouts” of principle to expediency or the result of astute maneuverings by liberal intellectuals.

This is the general view on the right; in the remarkable phrase of Ayn Rand, Big Business is “America’s most persecuted minority.” Persecuted minority, indeed! Sure, there were thrusts against Big Business in the old McCormick *Chicago Tribune* and in the writings of Albert Jay Nock; but it took the Williams-Kolko analysis to portray the true anatomy and physiology of the American scene.

As Kolko pointed out, all the various measures of federal regulation and welfare statism that left and right alike have always believed to be mass movements against Big Business are not only now backed to the hilt by Big Business, but were originated by it for the very purpose of shifting from a free market to a cartelized economy that would benefit it. Imperialistic foreign policy and the permanent garrison state originated in the Big Business drive for foreign investments and for war contracts at home.

The role of the liberal intellectuals is to serve as “corporate liberals,” weavers of sophisticated apologies to inform the masses that the heads

of the American corporate state are ruling on behalf of the “common good” and the “general welfare”—like the priest in the Oriental despotism who convinced the masses that their emperor was all-wise and divine.

There’s been a flurry of writing lately within the Left-Rothbardian blogosphere on Rothbard’s abortive New Left project, provoked in part by this latest posting by the Mises Institute. For example, Wally Conger writes:

The once “conservative Republican” Rothbard exhorted libertarians to recognize their past and ally themselves with the New Left, from which had sprung the anarchistic, anti-imperialist “Port Huron Statement.” He and other libertarians shared podiums with Leftists like Paul Goodman and Carl Oglesby. At the end of the ’60s, many libertarians — most of them, like me, student members of the Young Americans for Freedom — followed Rothbard and former Goldwater speechwriter Karl Hess out of the right wing to build coalitions with the Left. An exchange of interesting strategic and tactical ideas ensued, but the fusion didn’t hold ultimately.

Rothbard himself abandoned the idea, gravitating later toward the position now identified with the paleos at LewRockwell.Com. But Samuel Edward Konkin (SEK3) dedicated himself, until his recent death, to a Rothbardian/New Left alliance. Wally Conger again:

The Movement of the Libertarian Left (MLL) worked to lay the groundwork for a day of reconciliation with the Left from 1978 until Sam’s sudden death last year. And they made inroads.