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The Left-Rothbardians

Kevin Carson

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In addition, it's worthwhile to browse his archives at LewRockwell.Com and Antiwar.Com. Although *Mises.Org...* doesn't maintain an author archive, his work can be found by a Google search of their site. Probably his single greatest work, aside from the two articles mentioned above, is his lengthy annotated bibliography of revisionist literature on war and foreign policy: "*War, Peace, and the State.*"

The *Agorist Action Alliance* (A3) was created by Spangler as an activist organization for coordinating agorist propaganda and counter-economic organization.

KoPubCo, a publishing outfit owned by old Konkin associate Victor Koman, has reprints of much of the MLL's literature, including reprints of *New Libertarian Notes* and *Strategy of the Libertarian Left*.

The Rothbard-founded scholarly journal, *Journal of Libertarian Studies* has since December 2004 had a left-Rothbardian editor, Roderick T. Long.

Another member of the Alliance of the Libertarian Left, Sheldon Richman, is (sic) editor of Leonard Read's long-lived periodical *The Freeman*; he has in recent years moved its editorial stance in a decidedly left-libertarian direction and been a vocal critic of state capitalism.

Joseph Stromberg – although completely unaffiliated with the Alliance of the Libertarian Left—is nevertheless something of a Left-Rothbardian eminence. He has himself rejected as artificial attempts to divide Rothbard's career into left- and right-leaning phases. But the division is quite useful in my opinion, and Stromberg clearly falls into the left-Rothbardian category when it comes to his analysis of the role of interests in U.S. foreign and domestic policy.

Probably the two centerpieces of his body of work are:

1. His analysis of corporate liberalism in American domestic policy in "*The Political Economy of Liberal Corporatism*," and
2. His extended effort at integrating radical left-wing theories (Hobson, Beard, W.A. Williams, and the neo-Marxists) of monopoly capital and imperialism into an Austrian theoretical framework, in "*The Role of State Monopoly Capitalism in the American Empire*." This article I cannot recommend highly enough.

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liance. There weren't any New Leftists or libertarian socialists in sight. The closest they came to dialogue with the genuine left was when some anarcho-commies or Georgists stopped by the LeftLibertarian list for a while and then moved on. Although the nucleus of the new *ALL* is made up of Konkin's old associates, it includes a much larger accretion of left-wing movements. Several Tuckerites and mutualists of my general stripe (who stress the socialist as much as the market aspect of individualist anarchism), and quite an assortment of geolibertarians. In addition to the old core of Agorists, there are a good many small-a agorist fellow-travellers. Chuck Munson (Chuck0) of *Infoshop* even has friendly ties with several members of the *ALL*. In a sense, the *Alliance of the Libertarian Left* is exactly the kind of left-right alliance Rothbard tried and failed to achieve almost forty years ago.

So despite Sam's seeming silliness with all his organizations, in the end he built something important that lasted. He impressed his thought on a wide range of people, and brought them together, and most of them are still together and building on his and each other's. His influence continues to leaven the broader libertarian movement in ways we may never fully realize the importance of in our lifetimes.

Just by looking at the links on the *Alliance of the Libertarian Left* site, or clicking the movement's associated blog ring, the *Blogosphere of the Libertarian Left*, you can find a wide range of sites hosted by Konkin's old fightin' comrades from the St. Louis days, more recent disciples of left-Rothbardianism and Counter-economics, and some even newer left-wing friends like me, who—despite never having considered ourselves followers of Rothbard or Konkin—have been strongly influenced by their thought.

Brad Spangler's site, *Agorism.Info*, reproduces the *NLM* along with many of Konkin's other pamphlets.

Left. Again, just about all the leading figures in the old *MLL* migrated to the *ALL* and left the old body as an empty shell owned by Schulman.

I know, I know. I'm the first to acknowledge how comical Konkin's alphabet soup of organizations must seem to anyone on the outside. To beat you to the joke, it's like *one man* founded the Judean People's Front, the Popular Front of Judea, and all those other "splitter" organizations *at the same time*. Sam's personality reminds me a bit of Bakunin's. With his childlike enthusiasm for founding endless organizations (with cool acronyms, of course) and publications, issuing name cards, and forming conspiratorial undergrounds, it's hard to keep track of it all without a score card.

But his ideas deserve to be taken seriously in their own right, and his work had a serious effect that belies the snicker factor in all the organizational mitosis described above. His theoretical ideas in the *New Libertarian Manifesto*, and in his unfinished work on agorist class theory, are both monumental contributions to libertarian thought. His ideas inspired a large circle of prominent libertarians who are influential in a wide range of organizations and publications today, and their ripple effects continue to spread outward.

The most important association of Konkin's left-Rothbardian followers today is the *Alliance of the Libertarian Left*. There's nothing remotely "Judean People's Front" or splinterish about it. If anything, it's a textbook example of how an affinity group should be organized in an era of networked politics. It is a large, vibrant community of left-Rothbardians and other left-wing allies (like me). It's an umbrella organization something like an Agorist International.

In a sense, the *Alliance of the Libertarian Left* is an improvement on its *MLL* predecessor. The old *MLL* was almost entirely made up of Konkin's Agorist fellow-thinkers. Although it was descended from Rothbard's attempt at a New Left alliance, it included only one side—the market libertarian side—of the al-

Part I: Rothbard

In "Libertarianism: What's Going Right," I mentioned Left-Rothbardianism as one possible basis for finding areas of agreement between market libertarians and the Left. I'd like to go into that in more depth now.

In 2004, I was extremely heartened by the "Era of Good Feelings" between the Libertarian Party's Michael Badnarik and the Green Party's David Cobb. It gave me some hope for the revival of an even more hopeful project of some 30-odd years before.

During the late 1960s, Murray Rothbard attempted a strategic alliance of the "isolationist" and comparatively anti-statist Old Right with the New Left. That period is the subject of an article by John Payne, "Rothbard's Time on the Left." Payne writes:

By the early 1960s, Rothbard saw the New Right, exemplified by *National Review*, as perpetually wedded to the Cold War, which would quickly turn exponentially hotter in Vietnam, and the state interventions that accompanied it, so he set out looking for new allies. In the New Left, Rothbard found a group of scholars who opposed the Cold War and political centralization, and possessed a mass following with high growth potential. For this opportunity, Rothbard was willing to set economics somewhat to the side and settle on common ground, and, while his cooperation with the New Left never altered or caused him to hide any of his foundational beliefs, Rothbard's rhetoric shifted distinctly leftward during this period.

I would add one qualification, concerning what Payne said about Rothbard setting economics to the side. In fact, as we will

see below, Rothbard shared some common economic ground with the New Left. At his leftmost position, Rothbard's Austrian critique of corporate-state capitalism was quite radical.

In the late '50s, according to Payne's account, Rothbard found himself at odds with W.F. Buckley and Frank Meyer at the *National Review*. His submissions on foreign policy, in a period when he saw the "war-peace question" as key to the libertarian agenda and referred to the "Verdamte cold war," were rejected. Finally, in 1961, Meyer publicly read him out of the "conservative movement" (or at least out of *National Review's* fusionism).

From the early '60s on, Rothbard found himself increasingly attracted to the left-wing revisionist critique of 20th century state capitalism (or what the New Left called "corporate liberalism"). He was especially struck by the thesis of Gabriel Kolko's book *The Triumph of Conservatism*, which came out in 1963.

Rothbard's Misesian critique of the corporate state, which shared so much common ground with the New Left, was a considerable departure from Mises' right-wing political affinities. For Mises, state interventionism was motivated almost entirely by anti-capitalist sentiment: what Nixon would have called the "filthy f**king hippies," or Eric Cartman would dismiss as "a bunch of G*ddamn tree-hugging hippie crap."

Rothbard, on the other hand, applied Austrian principles largely from the standpoint of Kolko's critique, which saw state interventionism as motivated mainly by the desire of corporate capitalists themselves to protect their profits from the destructive force of market competition. Kolko directly contradicted the orthodox historical account of the regulatory state, as exemplified by the liberal Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. Specifically, he denied that the Progressive Era legislative agenda was formulated primarily as a populist restraint on big business, or that government had intervened in the economy in the 20th century as a "countervailing force" against big business. Rather, the regulatory state was an attempt by big

excellent *Agorist Class Theory*, which itself is based on the chapter and surviving scraps of Konkin's work in the area. An in-depth class analysis of the financial system and its industrial satellites, based on the same version of libertarian class theory, is set forth in an article by Walter Grinder and John Hagel: "*Toward a Theory of State Capitalism*."

As Konkin said, Agorist and Marxist class theories pretty much agree when it comes to those at the top and bottom of their respective class systems. "The differences arise as one moves to the middle of the social pyramid." The main difference regarding the middle is that Agorist class theory is a lot closer to the "petty bourgeois producerism" of the nineteenth century populists. Agorists don't have any problem with entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial profit. What they have a problem with is the rentier classes, deriving absentee incomes from huge fortunes with the help of the state. Those at the top of the pyramid generally act through the state to make sure they don't *have* to engage in entrepreneurship. Rather, the state protects them from risk and competition, and thereby enables them to collect secure long-term rents (see, for example, here and here – *please* do!).

In 1999, Konkin founded the *LeftLibertarian yahoogroup*, the venue through which I first came into contact with him, his ideas, and his wide circle of friends. I had several years of stimulating discussion there that influenced my development to no end. In 2007, three years after Konkin's death, the list imploded over a political dispute between J. Neil Schulman and just about everybody else, and most of the important figures in Konkin's circle migrated to the *Left-Libertarian2 group*. Konkin's old yahoogroup is pretty much an empty shell, although Neil Schulman and Kent Hastings stayed with it (and the archives are well worth digging into). Because of a similar dispute with Neil over the rights to the name "Movement of the Libertarian Left", several members of LeftLibertarian2 collaborated to form a successor organization, the *Alliance of the Libertarian*

land is appropriated and they no longer have direct access to self-employment on their own land. This was a commonplace observation made by Smith, Ricardo, and Malthus. Oppenheimer's radical contribution was to observe that although the land was indeed all appropriated, it had never been *naturally* appropriated; it had, rather, been *politically* appropriated by the great landlords acting through the state. The great landlords used their artificial property rights in the land to control access to it and charge tribute to those working it, and in many cases to hold vast tracts of it out of use altogether. Only under these circumstances, in which the means of direct subsistence were made inaccessible to labor, could labor be forced to sell its services on disadvantageous terms (the British ruling class literature at the time of the Enclosures was full of frank admissions that the only way to get people to work hard enough, for a low enough wage, was to steal their land). Privilege was the political means to wealth, and the state was the organized political means.

Rothbard made this the centerpiece of his class theory, treating collusion with the state as the political means to wealth, and the ruling class as those who attached themselves to the state and used its subsidies, privileges and special protections as a source of profit. Rothbard stated these principles, among other places, in "The Anatomy of the State."

Konkin took this basic insight and ran with it, applying it in detail to the concrete conditions of American state capitalism. The ruling class was not only state functionaries, but the central banks and associated large financial interests, and the commanding heights of the corporate economy most closely tied to the statist finance system. Agorism was the revolutionary movement of those engaged in the economic means, attempting to take as much economic activity as possible out of the control of the ruling class. Konkin's agorist class theory was set forth in the first chapter of his unfinished work *Agorism Contra Marxism*. That chapter is appended to Wally Conger's

business to achieve, acting directly through the state, what it had been unable to achieve through voluntary combinations and trusts carried out entirely in the private sector: the cartelization of the economy, and the creation of stable oligopoly markets characterized by administered pricing. Payne quotes this summary statement from Kolko's book:

Despite the large number of mergers, and the growth in the absolute size of many corporations, the dominant tendency in the American economy at the beginning of this [the twentieth] century was toward growing competition. Competition was unacceptable to many key business and financial interests... As new competitors sprang up, and as economic power was diffused throughout an expanding nation, it became apparent to many important businessmen that only the national government could rationalize the economy. Although specific conditions varied from industry to industry, internal problems that could be solved only by political means were the common denominator in those industries whose leaders advocated greater federal regulation. Ironically, contrary to the consensus of historians, it was not the existence of monopoly that caused the federal government to intervene in the economy, but the lack of it.

The purpose of state action was, first of all, to help overbuilt industry simultaneously to operate at full capacity and to dispose of the surplus product it couldn't sell at cartel prices. Second, as an alternative, it was to enable cartelized industry to operate with high costs and idle capacity and still remain profitable by selling its product at cost-plus markup through monopoly pricing. (This might as well have been the mission

statement of FDR's National Industrial Recovery Administration, by the way.)

This initial perception by Rothbard, that New Left revisionist historiography was useful for a free market critique of twentieth century corporate capitalism, led to a considerable amount of cooperation with New Left scholars.

Rothbard participated in Studies on the Left, a project of New Left historians James Weinstein and William Appleman Williams. It was Weinstein, in *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State*, who coined the term "corporate liberalism." And Williams devised the thesis of "Open Door Imperialism" to describe American foreign policy. Some of Rothbard's contributions to Studies on the Left were included in a paperback collection of articles resulting from the group's efforts through 1967: *For a New America*.

Rothbard retained friendly ties to the scholarly New Left long after his disillusionment with the radical student movement. His second venture in collaborative scholarship (at the comparatively late date of 1972) was *A New History of Leviathan*, a collection of critical essays on New Deal corporatism coedited by Rothbard and the libertarian socialist Ronald Radosh.

He contributed one article ("Confessions of a Right-Wing Liberal"), in 1968, to *Ramparts*. (Both David Horowitz and Ronald Radosh, who both later became two of the most odious members of a neoconservative movement characterized by its odiousness, were associated with this leading periodical of the New Left.)

Rothbard founded the journal *Left and Right* in 1965 as a vehicle for this academically oriented Left-Right alliance. If you're at all interested in this kind of things, browsing the archives there will well repay your effort.

From his initial scholarly collaboration with New Left academics, Rothbard moved on to attempt a mass movement in alliance with student radicals.

takes place within the social or gift economy, self-employment, barter, etc. The linkages need to be increased and strengthened between those involved in consumers' and producers' co-ops, self-employment, LETS systems, home gardening and other household production, informal barter, etc. What economic counter-institutions already exist need to start functioning as a cohesive counter-economy.

Konkin's other major innovation was his development of libertarian class theory. The roots of Rothbard's and Konkin's class theory lie in the French thinkers Saint-Simon, Comte, and Dunoyer, and in the radical wing of English classical liberalism. They identified the ruling class as those interests that obtained their wealth by acting through the state.

The classic thinker in this tradition was the English free market radical Thomas Hodgskin, who made the distinction between "natural" and "artificial" rights of property. The former, he said, followed naturally from possession and served to secure the individual's ownership of his labor product. Artificial property rights, on the other hand, were creations of the state which enabled the holder to collect tribute from the product of labor. Holders of artificial property rights included the great landlords with their feudal rents, the politically connected mercantile capitalists, and the recipients of assorted other privileges and immunities.

The ideas of the French positivists and of Hodgskin were taken up in Franz Oppenheimer's distinction between "natural appropriation" and "political appropriation" of the land, and between the "economic means" and "political means" to wealth. Political appropriation of land was the chief political means to wealth.

The classical political economists had acknowledged that most people will enter wage employment only when all the

Economics” or “Agorism.” The idea was outlined in Konkin’s *New Libertarian Manifesto*: to build a black market counter-economy, and drain resources from the corporate state nexus, until the free market counter-economy finally supplanted the state capitalist system altogether.

Konkin’s ideas on counter-economics dovetail to a considerable extent with the left-wing ideas of dual power and prefigurative politics. I discussed a counter-economic strategy based on those concepts, from a libertarian socialist perspective considerably to the left of Konkin’s, in “Building the Structure of the New Society Within the Shell of the Old”:

Economic counter-institutions, unfortunately, work within the framework of a larger corporate capitalist economy. They compete in markets in which the institutional culture of the dominant firms is top-down and hierarchical, and are in great danger of absorbing this institutional culture themselves. That’s why you have a non-profit and cooperative sector whose management is indistinguishable from its capitalist counterparts: prestige salaries, middle management featherbedding, bureaucratic irrationality, and slavish adherence to the latest motivational/management theory dogma. The problem is exacerbated by a capitalist financial system, which extends positive reinforcement (in the form of credit) to firms following an orthodox organizational model (even when bottom-up organization is far more efficient)...

The solution is to promote as much consolidation as possible within the counter-economy. We need to get back to the job of “building the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.” A great deal of production and consumption already

The high point of this alliance occurred in 1969. The radical libertarian/anarchist caucus of the Young Americans for Freedom walked out of the YAF convention in St. Louis (mainly over the Vietnam War and the draft). The roots of the contemporary libertarian movement, and most of its founding personnel, can be traced to this act of secession. Not long afterwards, Rothbard (along with Karl Hess, a former Goldwater speechwriter who coined the phrase “extremism in defense of liberty,” and subsequently moved considerably to the left) organized a mass meeting of the YAF’s libertarian dissidents with similar libertarian socialist secessionists from the SDS. During that event, Hess addressed a combined audience of YAF and SDS insurgents wearing combat fatigues and a Wobbly pin.

Rothbard’s journal *The Libertarian Forum* was founded in 1969, at a time when Rothbard was becoming increasingly disenchanted with the New Left, and the New Left itself (and specifically the SDS, under onslaught from the Maoist Kool-Aid drinkers in Progressive Labor and the nihilist nutcases in the Weather Underground) was disintegrating. Although Rothbard could get along pretty well with New Left academics, he apparently suffered considerable culture shock in 1969 at finding out just how radical the student radicals really were (their blanket denunciations of academic economists and the wearing of neckties were a particular affront to Rothbard, who was guilty on both counts). Nevertheless the first volume of *Libertarian Forum* was packed with heady commentary on the New Left alliance.

Take, for example, this quote from the May 1, 1969 issue:

[The students] see that, apart from other tie-ins, corporations have been using the government schools and colleges as institutions that train their future workers and executives at the expense of others, i.e. the taxpayers. This is but one way that our corporate state uses the coercive taxing

power either to accumulate corporate capital or to lower corporate costs. Whatever that process may be called, it is not “free enterprise,” except in the most ironic sense.

Consider also this statement by Hess:

The truth... is that libertarianism wants to advance principles of property but that it in no way wishes to defend, willy nilly, all property which now is called private.

Much of that property is stolen. Much is of dubious title. All of it is deeply intertwined with an immoral, coercive state system which has condoned, built on, and profited from slavery; has expanded through and exploited a brutal and aggressive imperial and colonial foreign policy, and continues to hold the people in a roughly serf-master relationship to political-economic power concentrations.

Libertarians are concerned, first and foremost, with that most valuable of properties, the life of each individual.... Property rights pertaining to material objects are seen by libertarians as stemming from and... secondary to the right to own, direct, and enjoy one's own life and those appurtenances thereto which may be acquired without coercion....

This is a far cry from sharing common ground with those who want to create a society in which super-capitalists are free to amass vast holdings and who say that that is ultimately the most important purpose of freedom....

Libertarianism is a people's movement and a liberation movement. It seeks the sort of open,

cause my main focus is on his ideas and the people today who were influenced by them.

Konkin (aka SEK3), a native Albertan and a social creditor in his callow youth, was an associate of Rothbard dating back to the days of the YAF schism (he was a Wisconsin delegate at the St. Louis convention where it took place). His Movement of the Libertarian Left continued to develop Rothbard's thought in the leftward direction that Rothbard himself had abandoned.

Despite Rothbard's disillusion with the libertarian-left alliance, the collaboration of 1969 between YAF and SDS dissidents had a certain momentum of its own. For example, according to SEK3's history of the *Movement of the Libertarian Left*, Libertarian Alliances formed on a number of college campuses through the 1970s. The phenomenon was kicked off in February 1970, when the California Libertarian Alliance organized a Left-Right Festival of Mind Liberation. Speakers included Karl Hess; the free market libertarian Robert LeFevre; Carl Oglesby; Dana Rohrabacher (yeah, him), who was known as the “Johnny Grass-seed” of the YAF radicals back when he was good for something; and Sam Konkin.

Starting from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Libertarian Alliance, and drawing associates involved with the mushrooming Libertarian Alliances all over New York and the West Coast, Konkin organized many of his fellow travellers into a left-Rothbardian movement that took on the name *New Libertarian Alliance* in 1974. Konkin created the NLA as an underground organization, for promoting his strategy of Counter-Economics and his ideology of Agorism. In 1978, he founded the Movement of the Libertarian Left as an above-ground counterpart to the NLA. The Agorist Institute popped up at some point thereafter, if you're still keeping track. (I'm not blind to the humor in this mad proliferation of organizations, believe me – more about which below.)

Konkin's chief strategic focus, in keeping with his doctrinaire anti-political stance, was what he called “Counter-

material on Rothbard's left-libertarian successors (Sam Konkin, Joseph Stromberg, and the rest) for another post.

Part II: After Rothbard

This post starts where the first half left off: Rothbard's disillusion with (and abandonment of) his New Left alliance. Now I want to look at some of the people who continued the left-Rothbardian tradition.

Karl Hess was just getting into his full left-wing swing when Rothbard gave up the New Left as a lost cause. Even during Rothbard's most enthusiastic attempts at collaboration with the Left, Hess was already to the left of Rothbard. As I mentioned in Part I, at one point he was a Wobbly. He continued to move leftward into the 1970s, in 1975 writing the libertarian socialist tinged *Dear America*.

As the 1970s wore on, his leftism took on more of a "Small is Beautiful" coloring, with an emphasis on human scale technology and neighborhood democracy. In this period he wrote the highly recommended book *Community Technology*, and coauthored *Neighborhood Power* with David Morris.

By around 1980 or so, Hess also started drifting back to the right, although he never went as far in that direction as Rothbard did in his last years. His autobiography *Mostly on the Edge*, written after his shift back to the right, still retained much of the generally decentralist and anti-bigness spirit of his earlier years.

In considering the career of *Samuel Edward Konkin III*, I rely among other things on his own account of the history of the *Movement of the Libertarian Left*. If you want the full, complicated history of all the organizations he built, go to Konkin's account (along with obits by Jeff Riggensbach and Phil Osborn) and you'll get all the organizational details and humanizing anecdotes you can handle. I'm skipping over a lot here, be-

non-coercive society in which the people, the living, free, distinct people may voluntarily associate, dis-associate, and, as they see fit, participate in the decisions affecting their lives.... It means people free collectively to organize the resources of their immediate community or individualistically to organize them; it means the freedom to have a community-based and supported judiciary where wanted, none where not, or private arbitration services where that is seen as most desirable. The same with police. The same with schools, hospitals, factories, farms, laboratories, parks, and pensions. Liberty means the right to shape your own institutions. It opposes the right of those institutions to shape you simply because of accreted power or gerontological status.

In another article in the same issue, "Confiscation and the Homestead Principle," Rothbard proposed a model of privatization far removed from the kind of corporate looting of state assets you commonly find advocated in mainstream libertarian venues these days.

What most people ordinarily identify as the stereotypical "libertarian" privatization proposal, unfortunately, goes something like this: sell it to a giant corporation on terms that are most advantageous to the corporation. Rothbard proposed, instead, was to treat state property as unowned, and allowing it to be homesteaded by those actually occupying it and mixing their labor with it. This would mean transforming government utilities, schools and other services into consumer co-operatives and placing them under the direct control of their present clientele. It would mean handing over state industry to workers' syndicates and transforming it into worker-owned cooperatives.

But if this was the appropriate way of dealing with state property, Rothbard asked, then what about nominally private industry which is in fact a branch of the state? That is, what about “private” industry that gets the majority of its profits from taxpayer subsidies?

But if Columbia University, what of General Dynamics? What of the myriad of corporations which are integral parts of the military-industrial complex, which not only get over half or sometimes virtually all their revenue from the government but also participate in mass murder? What are their credentials to “private” property? Surely less than zero. As eager lobbyists for these contracts and subsidies, as co-founders of the garrison state, they deserve confiscation and reversion of their property to the genuine private sector as rapidly as possible. To say that their “private” property must be respected is to say that the property stolen by the horsethief and the murderer must be “respected.”

Such factories should be taken over by “homesteading workers,” he said. But he went further, and suggested that a libertarian movement, having captured the commanding heights of the state and proceeding to dismantle the apparatus of state capitalism, might actually nationalize such state-subsidized industry as the immediate prelude to handing it over to the workers. He went so far as to say that even if a *non*-libertarian regime nationalized state capitalist industry with the intention of hanging onto it, it wasn’t anything for libertarians to get particularly bent out of shape about. The subsidized industry was no more the “good guys,” and no less a part of the state, as the formal state apparatus itself. “[I]t would only mean that one gang of thieves—the government—would be confiscat-

ing property from another previously cooperating gang, the corporation that has lived off the government.”

I’d go Rothbard one further. Why is the criterion for de facto government status the amount of profits directly subsidized from state revenue? What about corporations that function within a web of state regulatory protections, and artificial property rights like Bill Gates’ “intellectual property,” without which they couldn’t operate in black ink for a single day. Anyone who’s read much of my work for any length of time knows that I consider the entire Fortune 500 a pretty good proxy for such de facto branches of the state. As I already argued in an earlier post, the largest corporations are so intertwined with the state that the very distinction between “public” and “private” becomes meaningless.

To reinforce that impression, bear in mind that (as Hess’s remarks above on property suggest) Rothbard considered all land titles not traceable to a legitimate act of appropriation by human labor to be utterly null and void. That meant that titles to vacant and unimproved land were void, and all such land in the United States should be open to immediate homesteading. It meant all the real estate in Southern California currently held as real estate investments by the railroads, pursuant to the land grants of the nineteenth century, should immediately become the absolute freehold of those currently making rent or mortgage payments on it. It meant that all the land in the Third World currently “owned” by quasi-feudal landed oligarchies should immediately become the property of the peasants working it; and land currently being used by corporate agribusiness and other cash crop operations, in collusion with those same landlords, should be returned to the peasants who were evicted from it.

In short, Rothbard didn’t exactly fit the “pot-smoking Republican” stereotype you see the commenters over at Kos regurgitating. This is getting way, way long. I originally intended to fit all the Left-Rothbardian material into one post. But I’ll save the