

A Cram History of the Libertarian Movement

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Part I: Pre-1969

In the beginning, man was free. Then he ran into his father.

Free philosophies have attempted to form throughout history, usually containing just enough contradictions or errors to have them refuted and discarded like the statist theories they were to replace. Then we came along. The first we goes back to William Godwin, the first anarchist, in the late 1700's and traces through Josiah Warren to Lysander Spooner. The limited government freaks can probably trace their lineage to Jeremy Bentham's Philosophical Radical Party in England (yes, dear reader, the first "radicals" were limited archists), which, thanks to its utilitarian base and John Stuart Mill, drifted toward Fabian democratic socialism. Meanwhile, back in the U.S.A., Spooner was firming up a pro-property base for anarchy.

It is both fascinating to realize (as you will if you read even as little of Spooner as *No Treason*) that if Praxeology had been added to Spooner's position, amending some of his views on economics, he would have reached the stage of development of the present Libertarian Movement, give or take a few deviationists, and dischartening to realize that a century has been wasted. This, gentle anarcho-objectivist, was all before Ayn Rand was a gleam in her father's eye. Spooner was an active abolitionist, shocking his comrades by supporting Southern secession, and demanding that position as the only one consistent with slave secession from masters. His *No Treason: The Constitution of No Authority* was published around 1870. He, along with others, passed along the anarchist tradition to Benjamin Tucker, who was the first in his line to call himself an anarchist from the Word Go.

Tucker also threatened to be the end of the line. His magazine *Liberty* was recognized as *the* radical journal until its demise in 1908. George Bernard Shaw acknowledges his debt to Tucker for making him famous, and was briefly an anarchist himself through Tucker's influence before continuing his meanderings on the political spectrum through fascism and socialism. Tucker also laid into the anarcho-communists of his time, setting westerners straight about Bakunin, Kropotkin, and their ilk. Supposedly, when Tucker met Kropotkin, those attending expected sparks to fly; actually they merely exchanged salutations. . .

With the onslaught of World War I and the seduction of his radical friends into what he scourged as "State Socialism," Tucker despaired of the world and went to France, dying in obscurity just prior to the Second World war. Some of those he had influenced were followers of the school of Henry George economics, the "Single Taxers." They believed (and still do) that Rent was immorally obtained, and that Land should not be owned privately (although anything else could). Some of them believed that government should at most collect this Rent and distribute it to the populace in the form of services; a few believed that this "social function" did not even require the state. Such a person was Albert J. Nook. Those in his Philosophical camp around the turn of the century were called Liberals (so was Herbert Spencer, whom they were also familiar with), but became Radicals with World War I and the split caused by Wilson's "betrayal" by entering into war and foreign entanglements. Eventually, with the post-war disillusionment, these Revisionists found their war interpretation to become widely accepted, and during the twenties, Nock, H. L. Mencken, and others were well-known and popular.

The Depression and World war II caused another estrangement of these neo-Georgist quasi-anarchists with the Liberals; first, because they opposed Statist solutions of the Hoover and later Roosevelt variety to the economic problems of the day, and second, because they were opposed to Roosevelt's imperialism against the Axis and the provocation of Japan into a totally avoidable

war. These positions brought them into tactical alliance with the Old Right, an uneasy alliance. Their influence pervades—the Modern Right, as indicated by William Buckley’s inclusion of two Nock essays in his definitive book on conservatism called, *Did You Ever See a Dream walking?*. One of Nock’s essays was blatantly called “Anarchist’s Progress.” During this time, young Georgist Frank Chodorov was brought into an anti-statist position by Nock’s influence, and became one of the Right’s main activists, founding the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists and taking Over Mencken’s American Mercury along with Buckley and crowd. About this time, a Young Taft Republican Columbia student named Murray Rothbard read von Mises and became an economist, studying under the master himself. The Taft wing or “Old Right” continued their anti-imperialism through the Korean war, while the liberals and social democrats insisted that Americans had a Duty to save the world from Bolshevism. In 1953, Robert A. Taft died, unleashing a Wisconsin Populist named Joseph McCarthy. Chodorov’s remarks on McCarthyism indicate the beginning of the end for the alliance: “The way to get rid of Communists in government jobs is to get rid of the government jobs.” Unfortunately, William Buckley and his converted brother-in-law decided that Roman Catholicism was insufficiently motivating and declared a Holy Crusade against International Communism. They began by defending McCarthy in print, and then, as *American Mercury* fell into the hands of racists, founded *National Review* in 1955 and staffed it with bitter ex-Communists. Rothbard, who had made friends with many of these people at the time, such as *NR*’s ideologue, Frank Meyer, split with them in 1957 over irreconcilable foreign policy differences, as he Joined SANE and various Left peace (for him, Isolationist) groups, and the spectrum flip-flopped. Around this time the Objectivist philosophy was turning into the personality cult of Ayn Rand and Murray was invited to the formative get-togethers. Unfortunately, in 1950 he had already decided that the only consistent libertarian position was anarchy, so he knew his days were numbered. Still, he had some influence on the early Nathaniel Branden Institute students.

In 1960, the New Right got behind Barry Goldwater, who symbolized their new synthesis of pseudo-free enterprise at home and American Imperialism abroad. The Youth for Goldwater became, the following year, a more ideological youth movement, meeting at Buckley’s Sharon, Connecticut estate to form a group of young conservatives. The National Chairman was Bob Schuchman (known to Rothbard, incidentally) who demanded that the name be the Young Americans for Freedom. Schuchman was the first and only libertarian Chairman.

The Goldwater campaign of 1964 brought vast recruits to YAF, and the subsequent battles with the rising New Left, for which YAF was the only organized opposition, sustained it in between the election years. Even objectivists began to join it, though prohibited officially from it by Ayn Rand’s dictates. In 1967, a libertarian caucus was formed from free market, ISI, and FEE style conservatives, semi-objectivists, and a few Rothbardians and even Georgists. They promised to really get it together in 1969, the next biennial National Convention of YAF.

Meanwhile, Richard Nixon was elected President, fulfilling every conservative’s dream, and disillusioning every libertarian from his work with the Right, and Murray Rothbard was into the Peace and Freedom Party, with many of his youthful converts moving past him into the SDS, where founders like Carl Oglesby were battling for Anarchy against the Statist Maoists and Trotskyites who sought control of the group at any expense. Jarret Wollstein split the Objectivist camp by coming out for anarcho-objectivism and the Society for Rational Individualism. And Nathaniel Branden fell from grace.

Part II: Post-1969

The summer of 1969 will be remembered as the sprouting of the modern libertarian movement. The Objectivists were in turmoil over Branden's ouster, and many were being picked up by Wollstein's anarcho-objectivist Society for Rational Individualism (SRI). The seeds of libertarian caucus organization in YAF after the 1967 convention came to flower in the libertarian takeover of Pennsylvania and California state YAF's with Rothbard's influence putting a few anarchists into the New York State group, and Karl Hess's son in Virginia another small group. Many of these Rothbardians, organizing into the Radical Libertarian Alliance, attended the SDS National Convention. Anarchists were being purged before the convention even began, and the group which had been organized by decentralists, community control advocates and anarchists, ended up with nought but the Revolutionary Youth Movement and the Progressive Labor Party, not to mention a few Independent Socialists. The first order of business was the purge of the IS, then the PL. Unfortunately, PL had stacked the Convention too well, and RYM found itself outvoted. Like good democrats, they rejected the majority decision and ran off to grab the National Office files. Each group called itself the one and only SDS. SDS-RYM promptly split again into RYM-I (Weatherman) and RYM-II (Bay Area Revolutionary Union, mostly). The RLA and their new friends, the Student Libertarian Action Movement, went home, with three SDS chapters (including Lysander Spooner SDS) to add to their disillusioned YAF chapters into RLA. Now, they thought, for the YAF convention, let us try to organize an Anarchist Caucus. And they did, writing aboard Karl Hess's yacht, the *Tranquil*, the Tranquil Statement, for enlightenment of the YAF average delegate.

But purges were underway in YAF. First, Wallacism had to go, especially as it was being succeeded by Willis Carto's real racism, and Yockeyite neo-nazism. Some libertarians who supported this action became uneasy when Objectivist chapters were purged next. Then came the dismissal of the Pennsylvania and California State Offices. Needless to say, the libertarians rose up angrily, and Libertarian Caucus mailings began to appear across the country with appeals for delegates to overturn the rulings. In Wisconsin, where David Keene awaited his inevitable succession to the National Chairmanship (with, I might add, LC endorsement!), the author of this paper sat blissfully unaware of anything but rumors of malcontents and subversives, and accepted a delegate status (as the token Canadian?) with the understanding that Keene was to be it.

Arriving at St. Louis, Labor Day, 1969, your author was as interested in the St. Louis World Science Fiction Convention as much as the national YAF convention. But the meeting with Dana Rohrabacher of California and Don Ernsberger of Pennsylvania, the ousted LC leaders, instructed one as to the perfidies of the National Office. The Wisconsin delegation broke, and I and my roommate found our vote for the key Executive Committee positions wrested from us through parliamentarianism. We were more "in" with the establishment than were many of the 100 LCers who lost their credentials battles, and regained our votes for the Issues, but by then the votes were running 700 to 200 against us. Michael Ingallinera of Virginia, who ran as a "Philosophical Anarchist" received 50, which was the maximum strength of the Anarchist Caucus, Rohrabacher got around 250 which was the maximum non-purged LC strength. Then one of the AC lit a Xerox copy of his draft card before a television camera. The Traditionalists tried to annihilate him physically, and he was protected by a living shield of libertarians. Radicalization had set in, and the RLA-SLAM people had found their mission: *agents provocateurs*. Many of us went home,

convinced by Keene that justice would triumph and the splits would be healed. Come 1971, why, we would *really* be organized.

The Trads retained control of both California and Pennsylvania, and Ernsberger's group joined Wollstein's SRI to form the Society for Individual Liberty (SIL). The Rohrabacher wing formed the California Libertarian Alliance, and Dana travelled around the country, seeding local LA's with ex-YAFers. Your author founded the University of Wisconsin LA in late 1969, and the Wisconsin LA the following summer. Meanwhile, many of us went to New York for the first Libertarian Conference, held Columbus Day, and featuring Rothbard and Hess.

But strange things had happened to the Trad speechwriter for Barry Goldwater who had gone Objectivist, then joined the Constitutional Alliance of Oakley Bramble, and finally rediscovered the Taftites camped out in New York. Murray Rothbard had tried to carry the Word in *Left and Right*, but finally gave that up for the *Libertarian Forum* (nee *Libertarian*) and Hess became the Washington editor. Hess wrote an article for *Playboy*, "The Death of Politics," which came to be one of the major recruiting tools of the movement. But almost as it was printed, his fascination with the Leftists that Murray had formed tactical alliances with led him to repudiate most of it, and attempt to work with the Black Panthers.

The ex-SDSers and YAFers met each other at the conference and promptly split into a group which followed Hess into an attack on Fort Dix, and a group which stayed around to hear Murray discuss economics and Revisionist History. Some of us were a bit skeptical of our viability at the time, but nevertheless, this author, at least, became an anarchist at that time. In February, 1970 Dana staged a California libertarian conference, again "Left-Right," which had 500 people and amazing harmony between anarcho-capitalists and anarcho-communists. Fired up at this success, we returned to our homes to organize.

Later that year, this author moved to New York—interestingly enough, so did the action. The RLA, rent by the Hessian defections to the Far Left, began to wither, and their *Abolitionist* watered itself down until it became the modern wishy-washy *Outlook*. SIL's *Individualist* schedule became more erratic, although their *SIL News*, handled directly by Ernsberger, remained regular. CLA's venture into slick publishing, financed by Robert LeFevre's Rampart College, went two issues as *Pine Tree*, two more as *Rap*, and folded. LeFevre, a pacifist "autarhist" began to lose contributors from his more conservative older followers worried about this influx of, and support for, long-hairs and weirdos. Rohrabacher has recently returned to activism in California and the sagging movement is coming alive again.

Down in Arizona, the Student Libertarian Action Movement was embattled by street fighting with the State, followed by court cases (which SLAM won). That was immediately followed by a Split into SLAM and the North American Libertarian Alliance, which coughed up two issues of *Sunburst*, folded, and was resurrected as a Social Revolutionary Anarchist Federation local (SRAF is the Left anarchist grouping). SLAM devolved to just putting out the *Match!*, which Fred Woodworth continues to do. Meanwhile, in New York, as SIL and RLA waned, Gary Greenberg's New York Libertarian Association was joined by this author's New York Libertarian Alliance, and LA's were formed on all Manhattan campuses by early 1972, and several others outside of Manhattan. *New Libertarian Notes*, originally a pronunciation pun on *NYU Libertarian Notes*, expanded to cover the East Coast movement. Then came the Libertarian Party.

With the exception of the defeat of the old Preform-Inform crowd's attempt to build a new country in the North Sea (which was carved up by Britain, Norway and Denmark) and their subsequent retreat to nomadism and troglodytism (*Vonulife*), no bigger setback hit the libertar-

ian movement in a decade. The Libertarian Alliance's attempt to bring together all libertarians, limited archist or anarchist, left or right, pro-political party and voting or revolutionary, voter-boycotting, or whatever, collapsed. Defections to the Party with the realization that *it* and *its* positions would be identified in the popular mind as what libertarianism was, regardless of how conservative and statist it was, forced us into an anti-party tactic. First, an anti-party group was needed to attract people turned off by the Party. Thus was SLAM reborn in New York. Secondly, a method of reaching the semi-converted attached to the Party, and exposing them to real libertarianism was needed. At the moment, organization has begun on a Libertarian Party Radical Caucus. In New York, the State group has already worked to co-opt us, this author finding himself on the State Committee/Executive Committee of the Free Libertarian Party. LPRC is obviously pictured as analogous to the YAF LC, and it will be interesting to see if the LP goes in for purges, etc. or some more sophisticated sell-out and suppression approach.

This is where you find yourself now. And, as you can deduce, this is where *I* came in!

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