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Agora v. Arena

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How does the world around you look to a hard-core libertarian?

Well, in general, it looks much like it does to everyone else... although freedom's advocates do fend to have a greater than their statistical share of quirkery and kookery. Libertarians are amused by comedy, saddened by tragedy, sweetened by candy, and soured by ill fortune. Yes it is rumoured that when we are cut, we, too, bleed.

But there is one difference that we share with perhaps only the devoutly theological and the Marxist. We have a comprehensive social structure. When we look at a newspaper story, we integrate the facts into our social theory and draw conclusions. We see mighty and powerful forces, and sweeps of history.

The well-read non-initiate sees facts around him, but they are confusing and not of a piece. They make only limited sense and are explained by ad hoc theories read in yesterday's column by some pundit who has already forgotten how he interpreted it.

An assassination? First reaction: how tragic! Second reaction: how senseless of that person to act that way. Third

thought: he believed such and such and therefore... or, he did not seem the type to kill somebody, so the poor man must be insane! It is here that the radical libertarian departs from his fellow man... and not just because he does not believe in insanity.

Perhaps the libertarian will end in agreement that the act was private and motivated by whim of an irrational man. But before that conclusion, he will investigate other possibilities—possibilities that the act *was* motivated by (perhaps not so enlightened, but nevertheless) self-interest.

He will ask: *cui bono*? Whose good?

Tariffs are not passed because of the great belief of the masses in the “American system” or “Economic Nationalism”—that is just the sales pitch. The cotton tariff exists because the cotton agricultural plutocrats financed the lobbying, bought those who would be, and paid off editors to sling propaganda and twisted workers to vote against those who would oppose them. And make deals with other plutocrats fighting for their interests who control their bloc of legislators *et al.* The legislature of the democratic country in question is then just the playing field of the powerful interests.

They know the rules of the game and, if they do not play by them, they get slapped down. The gladiator may not step out of the ring and stab Caesar. The political system is the arena of the ruling class, the power elite, the Higher Circles, the open “conspiracy” of a State. Political parties and their factions are the tools, the mock weapons, the counters on the game board for the rich and powerful.

Preach populism and soak the rich? Fine, turn it into the Populist Party and you have, say, the silver interests sending a rook against a few pawns of King Republican. Progressivism your bag? Excellent, the transportation interests can get “regulation” which will finally solve the troublesome problem of cartelization on a relatively free market.

How about social democracy? Good, the industries of “peace” which were not getting their “share” of the federal rip-off known as “taxes” can now expand their markets of goods for the needy’s “welfare.”

Surely Bolshevism, raw State communism, is immune to plutocratic gain? Ask Pepsi-Cola, which was just granted a monopoly over Coca-Cola in the USSR in exchange for a monopoly of sales and distribution in Russian wines.

Perhaps, if you have just been brought to the border of acceptance of this awful truth about Statism, you recoil in horror at the cynical picture presented. Is there no hope, you ask? Can not a Party of Libertarians escape the fate that has overtaken every other, from Whig to Nazi? (And if you believe that the National Socialists were true to *their* campaign promises, ask an old follower of Ernst Roehm or Gregor Strasser.)

Nope. No hope.

But why do we have to play the game in which the other side has made the rules and has all the pieces? There *is* another game whose only rules are the laws of nature, whose rules we can deduce from the study of science and praxeology. These rules are not subject to whimsical legislation and the clash of interests, whatever interpretation you prefer.

The Market still works on the basis of supply and demand. And always will. And anyone who can get goods with relatively low cost (perhaps with high risks if there is a lot of State intervention) to one willing and able to pay a relatively high price will still earn a profit. The worker usefully engaged in satisfying demanded production will earn his wages—if he accepts the risk and takes needed precautions against rip-offs. The investor can still gain his interest by backing the aforementioned entrepreneur and labourer—if he hedges against the State-caused inflation.

And those whose wealth arose and is maintained in defiance of the State and is threatened by the State’s existence will

be moved by self-interest to destroy his enemy—just as the plutocrat is motivated to maintain the system.

Choose the arena over the agora if you will. I intend to pick up my marbles and go home. And have.