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## **A Coherent Vision of Freedom**

*By Carl S. Milsted, Jr. Ph.D.*

As shown previously, one way to avoid the “lesser of two evils” dilemma is to position our candidates leftward in many three-way races. Like it or not, the Republicans have successfully marketed themselves as being more libertarian – at least on economic issues – than the Democrats. Some of the RP politicians even follow through on this marketing position, albeit much less well than we Libertarians would like.

Unfortunately, campaigns emphasizing the Libertarian Party’s social issue stances have done much less well than this theory would indicate – at least those campaigns in which I have participated. Therefore, I have made a concerted effort to more carefully listen to the views of those dope smoking hippies who should be a core part of our coalition in order to find out what we have missed.

It turns out that the Nolan Chart does not completely describe the differences between Left and Right in this country. Differentiating ourselves from the RP involves more than emphasizing social issues and foreign policy. On the plus side, we can get this positioning while pushing quite a few economic ideas. I have done so successfully with groups of people who have a history of saying “capitalism kills.”

There are two main differences between the Left and Right that we need to understand in order to truly reach the politically homeless. My (somewhat limited) testing in the field indicates that these are dynamite – the closest things to magic bullets that I have come across. This essay will describe the first: a coherent vision of freedom.

### ***What is Freedom?***

We libertarians pride ourselves on our consistency. We have derived our platform from a single axiom, and have done so consistently. However, we have *not* achieved *emotional* consistency. There are many free-spirited individualists who view our program with revulsion. Think on it: we libertarians get branded as anarchists at the same time that we fail to get the anarchist vote!

I can hear the Objectivists objecting in the background: “How is it possible to be logically consistent and emotionally consistent at the same time? Are you siding with the philosophically ill?..” The solution to the conundrum is simple: the axiom we use to derive our program is incomplete; it does not fully define us as being in favor of freedom, of liberty. Simple non-initiation of force unless there is violation of person, property, or contract does *not* obviously lead to more freedom. Indeed, there are steps towards this definition that are steps *away* from freedom!

If your wish to understand the gut reaction of many to our program and our rhetoric, watch the movie *Robocop*. This movie presents a dystopian future based on libertarian ideas just as 1984 presents a dystopian future based on socialist ideas. Imagine a society run by an armed impersonal bureaucracy stripped of any veneer of social responsibility or deference to the “will of the people.” This is the vision of big corporations released from the bonds of government, and

there is some history to back this vision. One can argue that this dystopia has some faulty extrapolations. A completely libertarian society would be considerably different. However, it is true that if some aspects of our program were implemented without others, we could end up with such a society. Order of operations is important! As an example, consider how the privatization of prisons has helped fuel the drug war.

Freedom is about having choices, real choices, choices better than “your money or your life.” Our options are limited by the government, true, but they are also limited by other things. They are limited by etiquette, by contract, and by our bosses at work. For many people, these limitations are more apparent than the limitations visibly imposed by government.

In his essay “The Abolition of Work” Bob Black states, “There is more freedom in any moderately de-Stalinized dictatorship than there is in the ordinary American workplace.” For those who are professionals, valued specialists (such as computer programmers), or entrepreneurs, this is not so much the case. But talk to those on the assembly line, or those working in call centers, or the people working the checkout lines. Talk to someone subject to time and motion studies, rationed bathroom breaks, strict dress codes and/or drug testing. Think of their vision of the private sector. To many of them, the government and the unions are agents of Liberty, not Tyranny.

Then there are the constraints of contract. Give me a citywide zoning board over the neighborhood associations I have seen. Give me downtown city streets vs. the mall.

True, the libertarian program does address the above issues *indirectly*, but they are treated as beneficial side effects instead of as core values. And if we simply dismantle the non-core aspects of government, looking only at the initiation of force directive for guidance, we could create an aristocracy of private power that is as bad as the current bloated government, an aristocracy that could last for decades before market forces put things aright. Then there is the real danger that this private aristocracy could translate this power into public power, locking the situation in place.

### ***Three Aspects of Freedom***

Freedom has at least three components:

1. Freedom from the policeman and the bureaucrat.
2. Freedom from the boss.
3. Freedom from everyone else.

Libertarians address the first one but sometimes pooh-poooh the others. Liberals focus on the second, though their solutions often backfire. The third aspect is a motivator for environmentalism and calls for population control. That’s right, there is a freedom-loving component to the environmental movement, despite the bureaucratic solutions proposed by many environmental activists.

Big corporations are often bureaucratic, authoritarian, insensitive and sometimes even violent. They use their great concentrations of wealth to manipulate the legal system to screw “the little guy” in the name of “jobs” or “progress.” Many of those “capitalism hating” hippies are *not* pro socialism; they are merely anti-corporate. Indeed, many are actually small business owners. The problem is that the Greens call for bringing in lions to control the wolves. The better solution is to arm the sheep.

It is time we dusted off the Jeffersonian vision of small farmers and independent small businesses. Big government is an especially bad case of concentration of power, but it is not the only case.

### ***Equality and Freedom, They Go Together!***

The Nolan Chart maps political philosophies in terms of economic and personal freedoms. However, it misses a very important value defining many political movements: equality. The average leftist would argue that the issue of equality is the primary differentiator between Left and Right. A well-versed Leftist would further point out that large discrepancies of wealth are equivalent to the power to initiate force. An exaggeration, perhaps, but “Your time or you starve” has much in common with “your money or your life.”

We libertarians can and should counter that power is a form of inequality, even if it is nominally in the name of the people. Democracy is inefficient; an activist democracy eventually delegates power to the executive creating an elite. Further, power is often converted into personal wealth, even by members of governments that make grandiose claims of being progressive.

Freedom and equality go together for these reasons and more. Great inequalities of wealth require dangerous men to protect them, whether they be part of a police force or a private army (e.g. feudal systems). Inequality leads to envy. Conversely, a society with more independent farmers and business owners means more people appreciative of the values of property, hard work and honesty.

### ***An Egalitarian Agenda***

There are many steps towards the libertarian goal of a government that respects natural rights that are also steps towards significantly greater equality. Here are a few:

- Eliminate business licenses save those that truly protect people from irreversable harm.
- Outlaw civic funding of sports arenas, special business tax breaks, and other forms of local corporate welfare.
- End farm price supports. Raising food prices is highly regressive, and most of the benefits go to large corporate farms anyway. If aiding the small family farm is to be done, it should be by exempting the first  $x$  thousand dollars of farm income from taxation (either property or income taxes).
- Replace the income taxes with wealth taxes. Income taxes hit those who are *getting* wealthy. Wealth taxes hit those who *are* wealthy.
- Attack Keynesian economics for what it is: a call for subsidies of the rich! Deficit spending subsidizes the owners of capital in the same way that the government supports (big) farmers by buying commodities and destroying them. Other anti-savings measures such as Social Security subsidize the owners of capital in the same way that paying some farmers not to plant raises the price of what they are not planting. Inflation is a subsidy to the financial services industry in that it is a tax on those who would store their savings themselves in the form of cash.
- End the drug war. Today, the rich get therapy while the poor go to jail.
- Give school stamps for the poor. Sell the public schools and make the middle and upper classes pay for their own children's education.

The results of these measures would be far more progressive than anything that Al Gore or Ralph Nader can come up with. They are all also steps towards more liberty. (Some libertarians might object that replacing income taxes with wealth taxes are not a step toward liberty. I would point out that the protection of wealth is the primary service provided by government in a libertarian society. Wealth taxes are thus the closest thing to a user fee possible. Further, there are many forms of wealth that are very easy to detect and assess by the government in that they exist only insofar that they are registered by the government, so the need for the evil surveillance system known as the IRS is eliminated.)

### ***An Anti-Corporate Agenda***

Big corporations have their place in society, particularly for handling projects with large economies of scale. However, corporations have become far bigger and more powerful than they would be in a free society. We live not in a welfare state, but in a cuddly fascist state. We have in the libertarian toolbox instruments far more powerful than anti-trust law for putting big corporations in their place.

- The Securities and Exchange Commission regulations have gotten so onerous that it takes over a million dollars on capital just to do the paperwork to float a new issue on the stock exchanges. The public markets have ceased to be a place to launch new corporations to compete with the old. Wealthy “angels” and venture capital firms have had to take over this role.
- The tax code severely penalizes companies that return income to investors as dividends instead of cancerously growing into conglomerates. Dividends returned to investors could make up a huge dispersed pool of capital for creating new corporations.
- The ridiculously complicated tax code, coupled with burdensome employment regulations is a huge barrier to entry to new businesses.
- Want to start that new business in the garage? Watch out for the lawn police! Zoning and other restrictions on property use are another tool to snuff out potential competition.
- High income tax rates coupled with deductions for IRAs, 401(k)s and home mortgages help prevent workers saving in liquid form, savings that could be used to start new businesses. Further, requirements on how to “safely” invest one’s 401(k) plan generally mean investing in Wall Street instead of Main Street.

### ***An Environmental Agenda***

Socialism and fascism are wasteful. Waste is bad for the environment. Libertarians have better tools to clean up the environment than the Greens have. For example:

- Pollution taxes could be used to discourage excessive amounts of those pollutants that are acceptable and natural in small quantities, such as nitrous oxides. If global warming is a concern, then a carbon tax would be the most efficient method to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Such a tax would be very easy to collect, as it is very hard to hide an oil refinery or a coal-fired power plant. Using a carbon tax to replace the income tax or social security taxes would be a huge reduction in surveillance and bureaucracy.

- Sprawl is a problem. Tradable property rights are the beginnings of a solution. Currently, it is illegal for city centers to grow, thus grow occurs in the suburbs. Tradable property rights as a replacement for zoning would allow the city cores to grow while compensating those whose neighborhoods are changed.
- Farm subsidies encourage farming marginal lands that would be better left as wilderness. Eliminate them.
- Rural electrification subsidies and the post office subsidize encroachment into the last wild places. Eliminate/privatize them.
- Privatizing the schools system would make the inner city schools competitive or even better than the suburban and rural schools due to greater competition in higher density areas.
- Privatizing limited access highways would reduce traffic congestion without encouraging people to move out into the exurbs.
- Property rights in the ocean fisheries would not only end over-fishing, they would be a major step towards ending world hunger. Current agriculture produces more than enough calories to feed the world. It is edible protein that is in short supply. Farming parts of the oceans would provide an abundance of edible protein.

### ***An Insensitive Agenda***

Just to show that it is possible to make steps toward less intrusive government that many people would consider steps away from freedom, consider the following platform:

- Repeal anti-trust regulations.
- Sell off the national forests and parks.
- End all federal welfare programs.
- End labor laws and affirmative action.
- End taxes on capital gains and inheritance.
- Flatten the income tax rates.

Some of the above is worth pursuing *after* the progressive and anti-corporate agendas are implemented. When the corporations have been cut down to size in general, anti-trust law will probably become unnecessary. When the middle-class has regained power and responsibility, reprivatizing charity becomes thinkable.

But starting out with these actions is not only a bad idea, it is political suicide. Order of operations is important.