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Two Views of Social Order: Conflict or Cooperation?

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The following is a transcript of a speech given at The Future of Freedom Foundation's June 2007 conference, "Restoring the Republic: Foreign Policy & Civil Liberties" held in Reston, Virginia.

Man 1: Lew Rockwell is founder of the Ludwig von Mises Institute and the editor of arguably the finest libertarian news site on the Internet, lewrockwell.com, which I know a lot of you are familiar with, and it serves as a great influence for many of us libertarians. All of the speakers in this lineup I have the utmost admiration and respect for, but certainly Lew counts right up there in that category, that he was one of the ones I discovered when I first got into libertarianism, and the Mises Institute served as a great inspiration for me. So it's a real honor to have him as part of this program. He's the editor of six books and the author of thousands of articles appearing in journals, magazines, and newspapers. The title of his talk is "Two Views of Social Order: Conflict or Cooperation?" Lew Rockwell.

<Applause>

Lew Rockwell: Bumper, thank you very much. It's a great honor for me to be here. Like all of you I've followed everything Bumper has done over the years, especially with the Future of Freedom Foundation, and applauded him. And I want to applaud the donors who've made this great conference possible — you did good. I should also mention that I remember right after 9/11 when a great silence descended upon the libertarian movement, except for a few yelps of fealty to the presidency and the wars and dictatorship that they were establishing, with very few exceptions. And Bumper was a real leader in that period, as he has always been, but especially at that period he stood out and never compromised, never gave in.

<Applause>

Lew Rockwell: A great man. There are two clear and present dangers to liberty in America. One is known as the Left, the other is known as the Right. They're dangerous because they seek to use government to mold society into a form that they seek, rather than that form that liberty

achieves if society were left to develop on its own. I'm going to assume that the Left and the Right come to their views sincerely, that their passion for using government is driven by some fear that the absence of government would yield catastrophe. So the burden of my talk today will be to identify and explain the common thread that connects the worldview of the Left and the Right and suggests that they are both wrong about the capacity of society, whether it is defined locally or internationally, to manage itself.

Let us begin with the question, why should we have confidence in the notion that society can develop on its own, that it contains within itself the capacity for self-management? Another way to ask the question, why do the advocates of Leviathan believe that the members of society are incapable of achieving cooperative engagement in the absence of the state? The discovery of the capacity for cooperation was the great intellectual contribution of the classical liberal school that gave rise to the American Revolution. It grew out of a belief that whatever imperfections social self-organization had, there was nothing that centralized government could do to improve it. They took the daring step of tossing off the rule of the consolidated state in favor of self-government, the Founders. They didn't fear chaos, they looked forward to liberty. This event was the product of the liberal ideas held to by most all sectors of society.

Now liberalism did not seek utopia, it sought liberty under the conviction that permitted individual members to achieve a harmony of interests. They believed it to be true because they lived it. The belief in this harmony of interests was the great passion of the old liberal intellectuals of which Thomas Jefferson was a leading exponent. After the Revolution, when government began to regroup and reconsolidate, the liberal idea began to gain detractors. John Adams, whom Jefferson beat in the great presidential election of 1800, never stopped resenting Jefferson's suspicions towards power and his opposition to most everything the federal government wanted to do. It was Jefferson's conviction that liberty yielded social cooperation. It was Adams's view that liberty could only be established and sustained through government authority. These two opposing views persist to this day.

Adams went so far as to level the familiar accusation against Jefferson's faith in pure liberty. Adams wrote him in 1813 — and this is a verbatim quote — “You never felt the terrorism of Shays’ Rebellion in Massachusetts. You certainly never felt the terrorism excited by Genet in 1793 when 10,000 people in the streets of Philadelphia day by day threatened to drag Washington from his house and effect a revolution in the government. I have no doubt you were fast asleep in philosophical tranquility when Market Street was as full of men as could stand by one another, and even before my door when some of my domestics, in a frenzy, determined to sacrifice their lives in my defense. What think you of terrorism Mr. Jefferson?”

So we can see then how Shays’ Rebellion served the government in the same way that 9/11 does now. It was held up as an example of the kind of terror that would befall us if we refused to give government the power and money necessary to make the world peaceful and wonderful.

What Adams conveniently overlooked was that the rebellion of what you spoke was actually sparked by government credit expansion and taxation. There would've been no need for a revolt had government not created the conditions that led to it. And so it is with 9/11. It was government that created the motives that led the hijackers to give up their lives, and it was government that had so regulated airline security that passengers and crew were defenseless in the face of criminals with box cutters. The right response would've been to roll back the conditions that created the motives for 9/11 and to unleash the power of private enterprise to prevent such attacks in the future. Instead, the impulse of the state, as backed by uninformed public ideology, was to escalate the conditions that breed terrorism and put government ever more in charge of airline security.

From Shays' Rebellion to 9/11, we see two worldviews of society at work. One sees the government as the source of liberty and order and fears society without the state more than any conceivable alternative. The other sees government as the source of disorder, which uses that disorder to enhance its power and material resources at the expense of society. The Left and Right in this country hold to the first view. The successors to Jefferson hold to the second view, which in Jefferson's time was called the liberal view and which today is called the libertarian view.

There are international parallels in each of these positions. Conservatives are of a view that the world without a single superpower is chaos and darkness. The Left believes in internationalizing their version of the domestic welfare state under the management of a single supernational institution. Libertarians on the other hand believe that international society thrives best without either a superpower or a supernational institutional manager. I maintain that these two views of order constitute the decisive ideological conflict of our time, which pits the libertarians against the two prevailing ideologies of the day. The old liberal view lives in the writings of such people as John Locke, Frédéric Bastiat, Lord Acton, Alexis de Tocqueville, and in the 20th century in the work of Mises, Hayek, and Rothbard. Hayek himself traced the liberal tradition from Cicero to the Middle Ages, to John Locke, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant.

The thread that connects all their thought is the idea that society is more capable than government, believes in shaping a prosperous order. In the same way that Locke believed that the nation state was a threat to human rights and social peace, so Kant envisioned an international order that was unmanaged from the top down but rather generated its own orderly peace. What was critical for Hayek in the liberal tradition was the conviction that liberty and law could exist in harmony with each other. Law itself emerged spontaneously from within society as its members sought better ways of managing their own affairs. The law of which Hayek speaks is law adhered to as a matter of voluntary contract, or what we more commonly refer to as rules. We have rules that govern the management of subdivisions, of civic organizations, of businesses, churches. Or think of merchant law that emerged over many centuries in international trade. This law exists apart from the state and reflects the desire of individuals to cooperate towards their

own betterment and their rightful conviction that their own betterment is consistent with the flourishing of society.

In contrast, writes Hayek, there is another tradition of law that sees all rules in society as rising from the state and always and everywhere must amount to a restriction on the liberty of the individual. The exponents of this view include the tyrants and despots of the ancient world, and in modern times, Thomas Hobbes and Karl Marx. The writings of the latter two are the preeminent influence over what we today call the Right and the Left.

It is impossible to understand this view of government without first understanding the illiberal view of society. The illiberal view regards society as essentially unworkable on its own because it is riddled with conflicting interests. Let us begin with the Left. They believe society has fundamental flaws and deep-rooted conflicts that keep it in some sort of structural imbalance. All these conflicts and disequilibria cry out for government fixes, for Leftists are certain that there is no social problem that a good dose of power can't solve. If the conflicts they want are not there they make them up. They look at what appears to be a happy suburban subdivision and see pathology. They see an apparently happy marriage and imagine it is a mask for abuse. They see a thriving church and think the people inside are being manipulated by a cynical and corrupt pastor.

Their view of the economic system is the same. They see poor peasants in the Third World drinking a Coke or making Nikes and cry exploitation. They figure that prices don't reflect reality but instead are set by large players. There is a power imbalance at the heart of every exchange domestically and internationally. The labor contract is a mere veneer to cover exploitation. To the brooding Leftist it is inconceivable that people can work out their own problems, that trade could be to people's mutual advantage, that society can be essentially self-managing, or that attempts to use government to reshape and manage people might backfire. Their faith in government knows few limits. Their faith in people is thin or nonexistent. This is why they are a danger to liberty.

The remarkable fact about the conflict theory of society held by the Left is that it ends up creating more of the very pathologies they believe have been there from the beginning. The surest way to drive a wedge between labor and capital is to regulate the labor markets to the point that people cannot make voluntary trades. Both sides begin to fear each other. It is the same with relations between races, sexes, the able and disabled, or any other groups you can name. It is the same with international relations. A tariff or trade sanction is nothing but war by another means. The very path to creating a conflict where none need exist is to put a government bureaucracy in charge. This view was at the heart of the old socialist vision. They believed that the key conflict in society was between those who owned capital and those who worked for capital. The gain of the capitalist always came at the expense of labor. Similarly the advance of labor can only come from the expropriation of the capitalist class through a revolution that is just because the laborers are only taking back what was expropriated from them.

Now as time has passed we've come to see the error in this view. Capital and labor do not exist in fundamental conflict. Their relations are managed by contract in the same way that relations between laborers and capitalists are managed by contract. Moreover these two groups are not hermetically sealed off from each other. Capitalists are workers and workers can be capitalistic owners of their own property. Only in the most primitive stages of development does it appear otherwise.

Once it became obvious that Marxism had mischaracterized the workings of capitalism, the Left looked for other forms of conflict to confirm their worldview. Most recently they have begun to advance the idea that man's interests can only be pursued at the expense of nature. The flourishing of one occurs at the expense of the flourishing of the other. Thus it is that a seemingly happy and prosperous people could in reality be doing deadly damage to the earth, the interests of which can only be advanced at the expense of prosperous consumers and producers. The Left accepts the reality that this will make everyone poorer, as indeed all forms of socialism do, but they tell us this is good for us and good for the planet.

The traditional and correct answer to the conflict theory is that there is essentially nothing government can do to improve the workings of society. During the Great Depression, for example, most everyone on the Left thought that government was the only way out. The hard Left favored Communist revolution; the soft Left favored the New Deal. The old liberals pointed out that it was government itself that had brought about the crisis and that more government intervention could only make matters worse. This was the rational response but it did not carry the day.

After the Second World War we saw the emergence of a strange creature in American life, something that called itself conservatism. It was opposed to the Left in American life, particularly that branch that was sympathetic to Communism. It counseled vagaries like prudence in public life, but in a crucial way it adopted one tenet of the Leftist worldview. It rejected old liberalism as a vision for how society can work in the absence of government. It adopted a conflict view of society, a different brand rooted in the assertions of Hobbes rather than Marx. The idea that conflict was at the very heart of society, absent government, was a key aspect of this. This new thing called conservatism adopted some of the rhetoric of the Old Right. It defended property and economic enterprise. But what was critical was the introduction of a notion that society if left to its own devices would collapse into chaos.

This was particularly true in international affairs. So while the Cold War was originally an invention of the Democrat Harry Truman, it was tailor-made to appeal to conservatives who were looking for an ideological enemy to slay. It is one thing to say that Communism is an evil ideological system. It is another to say that we cannot rest until every Communist is killed and every Communist government wiped from the face of the earth. What happened to the noninterventionist views of the Old Right? They were predicated on the idea that there could be a leaderless world order, that nations could best get along without an overarching authority and

source of law. But after the war that too began to change; a new conviction arose. Russell Kirk wrote in 1954 that "Civilized society requires distinctions of order, wealth and responsibility and it cannot exist without true leadership." Society longs for just leadership, he said.

He contrasted this view to what he considered the erroneous opinion of Ludwig von Mises. Mises, wrote Kirk, had exaggerated faith in the rationality of individuals. Kirk, in contrast, sees that all of history is governed by two great forces, love and hate. Neither are rational impulses. He says, in order to achieve the triumph of love over hate the conservative "looks upon government as the great power for good." And so conservatives threw themselves behind the force of government to achieve their aims, and no matter how many wicked things government did over the years under conservative control, they always told themselves that it was surely better than the much-feared alternative of an unmanaged society.

Kirk became more explicit as the years went on, and after the old liberalism was refashioned by Rothbard as libertarianism, conservatives began to define themselves in opposition to all forms of liberalism. The government had many things to do in this world, they said: The police, with a thin blue line that separated chaos from order, and forget just how awful the police often are in reality. The U.S. military empire was all that stood between us and Soviet domination; they paid no attention to the fact that a Soviet economy always had been and always would be a basket case. They became cheerleaders of government power of a different sort. Frank Chodorov was so upset with tendencies on the Right that he once said, "anyone who calls me a conservative gets a punch in the nose."

We've lived now through six years of a Republican president, backed by conservatives, who still escapes fundamental criticism by them. After promises of a humble foreign policy, war and war spending define our era. We're told that every problem with war can be solved through more force; that there is nothing necessarily wrong with imprisoning people without cause and without legal representation; that torture can be a legitimate tactic; that some countries have to be destroyed in order to be made free; and that we can have all the welfare and all the warfare we desire at virtually no cost thanks to the miracle of central banking and debt-driven economic growth.

Now some people say that the real problem with the Bush Administration is that it's too far left and that a genuine rightwing government would be better. I'm disinclined to believe that, for I detect in the Bush Administration's philosophy of government something that departs from the Left in many ways except in its unlimited faith in government to keep order; that is, to exercise force and the threat of force. Elsewhere I've referred to members of political groups that support the Conservative Right as Red-State Fascists, and I don't use the phrase merely for rhetorical purposes. There was and is something called fascism as a nonleftist form of social theory that puts unlimited faith in the state to correct what they see as the flaws in society and the world.

Let's look more closely at the conservative view of police power. While it's true that law itself is critical to freedom and police can defend rights of life and property, it does not follow that any tax-paid fellow bearing official arms and sporting jackboots is on the side of the good. Every government regulation and tax is ultimately backed by the police power. So free market advocates have every reason to be as suspicious of socialist-style police powers as anyone on the Left. Uncritical attitudes towards the police lead in the end to the support of the police state and in turn to the celebration of American imperialism as somehow filling a void in the world. And to those who doubt that, I would invite a look at the U.S.-backed regime in Iraq, which has been enforcing marital law since the invasion, even while most conservatives have been glad to believe that these methods constitute steps towards freedom.

I don't see this as a contradiction of conservative principles. It appears as the fulfillment of their essentially Hobbesian view of how society must function. And the problem of police power is hitting Americans very close to home. It is the police, much militarized and federalized, who are charged with enforcing the on-again/off-again states of emergency that have characterized recent American civilian life. It is the police who confiscated guns from New Orleans residents during the flood, kept residents away from their homes, refused to let the kids go home in the Alabama tornado earlier this spring, and will be the enforcers of the curfews, checkpoints, and speech controls that the politicians want during the next national emergency.

If we want to see the way that police power could treat U.S. citizens, look carefully at how the U.S. troops in Iraq are treating the civilians there, or how prisoners in Guantanamo Bay are treated. A leading contender for the Republican nomination received wild cheers when he proposed to double the capacity of Guantanamo. This ideology of power is inherent in postwar conservatism, and that is particularly clear when it comes to war. In the 1970s they developed a myth on the Right that the real problem with Vietnam was not the intervention itself but the failure to carry it out to an even more grim and ruthless end. This seems to be the only lesson the Bush Administration garnered from the experience.

So the solution to every problem in Iraq — at least I can't think of any exceptions to this rule — has been to apply more force through more troops, more bombs, more planes, more helicopters, more tanks, more guns, more curfews, more patrols, more checkpoints, more controls of every sort. They believe that another surge will work wonders because they're out of ideas. It's as if the Administration were on an intellectual trajectory that it cannot escape. Even after all the evidence that the War on Terror has produced even more terrorism, and this evidence is offered up by the government's own statistics, the champions of the War on Terror cannot think their way out of the intellectual trap into which their ideology of force has locked them.

How is it that the war planners, and their vast numbers of supporters on this question, do not question the underlying assumption that government is capable of achieving all its aims, provided only that it is given enough time and enough fire power? Let's look more carefully at

their crude form of Hobbesianism. Thomas Hobbes's book *Leviathan* was published in 1651, during the English Civil War, in order to justify a tyrannical central government as the price of peace. The natural state of society, he said, was war of all against all. In this world life was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. Conflict was the way of human engagement. Society is rife with it and it cannot be otherwise."

What is striking here is the context of this book. Conflict was indeed ubiquitous, but what was the conflict over? It was over who would control the state and how the state would operate. This was not a state of nature but a society under Leviathan's control. It was precisely Leviathan that bred the very conflict that Hobbes was addressing, and he proposed a cure that was essentially identical to the disease. In fact the result of the Civil War was the brutal and ghastly dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell, who ruled under democratic slogans. This was a foreshadowing of some of the worst political violence of the 20th century. It was Nazism, Fascism, and Communism that had transformed formerly peaceful societies into violent communities in which life did indeed become solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. Leviathan didn't fix the problem; it bred it, and fastened it on society.

What is striking about Hobbes is that he thought not at all about economic problems. The problem of human material well-being was not part of his intellectual apparatus. He could not have imagined what England would become a century to a century and a half later, a bastion of freedom and of rising prosperity for everyone. He wrote at the tail end of an epoch, before the rise of old-style liberalism. At the time that Hobbes was writing the liberal idea had not yet become part of public consciousness in England. In this respect England was behind the continent, where intellectuals in Spain and France had already come to understand the core insights of the liberal idea. But in England John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* would not be written for another 30 years, a book that would supply the essential framework of the Declaration of Independence and lead to the foundation and formation of the freest and most prosperous society in the history of the world.

Because Hobbes didn't think about economic issues, the essential liberal insight was not part of his thinking. And what is this insight? It's summed up in Frédéric Bastiat's claim that "the great social tendencies are harmonious." What Bastiat means by this is that society contains within itself the capacity to resolve conflicts and to create and sustain institutions that further social cooperation. By pursuing their individual self-interest, people can come to mutual agreement and engage in exchange to their mutual benefit.

A critical insight here, one that needs to be taught to every generation, relates to the law of association. The law of association points out that people of radically different abilities, backgrounds, religions, races, and capacities can successfully cooperate to achieve ever-higher levels of social welfare through negotiation and trade. The law of association is what explains the method by which humans were able to move out of caves, away from isolated production, beyond

the hunter/gatherer stage, and into what we call civilization. This law makes it possible for people not to steal from each other, not to kill each other, but to cooperate. It is the basis of society.

It is also the basis of international order. Note that the law of association does not suppose that everyone in society is smart, enlightened, talented, reasonable, or educated. It presumes, in fact, radical inequality and points to the paradox that the world's smartest, most talented person still has every reason to trade with his polar opposite because scarcity requires that the tasks of production be divided between people. Under the division of labor everyone plays an essential role. It is the basis of families, communities, firms, and international trade.

Another fact that needs to be understood is this: the law of association is a fact of human existence, whether or not there is a state. Indeed the foundation of civilization itself perceives the existence of the state. What the law of association addresses is the core problem of freedom itself. If all people were equal, if everyone had the same skill level, if there were racial, sexual, and religious homogeneity in society, if people did not have differences of opinion, there would be few, if any, problems in society to overcome because it would not be a human society; it would be an ant heap or a series of machine parts with no volition.

The essential problem with social and economic organization, apart from scarcity, is precisely how to deal with the fact of inequality and free will. It is here that freedom excels. Let us be clear: the old liberals were not saying there were no such things as criminals. They were saying that society can deal with malevolence through the exchange economy in precisely the way we see hinted at today in private security companies, private production of locks and guns, private arbitration, and private insurance. The free market can organize protection better than the state. Private enterprise can and does provide the police function better than the state. As Hayek argued, the state is wildly overrated as a mechanism of order-keeping. The state is and has been in history a source of disorder and chaos. The essential insight of liberalism is what led the Founding Fathers to take such a radical step in overthrowing the rule of Great Britain. They had to be firmly convinced that chaos would not ensue, that the American people could manage their own affairs without an overachieving Leviathan. They believed that the source of any conflict in their society was the central state, and that society itself could be self-regulating.

In place of control by the king they put the Articles of Confederation, which was a type of government that more closely approximated anarchy than any system in the modern world. The central government was barely in existence; it had essentially no power. Why did anyone believe it could work? It was the new science of liberty that led to this conviction. The American consensus was that Hobbes was wrong; in the state of nature life is not nasty or brutish, or rather if it is there's nothing that a nasty and brutish state can do about it. The only way society can advance out of barbarism is from within by means of the division of labor.

This logic has been forgotten by the American Right. Instead they have bought into the view that society is fundamentally unstable and rife with conflict that only the state can solve.

The root conflict to them is between those who adhere to the law and those who are inclined to break it. These they define as the good guys and the bad guys, but it is not always true since the law these days is not that written by God on our hearts but rather the arbitrary order is handed down by our political masters. This seemingly important point is completely lost on the Republican mind, since they believe that without the state as lawmaker all of society and all of the world would collapse in a muddle of chaos and darkness. Society, they believe, is a wreck without Leviathan — this is why they celebrate the police and military, and ignore merchants and entrepreneurs, and why they think that war deserves credit for world prosperity instead of trade.

The conviction that society, no matter how orderly it appears, is really nothing more than a gloss on deep-rooted conflict expresses itself in the romantic attachment to the police power and war. But it also reflects the Right's attitude towards religion. Many people are convinced that in the end it is not possible that society can be religiously heterogeneous. Particularly these days, most conservatives believe that the United States cannot abide the presence of Muslims and other religious minorities. I'm sure you've heard, as I have, conservatives telling us that there can be no peace in the world so long as the Muslim religion exists; it is inherently bent on violence; they have always been our enemy and always will be our enemy. When I hear such claims I can't help but think of Orwell's *1984*, in which the enemies were always changing and the history always being rewritten. For it wasn't too long ago we were told that Islam, and its fundamentalist branch in particular, was a wonderful ally in the war against Communism, and moreover that they shared with us the virtues of faith and family.

So with a sigh we must point out that so long as Western troops are not invading their countries and starving their peoples, we tend to get along rather well. Indeed, in conditions of freedom, there is no reason why all religions cannot peacefully coexist. The current-day view of conservatives that we are in an intractable war against Islam also stems from their conflict-based view of society. In absence of the state, people find ways to get along, all preserving their own identities. Religious heterogeneity presents no problems that freedom cannot solve. And yet conservatives today are disinclined to accept this view. They seem to have some intellectual need to identify huge struggles at work in history that give them a sense of meaning and purpose. Whereas the founding generation of old liberals was thrilled by the existence of peace and the slow and meticulous development of bourgeois civilization, the Right today is on the lookout for grand morality plays in which we can throw ourselves as a means of making some mark in history; and somehow they've come to believe that a state is the right means to use in fighting this battle.

In short, their understanding of politics is influenced by a past liberal revolution of the 18th century, and they embrace the antiliberal environments in the Enlightenment. Liberty is fine, but order, order is much more important, and order comes from the state. They can't even fathom the truth that liberty is the mother, not the daughter, of order. That thought is too complex for the

mind that believes that the law alone, legislated and by executive fiat, is what separated barbarism from civilization. Freedom to them is not a right but something conferred as a reward for good behavior. The absence of good behavior justifies any level of crackdown. At the end of the Cold War many conservatives panicked there would be no more great causes into which the state could enlist itself. There were about 10 years of books that sought to demonize someone, somewhere, in the hope of creating a new enemy. Maybe it would be China, maybe it would be the culture war, maybe it would be drugs. At least from their point of view 9/11 presented exactly the opportunity they needed, and thus began the newest unwinnable war, the Global War on Terror.

So must government rule every aspect of life until every last terrorist is wiped off the face of the earth? Must we surrender all our liberty and property in this cause, as the regime and its apologists suggest? This view of society is certainly not sustainable in these times and in the future. Ever more of daily life consists in seceding from the state and its apparatus of edicts and regulations. In the online world, billions of deals are made every day that require virtually no government law to enforce. The technology that is pushing the world forward is not created by the state but by private enterprise. The places we shop, the communities we live, are being created by private developers. Most businesses prefer to deal with private courts. We depend on private insurance companies, not police, to reduce the risks in life. We secure our homes and our workplaces through private firms. What's more, these days we see all around us how liberty generates order and how this order is self-sustaining. We benefit daily, hourly, minute by minute, from an order that is not imposed from without but rather generated from within by the remarkable capacity we have for pursuing self-interest while benefiting the whole. Here is the great mystery and majesty of social order, expressed so well in the act of economic exchange.

Many Republicans, by contrast, live intellectually in a world long past, a world of warring states and societies made up of fixed classes that fought over ever-dwindling resources, a world unleavened by enterprise and individual initiative. They imagine themselves to be the class of rulers, the aristocrats, the philosopher kings, the high clerics, the landowners, and to keep that power they gladly fuel the basest of human instincts, including nationalism, jingoism, and hate. Keeping them at bay means keeping the world of their imaginations at bay, and this is a very good and important thing for the sake of civilization.

I've spoken about the problem of those who look at society and see nothing but conflict and no prospect for cooperation. It is the view shared by the Left and the Right. But truly there is an actual conflict at the root of history that is not the one most people understand or see. It is the great struggle between freedom and despotism, between the individual and the state, between the voluntary means and coercion. But here we know where we stand; we stand with the future of freedom. Thank you.

<Applause>

Lew Rockwell: There's time for questions.

Man 2: Howard Onstott from Boerne, Texas.

Lew Rockwell: Hey Howard.

Man 2: How are you Lew?

Lew Rockwell: Good to see you.

Man 2: Very good. Lew, you did not mention or have not mentioned the neocons in all of this. I'm afraid that the conservatives are being blanketed, or I should say the Republican Party is being blanketed as what Bush represents in it today. Wouldn't we do well, both as libertarians and as Republicans, or libertarian Republicans if you will, to distinguish between these former Trotskyites who call themselves neocons now, I'm testing you on this [laughter], and some of the rest of us?

Lew Rockwell: Well I think the neoconservatives are an extremely important group of intellectuals who've had a vast influence towards — these are people who, as you mentioned, came out of Trotskyism — Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz being two of the most famous — and many, many others — young Bill, not young, Bill Kristol and John Podhoretz, their sons, and of course there are a million people in the Bush Administration, columnists, and they're very influential and they've had a bad effect. Whether they actually corrupted the good-hearted conservatives I think is another question. I think there was something rotten at the heart of conservatism in the very beginning. The neoconservatives are smarter than the typical conservative and so they've helped lead them and they — these are people who are dedicated to war and they want perpetual, and the ill-phrased perpetual war, although perpetual war for perpetual war; they don't even claim for perpetual peace.

And they believe in what they call national greatness, they believe in a huge government. George Bush is certainly their kind of guy. They want to reconstruct the Middle East and the whole world through U.S. power, and they have an unlimited faith in the power of the gun, which is why I think they actually thought that U.S. troops are going to be welcomed with flowers in Baghdad and that everything would go well once you dropped the bombs. And they have a hard time understanding that government power can't actually do everything, and in fact it can't do much at all except, of course, evil. So they've been very influential. But I would argue that it goes back to the very beginnings of Conservatism, Bill Buckley and Russell Kirk and all these people, who were long before the neoconservatives started coming into the Republican Party and the conservative movement in the late 1960s and following. I think that conservatism was bad from the beginning. It was wrong from the beginning — to reverse Pat Buchanan's book title, *Not Right from the Beginning*. But the neocons are very bad guys, and it's good to identify them and good to finger them. They're an awful bunch. Yes sir?

Man 3: Ed Elmer from San Antonio. It's been argued that the original Articles of Confederation were more friendly to liberty. Why do you think the early Americans replaced them with our current Constitution?

Lew Rockwell: Well there were ideological battles from the very beginning. You had people, Alexander Hamilton being probably the most important intellectual on the other side, who wanted a far bigger government. They didn't have a problem with big government under the king, they just wanted it run domestically by themselves and not by London. So they set out immediately to have a big central government, and probably Shays' Rebellion, as I mentioned, was a major ideological factor in scaring people. They almost did not get the Constitution through, and the Constitution was a step up in centralization and government power from the Articles. They almost didn't get it through. They could only — what they wanted was the Constitution without a Bill of Rights. Thank goodness that the antiphysical, Anti-Federalists were able to get the Bill of Rights affixed to the Constitution, and that was the only way they could get it passed.

So yes, I think the Constitution unfortunately was a step down. Of course by our current standards the Constitution looks like the great upland of liberty to us. It would be a huge improvement over what there is now. But yes, I think I'm one — I stand with the Anti-Federalists and with Patrick Henry and others who thought that the Constitution, by establishing a presidency and a Supreme Court, was going to lead to trouble. And if you read the Anti-Federalists — there's one book called *The Anti-Federalist Papers*, but there are other collections and many other articles on it — these guys were very prescient; everything they predicted has all come true, which is not to say that bad things wouldn't have happened under the Articles, because government always wants more. They are constantly in a battle with society to seize more property and more power. So it's very, very difficult to oppose them.

And of course the key thing that people like Jefferson thought, that at least it continued under the Constitution, was what Jefferson called State's Rights, as Ralph Raico mentioned, that divided sovereignty; and not so much the division of powers within the federal government, the key was the power that the states had versus the federal government. This, of course, was abolished by Abraham Lincoln, the evil guy that Tom DiLorenzo will be talking about later in this conference and whose Roman temple is in Washington, if you haven't visited it, where he sits on a vast throne of Jupiter best and greatest with fasces on the side of his throne, very appropriately. And so there's the guy who destroyed I think whatever hope the original Constitution had in holding down the power of government. And so it's been off to the races ever since Abe.

Man 4: Given the comments earlier today and from yourself, and given the fact that we had a Constitution which created I think conditions that are most auspicious for the preservation of liberty, and that it did fail — it was ground under by Lincoln — what do you make of Ron Paul's candidacy? Let's say if the stars line up and he is, he somehow wins the nomination and is elected

President and he's up there January 20th, 2009, taking the oath of office, how effective do you think a Ron Paul presidency would be, given the political realities we face in America today — the size of government and what people —?

Lew Rockwell: Like the old joke, I guess he'd have to start off by saying, "You're all under arrest." I had the great pleasure of working for Ron Paul as his Chief of Staff a number of years ago in Congress, and he definitely is the real article. He's a man of integrity and deep conviction, a man who never compromised, a man who's held to his principles all these years under vast pressure. I'll never forget, for example, the only time that Ronald Reagan ever personally lobbied him, and lobbied him extremely hard, put huge pressure on him, not, you'll be shocked to learn, to cut the government but to spend vast billions on the B-1 bomber, is what Reagan was putting pressure on Dr. Paul; and of course he wouldn't give in, he wouldn't give in to any of these guys.

When I saw him at that South Carolina debate when he answered that question, I thought this is the greatest moment in modern American political history. <Applause> It reminds you of why the state puts such vast resources into trying to keep inconvenient ideas out of the public discourse, because of course the entire apparatus, the whole regime is based on lies. And if the right person is saying the Emperor is naked, they're in trouble. So I've seen, as I'm sure you have all seen, a vast outpouring of support for Ron Paul like nothing I've — I haven't seen anything like this since the Goldwater campaign, and that was nothing like Ron Paul. And of course the Goldwater campaign was only among a minority, and very — was no Ron Paul, although a lot of us liked him at the time.

So this is happening not from the Ron Paul campaign, which is not too far from here, in Falls Church. It's entirely decentralized, it's involving tens of thousands of people all across the country, groups. I had one lady who ran Pat Buchanan's — Linda Muller, who ran Pat Buchanan's Internet efforts when he was running and now she's working for Ron — she said, "I've never seen anything like it, people in my own neighborhood printing up their own yard signs, and groups organizing and people printing bumper stickers." And she said, just, it's entirely decentralized, unconnected to the official campaign. And this is true all over the country.

You've heard about what's happening on the Internet. There's never been anything like this politically on the Internet. They mentioned Howard Dean. This is a far bigger phenomenon than Howard Dean. The other day Bruce Bartlett who was — used to work for Ron, then I'm sorry to say worked for George Bush the first; but Bruce had a column and he said he thought that Ron, at the very least, was going to be the Gene McCarthy of this era and that Gene McCarthy changed the politics of the Democratic Party for decades. I think — there's no telling where Ron is going to go. I think he's already had a huge effect for good. I think he's going to have even a bigger effect for good.

As to what's going to happen politically, my own guess is I think they're not going to have a candidate at the end of the primaries, there's not going to be anybody with a majority. So there's

going to be a very interesting five or six months before the convention. People love Ron Paul. I don't know if you saw him on the Bill Maher show the other night. It's a very liberal, young audience, and anytime anybody said anything that was just slightly critical of Ron — this was Ben Affleck and P.J. O'Rourke — the audience starts chanting, "Ron Paul, Ron Paul, Ron —." And Maher himself said he'd never seen a Republican greeted like this. They were just cheering to the rafters. Young people love him. Here he is the oldest candidate in the race — he's older than McCain, although of course in far better shape than McCain. He's a great athlete, by the way, Ron Paul, in addition to all the other things about him, and he's touched the hearts of young people like no — I've never seen anything like this — maybe since Gene McCarthy. And I worked with Gene McCarthy myself in a very low-level thing and I've — young people loved him. But Ron is so far above Gene McCarthy. I just — I think anything's possible.

If he were to get the nomination and were to be elected, which you have to think this is unlikely but not impossible, I think that it would mean just a huge surge of public opinion. And the government can't actually stand against public opinion, as Philip Whetay and Hume and Mises and Rothbard and others have shown. Government is a small minority. The parasite can't be too big or it can't live off the host. It's always a minority, and they're constantly concerned about keeping the host unknowing and happy to give to support them. They can't actually stand against a change in the climate of opinion. So if something — that would be a revolution in the climate of opinion. I think Ron Paul is already bringing out a revolution in the climate of opinion.

I feel very confident and very optimistic about the changes that Ron has already been responsible for. I think it's just hugely thrilling and heartening, and I think the establishment, the elites, are terrified. They don't know how to handle him. They tried to keep him out of the future debates, and the response was so overwhelming that they had to back off. You remember that the Chairman of the Michigan Republican Party started off by saying he should be kicked out of future debates. But this is a guy who of course never hears from anybody. At lazy Michigan Republican headquarters, the cobwebs on the phone and so forth, well all of a sudden, from the whole world and the Ron Paul supporters worldwide, calls and e-mails, people started posting on the Web his personal cell phone, his wife's cell phone number. So he finally backed off and said well I don't actually want to keep anybody out of the debate, so well thanks a lot.

So Howard Kurtz, who is the *Washington Post* media critic and is on Reliable Sources on CNN on Sunday morning a couple of weeks ago, said shouldn't we keep these fringe candidates like Ron Paul out of the future debates? And he has a question every week where he asks for e-mails. And so the next week he gets on and he's up and he's sort of got a hangdog look and discouraged and angry that people had disagreed with him. And he said he was going to read three typical e-mails and — which means — so the first one was, what do you mean keep Ron Paul out of the debates? He said, I'm Japanese and I can tell you all my friends in Japan, we just want to hear about Ron Paul. And then the next guy said, so you people in the media, before any

votes, before any primaries, you want to tell us who should be the candidates? And then the third guy said, oh, so you want only the bought and paid for candidates to be up there? So Kurtz said, well they all have to get candidate contributions, they're all bought and paid for. Well not quite Howard — right? Some of them are bought and paid for. Ron Paul is not bought and paid for.

So here because of the Internet and because of people's enthusiasm spontaneously welling up all over the country and all over the world, he doesn't actually need \$50 million, he doesn't actually need to be able to buy statewide TV in California and similar very expensive — he doesn't need 120 paid staffers like the McCain campaign has or the 150 that Mitt Romney has. So it's quite an extraordinary moment. I think we're all going to be very glad that we are alive at this period, and I'll just say that I'm very optimistic. And excuse the long answer.

<Applause>

Man 5: This is a philosophical question. It relates to you and the preceding two speakers. Many years ago, in the '50s, my first full-length book I read about libertarians was by Leonard E. Read, *Government, An Ideal Concept*, which I now consider somewhat conservative. A few years later, probably — or *New Liberty* by Rothbard — I read that a self-organizing system which he labeled as anarchy was the way to go. How do you read this?

Lew Rockwell: Well I'm a Rothbardian and — Murray called himself not an anarchist but an anarchical capitalist, because of course most of the people who call themselves anarchists believe that in the absence of a state we'd have communism, of course —. No, Murray's view is Murray's view, as it is mine, that private property is inherent in the human construction. This is not something imposed by evil capitalists or whatever, it's part of human nature. I knew Leonard Read, and Leonard Read was a great man, and a man to whom we all owe a tremendous amount for his establishment of the Foundation for Economic Education, what he did for Ludwig von Mises and many other things.

That particular book is not — I'll just say it's not my favorite one of Leonard's. I don't find it a persuasive book. It's very tough to come up as a libertarian with reasons for government. It's actually very tough to prove that such an institution should exist, and I would say that he didn't do it in that book. But I think it's a very tiny — Leonard was a great champion of liberty and a great man and I'm sure glad I knew him. And I think one of the great things about Bumper is he carries on Leonard's work. I know Bumper was inspired by him too, and so a lot of what Leonard Read stood for, all the good things Leonard Read stood for, continue in a number of ways, but one of the ways they continue is in the Future of Freedom Foundation. Yes sir.

Man 6: Not a question but a comment, just a reiteration. Leonard Read, I remember him speaking about a remnant out there, and why this convention here, and people like yourself and the speakers that have come before you today, as well as the ones that are going to come the rest of the day and the rest of the weekend, and all of us here, how the impact that all of us have on our friends and neighbors, the importance of it; because you talked about Ron Paul's impact so far

and how it's being spread all over the Internet, all over the country. Don't ever let it be said that things can't change. Ideas do have consequences, as we all know, and we all have an important stake in this, and there is a remnant out and people are listening. They're getting tired of what's happening to them and they're being impacted on a daily, daily basis. So I compliment you and compliment all of you for coming here today. Thank you.

<Applause>

Lew Rockwell: Oh thank you. Yes sir?

Man 7: Mr. Rockwell, you did an excellent job of describing the Left and the Right. But I think most people in this country are nonideological. How do we get them into our camp?

Lew Rockwell: Well I think that's true, but I would argue that everything is done by minorities. It is true most people are not ideological, but ideology accounts for everything, intellectuals account for everything, and ideas count for everything, and ideas do move history. But we don't actually have to get the majority of the population. All we have to get is some — I don't know what the percentage is — but we have to get a significant minority. I think that's — I think all the work —. We talk about John T. Flynn and Albert Jay Nock and Frank Chodorov and all the great men of the Old Right, and Mises and Rothbard and Hayek and Leonard Read and all the others. Maybe all that work is coming to fruition, maybe all that writing, all that thinking, all that discussion and teaching is happening, is coming to a great moment with Ron Paul. I think we're sort of in for exciting times, and I better get off. Thank you all very much.

<Applause>