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Go forth and set the world on fire.

— *St. Ignatius Loyola*

FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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Socialism in America

by *Jacob G. Hornberger*



Most in the ongoing debate in America as to whether the United States should embrace socialism is a discomfoting fact: America embraced socialism a long time ago. The problem is that many Americans have simply not wanted to accept that fact and instead have preferred living a life of denial.

A complete socialist system would be one in which the state owns everything in society, including businesses and real estate. In a pure socialist society, the government is the sole employer, and everyone is a government employee. No private grocery stores, computer companies, restaurants, movie theaters, or anything else. The government owns and operates everything, and everyone works for the government.

Moreover, in a pure socialist society, all the homes are owned by

the state. There are no private houses or apartments for sale or rent because nothing is privately owned. Everyone lives in public housing because the state owns all the dwellings. How do people determine where they are to live? The state assigns everyone his own particular housing unit.

How does the socialist state fund all this? It owns and operates all the businesses and enterprises in the hope of generating revenues to finance its socialist system. One problem, however, is that state-owned enterprises are notorious for inefficiencies and corruption, which means that they inevitably end up losing money rather than making money. Think of Amtrak and the Postal Service. Or state-owned petroleum companies in Latin America. They produce losses, not gains, for the state.

Thus, to fund its socialist enterprises, the socialist state inevitably permits a small number of citizens to engage in private enterprise. Once those people begin making money, the state taxes them and uses the money to fund its operations. The state does its best to extract as much money as it can from these private-sector enterprises without pushing them out of business.

There are few purely socialist countries. North Korea comes closest to the socialist ideal.

There are countries, however, that adopt programs and policies that are socialist in nature. The United States is a premier example of such countries, even though many Americans are loathe to acknowledge it. They have convinced themselves that America is a “free enterprise” country and that they themselves are “capitalists.” The last thing they want to confront is that they are living a life that embraces socialism.

Let’s examine socialism in America.

Social Security

Contrary to popular opinion, especially as held by seniors, Social Security is not a retirement program. There is no investment fund into which people place their savings for retirement. There are no lock boxes at Fort Knox labeled with each person’s name and containing his “contributions.”

Social Security is a straight socialist program, one that uses the government to take money from people to whom it belongs and gives it to people to whom it does not belong. This process of coercive redistribution of wealth is based on

a principle enunciated by Karl Marx: from each according to his ability, to each according to his need. The state takes money from those who have produced it and gives it to people who are said to need it more.

From its inception, Social Security has been a straight socialist, welfare-state program.

For more than a century after the United States was founded, Americans lived without Social Security. The idea for this particular socialist program originated among German socialists in the late 1800s. The so-called Iron Chancellor of Germany, Otto von Bismarck, adopted it into law in Germany. The program was later imported into the United States and became a legally established program in the 1930s. Today, the U.S. Social Security Administration displays a portrait of Bismarck on its website.

From its inception, Social Security has been a straight socialist, welfare-state program, one that uses the state to forcibly take money from some and give it to others. It is no different in principle from food stamps, education grants, farm subsidies, or other socialist programs.

Seniors have a valid point when they say that the state plundered and looted them throughout their work lives, which has left them without savings for their retirement years. They say that they are just getting their money back under this program.

But that is simply not the case. Their money is long gone. It was spent in the same year that it was collected, on Social Security payments to people who are now long dead, to fund other welfare-state programs, or to fund the national-security establishment and its vast and ever-growing array of warfare-state programs. The money that is being given to seniors today is coming out of the pockets of their children and grandchildren and their friends in those generations, many of whom are struggling to make ends meet. The problem is only getting worse because seniors are demanding more, which means even more taxes must be imposed on young and middle-aged people who are still working.

Proponents of Social Security say that this socialist program reflects how good, caring, and compassionate Americans are. That's ridiculous. Social Security is founded on force. Young people are forced to pay Social Security taxes. There is

nothing voluntary about paying such taxes. If a young person refuses to pay his Social Security taxes, the authorities will come after him, arrest him, fine him, and send him to jail. If he resists with force, he might well find himself dead at the hands of some trigger-happy cop.

**Goodness, care, and compassion
can come only through the
voluntary choices of people.**

Goodness, care, and compassion can come only through the voluntary choices of people. When a young person chooses to help his parents in their old age with financial assistance or personal care, that's goodness, care, and compassion. When the IRS takes a young person's money and gives it to seniors, that's just political stealing.

There is no way to reconcile Social Security with the principles of a free society. Freedom necessarily entails the right to keep everything you earn and decide for yourself what to do with it.

Medicare and Medicaid

The United States once had the finest health-care system in the world, one that was largely based on free-market principles. Health care in the 1950s was reasonably priced.

In fact, hardly anyone had medical insurance except perhaps for catastrophic illnesses. Health-care costs were so low and stable that people considered them just a regular cost of living, like going to the grocery store.

Medical innovations, discoveries, cures, and inventions were surging. Doctors loved what they did in life. Many of them, along with private hospitals, provided free medical services to the poor, all on a voluntary basis.

There is no way that socialized health care can be reconciled with the principles of a free society.

It all came to an end in the 1960s, with the adoption of two socialist programs — Medicare and Medicaid. These two programs were based on the same Marxian principle as Social Security — using the political process to take money from people who have it to provide or subsidize health care for others.

With the enactment of Medicare and Medicaid, health-care costs began climbing and then soaring. Doctors came under strict regulations, which sometimes brought fines and criminal prosecution for Medicare or Medicaid fraud. A nev-

er-ending series of health-care reforms began to be adopted to deal with the ever-growing health-care crisis. Doctors began hating what they did in life and couldn't wait to retire.

Today, the direction is clear — with each new health-care reform to fix the crises generated by previous reforms, the American people are heading toward a complete government takeover of health care, just as in Cuba and North Korea. The difference will be that Americans will call it “saving free enterprise,” while the Cubans and North Koreans correctly call it “celebrating socialism.”

As with Social Security, there is no way that socialized health care can be reconciled with the principles of a free society. To restore freedom to America, it is necessary to repeal, not reform, Medicare and Medicaid and to end all other governmental involvement in health care. Moreover, the eradication of health-care socialism is also a necessary prerequisite for restoring a healthy health-care system to our land.

Public schooling

It would be difficult to find a better example of a socialist program than public schooling or, more

accurately, government schooling. This is a state-run program, one that is based on coercion and compulsion.

Parents are forced to subject their children to a state-approved education, on pain of fine and imprisonment for failing or refusing to do so. Most parents comply with this directive by sending their children into the state-run schools. But even private schools are subject to state supervision through licensing laws. Private schools know that if they fail to satisfy public officials, they risk losing their license or accreditation. Most home-schoolers have to satisfy state officials that they are meeting education standards set by the state.

Funding for public schools is by coercion. People are taxed to fund the system. Among those taxed are people who don't have children. It is a classic example of the Marxian principle that undergirds Social Security, Medicare, and other socialist programs — from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.

The state authorizes the textbooks and sets the curriculum. Schoolteachers and administrators are state employees. If a teacher teaches things that are dramatically outside acceptable boundaries

(such as libertarianism), he is subject to being dismissed or pressured out of the system.

The entire public-schooling system is based on the concept of central planning, which is a core principle of socialism. Whether at a national, state, or local level, a board of government officials plans, in a top-down, command-and-control manner, the educational activities of hundreds, thousands, or millions of students.

The entire public-schooling system is based on the concept of central planning, which is a core principle of socialism.

Public schools inculcate regimentation and conformity in children, while smashing out of them the natural propensity to wonder, question, and challenge. Indoctrination is the order of things, especially when it comes to teaching children that they live in a free country, one characterized by a welfare-warfare-state way of life. By the time they graduate from high school, many students are absolutely convinced that they are free and that they work in a “free enterprise” economic system. The indoctrination is so effective that sometimes it lasts a lifetime.

It is impossible to reconcile a system of state schooling with the principles of a free society. A genuinely free society entails a separation of school and state, in the same way that our ancestors separated church and state. That means an entirely free-market educational system, one where families, not the state, are responsible for education and where entrepreneurs are vying for their business in a free and unhampered market economy.

Trade restrictions and immigration controls

Border controls are based on the socialist concept of central planning. Government officials plan how much trade Americans are going to be permitted to engage in with people in foreign countries; and they plan the movements of millions of people in a complex labor market. That's what trade restrictions, tariffs, trade wars, immigration controls, visa restrictions, travel restrictions, and restrictions on spending money in foreign countries are all about. They are all designed to fulfill the visions of central planners.

As people in Venezuela, Cuba, North Korea, and other socialist countries can affirm, socialism produces crises or, in the words of Lud-

wig von Mises, "planned chaos." That's why farmers who previously were prospering by selling to foreign countries are now being sent into bankruptcy because of tariffs and trade restrictions imposed by U.S. central planners. It's also why there are thousands of foreigners backed up at the border trying to get into the United States to work, even while there are farms in the United States where crops are rotting owing to a scarcity of workers.

Government officials plan how much trade Americans are going to be permitted to engage in with people in foreign countries.

Socialism often comes with a police state, as the citizens of many socialist countries can also attest. That's because people naturally try to avoid the crises and the chaos that socialism produces. That makes government officials angry. To ensure compliance with their measures, they begin adopting and enforcing an ever-increasing array of harsh and brutal measures.

That's how Americans have ended up with an immigration police state in the American Southwest. Highway checkpoints. Warrantless searches. Boarding of Greyhound buses to check people's

papers. Felony prosecutions for hiring, transporting, or harboring illegal immigrants. The types of things one would expect in communist and totalitarian countries.

There is also the massive death, suffering, and impoverishment that comes with a socialist trade and immigration system.

There is no way one can reconcile a system based on central planning of trade and immigration with the principles of a free society. A genuinely free society necessarily is one that is based on the rights of economic liberty, freedom of trade, and freedom of association. Americans, like everyone else, have the natural, God-given rights to travel wherever they want, spend their money anywhere they want, associate with whomever they want, and hire whomever they want. Freedom necessarily means free trade and open immigration — i.e., open borders — the free movements of goods, services, and people across borders.

The national-security establishment

Perhaps the best example of a socialist system is America's national-security state, which is a totalitarian form of governmental structure. North Korea is a national-security state. So is Egypt. And

Cuba. Russia. Pakistan. And post-World War II United States.

The Pentagon, the CIA, and the NSA, like all socialist structures, are operated by bureaucrats, both military and civilian, in a top-down, command-and-control fashion. There is nothing “free market” or “free enterprise” about the national-security state. The system is based entirely on force, regimentation, conformity, indoctrination, deference to authority, and obedience to orders.

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It shouldn't surprise anyone that a socialist governmental structure has come with dark-side practices that one would ordinarily expect from communist and totalitarian regimes. Invasions. Wars of aggression. Wars without the constitutionally required congressional declaration of war. Coups. Alliances with dictatorial regimes. Foreign aid to dictatorial regimes. State-sponsored assassinations. Drug experiments on unsuspecting people. Extra-judicial executions. Kidnappings. Torture. Secretive prison camps. A kangaroo judicial system.

Sanctions and embargoes that impoverish or kill innocent people for political purposes. Denial of due process of law. Denial of trial by jury. Persecution of people who blow the whistle on dark-side practices. And much more.

None of this can possibly be reconciled with the principles of a free society. A genuinely free society entails the restoration of a limited-government republic, which was the type of governmental system that the Constitution called into existence. That means the dismantling of the national-security state and

the termination of its dark-side practices.

Like the rest of the world, Americans are faced with a choice: Do you want socialism or do you want freedom? You can't have both.

Jacob Hornberger is founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation.

NEXT MONTH:
“Monetary Destruction in America”
by Jacob G. Hornberger

Well knows he who uses to consider, that our faith and knowledge thrives by exercise, as well as our limbs and complexion. Truth is compar'd in Scripture to a streaming fountain; if her waters flow not in a perpetual progression, they sick'n into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition.

— John Milton

U.S. Foreign-Policy Perpetual Perfidy

by James Bovard



The Washington establishment was aghast in October when Donald Trump appeared to approve a Turkish invasion of northern Syria. The United States was seen as abandoning the Kurds, some of whom had assisted the United States in the fight against ISIS and other terrorist groups. But the indignation over the latest U.S. policy shift in the Middle East is farcical considering the long record of U.S. double-crosses. Rather than the triumph of American idealism, recent U.S. policy has been perpetual perfidy leavened with frequent doses of idiocy.

Almost none of the media coverage of the Turkish invasion and flight of Kurdish refugees mentioned that President George H.W. Bush had urged the Kurds and oth-

er Iraqis to “take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside” just before the start of the U.S. bombing campaign in 1991 in the first Gulf War. After it became clear that the U.S. military could not protect the Kurds from Saddam’s backlash, U.S. policymakers basically shrugged and moseyed along. As a CNN analysis noted in 2003, “Bush refrained from aiding Kurdish rebels in the north, although he finally sent troops and relief supplies to protect hundreds of thousands of fleeing Kurds who were in danger of freezing or starving to death. Bush has never regretted his decision not to intervene.” George H.W. Bush’s abandonment and betrayal of the Kurds did nothing to deter the media and political establishment from praising him lavishly after he died in late 2018.

U.S. meddling in the Middle East multiplied after the 9/11 attacks. Even though most of the hijackers were Saudis who received plenty of assistance from the Saudi government, the George W. Bush administration seized the chance to demonize and assault Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi regime. He portrayed his invasion of Iraq as American idealism at its best. In his May 1, 2003, “Mission Accomplished” speech

aboard the USS *Abraham Lincoln*, Bush hailed “the character of our military through history” for showing “the decency and idealism that turned enemies into allies.” Speaking three weeks later at a Republican fundraiser, he bragged, “The world has seen the strength and the idealism of the United States military.” *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius declared in late 2003 that “this may be the most idealistic war fought in modern times.” The torture scandal at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere in Iraq has not been permitted to deter the recent embarrassingly fulsome praise of George W. Bush by the establishment media.

**Almost all the pre-invasion
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government.**

The Bush administration and its media allies produced one smoke-screen after another to justify the war. Almost all the pre-invasion broadcast news stories on Iraq originated with the federal government. PBS’s Bill Moyers noted that “of the 414 Iraq stories broadcast on NBC, ABC, and CBS nightly news, from September 2002 until February 2003, almost all the stories could be traced back to sources from the

White House, the Pentagon, and the State Department.” A 2008 report by the Center for Public Integrity found that “in speeches, briefings, interviews and other venues, Bush and administration officials stated unequivocally on at least 532 occasions that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction or was trying to produce or obtain them or had links to al-Qaida or both.” The report concluded that the “false statements — amplified by thousands of news stories and broadcasts” created “an almost impenetrable din for several critical months in the run-up to war.” Bush’s falsehoods on Iraq proved far more toxic than anything in Saddam’s arsenal. But the exposure of the official lies did not deter Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld from equating criticizing the Iraq war with appeasing Adolf Hitler.

“Holy warriors”

The chaos from the 2003 invasion of Iraq was still spiraling out of control when the Bush administration began seeking pretexts to attack Iran, which Bush had designated part of the “Axis of Evil” in his 2002 State of the Union address. Bush officials and subsequent administrations chose to champion the Iranian terrorist group, Mujahi-

deen-e-Khalq (MEK). That organization sprang up in the 1960s and proceeded to kill Americans in the 1970s and to kill large numbers of Iranians in the subsequent decades. A 2004 FBI report noted that MEK continued to be “actively involved in planning and executing acts of terrorism.” NBC News reported in early 2012 that MEK carried out killings of Iranian nuclear scientists and that it was “financed, trained and armed by Israel’s secret service.”

That was the same year that a stampede of Washington hustlers took huge payoffs to publicly champion de-listing the MEK as a terrorist organization. As Trita Parsi noted in the *New York Review of Books*, MEK “rented office space in Washington, held fundraisers with lawmakers, or offered U.S. officials speaking fees to appear at their gatherings. But the MEK did this openly for years, despite being on the U.S. government’s terrorist list.” Federal law prohibited taking money from or advocating in behalf of any designated terrorist group. But, as a 2011 Huffpost headline reported, “Former U.S. Officials Make Millions Advocating for Terrorist Organization.” Former FBI boss Louis Freeh, former CIA boss Porter Goss, co-chair of the 9/11 Commission Lee Hamilton, former at-

torney general Michael B. Mukasey, and former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge pocketed \$30,000 or more for brief speeches at pro-MEK events. Glenn Greenwald rightly scoffed that the advocacy for MEK “reveals the impunity with which political elites commit the most egregious crimes, as well as the special privileges to which they explicitly believe they — and they alone — are entitled.” Greenwald pointed out that average people were scourged by the same law the pooh-bahs brazenly trampled: “A Staten Island satellite TV salesman in 2009 was sentenced to five years in federal prison merely for including a Hezbollah TV channel as part of the satellite package he sold to customers.”

Washington hustlers took huge payoffs to publicly champion de-listing the MEK as a terrorist organization.

Thanks in part to the torrent of insider endorsements, the Obama administration canceled the MEK’s terrorist designation in 2012. While Washington poohbahs continue portraying the group as idealistic freedom fighters devoted to democracy, a simple online search shows that the translation of the

group's name is "holy warriors of the people," as Ted Carpenter noted in his new book, *Gullible Superpower*. Trump administration officials have gurgled about MEK's possible role in ruling Iran after the current government is toppled. But MEK remains odious to the Iranian people regardless of the group's PR successes inside the Beltway.

Contradictions

The prior pratfalls of U.S. Middle East policy did nothing to stymie the outrage when Trump asserted that he was withdrawing U.S. troops from eastern Syria. Congress showed more indignation about a troop pullback than it had shown about the loss of all the American soldiers' lives in pointless conflicts over the past 18 years. The House of Representatives condemned Trump by a 354 to 60 vote, and Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, proclaimed, "At President Trump's hands, American leadership has been laid low, and American foreign policy has become nothing more than a tool to advance his own interests." Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) said he felt "horror and shame" over Trump's action. *Boston Globe* columnist Stephen Kinzer aptly described Con-

gress's protest as "a classic example of 'buffet outrage,' in which one picks and chooses which horrors to condemn."

MEK remains odious to the Iranian people regardless of the group's PR successes inside the Beltway.

President Barack Obama had promised 16 times that there would be no "U.S. boots on the ground" in Syria; when he betrayed that promise, Congress did nothing. Trump's plans to have fewer U.S. boots on the ground in Syria — or at least in part of it — somehow became the moral equivalent of giving Alaska back to Russia. Pundits attacked politicians who supported the troop pullback as "Russian assets" — i.e., traitors.

Syria offers another reminder that "material support of terrorism" is a federal crime unless you work for the CIA, State Department, Pentagon, or White House. After Obama, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and former Secretary of State John Kerry all publicly declared that Syrian president Assad must exit power, the U.S. government provided cash and a massive amount of military weaponry to terrorist groups seeking to

topple the Assad regime. The Obama administration's beloved, nonexistent "moderate Syrian rebels" achieved nothing. The Kurdistan Workers' Party, the PKK, a prime beneficiary of the U.S. occupation, has been considered a terrorist group by the U.S. government since 1997. Evan McMullin, a 2016 presidential candidate, admitted on Twitter, "My role in the CIA was to go out & convince Al Qaeda operatives to instead work with us." Such absurdities spurred Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii) to introduce The Stop Arming Terrorists Act in 2017 to prohibit any U.S. funding of terrorist groups. Gabbard's bill was mostly ignored and never enacted, though her outspoken criticism of U.S. policy did spur Hillary Clinton and others to vilify her.

Most of the American media ignored the Syrian people who died as a result of U.S. policies.

Prominent politicians and much of the media blamed Trump for the attacks on civilians that followed the Turkish invasion, carried out mainly by groups allied with the Turkish government. U.S.-armed terrorist groups involved in the Turkish invasion have freed Islamic State prisoners. A Turkish think

tank analyzed the violent groups committing atrocities in Syria after the start of the Turkish invasion; "Out of the 28 factions, 21 were previously supported by the United States, three of them via the Pentagon's program to combat DAESH [ISIS]. Eighteen of these factions were supplied by the CIA." A prominent Turkish journalist observed after his government invaded Syria, "The groups that were educated and equipped by the United States west of the Euphrates are now fighting against the groups east of the Euphrates that have been also educated and equipped by the United States." This is nothing new: in 2016, Pentagon-backed Syrian rebels openly battled CIA-backed rebels in Syria. A prominent Assad opponent who organized a conference of anti-Assad groups financed by the CIA was denied political asylum in 2017 because he provided "material support" to the Free Syrian Army, which meant he had "engaged in terrorist activity," according to the Department of Homeland Security. A press backlash spurred a reversal on that decision but the media mostly ignored the other contradictions in U.S. policy in Syria.

Members of Congress were indignant that Syrian civilians suffered as the result of Trump's troop

pullback. But both Congress and most of the American media ignored the Syrian women, children, and men who died as a result of U.S. policies that intensified and prolonged that nation's civil war. This is typical inside-the-Beltway scoring: the only fatalities worthy of recognizing are those that are politically useful.

Despite Trump's declarations on Syria, the United States continues to have more than 50,000 troops deployed in the Middle East. The sooner those troops come home, the less likely that the United States will be dragged into another quagmire. The perennial follies and frauds of Middle East policy provide one of the strongest arguments for the United States to mind its own business. The dishonesty that

has long characterized policies and policymakers ensures that the United States will continue failing to learn from mistakes.

James Bovard is a policy advisor to The Future of Freedom Foundation and is the author of the ebook Freedom Frauds: Hard Lessons in American Liberty, published by FFF, Public Policy Hooligan, Attention Deficit Democracy, and eight other books.

NEXT MONTH:

“Deep State Demolition of Democracy”
by James Bovard

“Are Uber Drivers Underpaid?”
by Laurence M. Vance

Wherever is found what is called a paternal government, there is found state education. It has been discovered that the best way to insure implicit obedience is to commence tyranny in the nursery.

— Benjamin Disraeli

Ice and Fire

by Laurence M. Vance



The relationship between conservatism and libertarianism is a tenuous one. However, such was not always the case. Fellow travelers of both groups were united in opposing Roosevelt's New Deal. The work of the late economist Murray N. Rothbard (1926–1995) on the "Old Right" is indispensable here. After World War II, the political right was generally opposed, not only to "domestic statism," but also to war, foreign intervention, and "American statism in the international arena." But after the death of the political and intellectual leaders of the Old Right, the conservative movement — which "was basically classical liberal and libertarian" in the 1930s and 1940s — suffered a "power vacuum in both the political and the intellectual areas," and was taken over and transformed "beyond recogni-

tion" by William Buckley (1925–2008) and those associated with him at *National Review* magazine. The "modern conservative movement" — after the departure of its libertarian element and the purging of "embarrassing extremists like the John Birch Society" — "combined a traditionalist and theocratic approach to 'moral values,' occasional lip service to free-market economics, and an imperialist and global interventionist foreign policy dedicated to the glorification of the American state and the extirpation of world Communism. Classical liberalism remained only as rhetoric, useful in attracting business support, and most of all as a fig leaf for the grotesque realities of the New Right."

"At the heart of the dispute between the traditionalists and the libertarians," says Rothbard, "is the question of freedom and virtue: Should virtuous action (however we define it) be compelled, or should it be left up to the free and voluntary choice of the individual?"

The disagreements between conservatism and libertarianism — the "uneasy cousins," in the words of the conservative sociologist Robert Nisbet — were made public in the early 1960s in the pages of *National Review* and other lesser-

known publications. No resolution was forthcoming, in spite of the “fusionist” efforts of Frank S. Meyer. Ronald Reagan, apparently, never got the memo.

In between his time as the governor of California and the president of the United States, Ronald Reagan (1911–2004) was interviewed by *Reason* magazine in 1975 about his political philosophy. The first question he was asked was about conservatism and libertarianism: “Governor Reagan, you have been quoted in the press as saying that you’re doing a lot of speaking now on behalf of the philosophy of conservatism and libertarianism. Is there a difference between the two?” Here is his response: “If you analyze it I believe the very heart and soul of conservatism is libertarianism. I think conservatism is really a misnomer just as liberalism is a misnomer for the liberals — if we were back in the days of the Revolution, so-called conservatives today would be the Liberals and the liberals would be the Tories. The basis of conservatism is a desire for less government interference or less centralized authority or more individual freedom and this is a pretty general description also of what libertarianism is.”

When asked to give “some examples” of what he “would consider

to be proper functions of government,” Reagan replied, somewhat libertarianishly, “Well, the first and most important thing is that government exists to protect us from each other.” He maintained that he didn’t “believe in a government that protects us from ourselves.” He recognized that “government’s only weapons are force and coercion and that’s why we shouldn’t let it get out of hand.” Although Reagan acknowledged that “the government has legitimate functions,” he also thought that “our greatest threat today comes from government’s involvement in things that are not government’s proper province.”

Reagan quickly abandoned any pretense of libertarianism.

Yet when asked about the issue of “laws against gambling,” Reagan quickly abandoned any pretense of libertarianism and showed that he, like modern conservatives, had no firm philosophical foundation: “You’ve named an issue that is one of the most difficult for me to reconcile. I know this gets into the whole area of the sin laws and here again I think you’re in one of the grey areas. There’s one side of me that says I know this is protecting us from ourselves; there’s another side

of me, however, that says you can make the case that it does get into an area in which we are protecting us from each other.”

The issue of “laws against gambling” is one of the least difficult for libertarians to reconcile. No government at any level should ever, for any reason, enact any laws against gambling. It’s that simple. This straightforward question shows that libertarianism and conservatism are not traveling “the same path” as Reagan said in his *Reason* interview. Their paths are going in opposite directions.

A contemporary and admirer of Reagan, conservative icon Russell Kirk (1918–1994), saw things differently. Although conservatives and libertarians “share a detestation of collectivism” and “set their faces against the totalist state and the heavy hand of bureaucracy,”

In the nature of things, conservatives and libertarians can conclude no friendly pact. Adversity sometimes makes strange bedfellows, but the present successes of conservatives disincline them to lie down, lamblike, with the libertarian lions.

When heaven and earth have passed away, perhaps the

conservative mind and the libertarian mind may be joined in synthesis, but not until then.

I venture to suggest that libertarianism, properly understood, is as alien to real American conservatives as is communism.

Conservatives have no intention of compromising with socialists; but even such an alliance, ridiculous though it would be, is more nearly conceivable than the coalition of conservatives and libertarians. The socialists at least declare the existence of some sort of moral order; the libertarians are quite bottomless.

What else do conservatives and libertarians profess in common? The answer to that question is simple: nothing. Nor will they ever have. To talk of forming a league or coalition between these two is like advocating a union of ice and fire.

Why, then, do some people have the idea that conservatism and libertarianism are cousins, or at least compatible? Before answering this question, it is first necessary to take a closer look at conservatism and libertarianism.

Conservatism

What is conservatism? I will let conservatives explain it.

In his book *The Conservative Mind* (1953), Kirk listed and described “six canons of conservative thought” that he considered to be a summary of themes common to conservative thinkers:

1. Belief that a divine intent rules society as well as conscience, forging an eternal chain of right and duty which links great and obscure, living and dead.
2. Affection for the proliferating variety and mystery of traditional life.
3. Conviction that civilized society requires orders and classes.
4. Persuasion that property and freedom are inexorably connected.
5. Faith in prescription and distrust of “sophisters and calculators.”
6. Recognition that change and reform are not identical.

In the introduction to his anthology *The Portable Conservative Reader* (Penguin, 1982), which includes essays, poetry, and fiction from writers that he identified as conservatives, Kirk offered a variation on his six canons, which he

termed “first principles.” Kirk’s “canons” were revised and expanded in subsequent editions of *The Conservative Mind*.

In his book *The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Conservatism* (1957), Kirk listed ten of “the chief principles which have characterized American conservative thought”:

1. Men and nations are governed by moral laws.
2. Variety and diversity are the characteristics of a high civilization.
3. Justice means that all men and women have the right to what is their own.
4. Property and freedom are inseparably connected; economic leveling is not economic progress.
5. Power is full of danger; therefore the good state is one in which power is checked and balanced, restricted by sound constitutions and customs.
6. The past is a great storehouse of wisdom.
7. Modern society urgently needs true community; and true community is a world away from collectivism.
8. In the affairs of nations, the American conservative feels that his country ought to set an example to the world, but ought not to try to remake the world in its image.

9. Men and women are not perfectible, conservatives know; and neither are political institutions.

10. Change and reform, conservatives are convinced, are not identical: moral and political innovation can be destructive as well as beneficial.

In his book *The Politics of Prudence* (1993), Kirk returned again to “principles,” presenting “a summary of conservative assumptions differing somewhat” from the “canons” and “principles” found in his earlier books. In introducing his new “ten articles of belief,” he said that they “reflect the emphases of conservatives in America nowadays.”

Next is George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America* (1996, second ed.):

What is conservatism? For those who have examined the subject, this is a perennial question; many are the writers who have searched for the elusive answer. Such an a priori effort, I have concluded, is misdirected. I doubt that there is any single, satisfactory, all-encompassing definition of the complex phenomenon called conservatism, the con-

tent of which varies enormously with time and place. It may even be true that conservatism is inherently resistant to precise definition. Many right-wingers, in fact, have argued that conservatism by its very nature is not an elaborate ideology at all.

So I offer here no compact definition of conservatism. In fact, American conservatives themselves have had no such agreed-upon definition. Instead, the very quest for self-definition has been one of the most notable motifs of their thought since World War II.

And then there is Bruce Frohnen, writing in *American Conservatism: An Encyclopedia* (2006):

Conservatism is a philosophy that seeks to maintain and enrich societies characterized by respect for inherited institutions, beliefs and practices, in which individuals develop good character by cooperating with one another in primary, local associations such as families, churches and social groups aimed at furthering the common good in a manner pleasing to God.

Conservatives are attached, not so much to any particular regime or form of government, as to what they believe are the requirements for a good life for all peoples. In the American context, conservatives defend the ordered liberty established by the Constitution and the traditions and practices on which that constitution was built.

Conservatives believe that there is a natural order to the universe, governed by a natural law that gives mankind general rules concerning how to shape their lives in common as individuals.

Nathan W. Schlueter, coauthor of *Selfish Libertarians and Socialist Conservatives? The Foundations of the Libertarian-Conservative Debate* (2017), has a hard time defining conservatism, since it “is not a specific philosophy of government but a generic term that can have a wide range of specific meanings, depending on context.” Nevertheless, he does say,

Conservatism seeks to “conserve” the best elements of that [Western philosophical and political] tradition.

Conservatism rests on a recognition of the mutual interdependence of liberty, tradition, and reason.

American conservatism is committed to conserving the principles of the American founding, and to renewing the models of political leadership that gave those principles life.

It seems as though the only thing that conservatives can say with absolutely certainty is that they don’t exactly know what conservatism is. But it is no wonder that conservatism suffers from not having any clear, concise, coherent, and consistent definition. Contrary to its name, conservatism changes with convictions, circumstances, country, and consensus. Conservative godfather Kirk readily acknowledges that:

Conservatism is not a fixed and immutable body of dogma, and conservatives inherit from Burke a talent for re-expressing their convictions to fit the time.

The diversity of ways in which conservative views may find expression is itself proof that conservatism is no fixed ideology. What particular

principles conservatives emphasize during any given time will vary with the circumstances and necessities of that era.

Although certain general principles held by most conservatives may be described, there exists wide variety in application of these ideas from age to age and country to country.

Conservatism amounts to the consensus of the leading conservative thinkers and actors over the past two centuries.

Concludes Kirk, “Conservatism offers no universal pattern of politics for adoption everywhere.”

Libertarianism

In contrast to the confusion and contradictions of conservatism, there is the simplicity and consistency of libertarianism. For a compact definition of libertarianism, here is Future of Freedom Foundation president Jacob Hornberger: “Libertarianism is a political philosophy that holds that a person should be free to do whatever he wants in life, as long as his conduct is peaceful. Thus, as long as a person doesn’t murder, rape, burglarize, defraud, trespass, steal, or inflict any other act of violence against another person’s life, liberty, or property, lib-

ertarians hold that the government should leave him alone. In fact, libertarians believe that a primary purpose of government is to prosecute and punish anti-social individuals who initiate force against others.”

Libertarianism is the philosophy of nonaggression, whether that aggression be theft, fraud, the initiation of nonconsensual violence against person or property, or the threat of nonconsensual violence. The initiation or threat of aggression against the person or property of others is always wrong, even when done by government. Aggression is justified only in defense of one’s person or property or in retaliation in response to aggression against him. Violence is justified only against violence. Force must be proportional, but is neither essential nor required.

There is nothing inherent in libertarianism that stands in opposition to custom, convention, tradition, natural law, Christian humanism, prudence, the natural order, religion, civilized society, moral laws, patriotism, the natural world, family values, community, civic pride, ordered liberty, an enduring moral order, cooperation, local associations, or the common good. And contrary to the smears of some conservatives, libertarianism has nothing to do with liber-

tinism, greed, selfishness, antinomianism, hedonism, utopianism, materialism, atheism, anarchy, licentiousness, relativism, or nihilism. Likewise, libertarians qua libertarians don't fetishize change, delight in eccentricity, sacrifice order on the altar of liberty, reduce everything to economics, deify efficiency, romanticize a fictional past, or celebrate alternative lifestyles.

Libertarianism is the philosophy of nonaggression.

Libertarianism celebrates individual liberty, personal and financial privacy, private property, free markets, free enterprise, free exchange, individual responsibility, personal freedom, free association, free assembly, voluntary interaction, freedom of conscience, free speech, and free expression — as long as one's conduct is peaceful and doesn't violate the personal or property rights of others.

The nature of conservatism

Beneath the conservative façade of tradition, culture, community, and prudence lies an authoritarian ideology. Conservatism is the philosophy of state-coerced morality and virtue. Conservatism is more interested in order, conformity, con-

trol, and orthodoxy than tradition, culture, community, and prudence. Conservatives are statist when the state does its bidding. They deem it just, right, and necessary for government at some level — (1) to arrest, fine, imprison, or otherwise punish people for engaging in entirely private, peaceful, voluntary, and consensual actions that do not aggress against the person or property of others; (2) to regulate, license, or prohibit commercial activity between willing buyers and willing sellers; and (3) to take people's resources against their will, by force if necessary, and transfer or redistribute them to other citizens or foreigners as the government sees fit.

Conservatism is an authoritarian philosophy that looks to the state to arrest people and then fine them, appropriate their property, or lock them in cages for engaging in private consensual behavior or peaceful activity that doesn't violate the personal or property rights of anyone.

Why?

Why, then, do some conservatives and libertarians, and many liberals, progressives, and socialists, have the idea that conservatism and libertarianism are cousins, or at least compatible? Consider these statements from the *Conservative Review*

news site and the Heritage Foundation think tank: “Principle[s] such as limited government, free markets, traditional family values, individual freedom, rule of law, and a strong national defense are at the core of *Conservative Review’s* principles.” The Heritage Foundation promotes “conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.”

Conservative organizations also regularly include in their mantra adherence to the Constitution, federalism and States’ Rights, free trade, and private property.

The reason people think that conservatism and libertarianism are related, allies, or two sides of the same coin is that libertarians regularly talk about those very things. There is one major difference, however. Libertarians actually believe them, although they don’t confound the idea of national defense with national offense, as most conservatives do. Conservatives only selectively believe their own mantra. They don’t follow the Constitution in many areas. They reject federalism when it comes to things such as the drug war. The only limited government they desire is a government limited to control by conservatives.

They don’t accept the freedom of individuals to do anything that’s peaceful as long as they don’t violate the personal or property rights of others. They don’t believe in the sanctity of private property. They think traditional values should be legislated by government. They confound free trade with managed trade. They don’t yearn for free enterprise and a free market in every area.

When conservative politicians want votes, and especially the votes of “libertarian-leaning” conservatives, they don’t talk about tradition, culture, community, and prudence. They instead use libertarian rhetoric to portray themselves as advocates of libertarian principles.

So Russell Kirk was right. There is no real affinity between conservatism and libertarianism. Conservatives and libertarians have about as much in common as ice and fire.

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Defending the Foundations of Freedom for 30 Years

by Richard M. Ebeling



This January 2020 marks the 30th anniversary of The Future of Freedom Foundation's monthly publication, *Future of Freedom*, which at its beginning was called *Freedom Daily*. Three decades means a total of 360 issues, containing even more hundreds of articles. Virtually every important policy issue, foreign and domestic, was written about as those months and years went by.

The world in the 1990s

Looking back, it might have seemed strange to some that a new organization dedicated to individual liberty and free markets was being established at that time. After all, in 1990, communism seemed to be crumbling all around the world. The

Eastern European captive nations forced into the political and military orbit of the Soviet Union at the end of the Second World War were regaining their national independence and introducing democratic governments. They all were declaring their intention of reintroducing rights to private property in the means of production and dismantling their socialist central-planning systems and replacing them with market-based supply and demand.

This was all symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, a structure that more than most other things during the Cold War years caught the essence of a totalitarian system closing off all those under its control from the free movement of ideas and people. Then at the end of 1991, the Soviet Union literally disappeared from the map of the world, with the successor states of the internal Soviet Empire announcing, one after the other, an intention of joining the West in transforming their nations into democratic market economies.

Yes, China was still a communist one-party system, with the Party authorities showing their willingness to use brutal force against all dissenters, as seen on television across the globe in June 1989, when the Chinese army stormed Tianan-

men Square in Beijing and killed hundreds if not thousands of students and others calling for democratic reforms. But China had introduced market-type reforms, and with growing economic prosperity, it was hoped that this would also lead to political change as well.

The fact is, the hydra-headed monster of Big Government was still moving across the land.

Some even declared that it was “the end of history,” with all the “isms” other than “democratic capitalism” having fallen by the wayside. Peace, freedom, and representative governments were now the future everywhere for all time. “Capitalism” had triumphed over socialist central planning; democracy had won over tyranny.

Freedom slipping away in America

At home, it was not so clear that freedom was spreading its wings. President George H.W. Bush was soon “liberating” Kuwait and invading Iraq. Government spending continued to increase, and the interventionist-welfare state was still in place and being as intrusive as ever.

But on the other hand, divided government during the Clinton presidency seemed to rein in the

growth of government. In fact, for two or three years there were even federal government budget surpluses. Was the end to the Keynesian deficit-spending mindset finally upon us?

All the while in the 1990s, those writing for The Future of Freedom Foundation, most especially its founder and president, Jacob G. Hornberger, and others including me, not only argued but insisted that freedom was far from being restored or secured from the invasive hands of Uncle Sam.

Month after month, those at FFF insisted that minor slowdowns in the rate of government spending, moderate declines in the number of government regulations, a few cuts in taxes, and new and continuing foreign interventions in various parts of the world (such as the U.S. bombing of Serbia, the landing of special forces in Somalia, and the destruction of a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan to distract from Bill Clinton’s legal problems) did not suggest that America was moving into a real and meaningful rebirth of liberty.

The fact is, the hydra-headed monster of Big Government was still moving across the land. In spite of the collapse of Soviet communism, the underlying political phi-

losophy that had created that ideological leviathan, as well as all other forms of collectivism in the 20th century, had not been defeated and had not disappeared from the stage of human history.

The surveillance state

All of that became clear as the new century made its appearance on that world stage. Rather than receding from the international scene, foreign interventions by the U.S. government only expanded in size and scope following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the Trade Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

Accompanying that came a new era of government surveillance and intrusion.

Insisting that those attacks were due to those Islamic fanatics' "hating us for who we are," George W. Bush ordered the invasion of Afghanistan to root out the planners and initiators of the attacks, and then, two years later, directed the invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of its government because of an asserted threat of nonexistent weapons of mass destruction. The president and his policy advisors were determined to remake the Middle East

in America's "democratic" image, whether or not the peoples in that part of the world wanted to be so transformed and with little regard for the financial and human cost on all sides from the attempt to do so.

Accompanying that came a new era of government surveillance and intrusion into the everyday lives of, in principle, every person inside the United States based on the excessive fear that there was a fanatic terrorist under every bed. Personal liberty and freedom of association were threatened and cast aside on the presumption that America was, everywhere and at any time, the potential target of enemies around the world.

That America's interventions in other parts of the world, and the misuses and abuses coming with U.S. military and diplomatic attempts to macro- and micro-manage lives and political activities in other countries, may be the source of the resentment and opposition and resistance to America as the self-declared policeman of the globe never seemed to enter the minds of the foreign-policy central planners in Washington, D.C.

Consistently since its inception in 1989, and especially after the 9/11 attacks, The Future of Freedom Foundation has been one of the few voices to challenge and crit-

icize American foreign intervention. That has been done in FFF's monthly articles and daily commentaries on its website and in speeches, conferences, and video presentations, as well as through a pair of important books, *The Failure of America's Foreign Wars* (1995) and *Liberty, Security, and the War on Terrorism* (2003).

Interventionist-welfare state at home

At the same time, increased military spending to fight America's foreign wars was joined by continuing growth in the domestic welfare state. The era of deficit spending, as some had believed or hoped, was far from over. Indeed, over the last two decades, it has become even worse. A national debt that came to around \$5 trillion in 2000 now stands at about \$22.5 trillion and will only get far worse over the next decade, according to all reasonable projections.

While military spending fed the cost of government that required the annual deficit borrowing during that time, the major culprits were the domestic entitlement programs — Social Security and Medicare, plus other health-care expenditures — that now eat up about 50 percent of everything that the federal government spends; and they are grow-

ing each year. The domestic welfare state is the real anaconda threatening to strangle the financial life out of the country.

On top of all that, there is now in the White House a president who seems to think in the crudest nationalist terms concerning America's relationship with the rest of the world. Donald Trump perversely sees the world as a zero-sum game: if another country improves its economic circumstances as a result of its trading with America, it very likely means that the other country has somehow "taken advantage" of the United States and thus made the American people worse off.

Trade between people in different countries is a positive sum game.

That trade between people in different countries is a positive sum game in which all voluntary transactors are made better off, seems not to have any place in Trump's thinking. Instead, he states that to set the world economically right and "make America great again," he needs to bully other countries and dictate whom Americans trade with and on what terms through executive orders on tariffs and sanctions. Here is the new version of GOP government central planning.

Here, too, the Future of Freedom Foundation has stood, forthright, for individual freedom, unrestricted free markets, and limited government with secure civil liberties and impartial rule of law. In numerous articles, and published books, FFF has insisted, on the basis of logical argumentation and historical evidence, that Trump's domestic policies are continuing to send the United States on roads to serfdom and financial ruin.

The new democratic socialism

With a presidential election year before us, what is offered by the Democrats as an alternative to Trump's nationalism and mercantilism? In the frankest terms, a horror file of collectivist paternalism with calls for "democratic socialism" as a "progressive" way forward. If there is any meaning to the phrase "back to the future," the candidates for the Democratic Party nomination for the presidency represent it in the extreme.

The American Left has always had a serious problem facing up to reality: the inescapability of scarcity; the need for trade-offs in a world in which we cannot get everything we want all the time and at the same time; the disincentives of taxes and regulation on work, savings, and in-

vestment; and most important, a fundamental resistance to simply leaving people alone to go about peacefully planning and directing their own lives for their own chosen purposes in voluntary association with others both in the marketplace and within the institutions of civil society.

FFF has stood for individual freedom, limited government with secure civil liberties, and impartial rule of law.

The leading Democratic Party rivals for the nomination are almost cartoonish exaggerations of all the Left's worse faults and foibles. They all promise the moon of more and more paternalistic goods in any amounts wanted, with little or no thought of how and by whom it will get paid, other than the usual blanket assurance that the money will come from "the rich," the "one percent," the "privileged white males" who are claimed to be abusing everyone else in society.

Government planning is the part of that "back to the future" in which almost all of the candidates live, a time warp in which the real-world experiences with central planning over the last one hundred years are treated as if they never oc-

curred. They speak and act as if all we need to do is wish for the central planners to have all the knowledge, wisdom, and ability they will need to set the world right; it is captured in the proposal for a Green New Deal, with its comprehensive control of all of society.

Freedom and the origins of FFF

If we ask why we have these ideological and political trends over the last thirty years, in spite of the downfall of the Soviet Union, the failure of all forms of central planning, and the reality of government control of economic affairs that inescapably leads to the loss of many other freedoms, as well as the corruption that comes with the greater politicization of life, the answer comes down to the failure of a proper, thorough, and persuasive understanding of what freedom means, why it should be considered essential to human existence, and how without it neither social harmony nor economic prosperity is possible.

That is what motivated the founding of The Future of Freedom Foundation by Jacob Hornberger and the publishing of the first issue of *Freedom Daily* in January 1990. Jacob and I met in Dallas, Texas, in 1984. He was practicing law and I

had recently taken up a teaching position at the University of Dallas. The chairman of the economics department, Samuel Bostaph, had been reading through the great works of economics in a tutorial with Jacob — Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Thomas Malthus, John Stuart Mill, Carl Menger, and Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk — and they had reached the point when they were to start reading through Ludwig von Mises's *Human Action* (1949).

Without freedom, neither social harmony nor economic prosperity is possible.

Bostaph suggested that Jacob should continue his tutorial with me by going through Mises's *Human Action*, since I was known to be fairly familiar with Mises's writings. However, after a few sessions together, our conversations often drifted away from the particular text of Mises's work and more towards the nature of a free society and the values and institutions without which liberty may not be sustainable.

We also ended up exploring what might be the limits to government action, by which both of us understood the question of what areas beyond which government

actions would be inconsistent with respecting the freedom of individuals and would hamper the free association that is the basis of collaborative cooperation among those living in a society of liberty.

A free society is one of economic and social laissez-faire.

Our conclusion was that, if government exists, any actions or intrusions by those in political authority beyond the protection of each person's life, liberty, and honestly acquired property, inescapably involves an unjustifiable abridgment of one person's freedom for the benefit of some other. In other words, we reached the conclusion that the more radical and consistent 19th-century classical liberals had been correct: a free society is one of economic and social laissez-faire.

A consistent laissez-faire liberalism

What the classical liberals of the past and too many friends of freedom today did not appreciate was that on purely economic grounds, many of the goods and services people presumed that government had to supply — infrastructure, central banking, roads and highways, any and all assistance to the poor and the needy, health-care and

old-age planning — all could be far more effectively and efficiently provided through marketplace competition and private enterprise.

To turn to government in any of them or similar matters was to concede that government planning was superior to the outcomes to be expected from a self-interested pursuit of profit in the competitive arena of supply and demand. Furthermore, history showed many instances in which such social problems had been handled and solved by the private sector in the past before government monopolized or crowded out private enterprise and voluntary associations.

However, whatever case could and should be made for the privatization of all such activities in the name of efficiency and prosperity, we agreed that there was a more fundamental and essential one: the moral case for individual liberty.

Natural rights and individual liberty

Does the individual possess a natural right to his liberty? Does the individual possess his rights to life, liberty, and honestly acquired property by the “pleasure” of those in political power — be it an absolute monarch or an unlimited democratic majority — or does the individual possess them from a higher

source, be it a Creator who has breathed life into each person and given him liberty, or, instead, from a reasoned reflection on the nature of man, the world in which we all live, the requirements for a human being to survive and prosper, and the social conditions without which society would be reduced to master and slave relationships regardless of how that association may be called?

Of course, this conception of the natural rights of every human being, propounded by the British philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) and inspired by him, is found in the ideas of the American Founders as articulated in the Declaration of Independence in 1776. For all the shortcomings of the U.S. Constitution and criticisms that may be made about it, it was clear to us that its design and structure were meant to serve as the institutional constraint on government itself, so as to preserve the liberty of each and every individual.

The American idea of liberty has been slipping away.

That conception is the foundational basis of American society that has been slipping away, especially over the last one hundred years, from the early 20th-century Progressives through the New

Dealers of the 1930s and the Great Society social engineers of the 1960s, to the identity-politics tribalists and central planners of our own time.

The U.S. Constitution was meant to serve as the institutional constraint on government itself.

The problem has not only been those on the Left, but too many American conservatives as well, who have claimed to oppose government direction of economic affairs, but who have, in reality, supported the growth of the interventionist-welfare state by conceding that government has social responsibilities that, however, should not be taken too far, and should be managed in cost-efficient business-like ways. And, worse, they have too often happily called for political paternalism when it has concerned matters of personal lifestyles and interpersonal relationships and actions of which they ethically disapprove.

And many, both on the political Left and in conservative circles, have accepted the notion of America's paternalistic place in the world. The circumstances and rationales for foreign interventionism may be points of controversy among Pro-

gressives and conservatives, but both believe in and call for U.S. social engineering in other countries through financial, political, and military means. Both American servicemen and the citizens experiencing American intrusion into their own country's affairs are considered expendable pawns, "collateral damage," in the pursuit of the goals of the Washington foreign-policy planners.

For the last three decades, The Future of Freedom Foundation has stood for and articulated that consistent case for individual liberty and noninterventionism of all types, both at home and abroad. This, in my opinion, has been part of its uniqueness and importance in the battle of ideas.

But it can be asked, has The Future of Freedom Foundation made a difference in all that time? Has it been worth the generous support that friends of freedom have kindly given FFF in its endeavors for liberty? With the acceptance that I am clearly not an unbiased person, I strongly argue, "Yes."

Every long-term advance in the march toward great liberty has required taking principled, consistent, and uncompromising stances to arouse the consciousness and win the support of members of society.

Whether it has been ending slavery, or opening the world to free trade, or establishing a greater equality of individual rights for all before the law, it has been spearheaded by those who insisted that liberty was the goal and should not be compromised in any of its forms and facets. And such consistency, at the end of the day, has made the difference.

This is what The Future of Freedom Foundation has been, is, and always will be about. And in this, it has made a difference by holding up the idea and ideal of a truly free society for all to see and for none to ignore.

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NEXT MONTH:
**"Tigers Are Less Dangerous
Than Tax Collectors
and Political Paternalists"**
by Richard M. Ebeling

The Long Shadow of World War I and America's War on Dissent, Part 2

by Daniel A. Sjursen



Upon U.S. entry into the war, in 1917 the Wilson administration proposed and a compliant Congress almost immediately passed the Espionage Act, a direct attack on American press freedom. The law criminalized newspaper journalists who dared to oppose the war, question the official narrative, or encourage dissent. Massive fines and stiff prison sentences were dealt out with regularity throughout the war. The postmaster general, Albert Burleson, used the Act with particular vigor, banning socialist and anti-war publications from the mails, which then was the only serious method of media distribution.

The actions of Burleson and the government were manifold and nefarious. Bilingual “watchdogs” (mainly university professors) were assigned to monitor the then-vibrant foreign-language publications for “material which may fall under the Espionage Act.” Burleson went past the foreign press and denied mail access to any publication that even vaguely criticized the war, or dared, as he declared, “to impugn the motives of the government” or even criticize “improperly our Allies.” Thus, even the esteemed liberal journal *The Nation* was banned in September 1918, simply for criticizing the pro-war labor leader Samuel Gompers. This official trampling of press freedom encouraged local organizations to take mass surveillance and thought policing to evermore extreme levels. For example, the Iowa Council of Defense urged each member to spy on his fellow citizens and “find out what his neighbor thinks.”

Attorney General Thomas Gregory even boasted of his having crafted an effective mass surveillance state. Indeed, it was so effective that it can now be seen as a precursor — though less technologically advanced — of the digital surveillance state that NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden unmasked

during the Obama years. In April 1918, Gregory claimed, “Scores of thousands of men are under constant observation throughout the country.” The connections to the present day are manifold, relevant, and discomfiting. It was the nearly century-old Espionage Act, in fact, that Barack Obama used to wage his war on leakers, including Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning and Edward Snowden. Indeed, the liberal darling Obama prosecuted more persons under the Espionage Act than all of his predecessors combined.

Democrats won the presidency in 1916 on the popularity of a specifically *anti-war* platform.

Still, while Obama indicted leaker after leaker, i.e., journalistic sources, his justice department stopped short of indicting a publication itself, citing the potentially dangerous precedent it would set. The Trump administration has followed in Obama’s footsteps by bringing charges against Julian Assange, who — like him or not — runs a viable publication, WikiLeaks. While WikiLeaks itself has not been indicted, that is certainly still a possibility. While the mainstream U.S. press failed to rally

to Assange’s side, it would behoove them to do so. If Assange is jailed or WikiLeaks is shut down, there is nothing to stop Trump or future presidents from indicting officials in the *Washington Post* or *New York Times* or the publications themselves for printing classified information gleaned from leakers. By then, using World War I vintage tools, the war on the press will be over, the federal government triumphant once and for all.

American propaganda at home

When the United States declared war, many millions of Americans remained uncertain about the need for intervention and skeptical of the official justifications. After all, Democrats won the presidency in 1916 on the popularity of a specifically *anti-war* platform. Such sentiments were hardly vanquished in April 1917. That presented Wilson with a serious problem, one that needed to be solved immediately. The most prominent, and infamous, government answer was George Creel’s Committee on Public Information (CPI). While Wilson and Creel vehemently protested that CPI would *not* peddle propaganda, that’s exactly what the organization felt compelled to do: to “cultivate — even to manufacture”

favorable public support for the war, in the words of historian David M. Kennedy.

What followed bordered on the ridiculous. Countless pamphlets were produced depicting German troops as rabid beasts, often shown as strangely threatening to white American women. The teaching of German was banned in many local school districts, as were history textbooks seen as too pro-German. CPI also collaborated with the hawkish National Board for Historical Service to craft and distribute various “war study courses” to the nation’s schools. Education, too, is a regular victim of the warfare state.

Creel’s methods were varied and increasingly nefarious.

Creel had few compunctions about his work and left behind an instructive legacy of unsubtle statements. He unapologetically described his job as “the fight for the *minds* of men, for the conquest of their convictions.” His methods were varied and increasingly nefarious. CPI unleashed 75,000 “Four-Minute Men” on local communities. They were prominent citizens with reliably pro-war viewpoints who whipped up support through millions of brief speeches across the

nation. Creel’s agency also distributed 75 million copies of pamphlets explaining the official government case for war. What’s more, the Committee even published pro-war advertisements in popular journals such as the *Saturday Evening Post* to shamelessly persuade the people. Consumerism, it seemed, had finally dovetailed with government propaganda.

The war on “hyphenated” Americans

“Any man who carries a hyphen about with him carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of the Republic.” —Woodrow Wilson (1919)

Nativism and xenophobia are as American as apple pie, and are pervasive themes in U.S. history. However, the flames of anti-immigrant sentiment reached a fever pitch in the World War I era. By then, the recent wave of new immigrants — Italians, Poles, Slavs, and Jews — outnumbered the old-stock immigrants composed of Western and Northern Europeans. This inspired fear among native Anglo Americans. Just before the war, Henry Ford’s automotive workers on the assembly line attended a factory school for immigrants in which the first English sentence

students learned was “I am a good American.”

By 1916, even the supposedly progressive Wilson framed his campaign partly around the concept of Americanism, as defined by the Anglo elite. So-called hyphenated Americans had no place in a United States, and new loaded terms such as “100 percent Americanism” took hold. Even before the war, Wilson gave voice to xenophobia, directed at once-admired German-Americans, as he stated, “There are citizens of the United States, I blush to admit, born under other flags but welcomed under our generous naturalization laws ... who have poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life.... Such creatures ... must be crushed out.” Then, during his official war address, he claimed that there were “millions of men and women of German birth and native sympathy who live amongst us.... If there should be disloyalty, it will be dealt with, with a firm hand of repression....” It was.

Scapegoating of German and new immigrants and the vigilantism against them straddled the lines of official and unofficial policy. Quasi-vigilante groups such as the massive American Protective League (APL) even managed to enter into a formal

relationship with Gregory’s Justice Department. APL members, who stood 250,000 strong by war’s end, spied on neighbors and co-workers, sniffing out even the vaguest hints of dissent. Owing to his virtual deputization of the APL members, Attorney General Gregory went so far as to boast, “I have today several hundred thousand private citizens ... engaged in ... assisting the heavily overworked Federal authorities in keeping an eye on disloyal individuals and making reports of disloyal utterances.”

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APL members rapidly slid into more nefarious arenas — burglary, illegal wiretapping, slander, citizens’ arrests, opening private mail, and, eventually, even physical violence. For perhaps the first time in U.S. history, whites — mostly Germans, pacifists, and socialists — were lynched wholesale. Some were viciously tarred and feathered, others outright murdered. The perpetrators almost never faced punishment. In one representative case, a German-American who had actually attempted (unsuccessfully) to join the U.S. Navy was humiliated, paraded through the streets, and

murdered before a cheering crowd. At their trial, the ringleaders wore red, white, and blue ribbons. Their defense counsel described their act as “patriotic murder.” Within 25 minutes the jury found them all not guilty. The “respectable” *Washington Post* then commented, “In spite of excesses such as lynching, it is a healthful and wholesome awakening in the interior of the country.”

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Which all links to the relevant present. Donald Trump’s 2016 campaign calls to “ban Muslims” coming from certain countries, and to “take out” the families of terrorists; and his characterizations of some Mexican and Central American refugees and migrants as “rapists” no doubt set the conditions for, and incited, a recent wave of domestic terror attacks. True, violence against Muslims — which first manifested in the highly emotive post-9/11 Bush years — and Hispanics (including the recent mass shooting in El Paso, Texas), and the recent rise in attacks on Jewish communities do not rise to the level of the First World War. Nonetheless, such actions follow in the mold of the xeno-

nophobia, racism, and alarmism the Great War produced.

Déjà vu all over again

The American people live, to a large extent, in the shadow of the world the Great War created. All war, especially war on such a grand scale, inevitably suppresses dissent, curtails liberty, and centralizes power in the federal government. Not only did that occur in World War I, but it did so to such a degree that the relationship of Americans to the federal government was completely transformed. U.S. presidents now unilaterally wage war — at home and abroad — with near total impunity.

It seems that while World War I did end, the post-9/11 “terror wars” may never come to a close. A major reason for that is the century-long centralization of foreign-policy and war-making power in the office of the president. Though Congress actually sanctioned (or rather rubber-stamped) war in April 1917, the Great War nevertheless transferred massive power to the executive branch. Indeed, Wilson’s unilateral military expeditions against Russian communists when he (and later his successor, Warren G. Harding) intervened in the Russian Civil War (1918-20) were a harbinger of things

to come, great-grandfather to today's unsanctioned interventions (and killing) in Libya, West Africa, Syria, and beyond. In retrospect, World War I and its more devilish step-child, the Second World War, proved to be the last two actual declared.

What's more, the tacit — yet wildly vague and open-ended — congressional “authorizations” for force in Afghanistan (2001) and then Iraq (2002) bear a striking resemblance to the legislative rubber-stamp in April 1917. Wilson had said as much in his war address. It was, he declared, the “[executive branch] upon which the responsibility of conducting war and safeguarding the nation will most directly fall.” And indeed it would. Today's executive-as-emperor political culture is partly an outgrowth of Wilson's precedent.

War, whether in 1917 or 2019, is as politically partisan as any other issue.

Political tribalism, no doubt prevalent today, was also common during the First World War. In spite of the cynical announcement of Republican Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge, a fierce Wilson opponent — “When this country is at war, party lines will disappear.... Both Democrats

and Republicans must forget party in the presence of the common danger” — Lodge intended all along to criticize Wilson and the Democrats for their “insufficient vigor” in war prosecution. Much the same has unfolded in the “forever wars.” Bush and the Republicans pressured early Democratic acquiescence, but Dems rebelled and criticized (rightly) Bush's failing Iraq War from 2006 to 2008. Only later, when one of their own — Barack Obama — was in office, did they suddenly support the war expansion, and it became the Republicans who portrayed the president as weak on terror. The formula flipped again when Trump took office. War, whether in 1917 or 2019, is as politically partisan as any other issue.

When the president filled the power vacuum in World War I, and Congress enabled him, it became clear that the federal courts could not and would not save liberty. Repeatedly, the Supreme Court upheld both the Espionage and Sedition Acts. As Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, once a darling of Progressives, wrote in *Schenk v. United States*, “when a nation is at war many things that might be said in time of peace are such a hindrance to its effort that their utterance will not be endured.” With those words

Holmes essentially spiked the promise of freedom in future wars. The same is true today, as the Supreme Court has failed to overturn the USA PATRIOT ACT or the much-abused Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF), or to shut down Guantanamo Bay and the Obama-escalated drone assassination program.

Modern liberalism, and the Democratic Party — as the Great War demonstrated — won't save liberty either: in 1917, the vast majority of self-proclaimed Progressives sold out and followed "their man" Wilson into war, just as neo-Progressives sheepishly followed Obama down his path of war expansion. Democrats, Progressives, and too many (small "I") liberals inflicted perhaps permanent damage on their once-optimistic social philosophy of progress. As such, according to David Kennedy, "the idea of the 'people' as good and educable, gave way to the 'masses,' brutal and volatile."

The pro-war Progressive Walter Lippmann sensed this by war's end, and proposed radical, undemocratic measures. The solution to man's irrationality was to abandon real democracy and create an "intelligence bureau" to pursue "the common interests that very largely

elude public opinion ... managed only by a specialized class." From that era, then, one may date the "substantial nagging fear of the people among modern liberals."

It may be said, then, that the true casualty of the First World War was not just liberty, but the very "progressive" soul, the perhaps always-misplaced faith in government as a potential force for good. It is this cynical postwar world that Americans inhabit.

Bibliographical note: This piece draws extensively on David M. Kennedy's book *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* as well as the author's own teaching notes as lecturer from his time at West Point. Interested readers should read Kennedy's work in full for a broader and more in-depth treatment of this massively complex subject.

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