
FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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*No one is more enslaved than he who believes
that he is free without being so.*

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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The Future of Freedom Foundation is a nonprofit educational foundation whose mission is to advance liberty and the libertarian philosophy by providing an uncompromising moral, philosophical, and economic case for individual liberty, free markets, private property, and limited government.

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Socialism, American Style, Part 4

by Jacob G. Hornberger



It would be difficult to find a better example of American socialism than the institution of public schooling or, as it might be more accurately termed, government schooling.

Public schooling is based on socialist central planning. Whether at a federal, state, or local level, government officials plan, in a top-down, command-and-control manner, the education of millions, thousands, or hundreds of students.

Participation in the state's education system is mandatory. To ensure compliance on the part of parents, the state has enacted what are called compulsory-attendance laws. If parents refuse to subject their children to the state's system, the state will secure a judicial order from a state

judge mandating that the recalcitrant parents appear in his court to show cause why they are not complying with the law. If they refuse to appear, they are cited with contempt of court, and the judge will order their arrest. Law-enforcement agents will carry out the arrest warrant. Once the parents are jailed, they will remain there until they agree to comply with the state's compulsory-attendance laws.

In the 1970s, before home-schooling became legal, a Utah man named John Singer refused to subject his children to the state's schooling system. He also refused to comply with a judge's order to appear to explain or justify his recalcitrance. In the end, law-enforcement officers shot him dead. They called it resisting arrest, but the underlying reason was his refusal to comply with the state's compulsory school-attendance laws.

Later, after many years of state opposition and resistance, home-schooling became legal. Nonetheless, it is understood that home-schooling is not allowed as a matter of right but rather because the state permits it as part of its overall control of education. Moreover, in many, if not most states, parents must prove to the state that their children are being educated in a way that satisfies state officials.

Coercion and indoctrination

Of course, there are privately owned schools, but in order to operate they must secure and maintain a license from the state. If they fail to meet the state's standards, their license is refused or revoked.

Public schooling is funded though coercion. The state taxes people, many of whom do not have children (or children in school) in order to get the money to fund its operations. There is nothing voluntary about taxation. If one refuses to pay his taxes, the state will come after him with liens, garnishments, attachments, and even criminal prosecution.

Indoctrination of the young is a critically important aim of the state with public schooling.

Public-school students use government-approved textbooks, and the curriculum is set by the state. The teachers are vetted and hired by the government. Most classes are one hour in length. Heaven help a student who, on hearing the bell ring at the end of class, doesn't make it to his next class on time.

Regimentation, obedience to orders, indoctrination, memorization, and regurgitation of information on tests are standard fare in

every government school across the country. Public schooling might well be termed "army-lite," given its similarity to boot camp for military conscripts.

Naturally, some children get bored with this government-run system. Woe unto them! A few parents will conclude rightly that it's the system that is ill, not their child, and remove him from the system. Others, however, nod with approval when state officials diagnose their bored kid with "attention deficit disorder" and prescribe medication such as Adderall until their child gets his head straight.

Given the socialist nature of this institution, it shouldn't surprise anyone that public schooling also plays an important role in such socialist countries as Cuba, North Korea, China, and Vietnam. Government officials in those countries believe as strongly as U.S. officials that education of the young needs to be under the control of the state.

Indoctrination of the young is a critically important aim of the state with public schooling. From the very first day in school, schoolteachers ingrain American students with the notion that they live in a free society and that their economic system is "free enterprise."

Of course, as libertarians know, it's all a lie, but what 6-year-old is going to know that, especially since his parents are more often than not a product of the same system? As he recites the Pledge of Allegiance (which was written by an avowed socialist) every day, he becomes convinced about how free he is ("with liberty and justice for all"). By the time he graduates high school, there is no doubt in his mind that he, unlike government-school students in socialist countries, lives in the freest country in history.

The last thing American government officials want children to learn about is libertarianism.

Of course, it's no different in socialist countries. Public school-teachers there indoctrinate their students in the same way, telling them that such socialist programs as government-provided retirement pay, government-guaranteed health care, government-provided education, and government assistance for the poor show that people who live under socialism are living in a free society.

Many years ago, I traveled to Cuba. In Havana I visited a museum that focused on actions that the U.S. government, specifically the

Pentagon and the CIA, had taken against Cuba — an invasion, assassination attempts against Cuban leaders, a brutal economic embargo, and terrorist attacks against Cuban-owned businesses that left innocent people dead.

Cuban students were being indoctrinated as to the evils of America's national-security state. American students, of course, are indoctrinated with the exact opposite perspective: that the Pentagon and the CIA are a force for good in the world, that Cuba was part of a worldwide communist conspiracy to take over the world, that Cuba was a "dagger pointed at America's throat," and that Cuba posed a grave threat to U.S. "national security." All that, American students are taught, justified the U.S. invasion of Cuba, the embargo, the assassination attempts, and the acts of state-sponsored terrorism.

And it is no surprise that there are no courses in libertarianism taught in any public school in the nation. The last thing American government officials want children to learn about is libertarianism. They don't want some libertarian school-teacher contradicting their version of what a free society is. They don't want students to hear how the conversion of America to a welfare-

state and a national-security state destroys freedom in America.

Reforms?

For decades, public schooling has been in crisis, a phenomenon that everyone, even the most ardent proponents of public schooling, acknowledges. The problem, however, is that there is still hope among the American people that this never-ending crisis can be ended. The hope is that there is some education-reform plan still waiting to be discovered that will finally make this socialist educational system work.

How could a socialist program ever be a solution to a socialist program?

It will never happen. Socialism is an inherently defective paradigm. It cannot be made to work, no matter how many “better people” are appointed or elected to the federal Department of Education, the state departments of education, or to the local school boards. No matter what reform is adopted and no matter who is in charge of the system, the public-schooling crisis will continue.

Long ago, conservatives began promoting school vouchers as a way to finally fix the public-school sys-

tem. The program was doomed to fail from the start. After all, school vouchers themselves constitute a socialist program, in that they use the force of the state to take money from people to whom it rightly belongs and give it to those to whom it does not belong. How could a socialist program ever be a solution to a socialist program? The notion was ludicrous from the beginning.

Unfortunately, there were libertarians who grabbed on to the voucher concept. Their reason? They concluded that if they were to be taken seriously by the mainstream media, they had to accept the permanent existence of public schooling and just come up with ways to save children from it and also to improve the system through competition and what they call “choice.”

The notion is that when people receive school vouchers that can be used in private schools, the parents receiving them have a “choice” that enables them to send their children to private school. But of course the same argument can be said of a thief. The minute he leaves a house with his loot, he too has choices that he didn’t have before. But choices coming from wrongfully acquired money are not what we ordinarily countenance in moral terms.

When vouchers were first being promoted, some libertarians argued that they were a transition device that would lead to the end of public schooling. That argument was fallacious from the start. In fact, vouchers have proven to do the exact opposite. They more deeply embed the state in the education process, especially for private schools that accept the vouchers. With the influx of voucher revenue, private schools expand operations by hiring new teachers and administrators, building new buildings, and acquiring more tools and equipment. Once dependent on the dole, they will fight fiercely any attempt to give it up.

There is but one solution to the education morass — the separation of school and state.

Among the worst aspects of the advocacy of school vouchers by libertarians is that people conclude that this socialist reform program is “libertarian” or “freedom-oriented” simply because there are some libertarian think tanks that promote it. The idea is that if prominent libertarian think tanks advocate a program, it must be libertarian.

Another baleful aspect of public schooling is what it does to people’s

minds. Every kid from birth to 6 years old is characterized by a wide-eyed awe of the universe. He absorbs everything he sees and as soon as he is able to speak, he begins bedeviling his parents with questions, the most annoying being that infamous 3-letter word, “Why?”

By the time kids graduate high school, however, that natural and passionate love of learning has been smashed out of most of them. All they want to do is get out of school. The lucky ones rediscover their natural inquisitiveness and passion for learning sometime before they die. The unlucky ones go to their deathbeds unaware of what the state did to them through public schooling.

There is but one solution to the education morass — liberty — educational liberty — the separation of school and state, just as our ancestors separated church and state. That would mean the repeal of compulsory school-attendance laws and school taxes and the selling off of all the public-school buildings. It would mean the end of all governmental involvement in education — a total free-market educational system.

The free market produces the best of everything. There is no doubt that it would produce the greatest educational system in history. Fami-

lies, not the state, would be responsible for the education of their children. That's a necessary prerequisite for a free society, one where the citizens are masters and the government officials are the servants.

In a free-market educational system, educational entrepreneurs would flood the market with new, dynamic, and innovative educational methods, ideas, and locales. There would be music schools, religious schools, secular schools, or simply unique education devices that cater to people who wish to have their children educated in a different manner.

The most important thing would be that each child could be treated as the one-of-a-kind person he is, rather than be crammed into the cookie-cutter mold that characterizes the government schooling system. Children would recapture and retain that awe of the universe and a passion for learning throughout their lives.

What about the poor? As we see in other areas of our lives — religion, computers, restaurants, grocery stores, automobiles, and so many others, entrepreneurs cater not only to the rich but also to the middle class and poor. They would do the same in a free-market educational system.

Moreover, there are always people among the rich and middle class who love helping poor people get an education. Voluntary donations would fund scholarships, tuition, and educational opportunities for the less fortunate.

Almost 250 years ago, our ancestors embraced a radical concept called the separation of church and state. No compulsory church-attendance laws. No church taxes. No government control or regulation over religion. Americans have developed a tolerance for how other people make their religion decisions.

As Sheldon Richman pointed out in *The Future of Freedom* Foundation's award-winning book *Separating School & State: How to Liberate America's Families*, there is but one solution to the education morass — liberty — educational liberty — the separation of school and state, just as our ancestors separated church and state.

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

NEXT MONTH:
“Socialism, American
Style, Part 5”
by Jacob G. Hornberger

Pandemic Follies: Tyranny Won't Keep Us Safe

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by James Bovard



Politicians have destroyed more than 30 million jobs this year in a deluge of edicts aimed to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 100,000 Americans still died from the coronavirus, but the anti-COVID government crackdowns probably did far more damage than the virus. The COVID crisis has also shown how easy it is for politicians to fan fears to seize nearly absolute power.

In March, Donald Trump proclaimed that “we are at war with an invisible enemy.” He also declared, “I’m a wartime president.... This is a different kind of war than we’ve ever had.” Maryland’s governor, Larry Hogan, asserted that “every Marylander can be a hero, just by staying home” after he dictated a “shelter-at-

home” order threatening a \$5,000 fine and a year in prison for any Marylander who went outside in violation of his edict.

Almost 40 percent of households earning less than \$40,000 per year have someone who lost his job in recent months, according to the Federal Reserve. The Disaster Distress Helpline, a federal crisis hotline, received almost 900 percent more phone calls in March compared with a year ago. A recent *JAMA Psychiatry* analysis warned that stay-at-home orders and rising unemployment are a “perfect storm” for higher suicide rates. A California health organization recently estimated that 75,000 Americans could die from “despair” as a result of the pandemic, unemployment, and government restrictions.

In the name of saving lives, politicians have entitled themselves to destroy an unlimited number of livelihoods. Politicians in many states responded to COVID-19 by dropping the equivalent of a Reverse Neutron Bomb — something which destroys the economy while supposedly leaving human beings unharmed. But the only way to assume people were uninjured is to believe their existence is totally detached from their jobs, bank accounts, and mortgage and rent payments.

COVID policymakers have written themselves the letter that Cardinal Richelieu gave to one of his agents in the novel *The Three Musketeers*: “The bearer of this letter has acted under my orders and for the good of the state.” This *carte blanche* was sufficient to place murders and other crimes above the law and beyond reproach in France. In contemporary America, the same exoneration is achieved by invoking “science” and “data.”

Gubernatorial tyranny

Oregon’s governor, Kate Brown, banned residents from leaving their homes except for essential work, buying food, and other narrow exemptions, and also banned all recreational travel. Six Oregon counties have only one confirmed COVID case, and most of the state has minimal infections. But schools, businesses, and other activities were slammed shut by government command.

Michigan’s governor, Gretchen Whitmer, imposed some of the most severe restrictions, prohibiting anyone from leaving his home to visit family or friends. Whitmer also severely restricted what stores could sell; she prohibited purchasing seeds for spring planting after she decreed that a “nonessential” activity. (Pur-

chasing state lottery tickets was still an “essential” activity though.) COVID infections were concentrated in the Detroit metropolitan area, but Whitmer shut down the entire state — including northern counties with near-zero infections and zero fatalities, boosting unemployment to 24 percent statewide. Her repression provoked fierce protests, and Whitmer responded by claiming that her dictates saved 3,500 lives. She exonerated herself with a statistical formula that was painfully ethereal compared with the stark physical devastation in Michigan.

Michigan’s governor, Gretchen Whitmer, imposed some of the most severe restrictions.

The shutdown order of Kentucky’s governor, Andy Beshear, resulted in the highest rate of unemployment in the nation — 33 percent. But according to Sen. Rand Paul, COVID’s impact in Kentucky “has not been worse than an average flu season.” But that did not stop Beshear from forbidding people to attend church services and sending Kentucky State Police to attach notices to car windshields ordering church attendees to self-quarantine for 14 days and reporting them to local health departments.

In New York, Gov. Andrew Cuomo imposed a state lockdown and justified his edict: “If everything we do saves just one life, I’ll be happy.” So the governor is entitled to freeze the lives and movement of 20 million people, subverting their efforts to provide for themselves and their families to save one person? Most counties in New York state had five people or fewer who tested positive for coronavirus at the time of his decree, and most of the state has avoided the stratospheric casualty rate of the New York City area. Cuomo’s ludicrous formula exemplifies how politicians reap media applause for dramatic actions that have little or nothing to do with public safety.

Maryland politicians have destroyed more than 400,000 jobs.

Maryland politicians have destroyed more than 400,000 jobs in dictatorial responses claiming to thwart the coronavirus pandemic. “Nearly one in five Maryland workers have filed for unemployment” compensation, the *Baltimore Sun* reported. The situation is so bad that even the *Washington Post* recognized that Maryland’s COVID “restrictions have crippled the economy and paralyzed daily life

since mid-March.” But the shutdowns failed to prevent COVID cases from increasing by fiftyfold or the death rate from rising a hundredfold. That dictate never made any sense for much of the state. Garrett County, for instance, has had only ten COVID cases and no fatalities, but its schools and businesses were shuttered at the command of Annapolis.

Killing the elderly

Secrecy and hypocrisy have permeated COVID policies across the nation. Maryland is busy hiring a thousand “contact tracers” to track down anyone who might have interacted with anyone who tested positive for COVID. Privacy will be no excuse for failing to disclose personal contacts. However, at the same time, the Maryland Department of Health ordered local county health departments to cease disclosing which nursing homes have been ravaged by COVID outbreaks, claiming that such information “serves no public health purpose” and violates privacy laws,” as WJLA-TV reported. Most COVID fatalities statewide have occurred in nursing homes. One might think that children would have a legitimate interest in knowing where their parents faced the greatest risk

of dying, but no such luck in the Free State.

Why the secrecy? Reopen Maryland requested and was denied “information on whether ... the state forced nursing homes to accept COVID-19 positive patients discharged from hospitals, as suggested by the Governor’s April 5 executive order and corresponding directives from the Maryland Department of Health.”

Similar policies in other states helped send the COVID death rate into the stratosphere. Governor Cuomo, who callously compelled nursing homes to accept COVID patients, will have no legal culpability for a policy that contributed to more than 5,000 nursing-home deaths in his state. Pennsylvania’s health czar, Rachel Levine, issued a similar order, contributing to thousands of nursing-home deaths, and then removed her own 95-year-old mother from a nursing home to keep her safe.

The pandemic also revealed the lust by some politicians to perpetuate their power as long as possible on any shabby pretext. On May 15, Governor Hogan rescinded Maryland’s statewide stay-at-home order but permitted counties to extend it with their own decrees. Hogan’s announcement ending the state shut-

down sparked a political pity party by Democratic officials in the Washington suburbs and Baltimore area. “All of us were taken aback by his announcement. We were hung out to dry,” whined Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich, who faced the burden of justifying perpetuating the lockdown for the million residents of his county. Elrich lamented that Hogan’s decision “makes it sound like it’s an arbitrary decision.... [Hogan] kind of ignited this rebellion against what we were doing.”

Levine removed her own 95-year-old mother from a nursing home to keep her safe.

The *Washington Post* summarized Elrich’s response: “Montgomery County rushed to create its own data dashboard last week, so elected leaders could justify to constituents why they remain stuck in a coronavirus shutdown.” But county officials are apparently being slippery, relying on arbitrary selection and manipulation of data to justify perpetuating arbitrary power. Maryland daily COVID fatalities had fallen by more than 50 percent but politicians did not want to loosen their grip. Anne Arundel County struck bureaucratic gold when it

declared that its pandemic emergency would continue until “health equity” was achieved — whatever that means.

Federal diktats

While much of the media has responded to the pandemic by painting pro-lockdown politicians as saviors, COVID carnage was multiplied by incompetent federal agencies. Incompetent scientists at the Centers for Disease Control contaminated key samples for creating a test in February.

Long after foreign nations had been ravaged and many cases had been detected in America, the Food and Drug Administration continued blocking innovative private testing. The FDA forced the nation’s most innovative firms to submit to its command-and-control approach regardless of the feds’ having little or nothing to offer. FDA commissioner Stephen Hahn shrugged off his agency’s disastrous policies: “There are always opportunities to learn from situations like this one.” Trump made bushels of false or inaccurate statements on the availability of testing early on that contributed to confusion and fear during the pandemic. Instead of speedy access to life-saving medical results, Americans were obliged

to settle for Trump’s ludicrous assertion that “anybody that needs a test gets a test.” While Trump condemned people who purchased more food and supplies than they needed short-term, administration officials also floated a proposal for a presidential diktat to cancel all flights nationwide and lock everyone at home for two weeks or longer.

The Food and Drug Administration continued blocking innovative private testing.

While that bizarre proposal was rejected, the pandemic spurred other “trial balloons” to see how much additional power government could seize. In March, media reports indicated that Trump’s Justice Department was considering asking Congress to approve suspending habeas corpus for the duration of the pandemic — which some experts say could last 18 months. But Norman L. Reimer, executive director of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, warned, the proposed policy “says ‘affecting pre-arrest.’ So that means you could be arrested and never brought before a judge until they decide that the emergency or the civil disobedience is over.” The

same type of pre-arrest power could be exercised to detain anyone suspected of being infected or failing to obey lockdown orders. Republican Utah Sen. Mike Lee, one of the most principled members of the Senate, tweeted in response to the news of the power grab, “OVER MY DEAD BODY.”

Because politicians have no liability for the economic damage they inflict, they have no incentive to minimize the disruptions they decree. Trillions of dollars of new deficit spending will be vexing American workers for many years. As *Reason*'s Matt Welch noted, “The estimated \$3 trillion price tag on the first four batches of COVID-19 stimulus, divided by 330 million increasingly underemployed U.S. residents, equals \$9,000 per capita, which has ended up where government payouts usually go: to entities with better connections than you.”

Permitting governments to seize boundless power on the basis

of shaky extrapolations of infection rates will destroy our nation. Trump's boast of being a “wartime president” should recoil on him after the government launched a preemptive attack on American prosperity. It will be years until we know how much permanent damage was inflicted by politicians' panicky responses to the pandemic.

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:
“The Korean War's
Forgotten Lessons on the
Evil of Intervention”
by James Bovard

Is Libertarianism Immoral?

by Laurence M. Vance



“The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun,” said the wisest man who ever lived in the book of Ecclesiastes. Although King Solomon wasn’t writing about libertarianism, what he wrote certainly applies to critics of libertarianism.

While doing some unrelated research on the history of conservatism, I noticed that conservatives, beginning in the 1960s (Frank S. Meyer, M. Stanton Evans, Russell Kirk, L. Brent Bozell, Robert Nisbet, William F. Buckley, and other writers in *National Review*), used much of the same rhetoric and sometimes even the same talking points in pointing out the problems they perceived with libertarianism.

Libertarianism misconceptions

In Frank S. Meyer’s edited symposium *What is Conservatism?* (1964), M. Stanton Evans writes,

The libertarian, or classical liberal, characteristically denies the existence of a God-centered moral order, to which man should subordinate his will and reason. Alleging human freedom as the single moral imperative, he otherwise is a thoroughgoing relativist, pragmatist, and materialist. He puts considerable emphasis on economics. Man and his satisfactions, the libertarian maintains, are themselves the source of value — and other values cannot be imposed from without. Because the free economy best serves man and best supplies his material needs, it is moral. It works.

The libertarian, or classical liberal, affirms the natural goodness, or, in the more scientific forms, the non-evil of human nature. He views government as the source of evil, the unfettered individual as the source of good. He has considerable faith in “progress” as the natural creation of free men and tends to believe that mate-

rial success and moral virtue are closely akin, if not identical. For all of these reasons, he concludes that government should let people alone to employ their natural goodness. In his extreme form, the modern-day libertarian is a philosophical anarchist, a free-enterprise Utopian.

Elsewhere he speaks of “the libertarian’s commitment to freedom at virtue’s expense,” the libertarian “attack on traditional values,” the libertarian demand “that all other considerations, including the structure of traditional values, yield to the task” of confronting the “terrible challenge” of “the power of the state increasing by leaps and bounds, while the power of the individual correspondingly diminishes,” and the libertarian’s “moral relativism” and rejection of “objective standards of right and wrong.” Evans believes that the libertarian “imperatives of individual freedom cannot be reconciled with the Christian conception of the individual as flawed in mind and will, with its demand for individual subordination to an objective, nonsecular order.”

Writing in *Modern Age* in 1980, Robert Nisbet says of libertarians,

For libertarians individual freedom, in almost every conceivable domain, is the highest of all social values — irrespective of what forms and levels of moral, aesthetic, and spiritual debasement may prove to be the unintended consequences of such freedom.

Libertarians, on the other hand, appear to see social and moral authority and despotic political power as elements of a single spectrum, as an unbroken continuity. If, their argument goes, we are to be spared Leviathan we must challenge any and all forms of authority, including those which are inseparable from the social bond.

Libertarians seem to me to give less and less recognition to the very substantial difference between the coercions of, say, family, school, and local community and those of the centralized bureaucratic state.

And writing toward the latter end of his career, conservative godfather Russell Kirk, who had put conservatism on the map with his 1953 book, *The Conservative Mind: Roots of American Order*, pulled no punches in his assessment of libertarians:

The perennial libertarian, like Satan, can bear no authority temporal or spiritual.

The typical libertarian of our day delights in eccentricity including, often, sexual eccentricity.

The representative libertarian of this decade is humorless, intolerant, self-righteous, badly schooled, and dull.

Libertarians (like anarchists and Marxists) generally believe that human nature is good, though damaged by certain social institutions.

The libertarian does not venerate ancient beliefs and customs, or the natural world, or his country, or the immortal spark in his fellow men.

Fast forward to the twenty-first century.

Tony Greco, writing for the “Democratic site” *Daily Kos*, argues that “libertarian values are repellent” because “libertarianism celebrates greed and selfishness.” Their “hearts bleed for the rich and successful, not for the underprivileged.” Although they are not “actively hostile toward or contemptuous of the poor,” they “don’t much care about them.” Libertarianism is “intellectually myopic” because libertarians

“understand freedom almost exclusively in terms of freedom from government, not recognizing that unfettered capitalism — the libertarians’ beloved free market economy — can be as great a threat to freedom as government action.” Libertarianism is “utopian” because “the minimal government society that libertarians envision doesn’t exist anywhere in the industrial or post-industrial world, and never has, for good reason.” Libertarianism is “politically hopeless” because libertarians are “hobbled by their principled consistency.”

Liberals and conservatives alike are guilty of many misconceptions about libertarianism.

Conservative writer William Bowen takes a different approach:

Libertarians assume that the primary means to judge human behavior is rationality.

Libertarianism is a haunt for atheists and skeptics.

Libertarians assume that freedom is the premier political value to which all other political values are subordinate. If people are basically good, then they should be free from all constraints, except those con-

straints imposed by the state to protect all of us from the oppressive acts of others. In this respect, the thinking of the libertarian is little different from the thinking of the socialist who assumes that equality is the premier political value, or the fascist who assumes the same about the exaltation of the nation-state.

Libertarians think they can manufacture liberty by reducing the size of government and telling people that “you can do whatever you want to do so long as you don’t hurt anyone else while doing it.”

Libertarians pave the road to tyranny by asserting that we can have freedom without moral obligation to God or others. Several have tried to find a moral haven in utilitarianism, a long-ago rejected moral framework. The more the libertine asserts a freedom apart from moral excellence, the more he tightens the natural chains that bind such men.

And most recently, progressive David Masciotra wrote a piece for *salon* about his brief experiment with libertarianism, which he termed a “more dangerous vice”

than “narcotics” and “kinky sexual practices.” Writes Masciotra,

Libertarian ideology became briefly attractive, because I had sensed that the left was growing too moralistic in its articulation of policy proposal. My aversion to Puritanism in all forms led me to believe that any set of political principles that purports to allow everyone to run wild, without interference from law enforcement or any other official regulator of human behavior, is desirable....

My sobriety from libertarianism did not result from a dramatic rock bottom moment, merely an awakening back into the reality I had earlier accepted; a fresh, but familiar realization that individuals myopically pursuing their own interests have no solution to ecological catastrophe, thousands dying for lack of health insurance, lethal disparities in the public education system, and the unending terror and devastation of racism.

Liberals and conservatives alike are guilty of many misconceptions about libertarianism. In short, de-

pending on which day of the week it is, libertarians are naïve, utopian, eccentric, idealistic, selfish, materialistic, and nihilistic. They are inimical to organized religion and disdain tradition. They are too individualistic. They reverence progress and fetishize change. They are ignorant of human nature. They have no compassion for the poor. They don't believe in social justice. They don't hold traditional values. They reduce everything to economics. Above all, liberals and conservatives characterize libertarians as libertines and hedonists who celebrate alternative life-styles and don't believe in moral principles or absolutes.

Critics of libertarianism have built themselves quite a straw man. But they have managed to do it only by treating libertarianism as a moral instead of a political philosophy, believing that virtuous action should be compelled, confounding libertarianism with libertinism, and grossly mischaracterizing libertarianism.

Libertarianism is

Before going any further, we must answer a fundamental question: What is libertarianism? Libertarianism is the philosophy that says that people should be free from individual, societal, or government

interference to live their lives any way they desire, pursue their own happiness, accumulate wealth, assess their own risks, make their own choices, participate in any economic activity for their profit, engage in commerce with anyone who is willing to reciprocate, and spend the fruits of their labor as they see fit. As long as people don't violate the personal or property rights of others, and as long as their actions are peaceful, their associations are voluntary, and their interactions are consensual, they should be free to live their lives without license, regulation, interference, or molestation by the government.

Liberals and conservatives characterize libertarians as libertines and hedonists.

Libertarianism says that when government goes beyond basic defense, judicial, and policing activities, then it inevitably and invariably aggresses against person and property.

Libertarianism says that every crime must have a tangible and identifiable victim with real harm and measurable damages.

Libertarianism says that vices are not crimes. They may be bad habits, poor judgments, risky be-

haviors, or dangerous activities, but that doesn't mean that they should be crimes.

Libertarianism says that there is no such thing as nebulous crimes against nature, society, the greater good, the public interest, or the state.

Libertarianism says that government should never arrest, fine, imprison, or otherwise punish anyone for engaging in entirely private, peaceful, voluntary, or consensual actions that do not amount to aggression, force, coercion, threat, or violence against the person or property of others.

Libertarianism says that government should not regulate, oversee, or prohibit commercial activity between willing buyers and willing sellers.

Libertarianism says that the nonconsensual initiation of aggression against the person or property of others is always wrong, even when done by government.

Libertarianism says that as long as a man doesn't infringe upon the liberty of others by committing, or threatening to commit, acts of fraud, theft, aggression, or violence against their person or property, the government should leave him alone.

Libertarianism isn't

To better understand what libertarianism is, we might also look at what it isn't. Libertarianism is not a social attitude or an alternative lifestyle. Libertarianism is not some particular school of aesthetics. Libertarianism is not free markets and limited government. Libertarianism is not fiscal conservatism combined with social liberalism. Libertarianism is not privatization of government functions. Libertarianism is not "dog eat dog." Libertarianism is not "every man for himself." Libertarianism is not "survival of the fittest." Libertarianism is not rebellion or nihilism. Libertarianism is not "unfettered capitalism." Libertarianism is not antinomianism or anarchy. Libertarianism is not indifference. Libertarianism is not atheism, agnosticism, or materialism. And libertarianism is not hedonism, licentiousness, or libertinism.

Libertarianism is not a social attitude or an alternative lifestyle.

Libertarianism does not seek to answer philosophical and religious questions about Original Sin, the depravity of man, human nature, the image of God in man, or the inherent goodness or evil of man. As

a political philosophy, libertarianism says nothing about culture, mores, virtue, tradition, morality, values, or ethics. Libertarianism takes no position on whether one should or shouldn't discriminate, work for a large corporation, attend church, use profanity, commit adultery, boycott a company, eat red meat, buy organic produce, smoke marijuana, wear a seatbelt, read the Bible, or own a gun. That doesn't mean that libertarians don't think that some of these practices are immoral. It just means that they believe that it is not the proper function of government to interfere with the voluntary, private, peaceful activity of consenting adults. But yet the myth persists: libertarianism is an immoral philosophy.

"What libertarians are opposed to is ... the coercive imposition of values by the use of force and police power."

It is actually just the opposite. As libertarian theorist Murray Rothbard has explained,

Compelling moral actions or outlawing immoral actions, therefore, cannot be said to foster the spread of morality or virtue. On the contrary, coer-

cion atrophies morality, for it takes away from the individual the freedom to be either moral or immoral, and therefore forcibly deprives people of the chance to be moral. Paradoxically, then, a compulsory morality robs us of the very opportunity to be moral.

What libertarians are opposed to is not voluntary persuasion, but the coercive imposition of values by the use of force and police power. Libertarians are in no way opposed to the voluntary cooperation and collaboration between individuals: only to the compulsory pseudo-"cooperation" imposed by the state.

Rothbard sees a free society as what "discourages the criminal tendencies of human nature and encourages the peaceful and the voluntary." Indeed,

The only genuine order among men proceeds out of free and voluntary interaction: a lasting order that emerges out of liberty rather than by suppressing it....

Elsewhere he writes,

... Liberty and the free market discourage aggression and compulsion, and encourage the harmony and mutual benefit of voluntary interpersonal exchanges, economic, social, and cultural....

[Since men] are actually a mixture of good and evil, a regime of liberty serves to encourage the good and discourage the bad, at least in the sense that the voluntary and mutually beneficial are good and the criminal is bad.

Libertarianism does not oppose private educational efforts, media campaigns, or other nonviolent, noncoercive methods of persuasion of individuals or groups to effect changes in the public or private behavior of others. What it opposes is state coercion to achieve those ends.

The issues

Libertarianism is said to be immoral because of its viewpoint on the drug war. Libertarianism says that there should be no laws at any level of government for any reason regarding the buying, selling, growing, processing, transporting, importing, exporting, manufacturing, advertising, using, possessing, or

trafficking of any drug. Why? Because it is none of the government's business what a man desires to swallow, snort, inject, smoke, or otherwise ingest into his mouth, nose, veins, or lungs. The war on drugs is a war on freedom.

Libertarianism is said to be immoral because of its viewpoint on gambling. Libertarianism says that there should be no laws that regulate, restrict, or prohibit any form of gambling. Why? Because it is none of the government's business how people choose to invest, spend, or waste their money.

Libertarianism is said to be immoral because of its viewpoint on gun control. Libertarianism says that there should be no gun control laws whatsoever. Why? Because guns don't kill; people do. Every American has the natural right to possess any weapon on his own property or the property of anyone else that allows such weapons.

Libertarianism is said to be immoral because of its viewpoint on prostitution. Libertarianism says that there should be no laws against paying for, or receiving money for, sex. Why? Because the government should not be concerned with any activity that takes place on private property between consenting adults that doesn't violate the rights of oth-

ers. Why should it be illegal to charge for a service that you can legally give away for free?

Libertarianism is said to be immoral because of its viewpoint on welfare. Libertarianism says that all government welfare programs are illegitimate and should be abolished. Why? Because it is not the job of government to fight poverty, have a safety net, subsidize anyone, feed the hungry, or provide job training. And because the government has no money of its own, all welfare programs are simply just wealth-redistribution schemes under the guise of charity. Libertarians cherish the individual liberty, private property, personal responsibility, and free society that allow the charitable actions of philanthropists, humanitarian institutions, and religious organizations to flourish.

Libertarianism is said to be immoral because of its viewpoint on price gouging. Libertarianism says that there should be no laws that limit how high businesses can raise prices because of a natural disaster. Why? Because the government should not interfere in any way with any transaction between a willing seller and a willing buyer. Once it is accepted that the government has the authority, knowledge, and competence to establish arbitrary price

ceilings because of a natural disaster, no reasonable or logical argument can be made against the government's setting prices during ordinary times.

Libertarians cherish individual liberty, private property, personal responsibility, and free society.

Libertarianism is said to be immoral because of its viewpoint on health care. Libertarianism says that Medicare and Medicaid are illegitimate and should be eliminated. Why? Because health care is not a right. No American should be forced to pay for the health care of any other American.

Libertarianism is said to be immoral because of its viewpoint on usury laws. Libertarianism says that there should be no laws that limit the rate of interest that can be charged on a loan. Why? Because the government should not interfere in any way with any transaction between a willing lender and a willing borrower.

Libertarianism is said to be immoral because of its viewpoint on the minimum wage. Libertarianism says that there should be no minimum-wage laws. Why? Because minimum-wage laws violate free-

dom of contract. The government should not interfere in any way with the employer/employee relationship.

Libertarianism is said to be immoral because of its viewpoint on discrimination. Libertarianism says that since discrimination — against anyone, on any basis, and for any reason — is not aggression, force, or violence, the government should never prohibit it, seek to prevent it, or punish anyone for doing it. Why? Because to outlaw discrimination is to outlaw freedom of association, property rights, and freedom of thought.

Conclusion

It is not the business of government to protect people from, or prevent people from engaging in, bad habits, risky behavior, harmful substances, unhealthy choices, dangerous activities, poor decisions, addictive actions, immoral conduct, or ruinous vice. Legislation will never change human nature. Government intervention in society is the antithesis of freedom.

Government has no business trying to make people virtuous or

selectively criminalizing certain acts that are not virtuous. Although they often accuse libertarians of being moral relativists, it is liberals and conservatives alike who advocate government aggression and violence against peaceful people's person or property to achieve some desired end. "Libertarians," as economist Robert Higgs has said, "should never concede the moral high ground to those who insist on coercively interfering with freedom."

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NEXT MONTH:
"A Four-Point Plan for Government"
by Laurence M. Vance

Celebrating the Arrival of Ludwig von Mises in America

.....
by Richard M. Ebeling



Eighty years ago, on August 2, 1940, the leading living member of the Austrian School of Economics, Ludwig von Mises, arrived in the United States as a refugee from war-torn Europe. Hated by the socialists, viewed as a “class enemy” by the communists, and despised as “racial vermin” by the Nazis, Mises, like so many others, had made the journey across the Atlantic to the shores of the country that was still considered a haven of freedom in a world that seemed increasingly threatened with a totalitarian future of one form or another.

The migration of Europe’s cultural legacy to America

Nazi domination of Central and Western Europe, especially after the fall of France in the summer of 1940, meant the exiling of much of Europe’s living culture to the Americas. Already, before the start of the Second World War in Europe with the joint invasion and dismemberment of Poland by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in September 1939, classical-liberal essayist, author, and social critic Albert Jay Nock (1870–1945) observed what he considered a momentous event in his article “Culture Migrates to the U.S.A.,” which appeared in the April 1939 issue of *The American Mercury*:

We all know it is going on, but I doubt that we have taken its measure as the most important movement of our time.... I refer to the westward migration of European culture, and the effort to transplant it in this hemisphere....

... Hardly anywhere in Europe can the pursuit of culture go on at the present time, and the prospects are that it must remain in abeyance for quite a while. In some European countries, as we all know, culture is officially outlawed; the

individualism and intellectual freedom which are the primary essentials of its existence, are proscribed....

Culture's refugees, therefore, come from all Europe — to our universities, our press, our urban centers of creative activity. They come out of all peoples, nations, and languages, bringing their big and little hoards of cultural experience and creative intuitions and artistic energies. In our country they see, or think they see, a refuge where they may be safe from the cruder forms of repression and persecution....

... Culture is knowing the best that has been thought and said in the world. Its purpose is to transform the raw and crude individual by setting up in him an overmastering feeling for the best; and this not only in the realm of the intellect and beauty, but in the realm of morals and conduct as well. In short, the aim of culture is to transform the individual by inculcating a controlling sense of all spiritual values, a sense of what is right, just, fair, honorable, as well as of what is beautiful, dignified, graceful, and becoming.

Albert Jay Nock wondered, "What will become of it is quite beyond prediction...." We have, then, the responsibility of choosing whether we shall welcome it as a windfall or resent it as alien and un-American."

Europe's intellectual and professional refugees enrich America.

Europe's loss due to Hitler's ideological imposition of racism, terror, and tyranny was America's gain in the natural sciences, the arts and humanities, and in many of the social fields, including history, political science, sociology, philosophy, and economics. Tens of thousands of scholars, scientists, professors, artists, musicians, doctors, lawyers, businessmen, and entrepreneurs who were able to escape from Nazi-occupied or -dominated Europe (and fortunate enough to obtain scarce U.S. government-issued visas to enter the country) enriched the culture and character of America for decades afterwards, since most remained here long after the war was over in 1945.

Between 1933 and 1945, more than 220,000 European refugees made their way to America, and of that number 125,000 were from Germany or Austria, with many of them being Jews. Tens of thousands

more wanted to come and could have made it to America's shores if the U.S. government had not closed the immigration door in the face of all those wanting freedom from the oppression and murder of the Nazi regime.

Franklin Roosevelt's famous claim of wanting a "freedom from fear" did not apply to those literally facing torture and death on the European side of the Atlantic. They were left to their fates at the hands of Gestapo interrogators, or concentration-camp guards and executioners, or the rain of Axis and Allied bombings and battlefield destruction.

Austrian economists who found safe haven in America

Those who successfully escaped likely death if they had fallen into Nazi hands included a number of the Austrian economists. To name only a very few of the prominent ones: Friedrich A. Hayek (1899–1992) had accepted a visiting professorship at the London School of Economics in 1931, which became a permanent position in 1933. He was fortunate to survive the Nazi bombing raids on Britain during the war.

Fritz Machlup (1902–1983), who wrote his dissertation under

Ludwig von Mises's supervision at the University of Vienna and who ran his family's corrugated-box business in Austria, came to the United States on a Rockefeller Foundation research grant in 1933–1934, and stayed after landing an academic position at the University of Buffalo in upstate New York. He later accepted a position at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.

More wanted to come and could have made it to America's shores if the U.S. government had not closed the immigration door.

Gottfried Haberler (1900–1995) had also been a student of Mises's at the University of Vienna and had worked at the Vienna Chamber of Commerce until moving to Geneva, Switzerland, as a three-year resident scholar at the League of Nations. He accepted a professorship at Harvard University in Boston in 1936, where he taught for the rest of his professional life before becoming a senior scholar at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C.

Oskar Morgenstern (1902–1977) also had studied at the University of Vienna and worked as an assistant to Hayek, who from 1927

to 1931 was the director of the Austrian Institute for Business Cycle Research in Vienna. Morgenstern took over the directorship of the Institute when Hayek moved to London. He found himself exiled in the United States while on a lecture tour at the time of Nazi Germany's invasion and annexation of Austria in March 1938. He was offered a position at Princeton University, and he remained there for many years.

Mises worked hard to prevent a violent socialist revolution.

The noted phenomenological sociologist Alfred Schutz (1899–1959) had been greatly influenced by the Austrian economists during his student years at the University of Vienna and had been an active participant throughout the 1920s and early 1930s in Mises's famous private seminar on topics relating to economics and the social sciences in general. He was visiting Paris when the Nazis occupied Austria in March 1938 and could not return home. Schutz moved to the United States in 1939 and worked as a lawyer while also teaching part time at the New School for Social Research in New York City.

Ludwig von Mises, policy analyst and Austrian economic theorist

Mises (1881–1973) was the last of this Austrian group to make his way to the American side of the Atlantic Ocean. Educated at the University of Vienna in the early years of the 20th century, he graduated with a doctoral degree in 1906 from the faculty of law but with an emphasis in economics. In 1909, he was employed at the Vienna Chamber of Commerce, Crafts, and Industry, a full-time position he held until 1934. In that capacity, and especially after the First World War, he served as a senior economic analyst who was influential in steering Chamber policy positions in free-market directions against the tide of socialist, interventionist, and welfare-statist policies that dominated Austria between the two World Wars.

In the 1920s, Mises had helped to bring an end to Austria's post-World War I hyperinflation. He partly wrote the new by-laws of the Austrian central bank for the re-establishing of a gold standard. He worked hard to prevent a full-blown violent socialist revolution in his native land. He attempted to restrain government budgetary excesses in the middle of the 1920s. And in the early 1930s, he tried to

prevent Austria from falling into a deflationary spiral with the coming of the Great Depression while working equally hard to limit any inflationary policies as misguided cures to the economic depression.

While he may have been a prominent economic policy analyst by day at the Vienna Chamber of Commerce attempting to influence the direction of economic policy in Austria, by night he was the “Austrian” economic theorist and grand classical-liberal social philosopher who devoted his free time to writing the books that won him a growing international reputation: *The Theory of Money and Credit* (1912; 2nd ed., 1924); *Socialism, An Economic and Sociological Analysis* (1922; 2nd ed., 1932); *Liberalism* (1927); *Monetary Stabilization and Cyclical Policy* (1928); *A Critique of Interventionism* (1929); and *Epistemological Problems of Economics* (1933), along with numerous articles in German-language scholarly journals, as well as frequent pieces for the popular press in Austria on the burning policy issues of the day in those years.

Mises as the enemy of all brands of collectivism

Through his writings, Mises became one of the best-known and

most respected voices on the European continent not only for “Austrian” economics in the pure theoretical sense, but for his uncompromising stance for free-market, laissez-faire liberalism. He, therefore, became the hated enemy of all those fighting for any form of collectivism and the planned economy. The democratic socialists in Western Europe and the dictatorial socialists, following the lead of their Marxist masters in Soviet Russia, detested Mises, since he had demonstrated why their holy grail of a centrally planned economy was inherently and inescapably unworkable, leading only to economic chaos.

Mises became the hated enemy of all those fighting for any form of collectivism and the planned economy.

The Nazis loathed Mises, first and foremost because he was Jewish and therefore a race enemy of a purified German master race. But they hated him also because he challenged the racial and linguistic premises upon which the German National Socialists built their plans of Germany’s superiority over all other peoples in the world. He defended a philosophical and political

individualism that challenged their tribal collectivism.

He also spoke on behalf of a cosmopolitan humanitarianism that emphasized an equality of all men everywhere before the law with the same rights to life, liberty, and the peaceful ownership and use of private property in free markets that should encompass the world. If Mises had fallen into the hands of the Nazis, his life, no doubt, would have been brought to a brutal and cruel end.

**Mises emphasized
an equality of all men everywhere
before the law.**

A year after Hitler's rise to power in Germany in early 1933, there was a short-lived civil war in Austria between the Social Democrats and the Christian Socials, the former wanting a radical Marxist re-making of the country, while the latter were inspired by the corporatist conceptions that guided fascist Italy under Mussolini. The Social Democrats were roundly defeated in a matter of days, but the conflict ushered in a fascist-style authoritarian regime in Austria that did away with the fairly liberal constitution of 1920 that had protected most people's civil liberties. Aus-

tria's version of the fascist state lasted until the German annexation of Austria in March 1938.

Mises's vision of things to come

Mises had understood the political and ideological currents present in Central Europe already in the 1920s and better than many others. In 1925, in an essay entitled "Anti-Marxism," he warned of a rising "national socialism" that was nationalist and anti-Marxist, but not anti-socialist. Its advocates merely wanted the "right kind" of socialism, a socialism based on a unity of all social classes for restoring Germany's national greatness — that is, the fascist variation on the collectivist theme.

In an essay a year later, in 1926, entitled "Social Liberalism," Mises warned that Germany was ripe for such a national socialist regime. He pointed out that a growing number of Germans were "setting their hopes on the coming of the 'strong man' — the tyrant who will think for them and care for them." Thus, seven years before Hitler's ascendancy to power, Mises forecast where political currents were taking Germany.

But Mises's understanding of the shape of things to come went even beyond that. In "Anti-Marx-

ism,” he anticipated the 1939 alliance between Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Russia. He asked, where would a national socialist Germany turn for an ally in a future plan of conquest in Eastern Europe?

If Germany, a nation surrounded by other nations in the heart of Europe, were to assault [other countries], it would invite a coalition of all its neighbors into a world-political constellation; enemies all around. In such a situation Germany could find only one ally: Russia, which is facing hostility by Poles, Lithuanians, Hungarians, and possibly Czechs, but nowhere stands in direct conflict with German interests. Since Bolshevist Russia, like Czarist Russia, only knows force in dealing with other nations, it is already seeking the friendship of German nationalism. German Anti-Marxism and Russian Super-Marxism are not too far apart.

Thus, nearly 15 years before the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 23, 1939, with its secret protocol for dividing up Eastern Europe between the two totalitarian states in case of

war, and which set the stage for the actual conflict that began a week later, Ludwig von Mises had anticipated the events that set lose the terrible cataclysm of the Second World War in Europe.

Mises, the “historian of decline”

Years later, shortly after arriving in America in the summer of 1940, when writing his memoirs, Mises reflected on his professional life in his native Austria and the nearly 25 years during which he worked as a senior policy analyst at the Vienna Chamber of Commerce:

Occasionally I entertained the hope that my writings would bear practical fruit and show the way to policy.... But I have never allowed myself to be deceived. I have come to realize that my theories explain the degeneration of a great civilization; they do not prevent it. I set out to be a reformer, but only became the historian of decline.

Did Mises have any regrets about fighting his losing battles over ideas and policies? He added, “I won nothing more than a mere delay of the catastrophe.... But I do not regret that I attempted the im-

possible. I could not do otherwise. I fought because I could do no other.”

“I do not regret that I attempted the impossible. I could not do otherwise.”

Seeing the events unfold in the 1920s and the early 1930s, he happily and immediately accepted a visiting full-time professorship at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland, when it was unexpectedly offered to him in the summer of 1934. While originally offered for only one year, it was renewed over and over again, and he remained in Geneva until July 1940, when he set off on his journey to reach America.

Mises’s Geneva years and his treatise on economics

He had taken the years in Geneva to write what became his great treatise on economics, which first appeared in Switzerland in its German-language version in May 1940, just as the German army was beginning its conquest of Western Europe, and which — in its 1949 English-language version — is known as *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics*, one of the most important works in the history of 20th-century economic ideas.

When Friedrich Hayek reviewed the original German-language version, *Nationalökonomie*, shortly after it appeared, he said,

[It] ranges from the most general philosophical problems raised by all scientific study of human action to the major problems of economic policy of our own days.... [The] result is a really imposing unified system of a liberal social philosophy....

[There] appears to be a width of view and an intellectual spaciousness about the whole book that are much more like that of an eighteenth-century philosopher than that of a modern specialist. And yet, or perhaps because of this, one feels throughout much nearer reality....

And as another reviewer of the book, the liberal German economist Walter Sulzbach explained, “It is the work of a man who combines an immense knowledge of economic history, economic theories and present-day facts with a thoroughly logical mind.”

Ludwig von Mises, as these comments by Hayek and Sulzbach suggest, was one of those living cul-

tural and intellectual treasures that the war in Europe had brought to America's shores. Mises might have stayed in neutral Switzerland for the duration of the war. In retrospect, we know that Germany did not invade that Alpine country, but with the fall of France in June 1940, there were serious concerns that the Swiss might be the next victim of Hitler's aggression. If that had happened and if Mises had fallen into German hands, he surely would have been either shot on the spot or sent to his death in a Nazi concentration camp in Eastern Europe.

Mises was one of those living cultural and intellectual treasures that the war in Europe had brought to America's shores.

So, in July 1940, he made an arduous and dangerous journey through southern France to Spain and then to Lisbon, Portugal, where he and his wife, Margit, were able to book passage on a ship to the United States, having acquired American visas before leaving Geneva.

When their ship docked in New Jersey on August 2, 1940, they were met by his Viennese friend Alfred Schutz, who had arrived in America the year before in 1939. He soon came into contact with the free-

market journalist Henry Hazlitt, who was then an economic editorial writer for the *New York Times*.

Mises in America and the revival of the Austrian School

Mises's first years in the United States were not easy ones. He financially survived on the generosity of research grants provided by the Rockefeller Foundation, which also enabled him to write his first books in the United States, *Bureaucracy* (1944) and *Omnipotent Government* (1944). He also lectured widely on the problems of postwar reform and reconstruction, if Europe and other parts of the world were to have a free and prosperous future. .

He finally landed a visiting professorship in the School of Business Administration at New York University in 1945, a "visiting" position that he retained until his retirement from teaching in 1969 at the age of 89. It was during those years that Mises published *Planned Chaos* (1947), *Human Action* (1949), *Planning for Freedom* (1952), *The Anti-Capitalist Mentality* (1956), *Theory and History* (1957), and *The Ultimate Foundations of Economic Science* (1962).

If the winds of war had not carried Mises to the United States, it is very possible that there might not

be today a living, surviving, and thriving Austrian school of economics. The rising appeal of socialist central-planning ideas and the triumphant domination of Keynesian economics in American and European academic and policy circles in the postwar period silenced almost all remaining voices for free-market liberalism.

But while alone and mostly intellectually isolated at New York University in the 1950s and 1960s, Mises attracted a new generation of young minds to whom he introduced the ideas and policy perspectives of the Austrian school. The two most notable of them were Murray N. Rothbard and Israel M. Kirzner.

Through them, Mises passed on the history and intellectual tradition of the Austrian economists, and therefore saved it from passing away as a closed chapter in the history of economic ideas. Thus, the cultural legacy of the Austrian school was given new roots and a new beginning in the New World.

Therefore, it is not only worth marking but celebrating the arrival of Ludwig von Mises to the United States 80 years ago this August. The tragic circumstances that brought him here served as the unintended catalyst and conduit for bringing about the revival and vibrancy of the Austrian economics that exists in America today.

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NEXT MONTH:
“Free Trade,
Liberalism, and Peace”
by Richard M. Ebeling

The Tortured Legacy of the Mexican-American War, Part 5

by Danny Sjursen



The President, in his first war message of May 1846, declares that the soil was ours on which hostilities were commenced by Mexico. Now I propose to try to show, that the whole of this ... is, from beginning to end, the sheerest deception.

— Congressman Abraham Lincoln (January 1848)

Though Polk's initial declaration of war on Mexico passed both houses of Congress with flying colors, early war fever waned within a year, picked up unassailable momentum by late 1847, and culminated in America's first-ever nationwide anti-war movement. While the climax of that activity was political and centered (most vocally) in Washington, D.C., much

of its genesis — surprising as it sounds — lay within the deployed army itself. Dreadful conditions and consequent low morale helped lay the foundation for that even before American atrocities sickened some of the soldiers, and the unexpected length of the war began to frustrate volunteers and regular troops alike.

Hygiene was terrible in military encampments from the start. Unsanitary camps, especially those filled with undisciplined volunteers lacking immunity, led to massive outbreaks of communicable diseases. Supplies were also a problem, and remained short throughout most of the war. Regular army officers — most of whom were sympathetic to the Whig Party — were convinced it was a form of political retribution from the staunchly Democratic president. There was a grain of truth in that assessment. Polk's was — at least in the volunteer regiments — a rather politicized army. After all, every one of the 13 generals he appointed during the war was a Democrat, most former party officeholders. Mostly, though, the culprit was Polk's *policies*, since he — just as George W. Bush would in the 2003 Iraq War — insisted on waging war and cutting taxes simultaneously. Partly as

a result of the shortfalls and rampant disease infestations, more than 9,200 soldiers deserted the U.S. armies in Mexico — the highest for any American foreign war before or since.

Patriotic dissent: The rise of military and political opposition

As the war dragged on, casualties mounted, and many veteran troops began to realize the inherent cruelty of the U.S. invasion and more political dissent infused the military ranks. In a sense it began at the top. General Taylor abhorred Polk. During his early campaign around Monterrey, the general, having heard rumors (which he did “not credit”) that Polk was dead, wrote his son-in-law, “While I regret to hear the death of anyone, I would as soon have heard of his death ... as that of any other individual in the whole Union.” Coming from a serving combat-theater commander, those were profound, even shocking, sentiments.

In other cases, dissent, desertion, and even treason reigned. So disgusted with the American invasion were many recently emigrated Irish Catholic soldiers — who had often suffered abuse and ethnic riots in northeastern cities the decade before — that a battalion’s worth

responded to enemy entreaties and defected to the Mexican Army. Most spent the remainder of the war as some of the fiercest fighters — and best artillerymen — in the Mexican Army. They named their unit the San Patricio (Saint Patrick’s) Battalion. At one of the final major battles — Churubusco — the San Patricios rallied Mexican troops, even tearing white flags of surrender out of their hands. The Irish deserters undoubtedly knew that for them surrender meant execution for treason. Ultimately, 72 of the Irish survivors were captured and court-martialed. Seventy were sentenced to death. Forty six were actually executed — 30 in a single mass hanging. The others’ sentences were reduced to jail, 50 lashes, and being branded with the letter D, for “deserter.”

One of the most famous military skeptics was Lieutenant — and future general and president — Ulysses Grant. Uncomfortable with the justifications for the Mexican War from the start, he wrote his wife, during the lengthy occupation of Mexico City, that, “Mexico is a very pleasant place to live because it is never hot nor ever cold, but I believe everyone is hartily [sic] tired of war.... I pity poor Mexico.” Grant never forgot the horror of his first

war, and never forgave his country for its aggressive invasion. In 1879, a few years after leaving the White House, he told a journalist, “I do not think there was ever a more wicked war than that waged by the United States on Mexico. I thought so at the time, when I was a youngster.... [The war] was one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation.” In his memoirs, he went further, and described that the Civil War as “our punishment,” for that “transgression.”

The Whigs, most of whom had followed their party leadership in feckless acquiescence to a war few had any enthusiasm for, were later transformed by the Mexican conflict. By war’s end it was their finest hour, but also, perhaps, their party’s downfall. No one with even scant knowledge of American history would conclude that anti-war activism tends towards political success. Nevertheless, even if most Whigs — fearful of suffering the extinction the anti-1812 War Federalists suffered — folded, a few in Congress, known as the “14 irreconcilables” showed courage from the start.

They were led by the indefatigable Rep. John Quincy Adams. When nearly all Whigs gave in to Polk’s reasoning for war, the 78-year-old

Adams would have none of it. Not only was old John Quincy totally opposed to “this most outrageous war,” but he told a fellow Massachusetts congressman that he “hoped the officers would all resign & the men all desert!” One of his fellow “irreconcilables,” Congressman Luther Severance of Maine, declared that from the start, “It is on *Mexican* soil that blood has been shed,” and, going further, even averred that for their “manly resistance” the Mexicans should be “honored and applauded.”

“It is on *Mexican* soil that blood has been shed.”

Nonetheless, it wasn’t until the Whigs’ stalwart party leader, Henry Clay, took a strong anti-war stand, that most members changed course. The three-time presidential candidate was very likely moved to a more vocal position of dissent after the death of his favorite son — Col. Henry Clay Jr. — at the Battle of Buena Vista. The younger Clay had, after being struck with a bullet in the thigh, heroically protected his retreating soldiers before succumbing to a deluge of Mexican bayonets. He was just 35. The elder Clay, was somewhat comforted by knowing that his son “if he were to die ...

preferred to meet death on the battlefield.” However, Clay, never enthusiastic about the invasion (and having very likely torpedoed his last presidential campaign by his muted critique), admitted to a friend, “That consolation would be greater, if I did not believe the Mexican War was unnecessary and of an aggressive character.”

Matters began to shift by the summer of 1847, when, finally, journalists outside of New England had seen enough atrocities in Mexico and began to condemn the war. The public intellectuals spoke out next. Henry David Thoreau spent a night in jail after he symbolically refused to pay his poll tax in protest of the war. He then delivered a famous lecture, “Civil Disobedience,” which called for resistance against the government’s immoral war effort. Other writers and poets, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Russell Lowell, followed suit. Then Walt Whitman, initially a war supporter, published an editorial titled “American Workingmen, versus Slavery” in support of the upstart Pennsylvania Democrat David Wilmot’s “Proviso” that all forms of human bondage be prohibited in any land taken from Mexico. Whitman’s dissent, certainly a slap in the face to his paper’s conservative Democrat-

ic readership, got him fired from the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, where he had served as an editor.

Still, the major turning point was clearly Henry Clay’s profound decision, on November 13, 1847, to give a widely promoted speech — the finest of his long career — in his hometown of Lexington, Kentucky. He had, after much soul-searching, and realizing his presidential prospects were very likely behind him, decided to boldly and publicly oppose the war that had cost him his son. A newly elected freshman congressman from Illinois — a young Abraham Lincoln — was in attendance, having fortuitously stopped in the town to visit his wife’s family en route to Washington, D.C. What Clay said shocked his party and the nation.

With thousands in attendance, Clay started from the beginning. The United States should never have annexed Texas in the first place, he asserted, and then he proceeded to attack not only the obvious target — Polk — but to excoriate the vast majority of his own party, which had expediently voted for the war in 1846. Significant highlights from the speech are worth quoting. The war had resulted in a “mad sacrifice of human life ... waste of human treasure ... man-

gled bodies ... death and desolation.” It was Mexico, not the United States that was “defending her firesides, her castles, her altars.” The consequences, he said, were substantial. America had ceded its “unsullied” international “character.” The only moral course, Clay declared, was for Congress to use its constitutional powers to cut off funds, end the war, and refuse to annex even a square mile of Mexican land. Now, and in the future, America should disavow “any desire ... to acquire any foreign territory ... for the purpose of introducing slavery into it.” Going a step further, in a radical step for a Kentuckian, Clay added that he had “ever regarded slavery as a great evil.”

Clay’s melancholy over his son’s death may have contributed to the sabotage of any remaining hopes he had for the presidency. Nonetheless, the renowned orator’s two-and-half-hour speech was incredibly courageous, and, more important, widely influential. Thanks to the wonders of technology (which his Whig party had long championed) — specifically the telegraph — Clay’s remarks boomeranged across the entirety of the country within days. Democratic papers labeled Clay a traitor. Polk’s favored newspaper, the *Washington Union*, con-

demned Clay’s remarks as “the spirit of treason promulgated.” No matter, this single speech catalyzed and exploded the nascent anti-war movement. That faction was no longer a New England phenomenon. At rallies across the nation, from Indiana, to Kentucky, to New Jersey, to Maine, thousands denounced the war and read aloud Clay’s speech.

Lincoln

The Lexington speech may have altered the career and even character of that young congressman in the audience, Abraham Lincoln. Before the Lexington talk, Lincoln was a “tariff-man,” a domestic policy-wonk, with little interest in foreign affairs. He hadn’t planned to kick off his freshman term in Washington on an anti-war platform. Yet, despite hailing from an enthusiastically pro-war Illinois district, that’s just what he did. No doubt, he foresaw the political consequences. Perhaps he thought, well, if Clay — his lifelong idol — could demonstrate political bravery, then so should he.

So it was, then, that on December 22, 1847, Lincoln, the unknown (and sole Whig) congressman from Illinois, delivered a bold first speech on the House floor. As a well-trained country lawyer, Lincoln’s inaugural

remarks were more methodical than inspirational, but other members took notice as he effectively battered away at Polk's deceptive justification for the invasion. American blood, Lincoln asserted, had been shed, but in a "contested region" by "armed officers and soldiers, sent into that settlement by the military orders of the President," and thus could not be blamed on the defensive Mexican troopers. Polk, according to Lincoln, though seduced by "military glory," must, in his heart, be "deeply conscious of being in the wrong — that he feels the blood of this war, like the blood of Abel, is crying to Heaven against him."

Lincoln could demonstrate political bravery.

Congressman Lincoln's speech and early votes didn't endear him to his pro-war constituents. Though his remarks brought him the national renown so rare for an obscure freshman representative, the blowback — particularly back in Illinois — was severe. One prominent Democratic paper labeled him a new "Benedict Arnold." His own local *State Register* seconded the notion and declared, "Henceforth will the Benedict Arnold of our dis-

trict be known here only as the Ranchero Spotty [slang for a Mexican guerrilla fighter] of one term." Lincoln's own law partner back in Springfield warned him that his anti-war position constituted "political suicide." Unfazed, Lincoln doubled down. On January 12, 1848, he again spoke — for 45 minutes — and declared that Polk should "remember he sits where Washington sat.... As a nation should not, and the Almighty will not, be evaded, so let him attempt no evasion — no equivocation." It ought to come as no surprise, then, that Lincoln, was, in fact, to be just a single-term congressman.

If Lincoln was the newest anti-war voice on Capitol Hill, former President John Quincy Adams was most certainly the eldest and ablest. Indeed, opposition to the Mexican War would constitute, literally, his final mortal act. As the historian Richard Immerman wrote, "Adams [had] never voted to withhold appropriations from the soldiers, but ... on Feb. 21, 1848, he cast his final vote against a resolution to commend America's victorious generals." It is fitting that, when the clerk called for a roll call on the routine measure, Adams bellowed what was to be his last word ever in Congress: "No!" He slumped over at his

desk. At age 80, he had suffered a massive stroke. He soon lapsed into unconsciousness. Before he did, he gathered the strength to ask for Henry Clay, who grasped his hand and wept over the old president. Two days later, the only ex-president to leave the White House for a career in the House of Representatives was dead.

The young Lincoln — representative of the “new blood” in the revamped Whig Party — had witnessed Adams’s dramatic collapse on the House floor. No doubt, he was soon surprised to learn that he’d been chosen to serve as one of the indefatigable old man’s pallbearers at the forthcoming elaborate state funeral. One wonders what effect these theatrical events had on the future president — how it influenced his future career. What we do know, is that a few days later Lincoln cast his first anti-slavery vote as a congressman. Adams’s death, coming on top of Clay’s histrionic speech, also seemed to buoy the Whig Party. Though they never cut off funds or supplies to the troops, Whig congressmen never acted on Polk’s two requests for reinforcements for the occupation of Mexico, and — in a prelude to modern political dramas — actually lowered the ceiling on federal borrowing.

Clay must have known his Lexington speech ruined any remaining hope he’d had for his party’s 1848 nomination — it would go, instead, to the more electable and less controversial Gen. Zachary Taylor. Furthermore, though Clay reentered the Senate in 1849 and worked hard to forge a compromise (in 1850) to avert civil war, the anti-war — and, by extension, anti-slave-state-expansion — positions he’d staked out in his speech ultimately proved the undoing of the Whig Party within a decade. But that didn’t make him, or Lincoln, wrong.

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