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A Strategy for Liberty

Education: Theory and Movement

And so we have it: a body of truth, sound in theory and capable of application to our political problems—the new libertarianism. But now that we have the truth, how can we achieve victory? We face the great strategic problem of all "radical" creeds throughout history: How can we get from here to there, from our current State-ridden and imperfect world to the great goal of liberty?

There is no magic formula for strategy; any strategy for social change, resting as it does on persuasion and conversion, can only be an art rather than an exact science. But having said this, we are still not bereft of wisdom in the pursuit of our goals. There *can* be a fruitful theory, or at the very least, theoretical discussion, of the proper strategy for change.

On one point there can scarcely be disagreement: a prime and necessary condition for libertarian victory (or, indeed, for victory for *any* social movement, from Buddhism to vegetarianism) is *education*: the persuasion and conversion of large numbers of people to the cause. Education, in turn, has two vital aspects: *calling people's attention* to the existence of such a system, and converting people to the libertarian system. If our movement consisted only of slogans, publicity, and other attention-getting devices, then we might be *heard* by many people, but it would soon be discovered that we had nothing

to say—and so the hearing would be fitful and ephemeral. Libertarians must, therefore, engage in hard thinking and scholarship, put forth theoretical and systematic books, articles, and journals, and engage in conferences and seminars. On the other hand, a mere elaboration of the theory will get nowhere if no one has ever heard of the books and articles; hence the need for publicity, slogans, student activism, lectures, radio and TV spots, etc. True education cannot proceed without theory *and* activism, without an ideology and *people* to carry that ideology forward.

Thus, just as the theory needs to be carried to the attention of the public, so does the theory need people to hold the banner, discuss, agitate, and carry the message forward and outward to the public. Once again, both theory and movement become futile and sterile without each other; the theory will die on the vine without a self-conscious movement which dedicates itself to advancing the theory and the goal. The movement will become mere pointless motion if it loses sight of the ideology and the goal in view. Some libertarian theorists feel that there is something impure or disreputable about a living movement with acting individuals; but how can liberty be achieved without libertarians to advance the cause? On the other hand, some militant activists, in their haste for action—*any* action—scorn what seem to be parlor discussions of theory; yet their action becomes futile and wasted energy if they have only a dim idea of what they are being active *about*.

Furthermore, one often hears libertarians (as well as members of other social movements) bewail that they are "only talking to themselves" with their books and journals and conferences; that few people of the "outside world" are listening. But this frequent charge gravely misconceives the many-sided purpose of "education" in the broadest sense. It is not only necessary to educate *others*; continual self-education is also (and equally) necessary. The corps of libertarians must always try to recruit others to their ranks, to be sure; but they must *also* keep their own ranks vibrant and healthy. Education of "ourselves" accomplishes two vital goals. One is the refining and advancing of the libertarian "theory"—the goal and purpose of our whole enterprise. Libertarianism, while vital and

true, cannot be merely graven in stone tablets; it must be a living theory, advancing through writing and discussion, and through refuting and combatting errors as they arise. The libertarian movement has dozens of small newsletters and magazines ranging from mimeographed sheets to slick publications, constantly emerging and dying. This is a sign of a healthy, growing movement, a movement that consists of countless individuals thinking, arguing, and contributing.

But there is another critical reason for "talking to ourselves," *even if* that were all the talking that was going on. And that is *reinforcement*—the psychologically necessary knowledge that there are other people of like mind to talk to, argue with, and generally communicate and interact with. At present, the libertarian creed is still that of a relatively small minority, and furthermore, it proposes radical changes in the *status quo*. Hence, it is bound to be a lonely creed, and the reinforcement of having a movement, of "talking to ourselves," can combat and overcome that isolation. The contemporary movement is now old enough to have had a host of defectors; analysis of these defections shows that, in almost every case, the libertarian has been isolated, cut off from fellowship and interaction with his colleagues. A flourishing movement with a sense of community and *esprit de corps* is the best antidote for giving up liberty as a hopeless or "impractical" cause.

Are We "Utopians"?

All right, we are to have education through both theory and a movement. But what then should be the *content* of that education? Every "radical" creed has been subjected to the charge of being "utopian," and the libertarian movement is no exception. Some libertarians themselves maintain that we should not frighten people off by being "too radical," and that therefore the full libertarian ideology and program should be kept hidden from view. These people counsel a "Fabian" program of gradualism, concentrating solely on a gradual whittling away of State power. An example would be in the field of taxation: Instead of advocating the "radical" measure of

abolition of all taxation, or even of abolishing income taxation, we should confine ourselves to a call for tiny improvements; say, for a two percent cut in income tax.

In the field of strategic thinking, it behooves libertarians to heed the lessons of the Marxists, because they have been thinking about strategy for radical social change longer than any other group. Thus, the Marxists see two critically important strategic fallacies that "deviate" from the proper path: one they call "left-wing sectarianism"; the other, and opposing, deviation is "right-wing opportunism." The critics of libertarian "extremist" principles are the analog of the Marxian "right-wing opportunists." The major problem with the opportunists is that by confining themselves strictly to gradual and "practical" programs, programs that stand a good chance of immediate adoption, they are in grave danger of completely losing sight of the ultimate objective, the libertarian goal. He who confines himself to calling for a two percent reduction in taxes helps to bury the ultimate goal of abolition of taxation altogether. By concentrating on the immediate means, he helps liquidate the ultimate goal, and therefore the point of being a libertarian in the first place. If libertarians refuse to hold aloft the banner of the pure principle, of the ultimate goal, *who will?* The answer is no one, hence another major source of defection from the ranks in recent years has been the erroneous path of opportunism.

A prominent case of defection through opportunism is someone we shall call "Robert," who became a dedicated and militant libertarian back in the early 1950s. Reaching quickly for activism and immediate gains, Robert concluded that the proper strategic path was to play down all talk of the libertarian goal, and in particular to play down libertarian hostility to government. His aim was to stress only the "positive" and the accomplishments that people could achieve through voluntary action. As his career advanced, Robert began to find uncompromising libertarians an encumbrance; so he began systematically to fire anyone in his organization caught being "negative" about government. It did not take very long for Robert to abandon the libertarian ideology openly and explicitly, and to call for a "partnership" between government and

private enterprise—between coercion and the voluntary—in short, to take his place openly in the Establishment. Yet, in his cups, Robert will even refer to himself as an "anarchist," but only in some abstract cloud-land totally unrelated to the world as it is.

The free-market economist F.A. Hayek, himself in no sense an "extremist," has written eloquently of the vital importance for the success of liberty of holding the pure and "extreme" ideology aloft as a never-to-be-forgotten creed. Hayek has written that one of the great attractions of socialism has always been the continuing stress on its "ideal" goal, an ideal that permeates, informs, and guides the actions of all those striving to attain it. Hayek then adds:

> We must make the building of a free society once more an intellectual adventure, a deed of courage. What we lack is a liberal Utopia, a programme which seems neither a mere defence of things as they are nor a diluted kind of socialism, but a truly liberal radicalism which does not spare the susceptibility of the mighty (including the trade unions), which is not too severely practical and which does not confine itself to what appears today as politically possible. We need intellectual leaders who are prepared to resist the blandishments of power and influence and who are willing to work for an ideal, however small may be the prospects of its early realization. They must be men who are willing to stick to principles and to fight for their full realization, however remote. . . . Free trade and freedom of opportunity are ideals which still may rouse the imaginations of large numbers, but a mere "reasonable freedom of trade" or a mere "relaxation of controls" is neither intellectually respectable nor likely to inspire any enthusiasm. The main lesson which the true liberal must learn from the success of the socialists is that it was their courage to be Utopian which gained them the support of the intellectuals and thereby an influence on public opinion which is daily making possible what only recently seemed utterly remote. Those who have concerned themselves exclusively with what seemed practicable in the existing state of opinion have constantly found that even this has rapidly become politically impossible as the result of changes in a public opinion which they have done nothing to guide. Unless we can make the philosophic foundations of a

> free society once more a living intellectual issue, and its implementation a task which challenges the ingenuity and imagination of our liveliest minds, the prospects of freedom are indeed dark. But if we can regain that belief in the power of ideas which was the mark of liberalism at its best, the battle is not lost.[1]

Hayek is here highlighting an important truth, and an important reason for stressing the ultimate goal: the excitement and enthusiasm that a logically consistent system can inspire. Who, in contrast, will go to the barricades for a two percent tax reduction?

There is another vital tactical reason for cleaving to pure principle. It is true that day-to-day social and political events are the resultants of many pressures, the often unsatisfactory outcome of the push-and-pull of conflicting ideologies and interests. But if only for that reason, it is all the more important for the libertarian to keep upping the ante. The call for a two percent tax reduction may achieve only the slight moderation of a projected tax *increase;* a call for a drastic tax cut may indeed achieve a substantial reduction. And, over the years, it is precisely the strategic role of the "extremist" to keep pushing the matrix of day-to-day action further and further in his direction. The socialists have been particularly adept at this strategy. If we look at the socialist program advanced 60, or even 30 years ago, it will be evident that measures considered dangerously socialistic a generation or two ago are now considered an indispensable part of the "mainstream" of the American heritage. In this way, the day-to-day compromises of supposedly "practical" politics get pulled inexorably in the collectivist direction. There is no reason why the libertarian cannot accomplish the same result. In fact, one of the reasons that the conservative opposition to collectivism has been so weak is that conservatism, by its very nature, offers not a consistent political philosophy but only a "practical" defense of

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[1]F.A. Hayek, "The Intellectuals and Socialism," in *Studies in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 194.

the existing *status quo*, enshrined as embodiments of the American "tradition." Yet, as statism grows and accretes, it becomes, by definition, increasingly entrenched and therefore "traditional"; conservatism can then find no intellectual weapons to accomplish its overthrow.

Cleaving to principle means something more than holding high and not contradicting the ultimate libertarian ideal. It *also* means striving to achieve that ultimate goal as rapidly as is physically possible. In short, the libertarian must never advocate or *prefer* a gradual, as opposed to an immediate and rapid, approach to his goal. For by doing so, he undercuts the overriding importance of his own goals and principles. And if he himself values his own goals so lightly, how highly will *others* value them?

In short, to really pursue the goal of liberty, the libertarian must desire it attained by the most effective and speediest means available. It was in this spirit that the classical liberal Leonard E. Read, advocating immediate and total abolition of price and wage controls after World War II, declared in a speech, "If there were a button on this rostrum, the pressing of which would release all wage and price controls instantaneously, I would put my finger on it and push!"[2]

The libertarian, then, should be a person who would push the button, if it existed, for the instantaneous abolition of all invasions of liberty. Of course, he knows, too, that such a magic button does not exist, but his fundamental preference colors and shapes his entire strategic perspective.

Such an "abolitionist" perspective does not mean, again, that the libertarian has an unrealistic assessment of how rapidly his goal will, in fact, be achieved. Thus, the libertarian abolitionist of slavery, William Lloyd Garrison, was not being "unrealistic" when in the 1830s he first raised the glorious standard of immediate emancipation of the slaves. His goal was the morally proper one, and his strategic realism came in

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[2]Leonard E. Read, *I'd Push the Button* (New York: Joseph D. McGuire, 1946), p. 3.

the fact that he did not expect his goal to be quickly reached. We have seen in chapter 1 that Garrison himself distinguished: "Urge immediate abolition as earnestly as we may, it will, alas! be gradual abolition in the end. We have never said that slavery would be overthrown by a single blow; that it ought to be, we shall always contend."[3] Otherwise, as Garrison trenchantly warned, "Gradualism in theory is perpetuity in practice."

Gradualism in theory indeed undercuts the goal itself by conceding that it must take second or third place to other non- or antilibertarian considerations. For a preference for gradualism implies that these other considerations are more important than liberty. Thus, suppose that the abolitionist of slavery had said, "I advocate an end to slavery—but only after ten years' time." But this would imply that abolition eight or nine years from now, or *a fortiori* immediately, would be *wrong,* and that therefore it is *better* for slavery to be continued a while longer. But this would mean that considerations of justice have been abandoned, and that the goal itself is no longer held highest by the abolitionist (or libertarian). In fact, for both the abolitionist and libertarian this would mean they are advocating the *prolongation* of crime and injustice.

While it is vital for the libertarian to hold his ultimate and "extreme" ideal aloft, this does not, contrary to Hayek, make him a "utopian." The true utopian is one who advocates a system that is contrary to the natural law of human beings and of the real world. A utopian system is one that could not work even if everyone were persuaded to try to put it into practice. The utopian system could not work, i.e., could not sustain itself in operation. The utopian goal of the left: communism—the abolition of specialization and the adoption of uniformity—could not work even if everyone were willing to adopt it immediately. It could not work because it violates the very nature of man and the world, especially the uniqueness and individuality of every person, of his abilities and interests, and

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[3]Quoted in William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease, eds., *The Antislavery Argument* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. xxxv.

because it would mean a drastic decline in the production of wealth, so much so as to doom the great bulk of the human race to rapid starvation and extinction.

In short, the term "utopian" in popular parlance confuses two kinds of obstacles in the path of a program radically different from the status quo. One is that it violates the nature of man and of the world and therefore could not work once it was put into effect. This is the utopianism of communism. The second is the difficulty in *convincing* enough people that the program should be adopted. The former is a bad theory because it violates the nature of man; the latter is simply a problem of human *will*, of convincing enough people of the rightness of the doctrine. "Utopian" in its common pejorative sense applies only to the former. In the deepest sense, then, the libertarian doctrine is not utopian but eminently realistic, because it is the only theory that is really consistent with the nature of man and the world. The libertarian does not deny the variety and diversity of man, he glories in it and seeks to give that diversity full expression in a world of complete freedom. And in doing so, he also brings about an enormous increase in productivity and in the living standards of everyone, an eminently "practical" result generally scorned by true utopians as evil "materialism."

The libertarian is also eminently realistic because he alone understands fully the nature of the State and its thrust for power. In contrast, it is the seemingly far more realistic conservative believer in "limited government" who is the truly impractical utopian. This conservative keeps repeating the litany that the central government should be severely limited by a constitution. Yet, at the same time that he rails against the corruption of the original Constitution and the widening of federal power since 1789, the conservative fails to draw the proper lesson from that degeneration. The idea of a strictly limited constitutional State was a noble experiment that failed, even under the most favorable and propitious circumstances. If it failed then, why should a similar experiment fare any better now? No, it is the conservative laissez-fairist, the man who puts all the guns and all the decision-making power

into the hands of the central government and *then* says, "Limit yourself"; it is *he* who is truly the impractical utopian.

There is another deep sense in which libertarians scorn the broader utopianism of the left. The left utopians invariably postulate a drastic change in the nature of man; to the left, man *has* no nature. The individual is supposed to be infinitely malleable by his institutions, and so the communist ideal (or the transitional socialist system) is supposed to bring about the New Communist Man. The libertarian believes that, in the ultimate analysis, every individual has free will and moulds himself; it is therefore folly to put one's hope in a uniform and drastic change in people brought about by the projected New Order. The libertarian would *like* to see a moral improvement in everyone, although his moral goals scarcely coincide with those of the socialists. He would, for example, be overjoyed to see all desire for aggression by one man against another disappear from the face of the earth. But he is far too much of a realist to put his trust in this sort of change. Instead, the libertarian system is one that will at once be far more moral and work much better than any other, *given* any existing human values and attitudes. The more the desire for aggression disappears, of course, the better *any* social system will work, including the libertarian; the less need will there be, for example, for any resort to police or to the courts. But the libertarian system places no reliance on any such change.

If, then, the libertarian must advocate the immediate attainment of liberty and abolition of statism, and if gradualism in theory is contradictory to this overriding end, what *further* strategic stance may a libertarian take in today's world? Must he necessarily *confine* himself to advocating immediate abolition? Are "transitional demands," steps *toward* liberty in practice, necessarily illegitimate? No, for this would fall into the other self-defeating strategic trap of "left-wing sectarianism." For while libertarians have too often been opportunists who lose sight of or under-cut their ultimate goal, some have erred in the opposite direction: fearing and condemning *any advances* toward the idea as necessarily selling out the goal itself. The tragedy is that these sectarians, in condemning all advances that fall short of the goal, serve to render vain and

futile the cherished goal itself. For much as all of us would be overjoyed to arrive at total liberty at a single bound, the realistic prospects for such a mighty leap are limited. If social change is not always tiny and gradual, neither does it usually occur in a single leap. In rejecting any transitional approaches to the goal, then, these sectarian libertarians make it impossible for the goal itself ever to be reached. Thus, the sectarians can eventually be as fully "liquidationist" of the pure goal as the opportunists themselves.

Sometimes, curiously enough, the same individual will undergo alterations from one of these opposing errors to the other, in each case scorning the proper strategic path. Thus, despairing after years of futile reiteration of his purity while making no advances in the real world, the left sectarian may leap into the heady thickets of right opportunism, in the quest for *some* short-run advance, even at the cost of his ultimate goal. Or the right opportunist, growing disgusted at his own or his colleagues' compromise of their intellectual integrity and their ultimate goals, may leap into left sectarianism and decry *any* setting of strategic priorities toward those goals. In this way, the two opposing deviations feed on and reinforce each other, and are both destructive of the major task of effectively reaching the libertarian goal.

How, then, can we know whether any halfway measure or transitional demand should be hailed as a step forward or condemned as an opportunistic betrayal? There are two vitally important criteria for answering this crucial question: (1) that, whatever the transitional demands, the ultimate end of liberty be always held aloft as the desired goal; and (2) that no steps or means ever explicitly or implicitly *contradict* the ultimate goal. A short-run demand may not go as far as we would like, but it should always be consistent with the final end; if not, the short-run goal will work against the long-run purpose, and opportunistic liquidation of libertarian principle will have arrived.

An example of such counterproductive and opportunistic strategy may be taken from the tax system. The libertarian looks forward to eventual abolition of taxes. It is perfectly legitimate for him, as a strategic measure in that desired direction,

to push for a drastic reduction or repeal of the income tax. But the libertarian must never support any new tax or tax increase. For example, he must not, while advocating a large cut in income taxes, also call for its replacement by a sales or other form of tax. The reduction or, better, the abolition of a tax is always a noncontradictory reduction of State power and a significant step toward liberty; but its replacement by a new or increased tax elsewhere does just the opposite, for it signifies a new and additional imposition of the State on some other front. The imposition of a new or higher tax flatly contradicts and undercuts the libertarian goal itself.

Similarly, in this age of permanent federal deficits, we are often faced with the practical problem: Should we agree to a tax cut, even though it may well result in an increased government deficit? Conservatives, who from their particular perspective prefer budget balancing to tax reduction, invariably oppose any tax cut which is not immediately and strictly accompanied by an equivalent or greater cut in government expenditures. But since taxation is an illegitimate act of aggression, any failure to welcome a tax cut—any tax cut—with alacrity undercuts and contradicts the libertarian goal. The time to oppose government expenditures is when the budget is being considered or voted upon; then the libertarian should call for drastic slashes in expenditures as well. In short, government activity must be reduced whenever it can: any opposition to a particular cut in taxes or expenditures is impermissible, for it contradicts libertarian principles and the libertarian goal.

A particularly dangerous temptation for practicing opportunism is the tendency of some libertarians, especially in the Libertarian party, to appear "responsible" and "realistic" by coming up with some sort of "four-year plan" for destatization. The important point here is not the number of years in the plan, but the idea of setting forth any sort of comprehensive and planned program of transition to the goal of total liberty. For example: that in year 1, law A should be repealed, law B modified, tax C cut by 10 percent, etc.; in year 2, law D should be repealed, tax C cut by a further 10 percent, etc. The

grave problem with such a plan, the severe contradiction with libertarian principle, is that it strongly implies, e.g., that law D should *not* be repealed *until* the second year of the planned program. Hence the trap of gradualism-in-theory would be fallen into on a massive scale. The would-be libertarian planners would have fallen into a position of seeming to oppose any faster pace toward liberty than is encompassed by their plan. And, indeed, there is no legitimate reason for a slower than a faster pace; quite the contrary.

There is another grave flaw in the very idea of a comprehensive planned program toward liberty. For the very care and studied pace, the very all-embracing nature of the program, implies that the State is not really the common enemy of mankind, that it is possible and desirable to *use* the State for engineering a planned and measured pace toward liberty. The insight that the State is the major enemy of mankind, on the other hand, leads to a very different strategic outlook: namely, that libertarians should push for and accept with alacrity *any* reduction of State power or activity on any front. Any such reduction at any time should be a welcome decrease of crime and aggression. Therefore, the libertarian's concern should not be to use the State to embark on a measured course of destatization, but rather to hack away at any and all manifestations of statism whenever and wherever he or she can.

In keeping with this analysis, the National Committee of the Libertarian party in October 1977 adopted a declaration of strategy which included the following:

> We must hold high the banner of pure principle, and never compromise our goal. . . . The moral imperative of libertarian principle demands that tyranny, injustice, the absence of full liberty, and violation of rights continue no longer.
>
> Any intermediate demand must be treated, as it is in the Libertarian Party platform, as pending achievement of the pure goal and inferior to it. Therefore, any such demand should be presented as leading toward our ultimate goal, not as an end in itself.
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> Holding high our principles means avoiding completely the quagmire of self-imposed, obligatory gradualism: We must

> avoid the view that, in the name of fairness, abating suffering, or fulfilling expectations, we must temporize and stall on the road to liberty. Achieving liberty must be our overriding goal.
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> We must not commit ourselves to any particular order of destatization, for that would be construed as our endorsing the continuation of statism and the violation of rights. Since we must never be in the position of advocating the continuation of tyranny, we should accept any and all destatization measures wherever and whenever we can.

Thus, the libertarian must never allow himself to be trapped into any sort of proposal for "positive" governmental action; in his perspective, the role of government should only be to remove itself from all spheres of society just as rapidly as it can be pressured to do so.

Neither should there be any contradictions in rhetoric. The libertarian should not indulge in any rhetoric, let alone any policy recommendations, which would work against the eventual goal. Thus, suppose that a libertarian is asked to give his views on a specific tax cut. Even if he does not feel that he can at the moment call loudly for tax abolition, the one thing that he *must not* do is add to his support of a tax cut such unprincipled rhetoric as, "Well, of course, *some* taxation is essential," etc. Only harm to the ultimate objective can be achieved by rhetorical flourishes which confuse the public and contradict and violate principle.

Is Education Enough?

All libertarians, of whatever faction or persuasion, lay great stress on education, on convincing an ever-larger number of people to become libertarians, and hopefully, highly dedicated ones. The problem, however, is that the great bulk of libertarians hold a very simplistic view of the role and scope of such education. They do not, in short, even attempt to answer the question: After education, what? What then? What happens after X number of people are convinced? And

how many need to be convinced to press on to the next stage? *Everyone?* A majority? Many people?

The implicit view of many libertarians is that only education is needed because everyone is an equally likely prospect for conversion. *Everyone* can be converted. While logically, of course, this is true, *socio*logically this is a feeble strategy indeed. Libertarians, of all people, should recognize that the State is a parasitic enemy of society, and that the State creates an elite of rulers who dominate the rest of us and extract their income by coercion. *Convincing* the ruling groups of their own iniquity, while logically possible (and perhaps even feasible in one or two instances), is almost impossible in practice. How much chance is there, for example, of convincing the executives of General Dynamics or of Lockheed that they should not take government largesse? How much likelihood is there that the President of the United States will read this book, or any other piece of libertarian literature, and then exclaim: "They're right. I've been wrong. I resign."? Clearly the chances of converting those who are waxing fat by means of State exploitation are negligible, to say the least. Our hope is to convert the mass of the people who are being victimized by State power, not those who are gaining by it.

But when we say this, we are also saying that beyond the problem of education lies the problem of power. After a substantial number of people have been converted, there will be the additional task of finding ways and means to remove State power from our society. Since the State will not gracefully convert itself out of power, other means than education, means of pressure, will have to be used. What particular means or what combination of means—whether by voting, alternative institutions untouched by the State or massive failure to cooperate with the State—depends on the conditions of the time and what will be found to work or not to work. In contrast to matters of theory and principle, the particular tactics to be used—so long as they are consistent with the principles and ultimate goal of a purely free society—are a matter of pragmatism, judgment, and the inexact "art" of the tactician.

Which Groups?

But education is the current strategic problem for the foreseeable and indefinite future. An important strategic question is *who*: If we cannot hope to convert our rulers in substantial numbers, *who* are the most likely prospects for conversion? which social, occupational, economic, or ethnic classes?

Conservatives have often placed their central hopes in big businessmen. This view of big business was most starkly expressed in Ayn Rand's *dictum* that "Big Business is America's most persecuted minority." Persecuted? With a few honorable exceptions, big business jostles one another eagerly to line up at the public trough. Does Lockheed, or General Dynamics, or AT&T, or Nelson Rockefeller feel persecuted?

Big business support for the Corporate Welfare-Warfare State is so blatant and so far-ranging, on all levels from the local to the federal, that even many conservatives have had to acknowledge it, at least to some extent. How then explain such fervent support from "America's most persecuted minority?" The only way out for conservatives is to assume (a) that these businessmen are dumb, and don't understand their own economic interests, and/or (b) that they have been brainwashed by left-liberal intellectuals, who have poisoned their souls with guilt and misguided altruism. Neither of these explanations will wash, however, as only a glance at AT&T or Lockheed will amply show. Big businessmen tend to be admirers of statism, to be "corporate liberals," not because their souls have been poisoned by intellectuals, but because a good thing has thereby been coming their way. Ever since the acceleration of statism at the turn of the twentieth century, big businessmen have been using the great powers of State contracts, subsidies and cartelization to carve out privileges for themselves at the expense of the rest of the society. It is not too farfetched to assume that Nelson Rockefeller is guided far more by self-interest than he is by woolly-headed altruism. It is generally admitted even by liberals, for example, that the vast network of government regulatory agencies is being used to cartelize each industry on behalf of the large firms and at

the expense of the public. But to salvage their New Deal world-view, liberals have to console themselves with the thought that these agencies and similar "reforms," enacted during the Progressive, Wilson, or Rooseveltian periods, were launched in good faith, with the "public weal" grandly in view. The idea and genesis of the agencies and other liberal reforms were therefore "good"; it was only in practice that the agencies somehow slipped into sin and into subservience to private, corporate interests. But what Kolko, Weinstein, Domhoff and other revisionist historians have shown, clearly and thoroughly, is that this is a piece of liberal mythology. In reality, all of these reforms, on the national and local levels alike, were conceived, written, and lobbied for by these very privileged groups themselves. The work of these historians reveals conclusively that there *was* no Golden Age of Reform before sin crept in; sin was there from the beginning, from the moment of conception. The liberal reforms of the Progressive-New Deal-Welfare State were designed to create what they did in fact create: a world of centralized statism, of "partnership" between government and industry, a world which subsists in granting subsidies and monopoly privileges to business and other favored groups.

Expecting the Rockefellers or the legion of other favored big businessmen to convert to a libertarian or even a laissez-faire view is a vain and empty hope. But this is not to say that *all* big businessmen, or businessmen in general, must be written off. Contrary to the Marxists, not all businessmen, or even big businessmen, constitute a homogeneous economic class with identical class interests. On the contrary, when the CAB confers monopoly privileges on a few large airlines, or when the FCC confers a monopoly on AT&T, there are numerous other firms and businessmen, small and large, who are injured and *excluded* from the privileges. The conferring of a monopoly of communications on AT&T by the FCC, for example, for a long while kept the now rapidly growing data communications industry stagnating in infancy; it was only an FCC decision to allow competition that enabled the industry to grow by leaps and bounds. Privilege implies exclusion, so there will always be a host of businesses and businessmen, large and

small, who will have a solid economic interest in ending State control over their industry. There are therefore a host of businessmen, especially those remote from the privileged "Eastern Establishment," who are potentially receptive to free-market and libertarian ideas.

Which groups, then, could we expect to be particularly receptive to libertarian ideas? Where, as the Marxists would put it, is our proposed "agency for social change"? This, of course, is an important strategic question for libertarians, since it gives us leads on where to direct our educational energies.

Campus youth is one group that has been prominent in the rising libertarian movement. This is not surprising: college is the time when people are most open to reflection and to considering basic questions of our society. As youth enamored of consistency and unvarnished truth, as collegians accustomed to a world of scholarship and abstract ideas, and not yet burdened with the care and the often narrower vision of adult employment, these youngsters provide a fertile field for libertarian conversion. We can expect far greater growth of libertarianism on the nation's campuses in the future, a growth that is already being matched by the adherence of an expanding number of young scholars, professors, and graduate students.

Youth in general should also be attracted by the libertarian position on subjects that are often closest to their concerns: specifically, our call for complete abolition of the draft, withdrawal from the Cold War, civil liberties for everyone, and legalization of drugs and other victimless crimes.

The media, too, have proved to be a rich source of favorable interest in the new libertarian creed. Not simply for its publicity value, but because the consistency of libertarianism attracts a group of people who are most alert to new social and political trends, and who, while originally liberals, are most alert to the growing failures and breakdowns of Establishment liberalism. Media people generally find that they cannot be attracted to a hostile conservative movement which automatically writes them off as leftists and which takes uncongenial

positions on foreign policy and civil liberties. But these same media persons can be and are favorably disposed to a libertarian movement which wholeheartedly agrees with their instincts on peace and personal liberty, and then links up their opposition to Big Government in these areas to government intervention in the economy and in property rights. More and more media people are making these new and illuminating connections, and they of course are extremely important in their influence and leverage on the rest of the public.

What of "Middle America"—that vast middle class and working class that constitute the bulk of the American population—and which is often at polar opposites from campus youth? Do we have any appeal for them? Logically, our appeal to Middle America should be even greater. We direct ourselves squarely to the aggravated and chronic discontent that afflicts the mass of the American people: rising taxes, inflation, urban congestion, crime, welfare scandals. Only libertarians have concrete and consistent solutions to these pressing ills: solutions that center on getting them out from under government in all these areas and turning them over to private and voluntary action. We can show that government and statism have been responsible for these evils, and that getting coercive government off our backs will provide the remedies.

To small businessmen we can promise a truly free-enterprise world, shorn of monopoly privilege, cartels, and subsidies engineered by the State and the Establishment. And to them and to the big businessmen outside the monopoly Establishment we can promise a world where their individual talents and energies can at last have full room to expand and to provide improved technology and increased productivity for them and for us all. To various ethnic and minority groups we can show that only under liberty is there full freedom for each group to cultivate its concerns and to run its own institutions, unimpeded and uncoerced by majority rule.

In short, the potential appeal of libertarianism is a multiclass appeal; it is an appeal that cuts across race, occupation, economic class, and the generations; any and all people not directly in the ruling elite are potentially receptive to our

message. Every person or group that values its liberty or prosperity is a potential adherent to the libertarian creed.

Liberty, then, has the potential for appealing to all groups across the public spectrum. Yet, it is a fact of life that when things are going smoothly, most people fail to develop any interest in public affairs. For radical social change—a change to a different social system—to take place, there must be what is called a "crisis situation." There must, in short, be a breakdown of the existing system which calls forth a general search for alternative solutions. When such a widespread search for social alternatives takes place, then activists of a dissenting movement must be available to supply that radical alternative, to relate the crisis to the inherent defects of the system itself, and to point out how the alternative system would solve the existing crisis and prevent any similar breakdowns in the future. Hopefully, the dissenters would also have provided a track record of predicting and warning against the crisis that now exists.[4]

Furthermore, one of the characteristics of crisis situations is that even the ruling elites begin to weaken their support for the system. Because of the crisis, even part of the State begins to lose its zest and enthusiasm for rule. In short, a failure of nerve by segments of the State occurs. Thus, in these situations of breakdown, even members of the ruling elite may convert to an alternative system or, at the least, may lose their enthusiasm for the existing one.

Thus the historian Lawrence Stone stresses, as a requirement for radical change, a decay in the will of the ruling elite. "The elite may lose its manipulative skill, or its military superiority, or its self-confidence or its cohesion; it may become

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[4]Thus, Fritz Redlich writes,

> . . . often the soil [for the triumph of an idea] must have been prepared by events. One can remember how difficult it was to disseminate the idea of an American central bank prior to the crisis of 1907 and how relatively easy it was thereafter.

Fritz Redlich, "Ideas: Their Migration in Space and Transmittal Over Time," *Kyklos* (1953): 306.

estranged from the non-elite, or overwhelmed by a financial crisis; it may be incompetent, or weak or brutal."[5]

Why Liberty Will Win

Having set forth the libertarian creed and how it applies to vital current problems, and having sketched which groups in society that creed can be expected to attract and at what times, we must now assess the future prospects for liberty. In particular, we must examine the firm and growing conviction of the present author *not only* that libertarianism will triumph eventually and in the long run, but also that it will emerge victorious in a remarkably short period of time. For I am convinced that the dark night of tyranny is ending, and that a new dawn of liberty is now at hand.

Many libertarians are highly pessimistic about the prospects for liberty. And if we focus on the growth of statism in the twentieth century, and on the decline of classical liberalism that we adumbrated in the introductory chapter, it is easy to fall prey to a pessimistic prognosis. This pessimism may deepen further if we survey the history of man and see the black record of despotism, tyranny, and exploitation in civilization after civilization. We could be pardoned for thinking that the classical-liberal upsurge of the seventeenth

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[5]Lawrence Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution*, 1529–1642 (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 9. Similar is Lenin's analysis of the features of a "revolutionary situation":

> . . . when there is a crisis, in one form or another, among the "upper classes," a crisis in the policy of the ruling class, leading to a fissure through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes burst forth. For a revolution to take place, it is usually insufficient for "the lower classes not to want" to live in the old way; it is also necessary that "the upper classes should be unable" to live in the old way.

V.I. Lenin, "The Collapse of the Second International" (June 1915), in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), vol. 21, pp. 213–14.

through the nineteenth centuries in the West would prove to be an atypical burst of glory in the grim annals of past and future history. But this would be succumbing to the fallacy of what the Marxists call "impressionism": a superficial focus on the historical events themselves without a deeper analysis of the causal laws and trends at work.

The case for libertarian optimism can be made in a series of what might be called concentric circles, beginning with the broadest and longest-run considerations and moving to the sharpest focus on short-run trends. In the broadest and longest-run sense, libertarianism will win eventually because it and only it is compatible with the nature of man and of the world. Only liberty can achieve man's prosperity, fulfillment, and happiness. In short, libertarianism will win because it is true, because it is the correct policy for mankind, and truth will eventually win out.

But such long-run considerations may be very long indeed, and waiting many centuries for truth to prevail may be small consolation for those of us living at any particular moment in history. Fortunately, there is a shorter-run reason for hope, particularly one that allows us to dismiss the grim record of pre-eighteenth-century history as no longer relevant to the future prospects of liberty.

Our contention here is that history made a great leap, a sea-change, when the classical-liberal revolutions propelled us into the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[6] For in the preindustrial world, the world of the Old Order and the peasant economy, there was no reason why the reign of despotism could not continue indefinitely, for many centuries. The peasants grew the food, and the kings, nobles, and feudal landlords extracted all of the peasants' surplus above what was necessary to keep them all alive and working. As brutish, exploitative, and dismal as agrarian

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[6]For a more extended historical analysis, see Murray N. Rothbard, "Left and Right: The Prospects for Liberty," in *Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature, and Other Essays* (Washington, D.C.: Libertarian Review Press, 1974), pp. 14–33.

despotism was, it could survive, for two main reasons: (1) the economy could readily be maintained, even though at subsistence level; and (2) because the masses knew no better, had never experienced a better system, and hence could be induced to keep serving as beasts of burden for their lords.

But the Industrial Revolution was a great leap in history, because it created conditions and expectations which were irreversible. For the first time in the history of the world, the Industrial Revolution created a society where the standard of living of the masses leapt up from subsistence and rose to previously unheard-of heights. The population of the West, previously stagnant, now proliferated to take advantage of the greatly increased opportunities for jobs and the good life.

The clock cannot be turned back to a preindustrial age. Not only would the masses not permit such a drastic reversal of their expectations for a rising standard of living, but return to an agrarian world would mean the starvation and death of the great bulk of the current population. We are stuck with the industrial age, whether we like it or not.

But if that is true, then the cause of liberty is secured. For economic science has shown, as we have partially demonstrated in this book, that *only* freedom and a free market can run an industrial economy. In short, while a free economy and a free society would be desirable and just in a preindustrial world, in an industrial world it is also a vital *necessity.* For, as Ludwig von Mises and other economists have shown, in an industrial economy statism simply does not work. Hence, given a universal commitment to an industrial world, it will eventually—and a much sooner "eventually" than the simple emergence of truth—become clear that the world will have to adopt freedom and the free market as the requisite for industry to survive and flourish. It was this insight that Herbert Spencer and other nineteenth-century libertarians were perceiving in their distinction between the "military" and the "industrial" society, between a society of "status" and a society of "contract." In the twentieth century, Mises demonstrated (a) that all statist intervention distorts and cripples the market and leads, if not reversed, to socialism; and (b) that socialism is a disaster because it cannot plan an industrial

economy for lack of profit-and-loss incentives, and for lack of a genuine price system or property rights in capital, land, and other means of production. In short, as Mises predicted, neither socialism nor the various intermediary forms of statism and interventionism can work. Hence, given a general commitment to an industrial economy, these forms of statism would have to be discarded, and be replaced by freedom and free markets.

Now this was a much shorter run than simply waiting for the truth, but to the classical liberals at the turn of the twentieth century—the Sumners, Spencers, and Paretos—it seemed like an unbearably long run indeed. And they cannot be blamed, for they were witnessing the decline of classical liberalism and the birth of the new despotic forms which they opposed so strongly and steadfastly. They were, alas! present at the creation. The world would have to wait, if not centuries then at least decades, for socialism and corporate statism to be shown up as utter failures.

But the long run is now here. We do not have to prophesy the ruinous effects of statism; they are here at every hand. Lord Keynes once scoffed at criticisms by free-market economists that his inflationist policies would be ruinous in the long run; in his famous reply, he chortled that "in the long run we are all dead." But now *Keynes* is dead and we are alive, living in *his* long run. The statist chickens have come home to roost.

At the turn of the twentieth century, and for decades thereafter, things were not nearly that clear. Statist intervention, in its various forms, tried to preserve and even extend an industrial economy while scuttling the very requirements of freedom and the free market which in the long run are necessary for its survival. For half a century, statist intervention could wreak its depredations through planning, controls, high and crippling taxation, and paper money inflation without causing clear and *evident* crises and dislocations. For the free-market industrialization of the nineteenth century had created a vast cushion of "fat" in the economy against such depredations. The government could impose taxes, restrictions, and inflation upon the system and not reap rapid and evidently bad effects.

But now statism has advanced so far and been in power so long that the cushion is worn thin; as Mises pointed out as long ago as the 1940s, the "reserve fund" created by laissez-faire has been "exhausted." So that now, whatever the government does brings about an instant negative feedback—ill effects that are evident to all, even to many of the most ardent apologists for statism.

In the Communist countries of Eastern Europe, the Communists themselves have increasingly perceived that socialist central planning simply does not work for an industrial economy. Hence the rapid retreat, in recent years, away from central planning and toward free markets, especially in Yugoslavia. In the Western world, too, State capitalism is everywhere in crisis as it becomes clear that, in the most profound way, the government has run out of money: increasing taxes will cripple industry and incentives beyond repair, while increased creation of new money will lead to a disastrous runaway inflation. And so we hear more and more about the "necessity of lowered expectations from government" from among the State's once most ardent champions. In West Germany, the Social Democratic party has long since abandoned the call for socialism. In Great Britain, suffering from a tax-crippled economy and aggravated inflation—what even the British are calling the "English disease—the Tory party, for years in the hands of dedicated statists, has now been taken over by a free-market-oriented faction, while even the Labor party has been drawing back from the planned chaos of galloping statism.

But it is in the United States that we can be particularly optimistic, for here we can narrow the circle of optimism to a short-run dimension. Indeed, we can confidently say that the United States has now entered a permanent crisis situation, and we can even pinpoint the years of origin of that crisis: 1973–1975. Happily for the cause of liberty, not only has a crisis of statism arrived in the United States, but it has fortuitously struck across the board of society, in many different spheres of life at about the same time. Hence, these breakdowns of statism have had a synergistic effect, reinforcing each other in their cumulative impact. And not only have they

been crises of statism, but they are perceived by everyone to be caused by statism, and not by the free market, public greed, or whatever. And finally, these crises can only be alleviated by getting the government out of the picture. All we need are libertarians to point the way.

Let us quickly run down these areas of systemic crisis and see how many of them dovetailed in 1973–1975 and in the years since. From the fall of 1973 through 1975 the United States experienced an inflationary depression, after 40 years of alleged Keynesian fine-tuning which was supposed to eliminate both problems for all time. It was also in this period that inflation reached frightening, double-digit proportions.

It was, furthermore, in 1975 that New York City experienced its first great debt crisis, a crisis that resulted in partial default. The dread *name* "default" was avoided, to be sure; the virtual act of bankruptcy was instead called a "stretchout" (forcing short-term creditors to accept long-term New York City bonds). This crisis is only the first of many state and local bond defaults across the country. For state and local governments will be increasingly forced into unpleasant "crisis" choices: between radical cuts in expenditure, higher taxes that will drive businesses and middle-class citizens out of the area, and defaulting on debt.

Since the early 1970s, too, it has become increasingly clear that high taxes on income, savings, and investment have been crippling business activity and productivity. Accountants are only now beginning to realize that these taxes, combined especially with inflationary distortions of business calculation, have led to an increasing scarcity of capital, and to an imminent danger of consuming America's vital stock of capital without even realizing it.

Tax rebellions are sweeping the country, reacting against high property, income, and sales taxes. And it is safe to say that any further increases in taxes would be politically suicidal for politicians at every level of government.

The Social Security system, once so sacred in American opinion that it was literally above criticism, is now seen to be as fully in disrepair as libertarian and free-market writers

have long warned. Even the Establishment *now* recognizes that the Social Security system is bankrupt, that it is in no sense a genuine "insurance" scheme.

Regulation of industry is increasingly seen to be such a failure that even such statists as Senator Edward Kennedy have been calling for deregulation of the airlines; there has even been considerable talk about abolition of the ICC and CAB.

On the social front, the once sacrosanct public school system has come under increasing fire. Public schools, necessarily making educational decisions for the entire community, have been generating intense social conflicts: over race, sex, religion, and the content of learning. Government practices on crime and incarceration are under increasing fire: the libertarian Dr. Thomas Szasz has almost single-handedly managed to free many citizens from involuntary commitment, while the government now concedes that its cherished policy of trying to "rehabilitate" criminals is an abject failure. There has been a total breakdown of enforcement of such drug laws as prohibition of marijuana and laws against various forms of sexual relations. Sentiment is rising across the nation for repeal of all victimless crime laws, that is, laws that designate crimes where there are no victims. It is increasingly seen that attempts at enforcement of these laws can only bring about hardship and a virtual police state. The time is fast approaching when prohibitionism in areas of personal morality will be seen to be as ineffective and unjust as it was in the case of alcohol.

Along with the disastrous consequences of statism on the economic and social fronts, there came the traumatic defeat in Vietnam, culminating in 1975. The utter failure of American intervention in Vietnam has led to a growing reexamination of the entire interventionist foreign policy that the United States has been pursuing since Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt. The growing view that American power must be cut back, that the American government cannot successfully run the world, is the "neoisolationist" analogue of cutting back the interventions of Big Government at home. While America's foreign policy is still aggressively globalist, this

neoisolationist sentiment did succeed in limiting American intervention in Angola during 1976.

Perhaps the best sign of all, the most favorable indication of the breakdown of the mystique of the American State, of its moral groundwork, was the Watergate exposures of 1973–1974. It is Watergate that gives us the greatest single hope for the short-run victory of liberty in America. For Watergate, as politicians have been warning us ever since, destroyed the public's "faith in government"—and it was high time, too. Watergate engendered a radical shift in the deep-seated attitudes of *everyone*—regardless of their explicit ideology—toward government itself. For in the first place, Watergate awakened everyone to the invasions of personal liberty and private property by government—to its bugging, drugging, wiretapping, mail covering, agents provocateurs—even assassinations. Watergate at last desanctified our previously sacrosanct FBI and CIA and caused them to be looked at clearly and coolly. But more important, by bringing about the impeachment of the President, Watergate permanently desanctified an office that had come to be virtually considered as sovereign by the American public. No longer will the President be considered above the law; no longer will the President be able to do no wrong.

But most important of all, government *itself* has been largely desanctified in America. No one trusts politicians or government anymore; all government is viewed with abiding hostility, thus returning us to that state of healthy distrust of government that marked the American public and the American revolutionaries of the eighteenth century.

For a while, it looked as if Jimmy Carter might be able to accomplish his declared task of bringing back people's faith and trust in government. But, thanks to the Bert Lance fiasco and to other peccadilloes, Carter has fortunately failed. The permanent crisis of government continues.

The conditions are therefore ripe, now and in the future in the United States, for the triumph of liberty. All that is needed is a growing and vibrant libertarian movement to explain this systemic crisis and to point out the libertarian path out of our

government-created morass. But, as we have seen at the beginning of this work, that is precisely what we have been getting. And now we come, at last, to our promised answer to the question we posed in our introductory chapter: Why *now?* If America has a deep-seated heritage of libertarian values, why have they surfaced *now*, in the last four or five years?

Our answer is that the emergence and rapid growth of the libertarian movement is no accident, that it is a function of the crisis situation that struck America in 1973–1975 and has continued ever since. Crisis situations always stimulate interest and a search for solutions. And this crisis has inspired numbers of thinking Americans to realize that government has gotten us into this mess, and that only liberty—the rolling back of government—can get us out. We are growing because the conditions are ripe. In a sense, as on the free market, demand has created its own supply.

And so that is why the Libertarian party received 174,000 votes in its first try for national office in 1976. And that is why the authoritative newsletter on Washington politics, *The Baron Report*—a report that is in no sense libertarian-oriented—denied in a recent issue, media claims of a current trend toward conservatism in the electorate. The report points out, to the contrary, that "if any trend in opinion is evident, it's toward libertarianism—the philosophy that argues against government intervention and for personal rights." The report adds that libertarianism has an appeal to both ends of the political spectrum: "Conservatives welcome that trend when it indicates public skepticism over federal programs; liberals welcome it when it shows growing acceptance of individual rights in such areas as drugs, sexual behavior, etc., and increasing reticence of the public to support foreign intervention."[7]

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[7]*The Baron Report* (February 3, 1978): 2.

Toward a Free America

The libertarian creed, finally, offers the fulfillment of the best of the American past along with the promise of a far better future. Even more than conservatives, who are often attached to the monarchical traditions of a happily obsolete European past, libertarians are squarely in the great classical-liberal tradition that built the United States and bestowed on us the American heritage of individual liberty, a peaceful foreign policy, minimal government, and a free-market economy. Libertarians are the only genuine current heirs of Jefferson, Paine, Jackson, and the abolitionists.

And yet, while we are more truly traditional and more rootedly American than the conservatives, we are in some ways more radical than the radicals. *Not* in the sense that we have either the desire or the hope of remoulding human nature by the path of politics; but in the sense that only we provide the really sharp and genuine break with the encroaching statism of the twentieth century. The Old Left wants only more of what we are suffering from now; the New Left, in the last analysis, proposes only still more aggravated statism or compulsory egalitarianism and uniformity. Libertarianism is the logical culmination of the now forgotten "Old Right" (of the 1930s and '40s) opposition to the New Deal, war, centralization, and State intervention. Only we wish to break with *all* aspects of the liberal State: with its welfare *and* its warfare, its monopoly privileges *and* its egalitarianism, its repression of victimless crimes whether personal *or* economic. Only we offer technology without technocracy, growth without pollution, liberty without chaos, law without tyranny, the defense of property rights in one's person *and* in one's material possessions.

Strands and remnants of libertarian doctrines are, indeed, all around us, in large parts of our glorious past and in values and ideas in the confused present. But only libertarianism takes these strands and remnants and integrates them into a mighty, logical, and consistent system. The enormous success of Karl Marx and Marxism has been due not to the validity of his ideas—all of which, indeed, are fallacious—but to the fact

that he dared to weave socialist theory into a mighty system. Liberty cannot succeed without an equivalent and contrasting systematic theory; and until the last few years, despite our great heritage of economic and political thought and practice, we have not had a fully integrated and consistent theory of liberty. We now have that systematic theory; we come, fully armed with our knowledge, prepared to bring our message and to capture the imagination of all groups and strands in the population. All other theories and systems have clearly failed: socialism is in retreat everywhere, and notably in Eastern Europe; liberalism has bogged us down in a host of insoluble problems; conservatism has nothing to offer but sterile defense of the status quo. Liberty has never been fully tried in the modern world; libertarians now propose to fulfill the American dream and the world dream of liberty and prosperity for all mankind.