FROM THE (acting) CHAIR

WANTED: ACTIVISTS
With Party Chairman Stew Engel leaving the state to accept employment in Virginia, the LPRI suffered a severe, though not mortal, blow. Of the present corps of party activists, Engel was the best qualified to lead the party into the formative period ahead. Not only did Stew have unqualified libertarian credentials to go with his organizing ability and zeal, but he also had the experience in Libertarian Party activities necessary to the party-building efforts that lie ahead. In addition, the fact that he was the party’s gubernatorial candidate in 1976 gave him the exposure and visibility to make him known to prospective party recruits, as well as making him an excellent spokesman for the libertarian cause in R.I. Stew’s absence will be felt, but the plans for party growth and increased activity remain unchanged.

One thing that the loss of a party activist of Engel’s stature does emphasize, however, is the need for more Rhode Island libertarians to come forward and take an active part in the LPRI an its programs. During the relatively short time that the LPRI has been in existence, we have met and talked to many people who are in accord with libertarian philosophy and favor the LP platform and programs. What we need now is for more of these party sympathizers and supporters to play a more active role in the party’s affairs; not only to attend party functions and activities, but also to participate in their planning and execution.

At present, some of our most capable, enthusiastic, and active party members are college students. We can justifiably proud of these young libertarians. As might be expected,

ENGEL LEAVES STATE INDEFINITELY: FIOCCA TO BE ACTING CHAIRMAN

The LPRI was left without a chair- man for an indefinite period of time when, on August 28th, Stewart Engel, the recently elected party chairman, left Rhode Island to accept employment in the state of Virginia.

The change in Engel’s employment situation was sudden, and at this time it is not certain just how long he will be working outside of Rhode Island. During Engel’s absence, the party’s vice-chairman, Tony Ficco, will serve as acting chairman, in accordance with the provisions of the party constitution.

The announcement of Engel’s departure was made at an informal cook-out held at his home in Newport. The affair was attended by about 15 local libertarian activists and party members. (While the news of Engel’s leaving was not cheerfully received, it did not totally dampen the spirits of the gathering, most of whom stayed well into the evening, enjoying good conversation, cold draft beer, and “Engel-burgers.”)

Acting chairman Ficco has announced that there will be no change in the party’s plans for the immediate future. There will be an emphasis on recruiting of new members and activists, a Speakers Bureau will be established, and plans for a convention next spring remain unchanged.

(Cont. Page 2)


(AVANTED - From page 1)

the libertarian movement attracts, literally, the "best and brightest" on
the college campus. Unlike some of
their more attention-gathering coun-
terparts - those whose level of politi-
cal thinking goes no deeper than
carrying signs in a demonstration
and shouting mindless slogans - the
college students who support the
libertarian philosophy are, for the
most part, come to that conclusion
through a process of rational thought
and analysis; they have "done their
homework" when it comes to know-
ledge and study of political and eco-
nomic philosophy.

Our college activists, therefore, are a
vital part of the libertarian move-
ment in R.I. But, they can't do it all.
The fact that many of them are
from out of state means they are not
around during the crucial summer
months of campaign planning and
election petitioning. It also means they
are not as involved in local issues,
and so they have the same acquisi-
tion with R.I. voters and officials
as adult residents of the state have.

It is vitally, therefore, that we get
more activists from the latter group.
Activism does not just mean solic-
ting signatures and votes, or run-
ning for office as an LP candidate (though
that is definitely a part of what we
need). It also means supporting the
party financially, helping to plan
party activities, hosting party func-
tions, attending these affairs ( and
inviting interested friends and acquain-
tances), being a part of the
 Speakers Bureau, contributing to the
newsletter, or any number of other
ways that you may be able to think of.

So, even though you may not wish to
actually join the party, but are inter-
ested in doing whatever you can to
help further the libertarian cause in
R.I., please contact me by writing
to: A.A. Fioccia, PO Box 657, Bris-
tol, R.I. 02809, or by phoning during
the day at 253-8228 or 234-0277
evenings).

We need people who can help out now
and who, in the future, will be able
to assume leadership roles in the
party.

We need you.

TONY FIOCCA

PLAGIARISMS - Gleanings from other libertarian and secular journals

"The Natural Gas Chicken Come Home To Roost" is the heading
of an editorial in the April, 1977 issue of
REASON magazine, wherein the editor
Robert Poole, Jr. brings out some
factors regarding the so-called shortage
of natural gas. Mainly, that there
isn't any such shortage. There is,
indeed, a potential 3974 trillion cubic
feet - 17 times more than existing
proved reserves - available from
currently untapped sources. Four
specific potential gas sources are
mentioned: methane trapped in coal
beds; gas trapped in Devonian shale;
behind sands interspersed with
shale; and methane dissolved in
the geopressed zone of the
Gulf Coast. Why aren't we obtaining
gas from these sources? Because
profitable utilization of these reserves
would require a price of at least
$2.00 per 1000 cubic feet, and the
present ceiling price on natural gas
is considerably below this level.

In other words, there is plenty of natu-
ral gas available, if only the produc-
ters are allowed to charge a rea-
sonable price for it. (Our comment:
no money, no gas. Just keep these
figures in mind next time you hear
a certain members of the R.I.
congressmen delegation bleating about
how are "protecting" the con-
sumer by voting against de-regu-
lation. There is no natural gas crisis;
the only gas crisis we have is the
un-natural gas emanating from the
White House and the halls of Con-
gress.)

"Writing in the August, 1977 issue of
The Illinois Libertarian, George
O'Brien reviews Robert Ringer's
latest book, Looking Out For
Number One. O'Brien describes Ringer
as "a pop philosopher who doesn't
accept the idea that he should sacri-
ifice his interests for others."
The review states that Ringer, who
admits to being strongly influenced
by Ayn Rand and Harry Brown,
"gives a very libertarian guide to
improving one's life" and "proposes this philo-
sophy in a fresh, entertaining,
and often humorous way which makes it
easy to accept." O'Brien points out
that, in describing the various hul-
gers standing in the way of one's
happiness, Ringer includes govern-
ment among them, and "in casual
paragraphs spread throughout the book,
he criticizes the Federal Reserve
System, Social Security, and other
government monstrosities." But,
his main point, O'Brien goes on,
is is the non-political one that you
must look for Number One if you
want to be happy." The reviewer
recommends the book both to those
who are already familiar with the
philosophy, and especially to people
new to the movement. (Having
recently read the book ourselves, we
heartily concur with Mr. O'Brien's
evaluation, and make our own rec-
ommendation that you pass the book
along to non-libertarian, non-object-
tivist friends who are having trouble
understanding the concept of rational
self-interest.)

LIBERTARIAN PARTY OF RHODE ISLAND, Box 657, Bristol, R.I. 02809

Name

Mailing address

City Zip

I wish to join LPRI. Regular member ($10.00) Student ($5.00)

I wish to subscribe to the newsletter. $5.00 enclosed. (Free to members)

I am enclosing a contribution of

I cannot at this time contribute financially but want to work for the LPRI.

I have not made up my mind. Keep me on the mailing list a while longer.

Membership applicants only, please sign: "I endorse the statement of
principles of the Libertarian Party. I do not believe in the initiation of force as
a basis of achieving political or social goals"

Signed

TONY FIOCCA
FROM THE FLOOR - (Ideas, comments, suggestions, criticisms from our readers.
We encourage your participation.)

IS LEBERTARIAN THEORY COHERENT?
By Todd Becker
(Ed. Note: The author of this piece, a student at Brown University, is secretary, and one of the "founding fathers" of the LPRI. Is Mr. Becker sounding a discordant note regarding libertarian philosophy? Of course, as libertarians, the last thing we do is adhere to a "party line" on any subject, but do we have here a basic challenge to libertarian theory?
We invite your comment.)

I'm going to be somewhat heretical in this article and suggest that libertarian theory doesn't really constitute a coherent system. That sounds a bit extreme, so perhaps I should clarify. What I want to say is that, as much as I have tried, I have been unable to come up with a cogent definition of libertarianism. The problem begins with the so-called "axiom" of non-aggression; that any individual may act freely so long as the rights of others are not infringed. The key word here is "rights"; it leads to a host of insoluble problems. "He who puts on the mantel of self-ownership" that is my starting point in this article. Rather than develop a complete exposition on this difficult question, I will just sketch the train of thinking that has made me uneasy about libertarian theory.

Libertarians usually assume that all human beings possess "inalienable" natural rights such as the right to life, self-ownership, the right to property, the rights of voluntary exchange and contract, etc. Well, just where do these rights come from? The "nature of man"? I fail to see how the fact that "man is a rational animal, and must use his mind to survive" (Rand) in any way entails the belief that man has rights which should be respected and enforced. Beavers must use their teeth to survive - what implication does this have for beavers' rights? I should just point out here that a number of nineteenth-century individualist anarchists - among them Benjamin Tucker and Max Stirner - actually denied that such rights exist.

Aside from the question of whether rights really exist, there are problems in ascertaining what they are and how they are to be implemented. Even if I agree with self-ownership, how do we "own" ourselves in the same sense as we "own" property? If so, can we sell ourselves - become slaves - in the same way that we can sell other property? If not, why in the one case but not the other? Which kinds of ownership are valid? Presumably because the individual will is not alienable - it cannot be sold. In other words, a person cannot bind his future self to act against its will. If this is the case, the whole notion of contract is brought into question. If I cannot bind my future self into some agreement, then the principle of contract is without basis. This becomes more evident when one realizes that a contract is just a special kind of promise. If I promise to pick you up at the train station Friday night and I can't show up, this may cause you a lot of trouble. But, you can't take any legal action against me. Why then does signing a piece of paper make such a promise any different? Under what conditions does a promise become enforceable?

How about property rights? If the right to self-ownership is unclear, the right to property is even more clouded. How does one originally acquire ownership of a particular un-owned good? A typical answer is that, by being the first to use a previously un-owned good, one acquires property rights in that good. By "mixing labor" with some un-owned resource one comes to own it. This sounds great, but I don't see how it can be applied "objectively". For instance, how does virgin land come to be owned? By cutting down a tree at each corner of the tract of land? By building a fence? By paving it? Can wild land be owned at all? (If not, then the libertarian "solution" to conservation is inconsistent.) It is by no means clear exactly which alterations confer ownership in a piece of land. George Mavorides has discussed these problems extensively in an excellent article called "Property" (The Personalist, 1971).

A glaring deficiency of the axiom of non-aggression is that, although it holds that it is wrong to initiate coercion, it says nothing of what to do when somebody does infringe another's rights. There is nothing in this principle that tells us how these rights are to be enforced. No philosophical principle spells out how much force may be used to defend ourselves, or whether any force at all may be used! The scope of justifiable punishment is even less defined by the non-aggression axiom. If somebody steps on my foot, may I justifiably chop off his guilty foot? Libertarian theory is at a loss to say.

Thus, the supposed "objective" standards of justice that both limited government advocates and anarchists propose are chimerical. I think that this becomes clearer if we employ the useful "Austrian" theory of subjective value propounded by Rothbard and others. According to this theory, value is necessarily a subjective measure. Each person has a "value scale" on which various possible goods are ranked according to the "psychic" utility they have for that person (in a specific time and place). Thus, it is meaningless to assign an "objective" value to any good, since a given good has value only for a specific person in a specific context.

(Cont. Page 4)

(EXECOM - From Page 1) the libertarian message across in as many ways as we can.

In addition to Becker, other Execom members present at the meeting were Tony Ficcas, Elizbeth Behrmann, and Karen Howard.

The next meeting of the committee was scheduled for early November.
[THEORY - From Page 3]

cific situation. In fact, all we can know for sure about another's values comes from observing that person's actions; e.g. if Murray pays a nickel for a candy bar at 3 P.M. on July 4, 1976, all we know is that he preferred the candy bar to the nickel in that specific situation. (He may regret it by 4 P.M.) So the idea of an objective or "just" price is nonsensical. Justice pertains only to the procedure by which the price is set. For instance, libertarians associate justice with the procedure of voluntary exchange; i.e., the free market.

From these observations, we must conclude that (along with "just price") "just defense", "just retribution", and "just retaliation" are meaningless, since valuation is subjective. But, unlike price, which may be determined by a just procedure (the market), defense, retribution, and retaliation cannot be determined by market standards. Trying to determine how much a criminal should pay or be punished is like trying to determine how much the state should compensate a homeowner for the property it has confiscated by eminent domain. There just aren't any non-arbitrary standards that apply here.

Similarly, it is impossible to set objective standards for property ownership precisely because there is no way to subject such standards to market processes; unless everyone agrees unanimously on what is ownable and what procedures establish ownership, any such standards will be arbitrary. The notion of objective law has no basis in either the non-aggression principle or in subjective value theory.

What I hope to suggest by these questions is that libertarians have yet to develop a consistent framework within which to understand rights, and the law necessary to enforce these rights.

LPRI
P.O. Box 657
BRISTOL, R.I. 02809

LAST FREE MAILING

During the last couple of years, the LPRI has built up a fairly lengthy mailing list, made up both of party members and supporters, and of individuals who have at some time shown varying degrees of interest in libertarianism and the Libertarian Party. (Many of the latter names came to us through inquiries sent in to national LP, as well as through interest generated locally.)

Until now we have been sending out mailings to our entire list; but, the economics of the situation require that we now cut down our mail to just those people who are party members, newsletter subscribers, or who have contributed either money or time to the LPRI. If you do not fit into one of these categories but want to continue to receive mailings and announcements from us, please fill in the form on Page 2 and mail it to us, indicating in which way you can support the party.

Please keep in mind that support of the national LP does not count; you must be a supporter of the state party, the LPRI, to remain on our mailing list.

Mr. Stewart Engel
Owens, Virginia 22532