

The INDIVIDUALIST

A VOICE OF REASON IN THE STATIST WILDERNESS

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 unquestioned 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 and 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 be justifiably proud of these young libertarians. As might be expected,

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EXECOMACTS TO FILL VACANCY CAUSED BY ENGEL DEPARTURE

The September meeting of the Executive Committee of the LPRI was held on the Brown University campus in the rooms of Secretary Todd Becker. Its first order of business was to decide what to do to fill the void in the chairmanship caused by Stew Engel's move to Virginia. It was determined that, since the length of Engel's absence is uncertain, and since he has not officially submitted a resignation, Engel will still be considered chairman of the party until such time as his future residence status becomes clearer. If it develops that Engel must remain out of the state for an excessively long period, then a new chairman will have to be elected. In the interim, the vice-chairman, Tony Fiocca, will perform the functions of the chairman, as provided for in the party constitution.

The Execom also took up the matter of party memberships. It was unanimously agreed that more members must be recruited; for the immediate future, the emphasis will be heavy on college and high school recruiting.

Along with the discussion of plans for bringing in new student members, the committee also dealt with the problem of attracting activists from the local adult population; people who not only can support and assist the party, but who also will be able to assume leadership roles.

Plans were discussed for activities that would have appeal to libertarian-oriented area residents. Among these activities would be speaking engagements by prominent libertarians (Robert Nozick and David Friedman were among those mentioned), tied in with a dinner and/or cocktail reception to which party mem-

ENGEL LEAVES STATE INDEFINITELY: FIOCCA TO BE ACTING CHAIRMAN

The LPRI was left without a chairman 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 Fiocca, 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 Fiocca 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.

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bers and supporters would be invited.

The meeting also stressed the fact that party members should become active in such things as attending public hearings, writing letters to the editor, making press statements when possible, and generally getting

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the libertarian movement attracts, literally, the "best and brightest" on the college campus. Unlike some of their more attention-gathering counterparts - those whose level of political thinking goes no deeper than carrying signs in a demonstration and shouting mindless slogans - the collegestudents who support the libertarian philosophy have, 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 knowledge and study of political and economic philosophy.

Our college activists, therefore, are a vital part of the libertarian movement 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 ballot petitioning. It also means they are not as involved in local issues, nor do they have the same acquaintance with R.I. voters and officials as adult residents of the state have. It is vital, therefore, that we get more activists from the latter group. Activism does not just mean soliciting signatures and votes, or running 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 functions, attending these affairs (and inviting interested friends and acquaintances), 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 interested in doing whatever you can to help further the libertarian cause in R.I., please contact me by writing to: A. A. Fiocca, PO Box 657, Bristol, R.I. 02809, or by phoning me during the day at 253-8228 (253-4027 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 Chickens Come Home To Roost" is the heading of an editorial in the April, 1977 issue of REASON magazine, where editor Robert Poole, Jr. brings out some facts regarding the so-called shortage of natural gas. Mainly, that there isn't any such shortage. There is, in fact, a potential 3794 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; gas in tight sands interspersed with shale; and methane dissolved in water in the geopressurized 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 natural gas available, if only the producers are allowed to charge a reasonable price for it. (Our comment: no monee, no gasee. Just keep these figures in mind next time you hear certain members of the R.I. congressional delegation bleating about how they are "protecting" the consumer by voting against de-regulation. 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 Congress.)

□ 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 sacrifice his interests for others." The review states that Ringer, who admits to being strongly influenced by Ayn Rand and Harry Browne, "gives a very libertarian guide to improving one's life" and "presents this philosophy in a fresh, entertaining, and often humorous way which makes it easy to accept." O'Brien points out that, in describing the various hurdles standing in the way of one's happiness, Ringer includes government among them, and "in casual asides 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 the non-political one that you must look out 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 recommendation that you pass the book along to non-libertarian, non-objectivist 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 means of achieving political or social goals"

Signed _____

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

**IS LIBERTARIAN 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.

"What are rights?" - 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.

Start with the right to 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?

If one cannot sell oneself, it is 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 don'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 unowned good? A typical answer is that, by being the first to use a previously unowned good, one acquires property rights in that good. By "mixing labor" with some unowned resource I come 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 Mavrodes 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 left toe, 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 cleared 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 spe-

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the libertarian message across in as many ways as we can.

In addition to Becker, other Execom members present at the meeting were Tony Fiocca, Elizabeth Behrman, and Karen Howard.

The next meeting of the committee was scheduled for early November.

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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 deter-

mine how much a criminal should pay or be punished is like trying to determine how much the state should compensate a home-owner 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.

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 in 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.

LPRI
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