

A Semi-Monthly Newsletter

THE

Libertarian Forum

Joseph R. Peden, Publisher

Washington Editor, Karl Hess

Murray N. Rothbard, Editor

VOL. I, NO. XV

November 1, 1969

35¢

Two Steps Forward, Two Steps Back

THE CONFERENCE

The first New York Libertarian Conference is over. It was a wild and woolly time, both exciting and dull, wonderful and a shambles. It was great that we held it, but it is highly doubtful that another conference will ever be held in the same form. To quote Dickens: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness . . . it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness . . ."

In contrast to the P.R. snow jobs handed out by other conference organizers, attesting to the joy and grandeur abounding at their meetings, this will be a candid, unvarnished report and appraisal of the Conference. Our readers deserve no less. It is only fair to add that the appraisal of most of the other organizers of the Conference is far more favorable than my own.

PHASE I: The Triumph

Looking backward, the Conference may be divided into two phases, which differed as Day and Night. Phase I, from Friday night through Saturday afternoon, was indeed a triumphant occasion. In the first place, the attendance. By forgetting to put in our ads that anyone could attend a single session for only \$2.50, we unwittingly discouraged a lot of our New York people; perhaps thirty or forty more would have appeared if not for this oversight. But even so, over 200 people attended the Conference, perhaps as high as 220, almost all of whom came from out of town. And what out of town! It was incredible. People came, just for this Conference, all the way from California, Florida, Texas, Iowa, Kansas, Wisconsin, Illinois, Ohio, Missouri, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, a large contingent from Michigan, and one heroic young man, John H. C. Pierce, who gave up his summer vacation in order to hitch-hike to the Conference from northern Manitoba! We, the organizers of the Conference, looked out across this sea of faces and hardly recognized a soul. It was a great and historic moment.

As amateur organizers of conferences, it is true that we packed far too much material in the Saturday afternoon panels. There was virtually no break between noon and six P.M. But what material! The papers were of a uniformly high and even scintillating level, and made real contributions to libertarian knowledge. We hope to publish the papers and speeches at the conference in paperback form, to make them available to libertarians across the country and as a permanent part of the libertarian literature.

In the meanwhile, a brief summary of the Phase I papers:

On Friday night, I gave a lengthy overview of the libertarian system, beginning with the natural right of self-ownership, developing the structure of property rights in libertarian theory, and ending with a call for the abolition of the State as quickly as possible. On Saturday, in the Economics panel, Professor Laurence Moss of Columbia and Queens Universities, gave a spirited and witty talk on the "Economics of Sin", pointing out that the State is continually redefining the "sin" that it outlaws in order to extend its power over the mass of the people, especially the poorest sectors of the populace. Jerry Tuccille, our most recent important convert from the idea of limited government, gave a rousing talk pointing out that *laissez-faire*, considered logically, must lead one to free-market anarchism. We are honored to be the first publication to announce that Jerry's book, *Radical Libertarianism*, will soon be published by Bobbs-Merrill. Mario J. Rizzo, an honors senior in economics at Fordham University, proved to be one of the stars of the Conference, giving a brilliant paper standing Marx on his head, and arguing that, in the kind of interventionist, corporate state economy that we have today, business profits indeed tend to be an index of exploitation of the rest of society, since they are usually derived from the use of State privilege. In short, much of Marx, while totally fallacious for competitive, free-market capitalism, turns out to be unwittingly applicable to the state-monopoly system that we suffer under today. Professor Walter Block, of Rutgers and New York Universities, delivered a sharp critique of the statism and deviations from liberty of Milton Friedman and the Chicago School.

In the "Politics and Liberty" panel, Roy A. Childs, Jr., a student in history and philosophy at SUNY, Buffalo, summarized his recent article which brilliantly used Randian terminology to demolish the inner contributions of the Randian concept of "limited government". (Roy's article is "Objectivism and the State: An Open Letter to Ayn Rand", *The Rational Individualist*, August, 1969). I gave a talk on how competing police forces and courts could work, and work well, in an anarchist society, and Professor Joseph R. Peden of Baruch College, CUNY, gave a learned and fascinating paper on the thousand years of successful, anarchistic "law and order" in medieval Ireland, an eminently workable society that only fell to the brutal English conquest in the seventeenth century.

(Continued on page 2)

THE CONVENTION — (Continued from page 1)

The Foreign Policy panel was another highlight of the meeting. R. Dale Grinder, of the history department of the University of Missouri, delivered a learned, witty, and illuminating paper on United States imperialism in China and the Far East, from 1880-1920. Walter Grinder, graduate student at New York University, traced the origins of the Cold War to the counter-revolutionary, expansionist drive of the United States, back from World War II through the aftermath of the first World War. Professor Leonard Liggio, of City College, CUNY, recalled for us the great founder of modern isolationism and anti-imperialism, the *laissez-faire* economist (and abolitionist) Edward Atkinson, who founded the Anti-Imperialist League during the Spanish-American War, and even sent "subversive" anti-war pamphlets to our soldiers waging an imperialist conquest of the Philippines. *This* is the isolationist heritage which the New Left has now taken up and the Right-wing has unfortunately abandoned.

So far, so great; but during the Saturday session, an undercurrent of rebellion rumbled from various "Young Turks" who, apparently restive at having to follow trains of thought for more than one paragraph, began to gripe about the "over-structuring" of the conference and to call for general "rapping" (open discussion). The time was to come, all too soon, when general rapping would unfortunately take over. And with this rapping came the disintegration of the conference.

PHASE II: Disintegration

Phase II covers Saturday night through the end of the conference the following night. The disintegration began after Karl Hess' rousing speech Saturday night, calling for action against the State. Karl threw the meeting open to questions and general rapping, and that's when trouble arose. The first thing that happened was an intensifying polarization of left and right-wings, each pushing the other into harder, more extreme, and more disparate stands. The point is that within the New York movement, agreement is intense and widespread, and the divergence between "right" and "left" is only a matter of tactics and nuance rather than fundamental principle. But hold a conference like this one, advertised widely and open to one and all, and massive extremes of left and right are bound to appear. It was inevitable that, once widespread rapping began, the almost total lack of communication between extreme left and extreme right, between ultra-left anarchists and anarcho-rightists, would lead to an aggravating polarization between them. Each extreme reacted on the other with cutting dialectical force, each pushing the other farther away from its position. Instead of the conference bringing both extremes, both "deviations" from the main line, together, the rap sessions only served to drive them further apart.

Take, for example, the late Sunday afternoon session, supposed to be devoted to Campus Organizing. The polarization process had continued through Sunday (the demoralization being aggravated by another one of our tactical miscalculations, since half of the people left for home around that time. We did not realize that, outside of New York, no school or business observed Columbus Day). The Campus Organizing session was to be a vital part of the conference, when our campus chapters were to discuss student organizing, development of RLA (the Radical Libertarian Alliance), relations with other fraternal libertarian campus groups, etc. Instead, everyone was so caught up with the intensifying left vs. right struggle that no one bothered to deal with campus organizing, and every speaker plunged further into an orgy of hatred, with left and right winding up literally screaming at each other.

In my view, the major source of intellectual aggression at the conference came from the ultra-left. The problem is

that the Sober Center, the intelligent main-line forces, had been geared all along to withstand assault from the extreme right, from those forces that still revere the U. S. government, still favor the Cold War, and still want to "protect" the government-run campuses from student rebellions. The extreme right was there, sure enough, but a larger menace came from the ultra-left, and the center, being geared psychologically only to oppose the right-wing, never really realized the extent of the ultra-left problem that was becoming a major force at the conference.

Thus, the major assault on the center (that is on the Conference itself, which was largely centrist-run), came from ultra-leftist Wilson A. Clark, Jr., formerly a student at the University of North Carolina, and now residing in Washington, D. C. Denouncing the New York group and the "power structure" of RLA (what a laugh *that is!*), Wilson proceeded to identify two groups as the major Enemy on which the libertarian movement is supposed to concentrate its ire: (a) *all* academic economists, without exception, that is economics *per se*; and (b) all people who wear neckties. As a special bonus, Wilson went on to attack people who favor proper English, in contrast to such cultural goodies as soul rapping, street argot, and whatever. Wilson's inchoate tirade was certainly one of the low points of the conference.

Various other speakers, carried along on a tidal wave of ultra-leftism, *even those who knew better*, called for an abandonment of the "capitalist" part of anarcho-capitalism, and presumed to claim that a viable anarchist society could be composed of "psychic" exchanges and "tribal sharing" carried on by hippie communes.

By far the best reply to the Clark forces came from Mario Rizzo who, nattily dressed in jacket and tie, announced that one could see from his attire which side of the cultural struggle he was on. Rizzo pointed out that the ultra-left was really abandoning the proper emphasis on *political* revolution, on abolition of the State, to stress "cultural revolution", a "revolution" whose implications range from misleading and irrelevant to totally wrong-headed and divisive. Addressing the cultural revolutionaries, Mario concluded by saying that *if*, as he suspected, they proposed to use coercion to impose their anti-necktieism, then "to hell with you."

If polarization and "cultural" hogwash was one measure of the disintegration during Phase II, another was the sudden emergency of a typically ultra-left call for immediate action, virtually *any* action, against the State. The cry was first raised on Saturday night when one ultra-leftist in the audience raised the call, "On to Fort Dix!" This referred to a New Left action against Ft. Dix, New Jersey that had been planned for Sunday. Theoretically, it was supposed to involve merely a demonstration at the fort on behalf of various military prisoners and in opposition to the war. But it was also rumored that an attempt would be made to march onto the fort itself. While there is nothing morally wrong, of course, with the idea of people invading an army fort--quite the contrary--there is a vast gulf between moral correctness and strategic and tactical wisdom. It was that wisdom that was so conspicuously lacking. Nothing could be achieved by such an "invasion"--certainly not a successful capture--and the only thing that could possibly be accomplished would be to be gassed and/or bayoneted, and/or clubbed, and/or shot, plus a possible ten years in jail for (literally!) stepping on the grass of army property.

What is more, the wisdom was particularly lacking from the people at our conference, few of whom had heard of the Ft. Dix action until that moment. But the process of polarization had done its ugly work. Goaded beyond endurance by the right-wing's attack on the very concept and morality of revolution, not only the ultra-left but even the bulk of the center responded swiftly and emotionally to the cry of "On to Ft. Dix!" It was as if, after defending the very concept of action against the State, the center and left felt that they

(Continued on page 3)

Letter From Washington

By Karl Hess

Robin Hood Revisionism

When I was a wee conservative, counting bond revenues at my mother's knee, it was the dear lady's practice to frighten me to death with tales of that arch-bandit, Robin Hood. The conservative wisdom was and is that no more dastardly crime lurks in the heart of man than the infamy of taking from the rich to give to the poor. Entire sweeps of political philosophy, in fact, seem to have been motivated by little else than antagonism to poor Robin and his hoods. On the other hand, an entire sweep of political reality, in this nation, was and is motivated by the reverse proposition,

that it is okay to rob from the poor and give to the rich.

The Democrats have done it through a welfare system in which the poor are "client" victims who get the crumbs from the bureaucratic table which is the system's principal purpose. They also characteristically steal the poor blind through construction projects, licenses and franchises, and such other thefts as are most appropriate to men who have risen from precinct politics.

The Republicans have done it through, most lately, the warfare state of corporate liberalism, in which the lives of the poor are daily robbed of meaning or hope so that they may be used solely as cogs in the industrial machine which is the system's principal purpose. They also steal through the total use of the state and its power, its credit, its regulations, to the end of special advantage for the corporate elite, a form of theft most appropriate to men who have gone to the best schools.

So much for the reverse. What about Robinhoodism, straight and unalloyed? Should we frighten tots with his image? Was his the worst of crimes?

Robin, after sober reflection, wasn't a half-bad sort. He had one wretched notion that we shall discuss later, but his work, by and large, was healthy, useful, and quite impec-

(Continued on page 4)

THE CONVENTION — (Continued from page 2)

had to rush out and seize the opportunity for any action whatever. It reached the monstrous point that the entire center was willing to call off the whole Sunday daytime proceedings of the convention, a convention for which they had lovingly prepared for many months, in order to rush off in a delirium to embrace the receiving end of the tear-gas canister and the bayonet. Anarcho-martyrism rearing its ugly head!

This sudden onrush at the conference was a superb example of one of the major reasons that anarchist revolutions have never been effective. It demonstrates, for example, why the anarchists lost out to their allies the Bolsheviks after the October 1917 Revolution in Russia. The anarchists were strong in Russia; but anarchists have, tragically, always been what the Randians very effectively call "whim-worshippers", creatures of the emotional moment, worshippers of the immediate spontaneous emotion of the hour, people who scorn rational forethought and purposeful, long-range planning. One of the main reasons that the Russian anarchists lost out to Lenin is because Lenin, above all, was no whim-worshipper, but a master of patient organization, strategic insight, rational forethought, long-range planning and tactical timing. It is always the kooky anarchists who suddenly raise the cry, "Seize the street!", "Storm that government building!", "Charge the cops!", and of course it is always the kooky anarchists who are first to get their heads beaten in--and to no avail. Note that it is not the *morality* of these anarchist actions that is in question (as it is in the case of anarcho-rightists who *defend* the government or government schools) but the sanity of the actions.

My own role, all of late Saturday night and early Sunday afternoon, was a hasty but in many ways effective one-man crusade to stem the ultra-left tide, and to save the conference by opposing the Ft. Dix mania. I managed to persuade the great bulk of the center to remain at the conference on Sunday, thus permitting the sessions to continue, so that only a small ultra-left contingent went on the Dix escapade. Most of the speeches on early Sunday afternoon were an implicit or explicit attack on ultra-leftism: Jerry Tuccille effectively reminding the meeting that our main reservoir of potential mass support was the vast middle class (the same middle class so scornfully written off as The Enemy by Clark and others); Leonard Liggio gently but firmly reminding worshippers of the Black Panthers of the Panthers' abandonment of black nationalism; and myself directly attacking ultra-leftism, Panther-mania, and the Ft. Dix adventure.

As the warriors began returning from Ft. Dix, ultra-left emotionalism started to reach another peak. One left youth leader lamented that he had not been gassed at Dix. And undoubtedly the all-time low arrived when an ultra-left woman from the Phoenix Coalition of Michigan (so ultra-left as to make Wilson Clark appear like a corporation executive) rushed to the podium, fresh from her gassing, to curse obscenely and hysterically at the entire audience for being in New York rather than at the barricades.

The conference ended ingloriously Sunday night on a note of (unfortunately rational) paranoia. For it became evident that the hotel room, the lobby of the hotel, and the street outside were suddenly crawling with plainclothes cops, their badges and their guns bulging prominently from their supposedly civilian attire. One Wobbly leader, familiar with the New York fuzz, spotted a Bureau of Special Services plainclothesman (the division specializing in political dissent). Why were they there? Were they going to bust the convention? Were they going to apprehend the Ft. Dix marchers? Were some or all of us going to be charged with Conspiracy to cross state lines to incite a riot, *à la* the infamous Chicago case? Nobody knew, and we still don't know, but prudence at last won over *machismo*, and most of us beat it the hell out of there. The convention petered out on a grotesquely ironic note, with the remaining rappers still griping that the main trouble with the conference was that there had not been enough rapping!

Lessons Of The Conference

One obvious lesson of the Conference is the emergence of ultra-left adventurism as a major threat to the movement. And so just as we have devoted several issues of the *Libertarian Forum* to an attack on anarcho-rightism, we must now devote some energy to a critique of ultra-leftism (which will be appearing soon).

A second lesson is that this sort of large, totally open convention--gathering all manner of leftists, rightists, and cops--has become counter-productive. The need now is for smaller, far more selective, and more homogeneous meetings, in which there will be far more room for much-needed internal education of cadre, and for genuine discussion and dialogue. Leftists and rightists can only be moved toward the center separately, where they cannot reinforce each other's errors through mutual denunciation. Only when and if left and right have effectively blended into the center will there be need for a second open convention.

ROBIN HOOD REVISIONISM — (Continued from page 3)

cable politically--so far as it went. Who did he rob? He robbed a bunch of rich churchmen, for one thing. Now what in the world is wrong with that? To hear the conservative diatribes against Robin Hood you would think that the mere fact of *having* riches is the only standard against which to judge the theft of those riches. In short, the conservative notion is that to steal anything from anybody is a crime--regardless of the source of the thing being ripped off or the nature of the owner's position in regard to the society in general.

The churchmen, whom Robin robbed, represented one of the great ruling classes of all time and, like every ruling class, their power and their pelf was the result of the sort of theft that becomes legitimized by longevity. Although much of the income being derived by churches today is from voluntary contributions, much of the capital upon which churches base their economies was extracted in times when the churches had real clout and could force contributions. The Roman Catholic church, of course, is the main user of such capital and is coming under increasing pressure from its priests to divest itself of what even a rudimentary ethical sense should be able to identify as ill-gotten gains. Robin didn't wait for divestiture. He helped out. So, on the count of robbing rich churchmen, Robin seems quite acceptable to a libertarian.

Robin was most noted, as a matter of fact, for stealing from government officials. Rich government officials. Now how do government officials become rich? How did the Sheriff of Nottingham make his? Or Lyndon Johnson? Or you name him. Politicians make their money by using their office; by, in an ethical sense, stealing advantages which lead to gains. I would say that such gains also are stolen. So, apparently, did Robin Hood.

It seems to me, as a matter of fact, that Robin Hood's attacks against the militant arm of the state have been purposefully overlooked by conservatives in their attacks against Robin Hood. There has been a preoccupation, instead, with the technicalities of whose forest it was, whether the Sheriff represented a mere aberration in the divinely inspired order of Western civilization, and whether Robin wouldn't have been better advised to press his case in a duly constituted court (presided over by the Sheriff of Nottingham!).

The reason for this oversight on the part of conservatives may not be innocent or merely myopic. Robin Hood's main crime, you see, was against an established order, one duly established in accord with the laws, customs, etc., of the time. Robin, on the other hand, thought it was illegitimate. He was, it should be recalled, a very political cat. His gripe

RECOMMENDED READING

PACIFIC RESEARCH AND WORLD EMPIRE TELEGRAM. A fine, new scholarly publication, concentrating on foreign affairs analysis, and put out by the Pacific Studies Center of East Palo Alto, California. The Sept. 10 issue has excellent articles on Eritrea's revolution against Ethiopian imperialism (and its U. S. supporters); government subsidies for big business programs in the ghettos; and the revolutionary movement in Thailand. 12 issues available for \$5.00 (50¢ per issue), from Pacific Studies Center, 1963 University Avenue, East Palo Alto, Calif. 94301.

was--ah hah--against THE STATE. Those upon whom he preyed were lackeys or running dogs of THE STATE. It is possible that the specter of Robin Hood today haunts so many conservative dreams not because of their pure thoughts on property rights so much as because of the possibly impure origins of the property dearest to their own hearts. Otherwise, why get so excited about Robin Hood?

There is one reason. It is the only thing that I hold against the old boy and his gassy greenclad gang. They were hung up on King Richard. Now, being hung up on any king is a mistake, I feel. But, until Dick showed up, big as life and raring to get back in the king business, Robin was a beautiful guy. As often happens in life, he was the sort you could go along with wholeheartedly so long as he didn't have the power he eventually wanted. When the king came back, of course, libertarians in the gang should have just gone back to the woods and started all over again and, by then, they should have had enough local support to stand a better chance than ever of success.

In short, while Robin was robbing, he was doing nothing that should offend libertarian sensibilities and the fact that so much of what he was doing was aimed specifically against state authority should actually draw libertarian cheers. The subsequent fact that he took some of the loot from his anti-state forays and returned it to the people most sorely victimized by the state should draw not only libertarian cheers but humanist ones as well.

There is one other thing about Robin Hood. He apparently is alive and well in Latin America today. The inter-urban guerrillas in Uruguay seem to operate in his spirit but without that hang-up about kings. Good.

I bet you a monk's bag of silver that conservatives line up with the Sheriff of Nottingham. But don't worry, Robin, libertarians are on your side.

SUBSCRIBE NOW

Please enter a subscription for:

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Subscription is \$7.00 per year.
Student subscription \$5.00 per year.

Bulk Rates. 20 or more, 10¢ each, 50 or more, 8¢ each.
Libertarian Forum Associate subscription is \$15.00 or more

THE LIBERTARIAN FORUM
Box 341 Madison Square Station
New York, New York 10010

The Libertarian Forum
BOX 341
MADISON SQUARE STATION
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10010

