

RRR

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Why Paleo?

I: The Modal Libertarian

In the January 1990 issue of *Liberty*, Lew Rockwell published an article, "The Case for Paleo-libertarianism," that set the libertarian world on its ear. It was the single most talked-about and controversial article in the history of that magazine, and indeed in many years in the libertarian movement.

The reason is simple: the libertarian world has been sunk, for years now, into torpor at best and advancing decay at worst. It has been marked by a lack of new ideas, of new thoughts or strategies. In the last decade, libertarian ideas have been advancing and permeating throughout the world, but apart from the special-

ized area of free-market economics, libertarian institutions have been steadily crumbling and falling into total irrelevance in American culture. Instead of meeting the challenge of chronic deterioration and decay, movement leaders have huddled around, hunkered down, and desperately stepped up their host of scams

and bunco schemes, precisely like leeches accelerating their vampirism as their host's blood gets ever thinner and less nourishing.

1989, the year of the glorious revolutionary implosion of communism/socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, has presented us with a totally new world, with new parameters for action. All other ideological groups, conservatives, liberals, and leftists, have, with varying success, understood the necessity of meeting the new

reality by rethinking their focus and their strategies. Only libertarians have, as usual, acted as if the real world does not exist, and continued heedlessly to play their bunco games.

Amidst this pervasive miasma, Lew's article came as a spark of excitement, a trumpet call announcing that there are big changes in the real world, folks, and that it's high

time we wake up and do some hard thinking about what it all means. For all libertarians not yet brain dead, Lew's article heralded a new dawn of purposive activity and creative thinking.

Unfortunately, such is the parlous state to which the movement has sunk that almost none of this

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THE EAR

Neocon Virginia Postrel, editor of *Reason*, is in deep doo-doo. To attack the flourishing paleo alliance, she wrote "The Ideological Shuffle" for *The Washington Post*. In it, besides praising statist Jack Kemp and Newt Gingrich and smearing the anti-statist Rockford Institute, she repeated a lie: that Rockford had hosted a party for eco-wacko Jeremy Rifkin. *The Post* had to run a red-faced correction.

What's happened to the Libertarian Party? LP leaders aren't talking, but there's been a precipitous decline in paid membership. There were, after the Ron Paul campaign, 9,000 national LPers, but virtually no one is renewing. Membership is said to be 7,500 and sinking.

Karl Hess, hippie editor of the *Libertarian Party News*, has resigned to write his autobiography. Karl wants his even-hippier business partner, the pony-tailed Randy Langhenry, to succeed him, but Randy is even less libertarian than Karl, and he can't write. Can Karl foist Randy on the LP? Stay tuned.

MeMe King—ballot-access wiz and the only capable person on the LP's national staff—has

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(THE EAR cont. from P.1)

left for greener pastures (which wouldn't be hard). She's now working for Howie Rich (of Laissez-Faire Books), who's set up a company to assist tax-rebellion ballot measures. Great idea, and great hire.

Former LP NatCom'r Alan Lindsay has left the party over an LP fundraising letter about the death of a young soldier in Panama. The soldier's parents and fiance have denounced the LP leadership as "vultures," and Alan agrees.

So LP bigwig (and public school-teacher) Don Ernsberger writes Alan a hate letter full of grammatical and spelling errors, MUCH OF IT TYPED IN UPPER CASE. Don is a one-man argument for private education.

There's been national publicity, and there may be a lawsuit. And Ear hears that buddies from the soldier's former battalion will visit the LP personally. No wonder Chairman Dave Walter, as one newspaper noted, "would give his address only as eastern PA."

As California goes, so goes the nation, at least for the LP. California has more votes, members, and contributors than most other states put together. Without California, the LP is dead, and without

ballot access, the California LP is dead. They can't afford to collect the zillions of necessary signatures, so they put their hopes on the state treasurer's race, where last time they beat the 2% barrier. But nominee George O'Brien of San Francisco forgot to file. Absent a miracle, California won't be on the ballot, and Marrou will be lucky to get 100,000 votes in the rest of the country.

The paradigmatic Washington State LP is in an uproar over allegations of grand theft involving the '87 Seattle convention. Judicial commission head Mike Dunn lays out the charges in a 100+-page report. State chairwoman Marla Bottemiller has resigned. They're running around like pigeons with their heads cut off. In other words, business as usual.

California LPer Dick Boddie is a man with, as the first R says, "no visible means of support." During the '84 Bergland for President campaign, Dick—one of the few blacks in the LP—was a full-time fundraiser. A typical Libertarian, he *cost the campaign more than he raised*. Now Dick says he may run for prez in '92, although he'd accept the veep slot under Andre Marrou. What a team!

- S.B.

(WHY PALEO cont. from P.1)

excitement was reflected in the many tedious and uncomprehending comments on the article in *Liberty*: almost all of which were nothing so much as the irritable responses of bears being disturbed from their lengthy slumbers. Indeed, the only intelligent and thoughtful critique of the Rockwell article appeared not in *Liberty* but by Justin Raimondo in the March issue of the *Libertarian Republican Organizer*.

So why paleo? As one of Lew's critics put it, why do we need *another* long word to tack on to the first one (libertarianism)? The standard critical summary of the paleo position is that we are setting out to "expel" all non-paleos (variously defined as all non-bourgeois and/or non-religious) from the libertarian movement. This is an absurd characterization of our position, and seems to reflect a severe reading (or thinking) disability.

In the first place, aside from the Libertarian Party, there is no membership-type organization in the movement from which we could expel anyone. And as for the LP, most of us have left it in body and all of us in spirit. And secondly, how can a small minority (paleos) "expel" a vast majority?

Separating Out

So the point has been severely missed. The point of the new paleo movement, including the designation, is to separate ourselves out of the broader movement, to find and inspire other paleos, and to form our own separate and self-conscious movement.

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Most of us have left the LP in body, and all of us in spirit.

(WHY PALEO, Cont. from P.2,

We are saying, in short, that liberty is great and we don't wish to weaken or dilute it by one iota, but that for us, at long last, it's simply not enough. We are still hard-core libertarians, but we now are not willing to settle, as a movement, for liberty alone. We insist upon *liberty plus*.

We have said that a certain cultural matrix is essential to liberty. I can understand why libertarians might be edgy at this sort of formulation; for example, the Oxford political theorist John Gray has, in recent year, marked his defection from classical liberalism (already a watered-down form of libertarianism) by talking about the need for a certain culture in addition to liberty: this sort of talk is almost always the prelude to a call for State power—certainly in Gray's case.

But that is *not* the point, although I agree that liberty will tend to flourish most in a bourgeois, Christian culture. I am willing to concede that you can indeed be a good, hard-core libertarian and still be a hippie, an aggressive anti-bourgeois and anti-Christian, a drug addict, a moocher, a rude and intolerable fellow, and even an outright thief.

But the point is that we paleos are no longer willing to be movement colleagues with these sorts of people. For two separate and powerful reasons, *each* of which would be good enough reason to form a separate and distinct paleo movement. One is strategic: that these sorts of people tend, for obvious reasons, to turn off, indeed to repel, most "real people," people who either work for a living or meet a payroll, middle class or working class people who, in

the grand old phrase, enjoy "visible means of support."

In the Libertarian Party, the prevalence of these sorts of people has kept the membership and the votes low and even declining. But also in the broader movement, these *luftmenschen* types have almost succeeded in making the glorious word "libertarian" a stench in everyone's nostrils, synonymous with nut or libertine. At this stage, the only way to save the glorious word and the concept of "libertarian" is to affix the word "paleo" to it, and thereby make the distinction and separation crystal clear.

But our reasons are not only strategic. For among the people repelled are we ourselves, and although obviously we have a high tolerance level, it has at last been exceeded, and it is with a sense of joyous relief that we scrape the detritus of the standard, or "modal," libertarian from the soles of our shoes.

When, in the *Libertarian Forum*, I used to fulminate against the "unreal people" and the crazies, later dubbing them *luftmenschen*, I was treated as either a lovable or an odious crank, but the point is that these cultural positions were not taken as in any way relevant to my libertarian doctrine. They *are* relevant, though on a different plane, than the doctrine itself. But the point is that it can no longer be acceptable to neglect the "paleo" part of the equation.

But if we are the "paleos," who

are the *other* guys? Since the terms are on a different plane of discourse, the simple word "libertarian" cannot suffice. I have therefore dubbed the other guys, our opposition so to speak, as the "nihilolibertarians" or "nihilos," with the remainder of libertarians, perhaps in the majority, confused in-betweeners who are not yet aware of any such distinctions. Many of these are instinctive paleos without being aware of it.

There is no way of knowing the precise numbers, but after almost forty-five years as an activist in the libertarian movement, I am certain of one thing: that the nihilos, whether or not a numerical majority, are unfortunately the

typical, or "modal" libertarians. [The "mode" is a concept in statistics designating that class or category which has the highest frequency of members.]

Lew Rockwell and myself have been severely critical of the Libertarian Party, especially since the debacle at the Philadelphia national convention in September of last year. But while the Libertarian Party is indeed irredeemable and has in fact not yet been subject to *enough* of an expose, the Party is not the sole problem. For the Party is simply the most visible, and most organized, institution of the movement. The sickness of the Party is only the visible reflection of the underlying rot of the movement as a whole.

**Liberty
isn't
enough.**

That is why Lew and I are not calling for a new Libertarian Party or for an immediate replacement as a substitute mass institution for the movement. The disease cuts far deeper, and so the solution must be far more radical, and unfortunately must take longer than another quick fix. The first step is to separate out, and to form our own paleo-libertarian organs and institutions, beginning, of course, with *RRR* itself.

Portrait of the Modal Libertarian

It is easiest to begin our definition of "paleo" by explaining what we are *not*, what we are determined to get away from. And the easiest way to explain that is to limn our portrait of the Modal Libertarian, his nature and his attitudes.

And the Modal Libertarian (henceforth ML) is indeed a *he*, because the movement has always, of course, been overwhelmingly male. And unfortunately, the few female libertarian activists suffer from much the same syndrome as the males.

The ML was in his twenties twenty years ago, and is now in his forties. That is neither as banal, nor as benign as it sounds, because it means that the movement has not really grown in twenty years; the same dreary people have merely gotten twenty years older. The ML is fairly bright, and fairly well steeped in libertarian theory. But he knows nothing and cares less about history, culture, the context of reality or world affairs. His only reading or cultural knowledge is science fiction, on which the ML is an expert, and which manages to keep him very nicely insulated

from reality. As a result, the average rank-and-file member of the most ineffectual Trotskyite sect knows far more about world affairs than all but a tiny handful of libertarian leaders.

The ML does not, unfortunately, hate the State because he sees it as the unique social instrument of organized aggression against person and property. Instead, the ML is an adolescent rebel against everyone around him: first, against his parents, second against his family, third against his neighbors, and finally against society itself. He is especially opposed to institutions of social and cultural authority: in particular against the bourgeoisie from whom he stemmed, against bourgeois norms and conventions, and against such institutions of social authority as churches. To the ML, then, the State is not a unique problem; it is only the most visible and odious of many hated bourgeois institutions: hence the zest with which the ML sports the button, "Question Authority."

And hence, too, the fanatical hostility of the ML toward Christianity. I used to think that this militant atheism was merely a function of the Randianism out of which most modern libertarians emerged two decades ago. But atheism is not the key, for let someone in a libertarian gathering announce that he or she is a witch

or a worshiper of crystal-power or some other New Age hokum, and that person will be treated with great tolerance and respect. It is only Christians that are subject to abuse, and clearly the reason for this difference in treat-

ment has nothing to do with atheism. But it has everything to do with rejecting and spurning bourgeois American culture; any kind of kooky cultural cause will be encouraged in order to tweak the noses of the hated bourgeoisie.

In point of fact, the original attraction of the ML to Randianism was part and parcel of his adolescent re-

bellion: what better way to rationalize and systematize rejection of one's parents, family, and neighbors than to join a cult which denounces religion and which trumpets the absolute superiority of yourself and your cult leaders, as contrasted to the robotic "second-handers" who supposedly people the bourgeois world? A cult, furthermore, which calls upon you to spurn your parents, family, and bourgeois associates, and to cultivate the alleged greatness of your own individual ego (suitably guided, of course, by Randian leadership).

There is a certain raffish charm to adolescent rebels at twenty; at forty however, the same attitudes

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and outlook become odious. The charm has gone. Lew Rockwell's critics conveniently leap to the assumption that what he and I have been attacking is noticeably "hippie" hair, manners, and clothing. But this is a highly superficial view. The only good thing about hippiedom is that it makes the modal nihilos easy to spot. But even those MLs who *look* like real people, who wear suits and ties, really aren't. The important point is the personality, the attitudes.

In short: the ML, if he has a real world occupation, such as accountant or lawyer, is generally a lawyer without a practice, an accountant without a job. The ML's modal occupation is computer programmer; the ML was a computer nerd long before the invention of the personal computer. Computers appeal indeed to the ML's scientific

and theoretical bent; but they also appeal to his aggravated nomadism, to his need not to have a regular payroll or regular abode. Furthermore, it is easy to call yourself a "computer consultant" when what you *really* are is unemployed.

The ML also has the thousand-mile stare of the fanatic. He is apt to buttonhole you at the first

opportunity and to go on at great length about his own particular "great discovery" or about his mighty manuscript which is crying out for publication if only it hadn't been suppressed by the Powers That Be. He is, like all fanatics, totally humorless; his idea of high wit is someone being on the receiving end of a hotfoot.

But above all, the ML is a moocher, a bunco artist, and often an outright crook. His basic attitude toward other libertarians

is "Your house is my house." How many libertarians in the rare privileged position of living in an apartment or house have not had the pleasure of hearing their doorbell ring, and being confronted with some guy on the doorstep who says, in effect; "Hey man, I'm a *libertarian*," and expects to be put up for the night, the week, or whatever? How many libertarians have had

to chuck such people out into the cold? Libertarians, in short, whether they articulate this "philosophy" or not, are libertarian-communists: anyone with property is automatically expected to "share" it with the other members of his extended libertarian "family."

We paleo libertarians are people who are finally saying,

"Basta!" "Enough!" We have had it up to here and we're not taking any more. As I will point out in a future installment, the glorious events of 1989 have ended the Cold War and have made an alliance with "paleo-conservatives," a reconstitution of the Old Right, possible and feasible. But our accelerating disgust with our libertarian movement comrades is a separate phenomenon, although it dovetails neatly with our new movement and has given us the word "paleo."

Years ago, when I was lamenting to an old friend about the crazies in the libertarian movement, he counselled: "Let's face it. In a kooky movement, you're going to get a lot of kooks." True, but our ideas are not that kooky.

While all movements are imperfect vessels for their pure ideas, the marvelous libertarian doctrine by no stretch of the imagination deserves this. Once my old friend Ralph Raico, commenting on some movement atrocity or other, took his cue from the wonderful line in the movie *The Godfather*, when Lee Strasberg, as the Meyer Lansky-type, was delivering Old World homilies to Corleone: "When Moe was killed (by the Corleones) did I say anything? Did I ask questions? No, because I said to myself: This is the business we have chosen." Ralph paraphrased this into "This is the movement we have chosen."

Okay. That worked as a consolation of sorts for years. But we paleos have had it. We're opting out. We're *unchoosing* the movement. We're forming a new movement of our own: paleo-libertarianism. *N.B.:* This is the first of multi-part article.) **-M.N.R.**

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