

## Know Your Rights

Recently, a bewildering and seemingly new phenomenon has burst upon the public consciousness, “right-wing libertarianism.” While earlier forms of the movement received brief and scornful attention by professional “extremist”-baiting liberals, present attention is, almost miraculously for veterans of the movement, serious and respectful. The current implication is “maybe they’ve got something here. What, then, have they got?”

Whatever their numerous differences, all “right-wing libertarians” agree on the central core of their thought, briefly, that every individual has the absolute moral right to “self-ownership,” the ownership and control of his own body without aggressive interference by any other person or group. Secondly, libertarians believe that every individual has the right to claim the ownership of whatever goods he has created or found in a natural, unused state: this establishes an absolute property right, not only in his own person but also in the things that he finds or creates. Thirdly, if everyone has such an absolute right to private property, he therefore has the right to exchange such property titles for other titles to property: hence the right to give away such property to whomever he chooses (provided, of course, that the recipient is willing); hence the right of bequest — and the right of the recipient to inherit.

The emphasis on the rights of private property of course locates this libertarian creed as emphatically “right-wing,” as does the right of free contract, implying absolute adherence to freedom of enterprise and the free-market economy. It also means, however, that the right-libertarian stands foursquare for the “civil liberty” of freedom of speech, press, and assembly. It means that he necessarily favors total freedom for abortion, pornography, prostitution, and all other forms of personal action that do not themselves aggress against the property of others. And, above all, he regards conscription as slavery pure and simple. All of these latter positions are of course now regarded as “leftist,” and so the right-libertarian is inevitably put in the position of being some form of “left-rightnik,” someone who agrees with conservatives on some issues and with leftists on others.

While others therefore see him as curiously fluctuating and inconsistent, he regards his position as virtually the only one that is truly consistent, consistent on behalf of the liberty of every individual. For how can the leftist be against the violence of war and conscription and morality laws while yet favoring the violence of taxes and government controls? And how can the rightist trumpet his devotion to private property and free enterprise while favoring conscription and the outlawing of activities he deems immoral?

While of course opposing any private or group aggression against the rights of private property, the right-libertarian unerringly zeroes in on the central, the overriding aggressor upon such rights: the State apparatus. While the leftist tends to regard the State as an evil enforcer of private-property rights, the right-libertarian, on the contrary, regards it as the prime aggressor on such rights.

In contrast to believers in democracy or monarchy or dictatorship, the right-libertarian steadfastly refuses to regard the State as invested with any sort of divine or any other sanction setting it up above the general moral law. If it is criminal for one man or a group of men to aggress against a man’s person or property, then it is equally criminal for an outfit calling itself the “government” or “State” to do the same thing.

Hence the right-libertarian regards “war” as mass murder, “conscription” as slavery, and — for most libertarians — “taxation” as robbery. From such past mentors as Herbert Spencer (*The Man vs. the State*) and Albert Jay Nock (*Our Enemy, the State*), the right-libertarian regards the State as the great enemy of the peaceful and productive pursuits of mankind.

With this as the central core of libertarian thought, we must now investigate the numerous facets of the right-libertarian spectrum; and, despite the numerous difficulties of such an analysis, it is still most convenient to align the various tendencies and factions of right-libertarianism on its own “left-right” continuum.

On the extreme-right fringe of the movement, there are those who simply believe in old-fashioned, 19th-century laissez-faire; the major laissez-faire group is the Foundation for Economic Education, of Irvington-on-Hudson, New York, for which many of the middle-aged members of the right-libertarian movement have worked at one time or another.

The laissez-fairists believe that a central government must exist, and therefore that taxes must exist, but that taxation should be confined to the prime “governmental” function of defending life and property against attack. Any pressing of government beyond this function is considered illegitimate.

The great bulk of libertarians, especially among the youth, have, however, gone beyond laissez-faire, for they have seen its basic inconsistency: for if taxation is robbery for building dams or steel plants, then it is also robbery when financing such supposedly “governmental” functions as police and the courts.

If it is legitimate for the State to coerce the taxpayer into financing the police, then why is it not equally legitimate to coerce the taxpayer for myriad other activities, including building steel factories, subsidizing favored groups, etc.? If taxation is robbery, surely then it is robbery regardless of the ends, benevolent or malevolent, for which the State proposes to employ these stolen funds.

Most libertarians also reject the laissez-fairist position that it is morally imperative to obey all laws, no matter how despotic, as well as the all-too-common laissez-fairist patriotic devotion to the American Constitution and the American State. They have also found current laissez-fairists (though this was not true of the 19th-century brand) to be conspicuously silent in mentioning the heavy responsibility of big business for the growth of statism in 20th-century America; instead, the blame is almost always placed on unions, politicians, and leftish intellectuals.

Moreover, almost never is there criticism of the greatest single force accelerating the Leviathan State in America: the military-industrial complex, and the American empire fueled by that complex. For all these reasons, the old-fashioned laissez-faire position has lost credibility for the bulk of today’s right-libertarians.

Moving one degree leftward, we come to the Randian and neo-Randian movements, those who follow or have been influenced by the novelist Ayn Rand. From the publication of Rand’s novel *Atlas Shrugged* in 1958, the Randian movement developed into what seemed to be destined as a mighty force. For the emotional impact of Rand’s powerfully-plotted novels attracted a vast following of young people into her “Objectivist” movement.

In addition to the emotional drawing power of the novels, Randianism provided the eager acolyte with an integrated philosophical system, a system grounded on Aristotelian epistemology, and blending it with Nietzschean egoism and hero worship, rationalist psychology, laissez-faire economics, and a natural-rights political philosophy, a political philosophy grounded on the libertarian axiom of never aggressing upon the person or property of another.

Even at its peak, however, the effectiveness of the Randian movement was severely limited by two important factors:

1. One was its extreme and fanatical sectarianism; Randians refused to have anything to do with any person or group, no matter how close in outlook, who deviated by so much as an iota from the entire Randian canon — a canon, by the way, that has a rigid “line” on every conceivable question, from aesthetics to tactics. (An odd exception to this sectarianism, by the way, is the Republican Party and the Nixon administration, which includes several highly placed Randians as advisors.) Particularly hated by the Randians is any former colleague who has deviated from the total line; these people are reviled and personally blacklisted by the faithful. Indeed, Rand’s monthly magazine, *The Objectivist*, is probably the only magazine in the world that consistently cancels the subscription of anyone on their personal blacklist, including any subscribers who send in what they consider to be unworshipful questions.
2. The second, associated factor is the totalitarian atmosphere, the cultic atmosphere, of the Randian movement. While the official Randian creed stresses the importance of individuality,

self-reliance, and independent judgment, the unofficial but crucial axiom for the faithful is that “Ayn Rand is the greatest person who has ever lived” and, as a practical corollary, that “everything Ayn Rand says is right.” With this sort of ruling mentality, it is no wonder that the turnover in the Randian movement has been exceptionally high: attracted by the credo of individualism, an enormous number of young people were either purged or drifted away in disgust.

The collapse of the Randian movement as an organized force came in the summer of 1968, when an unbelievable bombshell struck the movement: an irrevocable split between Rand and her appointed heir, Nathaniel Branden.

Since then, the Randian movement has happily become polycentric; and Branden repaired to California to set up his own schismatic movement there. But the latter is still a movement confined to psychological theories and publications, and to book reviews in the occasionally appearing *Academic Associates News*. As an organized movement, Randianism, whatever variant, is a mere shadow of its former self.

But the Randian creed still remains as a vital influence on the thinking of libertarians, so many of whom were former adherents to the cult. Politically, Rand is to the left of the laissez-fairists in rejecting taxation as robbery, and therefore illegitimate. Rand saw through the illogicality, the inconsistency, of the laissez-faire view of taxation.

Randian political theory wishes to preserve the existing unitary state, with its monopoly over coercion and ultimate decision-making; it wishes to define its “government” as a utopian institution which retains its State monopoly but gains its revenue only by voluntary contributions from its citizens. Still worse, while Randians agree that taxation is robbery, they stubbornly refuse to regard the government — even the existing government, which lives off taxation — as a band of robbers. Hence, Rand illogically infuses into the political outlook of herself and her charges an emotional devotion to the existing American government and to the American Constitution that totally negates her own libertarian axioms.

While Rand opposes the war in Vietnam, for example, she does so on purely tactical reasons as a mistake not in our “national interest”; as a result, she is far more passionate in her hostility to the unpatriotic protestors against the war than she is against the war itself. She advocated the firing of Eugene Genovese from Rutgers, on the surprisingly anti-individualist grounds that “no man may support the victory of the enemies of his country.” And even though Rand passionately opposes the draft as slavery, she also believes, with Read and the laissez-fairists, that it is illegitimate to disobey the laws of the American State, no matter how unjust — so long as her freedom to protest the laws remains.

Finally, Ayn Rand is a conventional right-winger, as well, in her attitude toward the “international Communist conspiracy.” While Randians are not exactly champions of war, they are prevented by their simplistic diabolism from absorbing the revisionist view of American foreign policy — from realizing that the Cold War and American interventions overseas have been caused by the expanding aggressions of American imperialism rather than by a noble response to “communist expansionism” by the “freest nation on earth.” Randians persist in the right-wing myth that the antipode of individualism is communism, whereas the real antipode to liberty in America today is far different: the existing corporate-monopoly, welfare-warfare state.

Many neo-Randians, devoted as they are to logical analysis, have seen the logical clinker in Randian political theory; that if no man may aggress upon another, then neither may an outfit calling itself “government” presume to exert a coercive monopoly on force and on the making of ultimate judicial decision. Hence, they saw that no government may be coercively preserved, and they therefore took the next crucial step; while retaining devotion to the free market and private property, this legion of youthful neo-Randians have concluded that all services, including police and courts, must become freely marketable. It is morally illegitimate to set up a coercive monopoly of such functions, and then revere it as “government.” Hence, they have become “free-market

anarchists,” or “anarchocapitalists,” people who believe that defense, like any other service, should only be provided on the free market and not through monopoly or tax coercion.

Anarchocapitalism is a creed new to the present age. Its closest historical links are with the “individualist anarchism” of Benjamin R. Tucker and Lysander Spooner of the late 19th century, and it shares with Tucker and Spooner a devotion to private property, individualism, and competition. Furthermore, and in contrast to Read and Rand, it shares with Spooner and Tucker their hostility to government officials as a criminal band of robbers and murderers. It is therefore no longer “patriotic.” It differs from the older anarchist in not believing that profits and interest would disappear in a fully free market, in holding the landlord-tenant relationship to be legitimate, and in holding that men can arrive through reason at objective law which does not have to be at the mercy of *ad hoc* juries. Lysander Spooner’s brilliantly hard-hitting *No Treason*, one of the masterpieces of antistatism and reprinted by an anarchocapitalist press, has had considerable influence in converting present-day youth to libertarianism.

It is safe to say that the great bulk of right-libertarians are anarchocapitalists, particularly among the youth. Anarchocapitalism, however, also contains within it a large spectrum of differing ideas and attitudes. For one thing, while they have all discarded any traits of devotion to the State and have become anarchists, many of them have retained the simplistic anticommunism, devotion to big business, and even American patriotism of their former creeds.

What we may call “anarchopatriots,” for example, take this sort of line: “Yes, anarchy is the ideal solution. But, in the meanwhile, the American government is the freest on earth,” etc. Much of this sort of attitude permeated the Libertarian Caucus of the Young Americans for Freedom, which split off or were expelled from YAF at the embroiled YAF convention at St. Louis in August, 1969. This split — based on their libertarianism and their refusal to be devoted to such unjust laws as the draft — led to the splitting off from YAF of almost the entire California, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and New Jersey sections of that leading conservative youth organization. These groups then formed “Libertarian Alliances” in the various states.

A group of older anarchocapitalists centered in New York founded the *Libertarian Forum* as a semimonthly, in early 1969, and formed the Radical Libertarian Alliance (RLA), which had a considerable impact in fueling and sparking the 1969 YAF split in St. Louis. Its ideas were propagated among the youth with particular effect by Roy A. Childs, Jr.

Childs had particular effect in converting Jarret Wollstein from Randianism to anarchocapitalism and then to a realistic view of the American State. Wollstein, an energetic young Marylander, had been ejected from the Randian movement, and had formed his own Society for Rational Individualism, publishing the monthly *National Individualist*. Finally, at the end of 1969, Wollstein’s SRI merged with the bulk of the old Libertarian Alliance members of YAF to form the Society of Individual Liberty, which has become by far the leading organization of libertarians in this country. SIL has thousands of members, and numerous campus chapters throughout the country, and is loosely affiliated with the California Libertarian Alliance, consisting largely of the ex-YAFers and which itself has over a thousand members within the state.

Meanwhile, as the SIL and the old Libertarian Alliance have flourished by moving from right to center within the spectrum, the New York-centered Radical Libertarian Alliance has fallen upon evil days. Murray Rothbard and Leonard Liggio had founded the journal *Left and Right* in early 1965 as a means of splitting finally from a conservative movement with which they had been allied but which had become a crusade against communism and a celebrant of the American consensus. In contrast, they saw in the New Left of those days many of the libertarian elements which they had, in earlier days, found on the Right: opposition to centralized bureaucracy and statism, hostility to the public-school system, opposition to conscription, and a renaissance of the old “isolationist” hostility to war and American imperialism. Hence, they called upon the libertarians to find their allies on the New Left rather than on the Right.

Leonard Liggio has been particularly energetic in working with the Left, having lectured on “American Imperialism” at the original Free University of New York, edited the

magazine *Leviathan*, and having been associated with the American branch of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation and its War Crimes Tribunal on Vietnam.

Under the inspiration of this search for the New Left, Becky Glaser led the transformation of the YAF chapter at the University of Kansas into an SDS chapter, and such youth leaders as Alan Milchman, then head of YAF at Brooklyn College, and Wilson Clark, Jr., head of the Conservative Club at the University of North Carolina, abandoned these organizations to plunge into radical-left activity.

Rapid growth in the New York movement in 1968–69 led Rothbard and his associates to found the *Libertarian Forum*, as well as an ever-growing series of dinners, culminating in a conference attracting several hundred libertarians from the East Coast and Midwest, held in New York City on Columbus Day, 1969. Increasingly, however, a split grew within the Radical Libertarian Alliance, which had branches in Washington, DC, Connecticut, and Boston.

The factional differences centered on the problems of revolution, relations with the Left, and communalism vs. individualism. For as the RLA youth took the concept of alliance with the New Left to heart, they increasingly and to varying degrees became “leftists,” thus setting up an extreme-left tendency within the anarchocapitalist movement. Leading this tendency was former Goldwater speechwriter Karl Hess, who had been one of the most spectacular converts to right-libertarianism during 1968. Going through a Randian phase — reflected in his famous *Playboy* article “Death of Politics” in mid-1969 — Hess had passed through the center and on to lead the extreme left by mid-1969.

Responsive to the call for alliance with the New Left, the Left tendency began to oppose any criticisms of their newfound allies, leading to an uncritical adulation of the Black Panthers and other groups on the Left, including the anarchocommunists headed by Murray Bookchin. As in the history of many ideological movements, tactics began to merge into principle, so that many of the extreme left began to become anarchosyndicalists or anarchocommunists, or, failing that, to see little or no difference between the various branches of anarchism.

On revolution, in contrast to the Right, which opposes revolution on principle, and the Center, which holds revolution to be morally defensible as armed self-defense against State aggression but tactically and strategically absurd for present-day America, the RLA-Left began to favor any and all revolutionary tactics, including street fighting, “trashing,” etc. This strategy has become increasingly unviable with the general collapse of the New Left and its drift back to Stalinism.

The final split between these various factions occurred after the Columbus Day, 1969, conference held by RLA in New York City, which degenerated into a screaming match between Left, Center, and Right factions, and featured a Left exodus from the Conference to join a march on Fort Dix. Shortly afterward, the over-30 group severed all connections with RLA, and soon New York saw two separate right-libertarian organizations, each wary if not hostile to the other: RLA; and the New York Libertarian Alliance, which was headed by Long Island lawyer Gary Greenberg, and which became affiliated with SIL. Since then, RLA has fragmented into various splintered affinity groupings, the only viable remnants being Ralph Fucetola’s New Jersey Libertarian Alliance, which publishes *The Abolitionist*, and a group led by Charles Hamilton, which publishes the newly established quarterly *Libertarian Analysis*.

In many ways, California, with the largest right-libertarian population, differs from the movement in the rest of the country. The movement there is led by the California Libertarian Alliance (CLA), of over a thousand members. Led by youthful former YAFers, the CLA is rightist and neo-Randian in tendency, although over the last year and a half it too has moved leftward and abandoned many of its Randian tenets.

CLA has held several highly successful conferences based on the idea of a Left-Right libertarian dialogue. The last conference, held on the campus of the University of Southern California last November and attracting over 700 attendees, featured Paul Goodman as well as more orthodox right-libertarian speakers. It also featured the libertarian psychoanalyst Dr. Thomas Szasz, who, influenced by such laissez-faire libertarians as Ludwig von Mises and F.A. Hayek, has also become

a favorite of the New Left for his crusade against the coercion involved in the “mental-health” program.

At the center of the flourishing movement in southern California is Robert LeFevre, head of the anarchopacifist tendency within the movement. LeFevre had founded and run for many years the Freedom School near Colorado Springs, a school that ran two-week summer seminars and was very successful in converting students and members of the public throughout the country. After transforming the school into Rampart College, LeFevre moved the operation to the Los Angeles area, where it has formed the nucleus for the libertarian movement there.

LeFevre believes in absolute pacifism, holding it immoral not only to aggress against the person or property of anyone else but also to defend that person or property by means of violence. Since he opposes all use of violence anywhere, he is far more consistent than socialist-pacifists in his opposition to force, and ranks as a kind of right-wing Tolstoyan. He himself rejects the label “anarchist” and prefers to call his pacifist libertarianism “autarchism.”

Another split within the libertarian movement centers on “youth culture”: drugs, rock, dress, etc. Almost exclusively, the split is generational, with the over-30s (with the exception of Hess) lined up against the youth culture, and the under-30s (with the exception of dyed-in-the wool Randians) strongly in favor. However, the California youth lead their generation in pushing youth culture as a supposedly mandatory part of the libertarian struggle; a similar but less important split centers on “Women’s Liberation” and “Gay Liberation,” both of which are pushed strongly by the CLA youth. California is also the home of such bizarre variants as “retreatism” — the dream of small groups for eluding the State by buying (or even making!) their own island, or even moving into caves underground.

Necessarily little known in the rest of the country, but probably with relatively the greatest influence within its own, is the right-libertarian movement in Hawaii. Led by Bill Danks, a graduate student in American history at the University of Hawaii, the movement there managed to gain control of a major radio station, KTRG. For two years, KTRG beamed libertarian programs at their many thousands of listeners for many hours each night.

However, the FCC, in a flagrant-though-unknown example of political repression, has cracked down and taken away the license of the station, and Danks as well as the heads of KTRG have been indicted for violation of the 1970 census! These are the only indictments so far for the high crime of refusing to answer questions on the census. Danks, affiliated with SIL, was head of SIL’s Census Resistance ‘70 in the state of Hawaii.

Another emerging activity in the movement is the National Taxpayers’ Union, headquartered in Washington, DC. Headed by James Davidson, publisher of SIL’s *The Individualist*, and Wainwright Dawson, Jr., a former conservative who has merged his United Republicans of America into the NTU, the organization includes among its officers and advisors Murray Rothbard, A. Ernest Fitzgerald, and the distinguished socialist-anarchist Noam Chomsky.

As “left” and “right” categories dissolve and become increasingly meaningless on the American ideological scene, as young people, with the collapse of both the SDS-Left and the liberal “consensus,” grope toward a new philosophy and a new orientation, the emerging phenomenon of right-libertarianism may be destined for an important role in American life. If that happens, left-pacifists should not be very distressed, for this would mean an important thrust toward the dismantling of the war machine, the imperial expansion, and the domestic Leviathan of the giant American State.