



SHOULD THE LIBERTARIAN PARTY DISBAND?

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Edward Ring [opens up his call](#) for the abandonment of the Libertarian Party with this powerful criticism: "Siphoning off voters from the side that's fighting the hardest to preserve individual liberty and economic freedom is not principled. It is nihilism."

He follows this up with the second of his strong one-two punches:

"If you want to find a Libertarian Party organization that has achieved relevance, look no further than Georgia. That's where Shane Hazel, running for the U.S. Senate as a Libertarian, garnered 2.3 percent of the vote in November. Hazel's showing may have been insignificant, but the Republican candidate, David Perdue, only needed 0.3 percent more votes to have avoided a runoff, where he lost... All that Perdue needed was for one in seven of Hazel's voters to choose him instead, and the GOP would still control the U.S. Senate..."

So, is it true? Would the cause of liberty be helped by the termination of the LP?

I think not. (Full disclosure: I have been a member of this party ever since 1969 when I ran for New York State Assembly, two years before the creation of the national party in 1971).

First of all, it is not that clear, as this author contends, that the Republicans are all that closer to libertarian principles than are the Democrats. Yes, indeed, they are, on economic issues. The Elephant clearly beats out the Donkey in terms of lower taxes, regulations, private property rights. This despite the fact that socialist Romney care started in Massachusetts. Neither party favors ending the fed or a unilateral declaration of free trade with all nations. Mr. Ring charges libertarians with "Killing American Jobs: Libertarians support 'free trade' without first insisting on reciprocity." Here, he just reveals his lack of economic sophistication. I recommend that he read Adam Smith's "The Wealth of Nations," or, for a more modern analysis of tariffs, Milton Friedman's splendid work on this issue.

Free trade is necessarily beneficial to all participants at least in the ex ante sense. If Jones purchases a shirt for \$10, it must be because at the outset, he values it at more than that amount, for example, \$15. So, he earns a profit. The salesman Smith valued it at less than that amount, otherwise he would have not accepted the deal. If he placed a value on that shirt of \$2, he gained to the tune of \$13. Both sides benefit. And it matters not one whit whether Jones and Smith are in the same or different countries. This

logic applies domestically as well as internationally .

But if Jones purchases a shirt from abroad, does that not mean lessened sales for the domestic supplier Smith? Yes, it does. So fewer shirts will be created locally, and more in this other country. But what will the foreign shirt manufacturer do with the money paid to him by Jones? Why, turn around and buy something else in the domestic country! If it is good economics to protect Smith, from foreign competition, then it makes sense for, say, Colorado, to protect its industry from the "incursions" of manufacturers in Texas, for instance. That's nonsense on a stick. No, one of the reasons the U.S. is so wealthy is because we have a gigantic free trade zone. No internal tariffs. These economic principles apply in all realms.

What about the minimum wage? The Democrats want to raise this to \$15 per hour. The Republican plank on this matter? To \$10 per hour. Both are horrid, albeit the former slightly more than the latter. The higher it is, the more unskilled persons it precludes from employment. The economically illiterate (and here, unfortunately, I include several Nobel Prize winners in economics) maintain that this law is like a floor under wages; the higher it is raised, the greater will be salaries. If so, why limit this to a mere \$15 per hour? Why not \$50, or \$1000, or \$1 million for that matter? In that way, we could all become rich! Why not eliminate foreign aid to poor countries, and advise them to inaugurate and then raise their minimum wage levels to the skies? No, this law, rather, is akin to a hurdle, or a high jump bar. The higher it is, the more difficult it is for unskilled workers to obtain any employment at all. Not only should it not be raised, it should be eliminated entirely. At its present national level of \$7.25, it consigns to joblessness all those with lower productivities.

But economics is only one of the three dimensions of political economy on which all philosophies must take a position.

The second one is personal liberties. And here the Democrats are much closer to the liberty position than are the Republicans. The latter are still being dragged into the 21st century in terms of legalization of marijuana; only Oregon, has made tiny steps in this regard with even harder drugs, and we all know which party is in charge there. Mr. Ring asks "Have libertarians recognized the consequences of tolerating use of these drugs?" Evidently, he does not recognize the horrendous effects of prohibition. Maybe he'd like to put alcohol on the banned list again? That substance, too, has deleterious effects. The Republicans are the paternalistic party. On the other hand, they are way better than the other organization on not defunding the police and gun control.

A similar pattern exists with sexual relations between consenting adults for pay. Legalization of prostitution is anathema to most politicians in the red states. The blue-staters are at least a bit more ambivalent on this and other such issues.

The third dimension is foreign policy. Here the libertarian view is the one articulated by Ron Paul, as also occurs in the other two cases. This former Congressman advocated a strong defense, but no "offense" at all. No more roughly 800 military bases in some 200 countries; bring the troops home, all of them. How do the Redsters and the Bluesters stack up on this non-interventionist policy? A mixed bag can be found on both sides of the aisle. There are Democratic warmongers such as Hillary Clinton, and also Republican ones such as Tom Cotton and Ted Cruz. There are also Democratic office holders such as Bernie Sanders and Republican ones such as Rand Paul [who are much closer to the libertarian position](#). Indeed, the two of them have cooperated with one another on such issues. Tulsi Gabbard is another Democratic Ron Paulian on foreign policy. Both parties were roughly equally responsible for the anti-libertarian wars in Afghanistan and Viet Nam. Call this is tie as far as the libertarian sweepstakes are concerned.

So, what is the final score? If this were a chess match, I would rule one win for the Democrats, one of the Republicans, and a drawn game. That is, 1.5 points for each. Nothing much to choose here for the libertarian.

There is one point Mr. Ring overlooks that might incline libertarians in the direction of the GOP: the Federalist society. This is an organization in which conservatives do not merely tolerate libertarians but actively cooperate with them, work with them, befriend them. (This is in sharp contrast to the Young Americans for Freedom in which libertarians were roundly condemned as "lazy fairies," a takeoff on the phrase "laissez faire capitalism" favored by the freedom philosophy.)

If Mr. Ring is serious about obviating future experiences such as provided by Shane Hazel, libertarian hero, he would urge Republicans to offer Libertarians an olive branch instead of the usual smack upside the head. Instead of making it difficult for the party of liberty to get on the ballot through endless lawsuits, for example, make a deal with the Party of Principle. Allowing them to run for some minor offices without Republican opposition, or, even, dare I say this, support. In return, the LP might agree not to run candidates in races expected to be very close. I cannot of course speak for the Porcupine Party (its nickname in New York State), but I don't see offers of this sort even being contemplated. Nor is there a lack of precedent for this sort of thing. In New York state the Republican Party cooperated

with the Conservative party along similar lines.

No, it is not "nihilism" to insist that the message of liberty be brought to the American electorate. Neither major party fills that role.

Addendum: Mr. Ring is mistaken in taking the platform of the Georgia state libertarian party as descriptive of all libertarians. Immigration, for example, is a hotly debated issue amongst its members.

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The [featured image](#) shows, "La liberté (Freedom)," by Jeanne-Louise (Nanine) Vallain; painted ca. 1793-1794.

