

Party Dialogue

From: Neither Bullets nor Ballots

By: George H. Smith

Libertarian Party Advocate (LPer): Considering the success that the Libertarian Party has enjoyed in recent years, especially in bringing libertarian ideas to the attention of the general public, I am curious why you refuse to support the LP - in fact, you criticize it openly.

Anti-Political Libertarian (APL): you raise two issues that need to be untangled. First, I criticize the political side of the LP, i.e., its effort to place libertarians in political office. I don't object to its educational endeavors, as I don't object to any organization that seeks to roll back the State.

Secondly, it is true that the LP gains publicity, but we must ask whether this is the kind of publicity that furthers libertarian goals. Publicity that links libertarianism to a political party - when the essence of libertarianism is anti-political - is counterproductive.

LPer: But the public understands that the LP is a party with a difference; it is devoted to liberty. That is the important thing.

APL: You beg the question. Can a political party be dedicated to uncompromised liberty? I answer, "No," and this is why I reject the L.P.

LPer: I disagree. There is no reason why libertarian legislators could not dedicate themselves to the repeal of unjust laws. We must remember that the ultimate goal of the LP is a free society.

APL: Let's separate campaign rhetoric from reality. It's easy to say that the goal of the LP is a free society. What political party in its right mind would come out against a "free" society? The important point is: What makes the LP a political party? What is its essential characteristic? In other words, what does the LP have in common with other political parties that it does not share with nonpolitical organizations? The answer is simple: the LP seeks political power. The immediate goal of the LP, qua political party, is (and must be) to wrest control of the State apparatus from its competitors, the Democrats and Republicans. The LP bids in the political auction, using the currency of votes in an attempt to buy control of the State machinery.

LPer: You're really off-base. The LP does not seek power. On the contrary, it wants to reduce power by dismantling the State. Getting elected to political office is simply a means to this noble end.

APL: Let's be clear about this. There is a difference between having power and exercising it. Those who control the State have immense power, whether or not they exercise it in particular instances. Political power - the capacity and legal sanction to aggress against others - is integral to political office. A State official, libertarian or not, has considerable power over defenseless citizens. It is disingenuous to claim that one aspires to political office but does not seek power. Power is a defining characteristic of political office.

LPer: But this is mere semantics! A libertarian politician might have "power" in a legal sense, but he would not use that power unjustly. His power would be used to combat other politicians and to repeal invasive laws.

APL: You have just conceded my point. Legal power, which you dismiss so lightly, is what makes a politician a politician. A politician can get together with his neighbors (other politicians) and vote to rob people, and he can bring the force of law to back up this vote. But if I and my neighbors vote to rob someone, we cannot do it with the sanction of law. The politician has this political power, whereas the private citizen does not. This characteristic of political office must never be forgotten.

You admit that even the libertarian politician will have this power after he is elected, but you stipulate that it will be used for beneficent purposes. You prefer to emphasize the (presumed) motives of libertarian politicians - their honorable intentions; whereas I prefer to stress the reality of what political office entails. I don't want anyone to have political power, regardless of his supposed good intentions. I object to the political office itself and to its legitimized power. Frankly, I don't give a whit about the psychological state of the politician.

LPer: You seem to be saying that you don't trust the libertarian politician to keep his word. Well, we live in an imperfect world with no absolute guarantees. We hope that libertarian politicians will not compromise. If they do, we shall be the first to denounce them.

APL: The issue of trust is quite secondary. Whether I trust this or that politician is not the point, although it does raise an interesting problem. Should the wise maxim often quoted by libertarians, "Power corrupts," now be amended to read, "Power corrupts - unless you are a libertarian?" It is not clear to me why libertarians are any less susceptible to the temptations of power than the ordinary mortal.

But, as I said, this is not fundamental. I may trust a particular libertarian politician, but I still don't want him to have political power over me. Libertarians stress that liberty is a natural right. If a legal/political system violates this right as a matter of policy, then the system is unjust to some degree. Libertarians should oppose this injustice in principle. We should seek to abolish the mechanism whereby one individual, in virtue of political office, can employ legitimized aggression against other individuals.

"Elect me to office," proclaims the libertarian politician, "give me enormous power over you and your property, but rest assured that I shall abstain from using this power unjustly." I reply: You have no right to such power in the first place - and as a libertarian you should know this. You should be denouncing the very office to which you aspire. You say your campaign literature is honest and forthright, Mr. would-be-Senator; but search as I may I cannot find the statement, "The office of Senator, as we know it, should be abolished." This lacuna is understandable, however, in view of the embarrassment that the statement would cause you. For then even a child might be prompted to ask: "But Mr. would-be-Senator, if the institution of senator is wrong in itself (because of its built-in political power), then how can you, in good conscience, ask us to make you a Senator?"

LPer: You bog down in technicalities. This business about the incompatibility of libertarianism and political office is just so much theoretical fluff. Let's get down to the real world. I still don't see why a libertarian Senator could not consistently and conscientiously work for the elimination of unjust laws.

APL: If you don't see it, it is because (to paraphrase Plato) you have eyes but no intelligence. You don't see the answer because you don't ask the right question. We don't start with the concept of a "Libertarian Senator" and then inquire whether this person can be trusted. The basic difficulty is with the concept of a "Libertarian Senator" to begin with.

"Libertarian" and "Senator" (for Senator, read: "any political office") are like a square and a circle. One cannot be both at the same time and in the same respect. The "technicality" to which you object is the law of noncontradiction.

What does it mean, in this society, to be a Senator? Among other things, it signifies the legal privilege; to formulate and enact laws without any necessary regard for the justice of those laws, and it permits one to dispense massive amounts of stolen money. Such powers, inherent in the office of Senator, are incompatible with libertarian principles. Libertarians should oppose not just this or that Senator, but the office of "Senator" itself.

LPer: But couldn't a libertarian accept a political office while being fully aware that the legal power inherent in that office is illegitimate? He need not exercise the options legally available to him, after all. As a libertarian, he would know that he has no right to act unjustly, regardless of his political situation.

APL: You confuse the subjective with the objective. A person can believe just about anything. A libertarian Senator may believe that he is faking it, that he doesn't really take the authority of his office seriously. He may convince himself that, although an agent and employee of the State, he is really and truly anti-state. It is similarly possible, I suppose, for an army general to convince himself that he is anti-military despite his occupation. Whether this kind of subversion from within is good strategy is a topic for another conversation. But the facts remain. The office of Senator is defined independently of the desires of individual Senators. The powers of political office do not depend upon the secret desires of the LP politician, nor do they change because the politician keeps his fingers crossed while taking the oath of office.

One cannot deny the legitimacy of the Senatorial office, as libertarians must logically do, and simultaneously advocate someone for that position. One should not accept the designation of "Senator," knowing full-well what this implies, while mouthing libertarian principles.

Consider an extreme case. If we lived under a dictatorship, would the LP advocate that a libertarian take over the office of dictator, or would it fight for the abolition of dictatorship itself?

LPer: Abolition must certainly be the goal of any libertarian. This doesn't mean, however, that abolition could not be achieved through the former method. It would be preferable to have a libertarian "dictator" who refuses to exercise the powers of his office, rather than an authentic dictator. Don't you agree?

APL: If we must have a dictator, then I prefer to have the most benign one possible. But a benign dictator is still a dictator; and if there were a group of self-professed "libertarians" who were expending their time, energy, and resources in an effort to put their version of a benign dictator in power to replace the current one, then I would have grave doubts about their libertarian credentials. And I would view their candidate for dictator as a threat, even if one less serious than the present dictator.

LPer: So you would support the libertarian "dictator."

APL: No. I would not support any dictator. I might prefer your dictator to the current one, but I wouldn't support either of them. If I am given a choice between Mr. Jones, who plans to cut off my head, and Mr. White, who plans to cut off my hands, then I may prefer Mr. White to Mr. Jones, since I would rather lose my hands than my head. But I certainly wouldn't support or condone either Mr. Jones or Mr. White. Both are my enemies, even if one is relatively less harmful than the other.

We must not forget the central point. Your dictator might be preferable to another dictator. There are obvious differences in degree. But we are concerned not only with the relative demerits of dictators, but with the possibility that one can be a dictator and a libertarian at the same time. Can libertarians actively support and promote a benign dictator, just because he might be the best dictator available? This is a peculiar situation indeed, and it would force libertarians to support the lesser of two evils.

In short, I would not call your candidate for dictator a libertarian, because the two are incompatible. I might call him a well-intentioned dictator, but he is no libertarian. And I would oppose him, because my principles leave me no option. There is no proviso in my stand against dictators that exempts those with good intentions.

Similarly, your Libertarian Senator may do less harm (and even some positive good) when compared to Democrats and Republicans. He may reduce taxes, for example, or help avoid war. But fewer taxes and peace are not distinctively libertarian positions; some conservatives and liberals advocate the same things. What distinguishes libertarianism is the basis for its opposition to taxes and war (the rights of the individual) and the logical extreme to which it carries its opposition. Most importantly, there is the libertarian analysis of the State as a ruling elite - the fundamental cause of taxes and war. The oppressive nature of the State is at the core of libertarian theory, and it requires libertarians to take a principled stand against the State per se. Now the State is an institution with different levels of authority, and it is this authority - legitimized aggression, as I described earlier - which libertarians must oppose.

You see, therefore, that libertarians must stand firm against all Senators, all Presidents, and so forth, because these offices and the legal power they embody are indispensable features of the State apparatus. After all, what can it possibly mean to oppose the State unless one opposes particular offices and institutions in which State power manifests itself? Do we dislike President Carter because he has the wrong ideas? No. We dislike him because he is dangerous, and he is dangerous because he is President. Millions of individuals may have even worse ideas than Carter, but we don't single them out for disdain unless they are in a position to enforce their

views. The danger lies not in Carter but in the Presidency. Carter derives his power from the office and its legal sanction. The political office itself is the fundamental danger, and that is what we must strive to eliminate. Certainly Carter is a dangerous man, but anyone who is President is dangerous as well. The Presidency embodies political power on an enormous scale, and any person occupying that office, "libertarian" or not, must be opposed by right-thinking libertarians.

LPer: Well, your ultimate goals are commendable, but you live in a fantasy world. You don't really believe that political offices are just going to fade away, do you?

APL: No, but neither do I believe that a group of libertarians are going to take over the government, establish themselves in power, and then attempt to abolish the instrument of their power and livelihood, the State. Now there is a real fantasy.

LPer: So what do you suggest instead? It's one thing to criticize, but it's more difficult to map an alternate strategy.

APL: First of all, let's get something straight. This is not - I repeat, not - an issue of strategy. You LPer's seem to have difficulty in understanding this, so I have to place special emphasis on it. I am not accusing the LP of faulty strategy here (although this is a lively topic for another discussion). This is not simply a matter of how to get from here to there.

LPer: But we both agree on the desirability of a free society. It seems to me that we just disagree on how best to achieve it.

APL: Yes, we are in basic agreement concerning the goal to be achieved. But I am not merely asserting that the political method is inefficient in pursuit of this goal. Rather, I am arguing that the political means is inconsistent with libertarian principles, that it flies in the face of basic libertarian ideals. Consider an analogy. I state that a basic goal in my life is to acquire a good deal of money. You concede that this goal is, in itself, unobjectionable. Then I proceed to rob a bank. You are horrified and demand to know how I could do such a thing. I reply that we have a strategic difference of opinion. We both agree that my goal is laudable; we simply disagree concerning the means by which to attain it. We disagree on how to get from here to there. So I demand from you an alternative strategy for me to get rich. Sure, I say, my plan may not be perfect, but what can you purists offer in its place? Give me an alternate strategy, I demand, before taking pot shots at mine.

How would you reply to this? I suspect that you would accuse me of shifting ground. You would point out that the objection to robbing banks is not a simple issue of strategy, but involves profound moral questions. And you would say that your protest against my action was moral, rather than strategic, in nature. Therefore, unless I can surmount the moral objections to robbing banks, the strategy question is irrelevant. I cannot squirm past the moral issues, the matters of principle, in the guise of demanding alternate strategies.

Now, returning to the subject of political action, I respond to your question the same way. Fine, let's get together and talk over the issue of strategy some-day - we can talk about education, moral suasion, counter-economics, alternative institutions, civil disobedience, or what have you - but that's not the issue here. I submit that there is a profoundly anti-libertarian aspect of political

action - i.e., of attempting to elect libertarians to public office - and this is the issue to which political libertarians must first address themselves. Show me that political action is consistent with libertarian principles, and then we can take up the issue of strategy.

LPer: But you must address yourself to the issue of strategy at some point. You wish to disqualify the political means altogether, which seems to leave you precious little by which you can work for a free society. If your principles condemn you to inaction and certain defeat, then surely there must be something wrong with your principles.

APL: This is quite curious. You equate activism with political action. Doing something, for you means, doing something political. You regard an anti-political libertarian as a non-activist, and this is surely one of the most pernicious myths circulating in the LP today. Often, when LP members learn that I am not a member of "The Party," I am greeted with the cute remark: "Oh, you're a libertarian with a small 'I'." To this I frankly feel like replying, "Yes, and you're an Idiot with a big 'I'."

LPer: O.K., so you don't advocate inaction or passivity. Then what kind of activity, in your view, should libertarians engage in?

APL: I will state what I regard as the major challenge confronting libertarians today, and from this you could justify any number of different strategies. Here is the basic issue.

The fight against the State is not merely a fight against naked power - the battle would be much easier if that were so. The essence of the State is not aggression per se, but legitimized aggression. The State uses the sanction of law to legitimize its criminal acts. This is what distinguishes it from the average criminal in the street.

Unfortunately, the reality of the State - what it is in fact - is not how it is perceived by most Americans. To put it bluntly, the vast majority of Americans disagree with the libertarian view of the State. We may get some agreement on particular points, but the vision of the State as, in essence, a criminal gang, is far more radical than most Americans are willing to accept.

This defines our ultimate educational goal. We must strip the State of its legitimacy in the public eye. We must persuade people to apply the same moral standards to the State as they apply to anyone else. We need not convince people that theft is wrong; we need to convince them that theft, when committed by the State in the name of taxation, does not differ from theft when committed by an individual. We need not persuade people that murder is wrong; we need to persuade them that murder, when committed by the State in the name of war or national defense, does not differ from murder when committed by an individual.

As I said before, political power represents legitimized aggression. Libertarians may not be able to stop all aggression - this would indeed be an unrealistic goal - but they can go far in stripping political aggression of its moral sanctity. This requires all the tools of persuasion that we can muster, and it also underscores the illegitimacy of political action. To run for or support candidates for political office is to grant legitimacy to the very thing we are attempting to strip of legitimacy. One cannot consistently denounce the State as a band of criminals while attempting to swell the ranks of this criminal class with one's own cronies. The hypocrisy is there for all to

see. So either you have to reject political action, or you have to waterdown or abandon your basic principles in order to conceal the glaring inconsistency. Some people call this latter alternative, being practical. I call it being dishonest and hypocritical.

LPer: So you don't think libertarians should run for political office. Does this mean that libertarians shouldn't vote either?

APL: Definitely, but there is more involved than simply not voting. Libertarians should oppose the vote in principle - they should oppose the mechanism by which political sanctification occurs. Political power is legitimized through the electoral process. The present voting system is based on the premise that fundamental rights can be gained or surrendered depending on the vote total. Libertarians must oppose this unconscionable process. We must oppose the political process itself - the mechanism whereby some persons gain unjust (but legitimized) power over others.

The vote sanctifies injustice. If the libertarian message is to be truly radical - if libertarians are to lead the fight, not only against this or that injustice, but against the political system that perpetuates and legitimizes injustice - then we must condemn voting altogether. A libertarian cannot use the vote for his own end, as if the vote were morally neutral. The vote is the method by which the State maintains its illusion of legitimacy. There is no way a libertarian organization can assail the legitimacy of the State while soliciting votes.

LPer: You make it sound as if pulling a lever in the election booth is an aggressive act. But it's not, and there's no way you can equate the two, particularly if one votes for a libertarian.

APL: Voting is not an aggressive act in the narrow sense. But politicians don't aggress in this sense either. A President or Senator doesn't personally go out and arrest or strong-arm people who disobey their decrees. It's possible that President Carter has never personally committed an aggressive act in his life. President Johnson didn't personally travel to Vietnam to murder Vietnamese. Does this mean that libertarians cannot regard these politicians as violators of human rights? Of course not. We are dealing with a chain of command where the upper echelon does not have to implement its own dirty work. Referring to my earlier point, however, President Johnson did not have the moral right to order the murder of innocent Vietnamese; and no politician has the moral right to order the violation of rights, however small.

Now let's apply this idea to the voting booth. To be elected to public office is to gain the legal sanction to aggress. This is a fact, whether we like it or not, and whether a given politician uses his power or not. But there is no corresponding moral right. The political right to aggress is a legal fiction without foundation in moral law.

I maintain, therefore, that no person has the moral right to vote. To vote a person into office is to give that person unjust authority over others. To vote for a presidential candidate is to grant to that person the legal sanction for injustice. Let us suppose that an LPer votes for Ed Clark for President. If Ed Clark were elected, he would, in his capacity as President, have the legal right of aggression. For instance, he could order the incarceration of political dissidents during a "national emergency." But there is no such moral right as this. It is the usurpation of rights. And

just as Ed Clark does not have the moral right to this kind of power, so no one has the right to grant him that power, or to legitimize that power. When an LPer enters the voting booth, he is attempting to place in office a person who will have unjust authority over me. But, claims the LPer, his candidate will not use that power. I reply that this, even if true, is immaterial. The legitimized power embodied in the political office is not his to give in the first place. The LPer does not have the right to aggress against me, and it is sheer presumption to assume that he has the right to grant this privilege to his political favorite. How the libertarian, of all people, can calmly grant his political candidate the legal right to aggress without the slightest qualms - when all libertarians know that one cannot transfer rights that one does not have in the first place - escapes my understanding.

LPer: Again, I sympathize with your point of view, but I must bring you back to the real world. In an ideal libertarian society there would not exist voting as we know it - agreed. But in this world, voting is the method by which political change is effected, for better or worse. Today libertarians should vote as a matter of self-defense. The government aggresses against us and will continue to aggress unless we fight back, using its own weapons, if need be. Surely you wouldn't deny to libertarians the right to vote in self-defense, as a means of fighting against the encroachment of state power. One can use the vote in this way without lending it moral sanction.

APL: Again I am accused of not living in the real world. May I suggest that this jab applies more to you than to me. I have argued that we should take a good, hard look at the world of politics. What is the State? What is the nature of political office? You reply that this is immaterial? Why? Because libertarian candidates are brimming over with good intentions. They will sneak up on the State and turn this engine of monstrous power against itself. They will win the voting game, and all the bad politicians will gracefully concede defeat, pick up their marbles, and go home in pursuit of honest work.

Next I argued that voting entails empowering someone to act as your agent, and that you cannot morally grant to your agent rights which you do not properly possess. Moreover, I pointed out that the vote is the basis of political legitimacy in America today. It is the taproot of political authority in the minds of most Americans. Now this is a hard fact, whether we like it or not. You reply that this doesn't matter, that libertarians can overlook these inconvenient details. Other people, you argue, may think that we approve of voting and the political process because we run candidates for office, just like every political party, and because we encourage people to vote, just like every political party. Those poor silly people. They obviously don't realize that, despite appearances, we are really against voting and political power. Deep down inside we really oppose these things. It's just that we have to defend ourselves.

To your plea of self-defense, I reply: Fine, defend yourself, but leave me alone. But voting is wrong precisely because it does not leave me alone. If you elect your candidate to office in the name of self-defense, his power will not be restricted to you and to those who voted for him. He will have power over me and others like me as well.

When you enter the voting booth, you are committing an act of enormous presumption. You presume that you have the right to appoint a political guardian over me - a benevolent one, you

claim, but a guardian nonetheless. Now as one libertarian to another, I must repeat my question: Where did you get such a right? You have no special authority over me. Where, then, did you obtain the right to appoint an agent with this authority? Where do you get the nerve to advocate that Ed Clark (or anyone else) should have the power of life and death over me and millions of other Americans? You claim self-defense. I claim that your vote extends far beyond the legitimate boundaries of self-defense.

LPer: You place great stress on this notion of abstract political power, which you say is the legal right to aggress, and you claim that the vote sanctions this power, whether or not a particular politician exercises it. It is primarily on this basis that you exclude political action. It seems to me that you sacrifice a strategy with great potential in the name of this abstract notion. We confront real-life crises, questions of economic survival and even of life-and-death. If we can elect politicians who will roll back the powers of the State, and who will not use those unjust powers inherent in their offices, then I say we contribute greatly to the cause of liberty.

APL: You miss the point of much of what I said. I, as an individual, do not somehow forbid political action. I contend that libertarian principles forbid it. You find this inconvenient, and you complain. I say, if you wish to complain, then complain about the principles, not about me. Political action conflicts with libertarian opposition to legitimized aggression - political power. Consistency demands, that I reject it. I accept libertarianism, and this very acceptance compels me to reject political action.

Therefore, when I am told that political action is a good strategy to achieve libertarian goals, I can only reply: Even if that were true (which I don't accept), it would not change the rightness involved. As the poet Heine once wrote: "We do not take possession of our ideas, but are possessed by them. They master us and force us into the arena, where, like gladiators, we must fight for them." So here I am, logically mastered by the consistency of libertarianism, forced into the arena to fight against political action.

LPer: You anti-party types amaze me. Here we have thousands of dedicated libertarians working to change things in America, and you purists sit in your ivory towers carping away. Words, words, words! If libertarians listened to you purists, nobody would do anything, and government power would continue to increase. I suppose you'll still be spouting your principles when the State comes to haul you off to jail.

APL: If the State hauls me off to jail then, yes, I will still be spouting my principles, especially if it's a libertarian State that does the hauling. You accuse me of purism. I reply, "So what?" If "purism" means anything, it means the refusal to budge on matters of principle even at the expense of apparent short-term gains. What is the alternative? "Impurism?" "Corruptism?" "Selling Outism?"

And as long as we're discussing amazing things, let's go back to the issue of strategy of which you seem so fond. Hasn't it ever struck you as paradoxical how libertarians who are innovative when it comes to free-market alternatives, can be so pedestrian and orthodox in the area of political strategy. I mean, libertarians never tire of outlining plans for free-market roads, sewers, utilities, charities, schools, police forces, and even courts of law. When our critics ridicule free-

market education, for instance, we encourage them to expand their thinking and to reject the notion that just because government has provided something in the past, it must continue to provide it in the future. Fresh, imaginative thinking is the key here. But now comes the issue of political strategy, and the imaginative libertarian suddenly turns slavishly orthodox. "How can we change things," he asks, "without political action? Nobody, especially the media, will pay any attention to us. Everyone knows that you have to muster the power of votes before you can change things significantly. We must get petitions signed; we must get our people on the ballot; we must get them elected to office - this is the only effective way to implement our goals."

To this political libertarian, I say: "if you spent a fraction of the time considering alternatives to political action as you do considering alternatives to public roads, utilities, etc., something might occur to you. You spend thousands of dollars and expend thousands of hours to get petitions signed and run political campaigns. If you spent a fraction of that energy and money on nonpolitical alternatives, you might witness a degree of progress that you now consider impossible.

LPer: But you're forgetting about the government and its repressive laws. Somebody, at some time, must work to repeal those laws. Education, counter-economics, civil disobedience, alternative institutions - all those things sound good, but of what use are they unless they result in the repeal of laws and regulations that restrict our freedom? And this repeal necessarily entails political action.

APL: First, it's not true that laws have to be repealed in order to be rendered ineffective. There are thousands of laws on the books today which are virtually dead, because the public would not tolerate their enforcement.

Second, there are always plenty of political hacks around who will attempt to curry favor by doing whatever is popular with the general public. Laws will become ineffective or will be repealed when it becomes impossible to enforce them - when the public sentiment overwhelmingly opposes them.

This brings me to a fundamental difference in our view of what libertarians should strive for. You wish to work directly through the political process. I maintain that this reinforces the legitimacy of that process. You tell people, in effect, that the way to assert their natural rights is to ask the government's permission. When the government gives you permission to keep your earnings, or to teach your children, or to live a particular lifestyle, then it's O.K. to do so. It's all very proper; the game is played by the State's own rules.

I maintain on the contrary, that libertarians should breed a thorough and uncompromising disrespect for the government and its laws. We should tell people, in no uncertain terms, that decrees of the government have no moral legitimacy whatever - that they are on par with decrees of the mafia. We must work to minimize and demystify the State. Of course, there is the practical problem of avoiding penalties, and individuals may choose to obey particular laws in order to escape punishment. But a government that must rely entirely on fear cannot long survive. All governments must cloak themselves in legitimacy in order to win the passive acquiescence of their subjects. Libertarians must seek to dissolve this aura of legitimacy. We must tell people:

you have certain rights, period; and what the government does cannot change that. The government is a thug and a thief; be on your guard, watch it with caution, for it is powerful. But do not be awed by it. Do not grant it respect or moral sanction. Treat it as you would any villain.

I submit that if this disrespect could be inculcated on a wide scale, we would experience a rebirth of liberty in America. Politicians would be beside themselves if only one percent of the population showed up to vote. Politics would be a laughing stock. One law after another could be passed, and nobody would pay any attention. The government would die of neglect. This rather than political action, is the course I would recommend to libertarians. And the likelihood of its success is no less than the prospect of dismantling the government from within. Granted, it lacks the flashy trappings of political campaigns. There would be no campaigns and media hype. It would be a quiet revolution and one that is largely decentralized. It would entail dozens of different strategies. It would take a long time, and it wouldn't be glamorous. There would be few, if any, positions of power to fight for. It would require dedication and knowledge. But it could be deadly.

This strategic vision, as I have argued, is incompatible with political action. We wish people to look elsewhere than government for their freedom. We wish them to view government with contemptuous indifference. This cannot be achieved through political action.

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