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A Strategic Green-Libertarian Alliance

Kevin Carson

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I've written before about the potential for a strategic alliance between Libertarians and Greens, based on using free market principles to undermine corporate state capitalism, to stop subsidizing waste and pollution, and to empower labor: "Libertarian-Green Tax Reform Alliance?" Dan Sullivan also wrote an excellent article on the same theme: "Greens and Libertarians: The yin and yang of our political future."

In the past, I concentrated mainly on building a consensus on substantive policy issues, rather than a common political strategy. But recently I read an interesting blog post by Logan Ferree, who suggested that libertarian Democrats should take a page from the 1994 Republican playbook and craft something like the "Contract With America," designed to build a large majority that cuts across party lines.

Our conclusion is that Democrats need to work on their economic agenda. If we're thinking about ten specific legislative proposals around seven to eight should focus on economic issues...

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If you can craft a piece of legislation dealing with an issue like spending, taxes, corporate welfare, or even trade, that receives the support of BOTH liberals and libertarians you have found a clear “60% issue.” And that, my friends, is victory for the Democratic Party.

I’d like to take it a step further and see a strategic alliance of DFC Democrats, Libertarians and Greens adopting a formal statement of shared principles along the lines of the “Contract With America.” It would involve no compromise in the differing ultimate goals of these different groups, and would be a win-win proposition in the intermediate term. The basic principle of all the planks would be that all parties agree to first withdraw existing state policies that promote the polarization of wealth, the concentration of corporate power, pollution and excess consumption of resources, etc., before even considering further augmentation of the state:

1. eliminate all corporate welfare spending, and translate this and all other budget savings (e.g., a radical scaling back of the drug war) into income tax cuts on the lowest brackets; eliminate all differential corporate income tax benefits, including deductions and credits, and lower the corporate income tax rate enough to make it revenue neutral;
2. eliminate all credit union regulations more restrictive than those on ordinary commercial banks; eliminate capitalization requirements and other entry barriers for banks engaged solely in providing secured loans against property;
3. fund federal highways and airports entirely with tolls and other user-fees, with absolutely no subsidies from general revenues, and no use of eminent domain;

4. repeal Taft-Hartley, all legislation like the Railway Labor Relations Act which restrains specific categories of workers from striking, and all legal restrictions on minority unionism in workplaces without a certified union;
5. repeal all food libel laws, liberalize or eliminate restrictions on alternative medicine, and radically scale back or eliminate the so-called “intellectual property” of the agribusiness, infotainment, and drug industries; radically scale back or eliminate patents in general;
6. devolve control of federal land to states, counties and municipalities, with those governments replacing much or all taxation of income and sales with severance and resource extraction fees as a source of revenue;
7. restore the common law of liability to its full vigor, in preference to the regulatory state, as a way of forcing polluters and other corporate malefactors to internalize the costs they impose on society; make civil damages directly proportional to the harm done;
8. at the state level, drastically scale back the drug war and translate the savings into eliminating the sales tax and cutting income taxes on the lower brackets; at the state and local levels, eliminate all corporate tax incentives, public spending on industrial parks, and the like, and reduce income taxes on the lower brackets accordingly; at the local level, shift all current taxes on buildings and improvements and personal property, and all sales taxes, onto the unimproved site value of land;
9. at the local level, accept some portion of taxes in LETS notes and other alternative currencies;
10. eliminate all local zoning restrictions on mixed-use development like neighborhood grocers in subdivisions,

and walkup apartments downtown; fund all urban free-way systems with tolls; require real estate developers to pay the full cost of extending roads and utilities to new subdivisions, instead of passing on the cost to tax- and ratepayers in old neighborhoods.

In short, as Tom Knapp put it, cut taxes from the bottom up and welfare from the top down. (Note that this list consists entirely of economic and pocketbook issues; civil liberties issues like the drug war are brought in only to the extent that they affect government expenditures or revenue.)

The Green and Libertarian parties and the DFC would agree not to run a candidate in any state or local race against a candidate who had already signed onto the Contract.

The main sacrifices, from the points of view of the respective parties to the Contract, would be from

1. a certain kind of libertarian who identifies on a visceral level with big business as the victimized party in modern society, and identifies “free market” advocacy with a zeal for defending beleaguered, pitiful corporate interests against the looming tyranny of welfare mothers; and
2. a certain kind of state socialist with an emotional affinity for state intervention in the market, and an aesthetic aversion to free markets in principle.

Both groups might well exclude themselves from any such alliance. But I suspect a majority of Libertarians and Greens, with a few likeminded candidates from the Democratic and Republican parties, and majorities or sizable minorities of the grass roots constituencies of the two major parties, would find it appealing on a very common sense level. Such a program would be immensely appealing to the libertarian, populist and decentralist values of the two major party constituencies, who

often have more in common with each other than with the corporate centrists who control their respective party establishments. Neither side has heard a sincere and genuine advocacy of those values; instead they’ve heard them used, by their respective party establishments as a smokescreen for promoting the interests either of big business or of state bureaucrats and elitist social engineers. The last thing in the world that either party establishment wants is for the GOP rank and file to find out that the real welfare parasites are in the corporate suites and that they’re terrified of the free market, or for the Democratic rank and file to learn that the “compassionate” and “progressive” state they love so much is the main bulwark of corporate power.

What’s more, the very fact of the Green and Libertarian parties officially signing onto a common policy document, perhaps along with other third parties, would in itself be a noteworthy event and focus public attention on a block of third parties as a growing alternative to establishment politics.