

The End of the Libertarian Movement

Samuel Edward Konkin III

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The end of the libertarian movement is a libertarian society. Where else does a movement move but to its goal?

It must follow, therefore, that if a libertarian society has formed, the libertarian movement has reached its end. It has.

This article is the beginning of a series the author plans to distribute to various publications—in various appropriate styles—of the libertarian movement concerning the direction of that body of people and thought for the next phase of its maturity. Underpinning the series lie the assumptions:

The new libertarian society is present; the new libertarian society must be fully self-conscious for both its full utilization and enjoyment and its self-preservation and growth, and the new libertarian society is a good goal, worthy of getting and keeping.

All these assumptions need verification; none are presently held by libertarians, with the exception of the last. However, if the first two are accepted, the third requires re-evaluation. Why? One is no longer talking about a quasi-utopian ideal “out there” which is *defined* as good, but rather a real entity which is now open to examination and observation as to whether it is indeed good.

The next article in the series will be primarily concerned with the enacting of the second assumption, the raising of the libertarian consciousness concerning their own society. It will do so by empirically demonstrating the first premise.

Subsequent elucidations and answers to challenges will complete the fulfillment of this second premise. Once the main body of libertarians accept those two premises in whole or part, the third one will become open to debate: “What hath we wrought?”

This article is a glimpse of the future of this thesis—where will it lead if and when it is verified. It is written for a select audience of avant-garde, highly “movement-conscious” libertarians who should grasp the arguments readily. Thus, when the position is presented, orderly, sequentially, and painstakingly to the general populace of libertarians, it will already be anticipated by our readers and they will be ready for its tactical deployment.

If one hears the hint of the strategic in this, one hears well.

The Growth of Libertarian Consciousness

The earliest, most primitive libertarians had an excellent consciousness. Josiah Warren attempted to create a separate anarchist community, to both show the world how well anarchy worked and to enjoy the benefits of living in the superior society. Because of the faulty economics of the early individualists, it was not sufficiently an improvement over the external society and remained unviable.

Lysander Spooner supported secession to bring about libertarian societies—the secession of black slaves from white owners, southern whites from northern whites, and western silver-coining society from eastern gold-dominant bimetallicists. Since all these moves were crushed, one will not know if viable communities could have seceded. But it is significant that Spooner himself did not secede.

Benjamin Tucker abandoned thoughts of living his egoistic anarchist values over a period of time, becoming a gadfly social critic of the external society, and finally giving up in despair and exiling himself in France. And with that act, libertarianism went into its Dark Ages.

No accident is it that Ayn Rand revived libertarian morale by creating—at least on paper—a viable libertarian community in Galt’s Gulch. Of course Mises had to work out the economics, Nock and Chodorov had to keep the anarcho-individualist insights alive (though with deep cynicism) for Rand to re-synthesize. But Rand wrote a blueprint, made sympathisers think it could really work, and recruitment shot up.

Even before the 1969 split from the Right, libertarians attempted to live their ideas. One of the most ambitious projects was Preform—an attempt to build a Galt’s Gulch on an artificial island in the North Sea. Confiscation of the ocean bed by the surrounding states broke up that group, with the hard core attempting to find their retreat within the U.S.—but in remote areas (Vonulife). With no viable market and isolation of the vonuers from even the libertarian community, they self-destructed.

Anarchozionist searches for the promised Gulch continue to attract hopeful libertarians to coral reefs and Caribbean gambling dens. Since basic new libertarian principles of market are ignored by these projects, they fail.

What happened in 1969 added the needed ingredient to make the libertarian society possible in the here and now. And it was provided, ironically, by those who are most often accused of escapist fantasizing.

The Separation of Libertarian Culture

In 1969, at the time of the St. Louis split, a culture without economics or political philosophy met an economic-political movement without a culture or societal consciousness. At the same city on the same weekend, the Young Americans for Freedom Convention and the World Science Fiction Convention occurred—with considerable crossing by delegates back and forth.

Thus, the Libertarian Caucus called their bulletin TANSTAAFL and described the traditionalist-dominated National Office as “a bad Wizard.” It was less the introduction of SF as of *fannishness* that gave the libertarians a rudimentary self-consciousness and cohesiveness. And this self-aware grouping split amoeba-like, to form its own “movement.”

Once a young neophyte plunged into the Libertarian Movement, he or she found that there were progressive stages to go through. One read libertarian SF and objectivist novels, listened to lectures or tapes of them, picked up history of the movement and found out who the Big Names were, and joined or quit groups, clubs, organizations, and social gatherings.

All of this is a direct parallel with SF fandom. And the more one “got into” the Movement, the more alienated one would feel with external society. Finally, pressure built up for highly committed libertarians to choose—become full-time libertarians or return to some form of assimilation with external society. The first choice led to agorism, the second to politics, and the inability to choose—the tension of seeing no alternative—led to the Brown-outs.

These phenomena deserve — and will receive—a separate writing. We are, as I have said, looking ahead to the consequences of the analysis, not the analysis itself. What is needed yet to deduce the conclusion is to define what we’re talking about.

The Meaning of Libertarian Movement

Many libertarians reject the very idea of being grouped in a collective. Some perfectly consistent, hard-core libertarians reject even the label libertarian because of the fear of being associated with others with whom they have small differences.

Of course they can choose to be hermits and they can deny all their ideas so they cannot be labelled (except as “anti-idea”—there’s no escape from labels short of destroying language).

On the other hand, few libertarians would flinch at being called “members of society.” And society is recognized as a plural concept in modern times: American society, Soviet Society, etc. One talks of Jewish society within European society, or Parsee society within Indian society, and so forth. What defines a society requires much more space, so it will be left to subsequent articles. Suffice it here to say it implies similar cultural and philosophical ideas (not necessarily ethnic), and above all, the *consciousness* of the societal individuals that they belong.

With that in mind, let’s tackle the concept of “movement.” All “movements” have a goal—to transform the society they live in. When they have done so, it will be a *new* society. Most movements explicitly assert this.

Libertarians are unique in that they will not attempt to compel a *complete* change in the society they are in. They will leave some alone who freely (and perversely) choose to reject membership in the libertarian society. This then, is the big step in my logic. A libertarian society, except by the most improbably accident, will co-exist with non-libertarian societies.

But hold—if that is true, where do we draw the line? *How many people must the Libertarian Movement reach to create the Libertarian Society?* 10,000? 100,000? A million? A hundred million?

The Parsees number around a hundred thousand; the largest coherent society (not counting overlordship over smaller societies) in the Soviet Union is less than a hundred million. By those limits, the libertarian movement has already passed the lower limit!

But if the Libertarian Movement has created a Libertarian Society, then it has succeeded. It has reached its end. It is . . . finished.

The End of the Libertarian Movement

The implications of the above sketchy analysis begin to hit home. The final task of the libertarian movement is to complete the consciousness-raising of those identifying themselves as libertarians into thinking of themselves as a separate, real-live society.

Rather, that’s the penultimate task. For when that task is accomplished, the Libertarian Movement’s *own* consciousness will be raised and it will have to destroy whatever vested interests, encrusted institutions, and misplaced faith that it has acquired and—and it must destroy itself.

The logic is inescapable, though surprising. The reader is invited to re-read this article and trace the steps, and begin the debate on the premises. As promised, further articles will be forthcoming in Movement magazines and *NLW—The First Newsweekiy of the New Libertarian Society!*

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