fifty years with their marginal triumphs of school voucher programs and marijuana legalization, then the electoral politics route might be best for them to engage. If libertarians want to actually create their paradise they need to be brave and be radical, and begin immediately.

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(originally published by the Students For Liberty Journal, Vol. 2, 2010. students-forliberty.org|college|journal|2010|)

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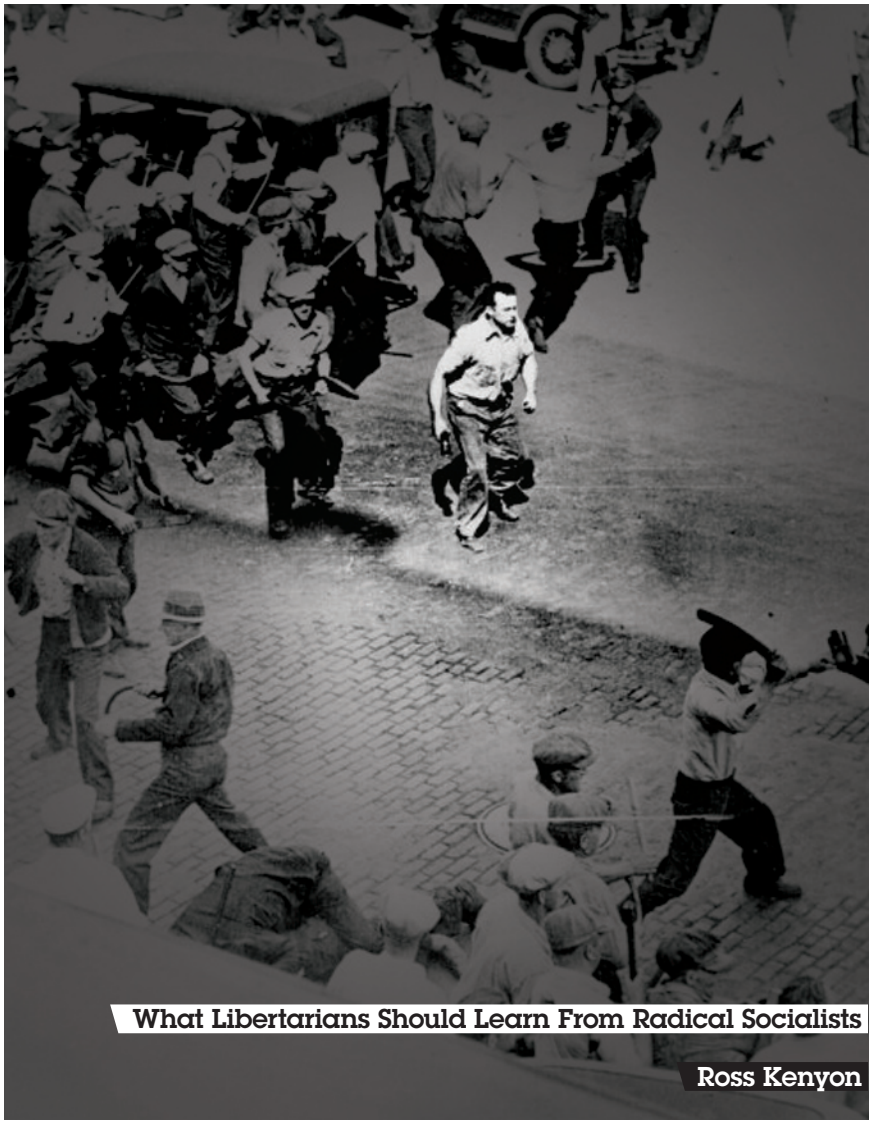
Spring 2011

ALLiance®
a journal of theory&strategy



What Libertarians Should Learn From Radical Socialists

Ross Kenyon

Vol. 6.4

What Libertarians Should Learn From Radical Socialists

Elements of radical movements consistently struggle against each other as two broad groups form: purists and pragmatists. Many radical movements before the present time have been unable to implement their philosophy in its entirety partially as a result of their internal failure to agree on the means of achieving their goals. For the liberty movement to be successful, libertarians must navigate this dilemma promptly and wisely or they will be marginalized and co-opted as others have been. An analysis of the radical socialist movement from America's Progressive Era and a brief look at the Populist movement will do much to guide the efforts of modern libertarians.

When radical ideas emerge potential revolutionaries always face the agonizing decision: should one compromise the utopian vision in the hopes of more realistic change or should one remain consistent to one's principles until the singularity of revolution is brought to fruition? This binary struggle is not exclusive to any one particular ideology or movement. It is the classic dualistic struggle of radical versus moderate; idealism versus pragmatism. Radical movements also face the possibility of having their ideas partially and disarmingly absorbed into mainstream avenues of power. Libertarians are certainly grappling with this today. Their efforts are split into the two mostly mutually exclusive directions of electoral and apolitical means. To ensure that libertarianism as a movement does not repeat the mistakes of their predecessors, libertarians need to heed this examination of radical politicking which will be teased out through the illustrative example of the socialist movement during the Progressive Era and the preceding Populist movement.

Eugene Victor Debs was nominated in 1904, 1908, and 1912 as the presidential candidate of the Socialist Party of America. In 1905, he co-founded the anarcho-syndicalist union, the Industrial Workers of the World, also known as the Wobblies. Eugene Debs and the syndicalists were in perfect agreement with the statement "if the worker is not entitled to all he produces, then what share is anybody else entitled to?" (Bernstein 210) However, at the founding of the IWW in 1905 they were already dogged by competing strategies based upon tactical differences. Conferences were held in 1905 and 1906 to ascertain the "causes of the division between the two [socialist] camps."(Brissenden 125) By 1912, (Bernstein 350) advocates of the two approaches regarding revolutionary socialist tactics rejected elements of each others' proposed means for achieving their shared goals and ended their official relationship.

Debs' willingness to engage in electoral and party politics from within the established system had a tendency of alienating anarchists in the IWW who sought their revolution through more controversial means. The syndicalists preferred to utilize direct action, which they defined as "any step taken by workers at the point of production which improve[d] wages, reduce[d] hours, and better[ed] conditions." (Dubofsky 158) This commonly included different types of sabotage, strikes, and civil disobedience but specifically *not* political action.

The Socialists who adopted the pragmatic approach held valid concerns

ment at the moment proclaims to be an anti-partisan force and is a viable force in American politics, but will most likely serve the interests of Republicans and be absorbed by the midterm elections in 2010, at least until the presidential campaigns start up again.

There are only three routes to widespread libertarianism in America:

Libertarians can allow themselves to be absorbed into the Republican Party and work to expand the Liberty caucus.

Libertarians can abandon the Republican Party to work exclusively through the Libertarian Party.

Libertarians can jettison electoral politics altogether and refuse to be governed by majoritarianism and statism.

If they attempt to co-opt the Republican Party they will have increased visibility as members of a major party, but they will only achieve some of their goals and will not realize systemic change, as in the case of the Wobblies, Socialists, and Populists. They will drag centrism closer to libertarianism but will always be hedging and moderating their radical principles in an effort to be appealing to the mainstream. Their efforts may occasionally bring some positive reform, but fighting incrementalism from within the state reminds one of the myth of Sisyphus.

If libertarians focus on working with the Libertarian Party, their ideals will mostly be neglected by Republicans, who will be busy appealing to their neoconservative and culturally conservative base. If the LP grew in strength, Republicans may also attempt to usurp libertarian voters in the tradition of the Democrats and the Populists. The Libertarian Party will be marginalized as it has been since 1971 unless instant run-off voting and proportional representation gain widespread bipartisan support, which is doubtful beyond all reason as it threatens the status quo power structure.

Should libertarians adopt a spirit of radicalism, refuse to be governed, and attempt to secede, they will present an intimidating force, but will alienate more conservative politicos. However, if they seek to avoid marginalization, absorption, and/or partial victory, their chances are best staked upon the radical path. As stated in the Communist Manifesto, the working class has nothing to lose but their chains, and all individuals are working class when contrasted with those who benefit economically from state power.

If libertarians pursue this courageous path, they must appear to be victims and never aggressors. Efforts must be made to always frame the radical libertarian movement in this fashion or public outcry against their oppression will never reach critical mass and the movement will be destroyed and discredited.

This final and most extreme route is more challenging and dangerous than volunteering for Campaign For Liberty candidates and trying to win some practical policy battles, but big risks are the ones that pay off. If the Wobblies, Socialists, and Populists of epochs past were still alive, they must regret not being more radical. They worked their lives for an ideal they were never able to achieve, and let themselves be placated by partial achievement and temporary victories. If libertarians can see themselves being content in

the final battle for freedom instead of solemnly gathering and guarding the remaining crumbs of freedom. If libertarians falter at the pretense of 'winning better contracts' by fighting for lower taxes, school vouchers, and more individual freedom, they'll be forever postponing the battles for an end to taxation, public education, and for the complete liberation of every individual.

The radical labor struggle of the 1900s and the 1910s foundered from internal divisions over means. The movement agreed on principle that "not until [the means of production were] owned and operated by the people [could] the people hope for any material improvement in their social condition,"(Bernstein 299) but the SPA and Debs were willing to work for practical concessions for their constituents until the ultimate socialist revolution, the General Strike, was within reach. The anarchists' refusal to play politics as well as their utilization of a decentralized ethic clashed considerably with the Socialists' rejection of the practice of sabotage and their willingness to centralize their efforts through party politics and simultaneous strikes. The idea of centralizing power in order to decentralize power, and voting within democratic capitalism to overthrow democratic capitalism deeply chagrined the anarchists' sense of principle and concern for keeping means consistent to their ends. This became an irreconcilable difference. Were they able to unify their efforts behind electing Socialists to public office or to destroying capitalism from outside of the existing political and economic framework perhaps there would have been some significant success. However, the idealists weakened the efforts of the pragmatists, who undermined and isolated the idealists in return.

This problem will continue to beleaguer libertarians who are also split on means. Many advocate supporting candidates such as Debra Medina, Gary Johnson, Peter Schiff, Rand Paul, and Adam Kokesh et al., while others, notably participants of the Free State Project in Keene, New Hampshire, desire to perform civil disobedience in order to illustrate the coercion inherent within all statism.

If libertarians persist in splitting their efforts between electoral politics and apolitical means it will continue to factionalize and weaken their movement in the tradition of the radical socialists. One can successfully argue that radicalism has no place in politics because **politics is the science of compromise.** Libertarianism can only be watered down and corrupted by electoral politics but in doing so it will drag the center of the political compass and public discourse closer to liberty. Libertarian participation in American majoritarian democracy also signals their willingness to be governed by such practices. By lobbying their rulers for more freedom, libertarians are legitimizing the position of rulers to redistribute the freedom they never had the moral authority to assume. This is troubling to some libertarians in the same way that the IWW preferred not to negotiate for contracts with the capitalists. While Ron Paul is directly responsible for the evolution of numerous market anarchists through his pragmatic office holding, libertarian efforts are diminished by focusing primarily on electing freedom-friendly candidates into the halls of political power.

Libertarians need to quickly address this concern. The Tea Party move-

that creating substantial systemic change was going to be a long struggle and were therefore willing to agitate through American democracy. By behaving in this manner they made it possible to win better labor conditions more immediately. This approach of utilizing the attention and credibility that public office and campaigns provided also had the benefit of allowing them to make the socialist message more palatable to the general public and appear less radical than the direct action of the Wobblies.

The liberty movement is currently staring down the barrel of this oppressive duality. In the 2008 presidential election libertarians saw someone who was obviously passionate about the free society ignored, insulted, and dismissed in favor of two marginally distinguishable centrists. There are anarchists in the spirit of Murray Rothbard, Ernest Hancock, and Nick Coons who are willing to play electoral politics, if for no other reason than to gain the ever-elusive mainstream credibility. The downside of this tactic is that by participating in democracy one implicitly agrees to adhere to the policies of the winning candidate. If one doesn't abide by the rules of the game, one is just another sore loser; a sordid refugee from the political playground. However, it does have the positive aspect of making the message appear less radical than it is and it occasionally results in some ideas being adopted into mainstream canon when it serves the interests of those in power.

This is certainly true for the Populist movement, which was a forerunner of the Progressive movement active during the late 19th century. It was primarily a rural and western philosophy which reacted to the hardships caused by the industrialization of the Gilded Age. Populists generally built their movement upon a foundation of producerism: the idea that those who did not farm or otherwise create material value were parasites living off of those who did. They claimed that bankers, industrialists, and railroad companies were exploiting the laboring class and advocated nationalizing those industries (Reichley 135). They also believed that the government should be run for and by the common person and not for and by the elite and special interests, which is what the term 'populist' means in mainstream discourse today. Their biggest single issue as a movement was an advocation of inflationary free silver policies through the monetary system of bimetallism.

The People's Party, which was comprised of populists, was virtually absorbed in its entirety in the 1896 presidential election when Democratic Party candidate William Jennings Bryan won the nomination as a free silver candidate and rebuked the Democratic gold bugs (Sundquist 152-153). Unwilling to split the vote against a free silver candidate, the People's Party and the Populist movement at large fell into the ranks of the Democratic Party. Issue absorption continued into the Progressive Era.

The same process occurred with Teddy Roosevelt's presidency and Woodrow Wilson's *New Freedom* paradigm. They busted trusts, created and expanded regulatory agencies, and passed labor laws, but they both were decisively not socialists. Their efforts gave the Progressives just enough of their demands to neuter the appeal of more radical socialist philosophies

without actually instigating systemic change (Gould 47).

Besides the looming threat of absorption by **reformists**, more obstacles remained in the way of a productive union between the socialist groups. The Socialist Party of America was concerned that there "was certainly little or no cooperative planning of the strikes, especially no careful timing of them, between the local unions and the general administration." (Brissenden 124) The IWW did not organize strikes simultaneously at many locations and instead opted in favor of a decentralized ethic. This inclination flowed from their distrust of centralized power and preference for egalitarianism both economic and political. This upset the Socialists, who preferred centralized striking because it would serve their pragmatic concerns by achieving more tangible gains for labor while still within capitalism and would spread the philosophy of radical socialism through the press that mass striking was sure to garner.

Therein lay still more polarizing tactics in the radical socialists' arsenal which libertarians may be tempted to use. Debs went so far as to endorse violence as a means of revolution, stating that "if [he] had the force to overthrow [capitalist property rights he] would use it without an instant's hesitation or delay."(Bernstein 350) In his estimate, socialists lacked the strength to violently usher in their philosophy and as a result he "had not a bit of use for the 'propaganda of the deed." (Bernstein 351)

While the Wobblies greatly preferred direct action and outright revolution, Debs warned that these tools had a boomerang effect which would wound the thrower and their allies (Bernstein 352) causing demoralization and bad press. By associating this behavior with the Socialist Party of America, Debs suggested it would become a target for government infiltrators, provocateurs, and spies, which would not only discredit the party's legitimacy but also sow "the seeds of strife… [arouse mutual suspicion], and the party would soon be torn into warring factions." (Bernstein 352) In the decades that followed, the FBI's COINTELPRO program again proved this prophetic vision correct. These radical measures, in Debs' estimate, would turn public opinion further against communism and anarchism and conversely strengthen the position of the threatened capitalists' by making them look like the victims.

As a result of these tactical preferences, the IWW had major public relations problems related to their image. IWW leader Big Bill Haywood dramatically stated in 1912 that "[he] despise[d] the law and [he is] not a law-abiding citizen." (Dubofsky 160) James Thompson, a member of the IWW, also established that "[he] not only believe[d] in destruction of property, but [he also] believe[d] in the destruction of human life if it [would] save human life." (Dubofsky 163) This consequentialist disrespect for law, private property rights, and the lives of others, though not necessarily representative of all Wobblies, caught the public consciousness and caused major public image problems for the socialists of all stripes (Gould 61). Their efforts at mainstream recognition and legitimacy were now being tarnished by their association with the aggressive approach of the IWW. Even though the majority of their members engaged primarily in nonviolent action (Dubofsky 161), as well as the fact that the IWW published disclaimers in their publication *Solidarity* that they "[did] not advocate violence," (Dubofsky 161) the public perception of them was rather negative, caricaturing them as bomb-wielding mustachioed malcontents. Big Bill Haywood renounced violence as a means to achieve change during the Lawrence Textile Strike in 1912, (Dubofsky 161) but it was too little and too late, as the IWW's mixed message of sometimes nonviolent protest and civil disobedience and sometimes sabotage and violent revolution estranged them in the public's eye.

Due to this radical and kooky image, any successful act of insurrection (or advocating insurrection) would have most likely led to an expansion of state power. Actions of that nature are spun by establishment pundits to scare potential converts and result in freedom-sapping measures like the PATRIOT Act or the Sedition Act of 1918. To engage in revolutionary violence, one must be seen as acting in self defense. If most people do not understand that the state is their enemy, they will view revolutionaries as aggressors instead of the state and radicals will fail to win the widespread support necessary to create a free society through insurgency.

With insurrectionism dismissed as temporarily infeasible, the option of working for reform deeply harangued the more radical elements of the socialist movement. There was a perception by the time Eugene Debs left the IWW in 1908 that even though the Wobblies were sometimes willing to work for better working conditions and remuneration through the established capitalist order, as at the Lawrence Textile Strike in 1912, they greatly preferred to avoid this tactic and often refused to "sign [agreements] with the employer, so [they] couldn't hold the conditions they had won."(Bird 52) They held to this principle because they did neither fundamentally respect the position of the capitalists nor did they wish to validate their legitimacy through contractual agreements. The IWW publication *Solidarity* declared in 1910 that "the contract between an employer and a workman is no more binding than the title deed to a negro slave is just." (Dubofsky 165) This attitude alienated both the SPA and the capitalists who may have been willing to give the IWW a collective contract, but instead "used the IWW's no-contract principle to rationalize their own resistance to any form of collective bargaining." (Dubofsky 165) Struggles for better contracts were rear-guard battles of immediacy and were not a viable long-term tactic for revolutionary socialism.

In this same way, libertarians frequently engage in defensive politicking. At their most radical, libertarians reject that there exists any legitimate authority to limit the peaceful expression of self ownership of any and all peaceful individuals, and fundamentally challenge the idea of an implicit social contract with the state. By being principled, libertarians will lose some practical gains much like the IWW, but they will be in open, consistent, and inspiring rebellion to the idea that the state and majorities have any rightful authority to rule and restrict nonaggressive people.

Libertarians need to decide whether they want to participate in electoral politics or confront the entire idea of the state and majoritarian rule as illegitimate, coercive, and violent. If they choose the latter, they will be fighting