



Donald Trump Is Not, And Never Has Been, A Libertarian President

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The long knives are again out for libertarianism, as opponents hope to slay the philosophy which preaches freedom and liberty for all, and the weakest government possible this side of anarcho-capitalism. The latest alleged chevalier to attempt an intellectually dishonest sortie against libertarianism is Jonathan Chait with his slanderous claim President Donald Trump brings the so-called ‘libertarian moment’ off the sidelines and into the White House. Chait based his vapid, hare-brained hypothesis on a decision by David and Charles Koch, whose actions to reduce American reliance on government have made them objects of ridicule to government-loving vassals, to reach out to Trump’s Administration on issues where they may find common ground.

“Largely satisfied with Trump’s conservative judicial appointments, lax regulation of business, and regressive tax cutting,” Chait furiously judged in *New York* magazine, “[T]he Kochs are spending several hundred millions of dollars to protect the Republican majority. Whatever points of contention remain between the two have been reduced to squabbles between friends.”

Chait brought his attack even further to libertarianism as a whole, falsely surmising, “libertarians have displayed some of the greatest levels of friendliness to the Trump administration.” He also believed there are only tiny holdouts amongst libertarians who are willing to bemoan Trump’s policies which have “come alongside a broader rejection of the priorities of the politically dominant wing of libertarian politics; they have criticized Trump for the same reasons most libertarians have supported him.”

The preposterous allegation came as a bit of a jolt to yours truly, who has been a rather vocal critic of the President since his 2015 speech before a crowd in Arizona. It would be quite effortless to unleash a torrent of abuse and Viking berserker fury on Chait’s ridiculous notion alone. However, there are other libertarians who do a better job at using their “little grey cells,”

to quote the Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, to dispute and heap their own abuse on Chait's gross distortion of our philosophy.

"I think there are a lot of dangers to liberty in Donald Trump's presidency," Cato Institute Executive Vice President David Boaz told me, while also indicating his annoyance with the headline of Chait's screed, "The idea that Trump is some sort of manifestation of libertarianism, I just think is poorly founded."

Reason Editor-in-Chief Katherine Mangu-Ward also chopped down Chait's claim. "I think it's pretty clear that Donald Trump is nobody's idea of a libertarian," she declared to me. "There are bunch of other elements of Trump's policy that could only be described as authoritarian".

Both Mangu-Ward and Boaz point to Trump's harsh, nasty critique of the press as authoritarian nonsense which runs sideways with the libertarian philosophy of freedom.

"To me, the worst thing, is to have the President of the United States declare that the American media are quote, "the enemy of the American people," unquote. That is authoritarian language," Boaz proclaimed. "It's the sort of thing that authoritarians in other countries have said on the way to using the government to shut down independent media. Now, he hasn't done that yet, and there are a lot of constraints in the United States that will prevent him from doing that."

Mangu-Ward went further, pointing out Republicans seem okay with Trump's dislike of the First Amendment. "I did a cover story for *Reason* about the ways in which Republicans, who until recently have positioned themselves as the defenders of free speech against the Left, have essentially abdicated that legacy under Trump," She confidently stated, before citing Trump's comments on flag burning, opening up libel laws, and challenging broadcast licenses. "None of those things, again, any sane person could describe as libertarian."

Trump's stance on trade and civil liberties cause angst with other libertarians. "[H]e is a trade protectionist, which doesn't jive with libertarianism," FreedomWorks Vice President of Legislative Affairs Jason Pye wrote me in an email. "He just signed a FISA bill into law that treats the Fourth Amendment as a mere suggestion, not the bedrock civil liberty that it is... There are other things I could get into that aren't consistent with libertarianism — such as the proposed nationalization of 5G, entitlement reform, and budget deficits — but I've already written more than I intended."

Pye has the same concerns Mangu-Ward and Boaz have about Trump's authoritarian leanings, but he believes libertarians can learn from the President's election, and how to connect with others. "I would note, though, that the reasons for the presidency's ascendance are largely because the people who make up his base believed that they had been left out of this economy."

Yes, Trump will get praise from libertarians for cutting taxes and reducing regulations. However, it's still foolish to assert libertarians are suddenly all-in on Trump, as Chait suggests. One thing he failed to address is the work libertarians, including the Kochs, did with the Obama Administration.

“As a libertarian, I have worked successfully with the Obama Administration (on criminal justice reform) and I would work with Trump as well, given opportunities on specific policies,” Free the People President Matt Kibbe emailed me. “That doesn’t make either Administration libertarian.”

Boaz agreed with Kibbe’s belief libertarians did find ways to work with Obama. “There were a few areas, immigration maybe, the report he did on occupational licenses where we could say, ‘This is a good thing,’”

Chait’s attack on libertarianism wasn’t the first, and certainly won’t be the last, as American socialists, liberals, and conservatives try to come to grips with a philosophy which promotes freedom for all. Last year’s attack on people protesting white supremacy in Charlottesville, Virginia brought about a misaligned discussion on whether libertarianism could lead to alt-Right ideology. Yet those who theorized there was some sort of pipeline between the two philosophies, or declared both sides shared similar traits, are completely missing the mark. There are certainly people who falsely claimed to be libertarian and should have called themselves “anti-establishment” because of their complete disillusionment with the Republican and Democrat parties. There are others who drifted away from libertarianism into frustrated nationalistic identitarianism, whilst still trying to desperately hold onto the libertarian label they discarded.

The true notion of liberty was eloquently summed up by Kibbe. “If you believe in liberty — the right to choose your own path in life, tolerance for the paths chosen by others, and the power of peaceful cooperation to build beautiful communities — you inevitable feel like a fish out of water in Washington, D.C...Chait’s contention that we can somehow get to libertarian ends through authoritarian means missed the fundamental point of our philosophy. Liberty is both the means and the end, the journey each of us makes based on the pursuit of happiness — the choices, risks, voluntary cooperation and the power of what we can do working together. Washington isn’t about any of that.”

As for why Chait decided to write his useless, deceptive piece? Boaz has a pretty good notion. “Jonathan Chait doesn’t like Trump and he doesn’t like libertarians, and so if he can tie libertarians to Trump, then he’s scored a point against libertarians.” He chuckled over the phone. “I don’t know that we have to read much more into it than that.”

If only Chait had bothered reaching out to libertarians such as Boaz, Kibbe, Mangu-Ward, and Pye before writing his intellectually dishonest, and execrable, piece.