



I Went to a Convention for Libertarian Revolutionaries Trying to Take Over New Hampshire

By Livia Gershon

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It's an early spring weekend in Manchester, and Emily Smith is sitting in the Radisson Hotel with her baby, selling goods from her northern New Hampshire farm. There are jugs of maple syrup in various sizes laid out on the table, and also guns, .308 caliber rifles, lovingly hand-assembled for improved accuracy. The combination would raise eyebrows in most company, but not here, at the annual gathering of the Free State Project, a libertarian movement to create a limited government utopia in the Granite State.

Hundreds of Free Staters were assembled for the three-day Liberty Forum, which brings together the movement's pioneers, prospective members, and sympathizers. The Free State Project aims to relocate 20,000 committed citizens to New Hampshire, change local laws, reduce taxes and regulations, and ultimately establish a literal Galt's Gulch where—to quote a popular libertarian saying—married gay couples can use guns to defend their marijuana plants. According to organizers, more than 1,700 people have moved so far, and another 16,000 or so have pledged to promising to do the same once the full 20,000 have signed on.

The annual conference is a way to bring on new recruits, showcasing the full spectrum of the Free State fringe. There are sessions on anti-war activism, school choice, and polyamory. A heavy-hitter in Koch brothers-backed political groups is giving a talk on "Freedom and Well-being." In one time slot, there were dueling panels on "the Tao of Anarchism" and a critique of anarchy based on the work of Ayn Rand. A woman in business casual tries to sell people on ziftrCOIN, a New Hampshire company that helps retailers accept cryptocurrencies.

Smith and her husband joined the migration in 2007, relocating to New Hampshire with another couple and opening up Bardo Farm. She told me the move was about freedom, but also about finding a great piece of land that came with oxen, goats and solar power. "We wanted to be off the grid," she explained, nursing her baby as we spoke. The Free State Project provides a built-in network of customers, she said, and the farm often gives like-minded libertarians a place to stay when they're in the area.

Like most Free Staters, Smith and the other farm owners are engaged in local politics. Ian Underwood, one of Smith's business partners, said selling the rifles is partly an effort to build a self-sufficient community in their area. "People who have guns can defend themselves," he said. "Who knows where the cops are, but your neighbors are right there." Plus, he noted darkly, cops might not be on your side at all. "One of the things that you may have to defend yourself against is your government," he said.

Not far from Bardo Farm, in rural northern New Hampshire, the small town of Grafton has become a haven for Free Staters, to the consternation of local residents frustrated by the libertarian zeal to overhaul local laws. At the Liberty Forum, Grafton resident James Reiher tried to sell potential movers on the town, promoting it as a great place for libertarians to create their alternatives to the mainstream. "They should be creating coops and doing what the government does on their own," he told me. "If you like fair wages, open a fair-wage store. You don't have to wait."