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Can liberals and libertarians get along

by [Gerry Nicholls](#) - 27/07/2009



One of the speakers at this year's Liberty Summer Seminar was the Cato Institute's [Will Wilkinson](#) who made an intriguing argument.

Libertarians he said should seek to align themselves with left-wing-liberals.

He says such an alliance would create a new political force he calls "liberalitarianism" or "progressive fusionism."

On the surface that sounds pretty strange, but in some ways his vision makes sense.

Certainly, for instance, on some social issues and foreign policy matters, liberals and libertarians do share common philosophic ground.

Plus once upon a time, back in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, libertarians were liberals, so there is also a common historic bond.

And finally, so-called conservatives in both the Republican and Conservative Parties have not shown themselves to be all that reliable as friends to those of us who cherish smaller government and free enterprise.

In fact, Prime Minister Stephen Harper essentially [turfed libertarians](#) from his party.

So in a sense libertarians in both Canada and the United States are political refugees looking for a new home. So why not try and hook up with liberals?

But can pro-big government liberals and anti-government libertarians really get along?

Yes, says Wilkinson.

But both sides would need to compromise.

Libertarians, he says, would have to accept the value of and need for the welfare state while liberals would need to concede that only unfettered free markets can produce the wealth necessary to fund things like the welfare state.

Like I said, it's an intriguing idea, but let's face it "progressive fusionism" has about as much chance as happening as Rush Limbaugh has of being name Moveon.org's "Man of the Year".

Besides the fact that liberals just don't like capitalism, there are other cultural issues which divide the two groups such as gun rights.

Yet, I don't want to be too dismissive of Wilkinson's plan.

For instance, I fully support the idea of libertarians infiltrating the Liberal Party to push it in the right direction. (The best way to convince the Liberals to adopt a pro-freedom agenda, is to suggest it will help them win an election.)

At the same time, libertarians should not give up on the Tories, the more natural allies of freedom.

Indeed, in the best of all worlds, libertarian philosophy would be an influence in both parties, and we would see the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition battling each other as to who would cut taxes the most.

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