



A RENAISSANCE OF LIBERTY

Joel D. Hirst February 4, 2013

Something is happening in America – and beyond. In Facebook groups, in Church basements and public libraries – on street corners, in public marches and buy-ins, a renaissance of liberty is stirring. It's happening quietly and slowly, beneath the radar and unseen by politicians, 'second-hand dealers' and especially by Hollywood. But make no mistake, it's happening.

"Something old is roaring back" wrote Peggy Noonan in her now-infamous oped on November 5, 2012. She was only partly wrong. You see, she fell into the trap of thinking like the statist and revolutionaries do – about people in their plurality. But a renaissance is the opposite of revolution. While revolutions seek the collective, a renaissance starts with only a few. The power that pulled Europe from a millennium of darkness was harnessed by a few painters, poets and scientists in Venice and Florence. The thoughts that saved England for a century were dreamt up by one man, sitting on a rooftop watching for German bombers. As Samuel Adams is said to have declared, "It does not require a majority to prevail, but rather an irate, tireless minority keen to set brush fires in people's minds."

This is the 'old thing' to which Noonan was referring. The renaissance of liberty. And it's happening everywhere. It is apparent in academia, popular culture and civil society. From the influence of Ayn Rand whose ideas are perhaps at their most powerful, despite the desperate attempts to minimize her via ridicule or blind hatred; ideas that wield influence over politics, 'counterculture' and even Hollywood – with Brad Pitt, Vince Vaughan, Eva Mendez and Big Bang Theory's Mayim Bialik talking of her. It is seen in the growth of free market think tanks, like the dozens of influential organizations like Cato Institute, Libertad y Desarrollo in Chile, Instituto Politico para la Libertad in Peru, and CEDICE in Venezuela – supported by important organizations like Altas Economic Research Foundation. It is apparent by free market publishing houses like Editorial Grito Sagrado in Argentina; and through the resurfacing of the works of John Lilburne, William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and more recently Jim Powell.

It's also apparent in politics, with a new explosion of libertarian parties and movements not only in the United States, but across the world. Politics that finds its expression in the nouveau literature of freedom from authors like Natan Sharansky, George Ayittey, and Gene Sharp – all keen to show how best to expose the statist dictators that still rule, so they can be pulled down.

Perhaps nowhere is the debate more striking than in economics, where the universally accepted provisions of John Maynard Keynes have been vigorously challenged and debunked by classical free market economics through the resurgence of Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, and Milton Friedman – and their important impact on the behavior of governments more responsible than our own; governments such as Germany, Canada, and New Zealand where they have found in the recipes of responsible government stability and prosperity.

All of this has made the statist worried; because while they have mastered the tools necessary to win elections, they are powerless in the face of an awakening of this kind. This renaissance is headless – so they cannot decapitate it. It is built from the ground up, so they cannot dismantle it. It seeks little funding, so they cannot strangle it. From social democrats, to national socialists to communists – statist can only ever envision a centralized world of coercion, collusion and eventually corruption. For their models to work, they need us. For them, this renaissance is an existential challenge.

To be sure, statism appears today to be at its most powerful politically – at least if evaluated through the prism of elections. However, if viewed with more real factors such as sustainability of their economic models, confidence in their governments and belief that their states will solve the very real problems of the world – the picture is much less sanguine. Watching the ongoing crises in countries as far flung as France, Greece, Russia, Venezuela, Spain and Japan, and even perhaps the United States – all of which have chosen a version of statism over liberty – the failure of the model is visible to those who use common sense. This only makes those who centrally plan work harder – believing that in the hyper nano-management of society they will eventually find balance and sustainability; despite all logic, reason and history to the contrary.

This is not an esoteric debate, as those who seek out the state for solutions would have you believe. The state is never at its most dangerous to liberty and freedom than when its survival is threatened. This is true in Venezuela where a dying dictator clamps down; to France where the fleecing of the rich via the tax code heralds economic collapse; to Russia where a corrupt government silences all dissent; and Argentina where a model that has caused hyperinflation and abridged investment institutes currency controls, but only after seizing private pensions while seeking perpetuation of political power

via constitutional amendments. Albert Nock once pointed out that the state is created when social power is taken from the individuals and surrendered to the state; thereby placing government beyond the consent of the governed. We have seen on too many occasions the behavior of a state which no longer requires the consent of its people.

'Something old is roaring back' indeed, but we must have the courage to see it, study it and defend it. And we must have the resolve to not be intimidated as those who are the most threatened by the imminent collapse of their models throw their collective weight against the men of the mind. And, finally, we must be patient, taking heart that while the ideas of the rational mind are supreme, they are also inevitable.