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David Boaz Is No Libertarian

Posted by [Walter Block](#) on January 14, 2010 03:35 PM

David Boaz has written an extraordinary column in Canada's Financial Post of 1/12/10. It is entitled "[Save America — Bring back Bill](#)," and subtitled: "Now I have a hazy memory of the Clinton years as a sort of Golden Age."

The executive vice president of the Cato Institute makes some good points (I'm being tongue in cheek here, for those whose sense of sarcasm is less well developed than my own). Boaz calls for less government spending (well, not exactly less spending; rather, a slower increase in government expenditures). He supports free trade (well, not free trade, exactly; rather, that customs union scheme widely known as NAFTA). Boaz, forthright "libertarian" that he is, opposes government regulation (well, he doesn't exactly call for massively fewer government regulations; rather, for a more modernized type of regulation "in light of changing technology and economic conditions."). This beltway "libertarian" also calls our welfare system into question (needless to say, Boaz does not advocate the entire elimination of this pernicious program; rather, he favors "welfare reform.")

All this is bad enough. Had Boaz just wanted to say that Obama is worse in many ways than was Clinton, ok, I'll buy into that. But, it is unconscionable for a libertarian to support Clinton's policies outright. (In my assessment, the Clinton administration would have been far worse but for Clinton's happy involvement with Monica Lewinski. The socialists once mentioned placing a bust of Mises in their central planning offices; I think that libertarians, in like manner, should show similar appreciation for Monica.)

However, I'm ready to let all of the above pass. A good (libertarian) editor would have urged this author to rewrite the piece, so as to not support Clinton at all, merely confining Boaz to making the reasonable case that Obama is worse. What the heck, a sympathetic reading of this column, a very sympathetic reading, would see that thesis in between the lines.

The really despicable part of Boaz's essay is this:

"Suddenly, I find myself nostalgic for Bill Clinton. Back in 1996, I denounced his 'breathtaking view of the ability and obligation of government to plan the economy' and his 'profoundly anti-individualist ideas.'

“But now I have a hazy memory of the Clinton years as a sort of Golden Age. Government spending was growing only slowly, the bad ideas were mostly small and we bombed a lot of countries but didn’t put American troops at risk.”

It is ok that we “bombed a lot of countries,” forsooth? Countries that never first attacked us, that never in a million years could have done so? And that we bombed them? And this is good? This is something to feel “nostalgic” about?

If these words had been penned by a neocon, they would have been unremarkable. But, when uttered by a self-styled libertarian, by the author of a book called *Libertarianism: A Primer*, I feel physically ill. I feel besmirched. I am not about to give up on the word “libertarian,” but I appeal to Boaz to do so. Try as I might, pulling my “sympathetic hat” firmly down around my ears as far as I can, I just do not see how support for “we bombed a lot of countries” can be reconciled with the libertarian philosophy.

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