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## Hey Libertarians! Liberals Are Just Not That Into You!

Matt Welch | February 12, 2010

In *The New Republic*, Ed Kilgore declares farewell and good riddance to the short-lived liberal-libertarian romance:

The progressive-libertarian alliance may have provided tactical benefits in 2006, augmenting the Democratic "wave" election of that year. But 2008 showed that libertarian support is hardly crucial: Obama still won "libertarian" states such as Colorado and New Hampshire handily, even without their backing, and he generally performed better in the "libertarian West" than any Democratic nominee since LBJ. [...]

[W]ith the arrival of the Tea Party movement, libertarians have acquired a kind of mass political cachet that they've never before enjoyed. As Nate Silver estimated last year, the early tea parties were "two parts Ron Paul/libertarian conservative--with its strength out West and in New Hampshire--and one part Sarah Palin/red-meat conservative--with its strength in rural areas, particularly in the South." This phenomenon has pulled libertarianism rightward: Despite some expressed concerns about the crudeness and cultural conservatism of many Tea Party activists, it has become clear that most self-conscious libertarians are willing to participate in, and cheerlead for, the Tea Party movement as though their political futures depend on it.

That, in turn, has torn open cultural rifts between libertarians and liberals. Progressives who previously fawned over the libertarians' Jeffersonian modesty are now exposed to the unattractive aspect of libertarianism that is familiar to readers of Ayn Rand: a Nietzschean disdain for the poor and minorities that tends to dovetail with the atavistic and semi-racist habits of reactionary cultural traditionalists. After all, it is only a few steps from the Tea Party movement's founding "rant"—in which self-described Randian business commentator Rick Santelli blasted "losers" who couldn't pay their mortgages—to populist backlash against all transfer payments of any type, complaints about people "voting for a living" instead of "working for a living," and paranoid conspiracy theories about groups like ACORN.

Certainly, few self-conscious libertarians have much tolerance for racism, but they are encouraging a point of view about "welfare" that has long been catnip to racists. And that's a problem for liberals. How can an alliance last in a climate where a progressive think tanker has to look down the rostrum at that nice Cato Institute colleague and wonder if he or she privately thinks the poor are "looter scum"; or if he's willing to get behind the Sarah Palin presidential candidacy that's so wildly popular in Tea Party circles? [...]



[E]ven liberals who are frustrated with the president have trouble mustering any sympathy for the Obama-bashing of contemporary libertarians—a sign that the earlier alliance really was an ephemeral product of the Bush administration's many sins.

Kilgore also points out that *Citizens United v. FEC* exposed some other fundamental faultlines.

I think you can boil this fooferaw down to two essential points: 1) Economics matter. 2) Yes, a political tendency that is critical of government power is likely to criticize the government in power.

Speaking only for myself, I don't see libertarianism moving rightward, I see rightward moving libertarian. Which is to be expected, what with the whole not-having-power thing (as Kilgore points out, the Democrats' wilderness years included such incongruities as Markos Moulitsas penning "libertarian Democrat" manifestos). Many libertarians already treat the Tea Party movement (and more than that, Sarah Palin) with 10-foot tongs, and it won't take many more Joe Farah/Tom Tancredo Tea Party-branded speeches to expose many of the conservative/libertarian cracks that were so evident during the Bushitler years. As for welfare and all that, again this is just me talking, but I have never for one second in my life used or thought the phrase "welfare queen" to mean anything besides one of those Evil Corporations my liberal pals are so afraid of. I don't give one shit about ACORN, wouldn't vote for Sarah Palin at gunpoint, and don't look down the rostrum at that nice Center for American Progress colleague fretting about their private thoughts.

What I *do* care about, regardless of who's president, is human freedom and prosperity. And I strongly and consistently suspect that when the government accumulates more power, I and everyone else (except those wielding it) have less of which I seek. Republicans diss libertarians when they're in power, and Democrats diss libertarians when they're in power. Their changing attitudes toward our little (albeit growing) tribe is mildly interesting, but it's about as newsworthy (and painful) as a dog biting a chew toy.

Link via [Newsalert](#). I wrote about the "[Liberalitarian Jackalope](#)" last April.