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## Has the Tea Party been hijacked?

By Aaron - February 10, 2010 at 1:38 PM

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### *Origins of the Movement*

I have been active in libertarian circles for more than a decade, so when Ron Paul's Presidential campaign raised more than \$6 million in one day for our Presidential candidate, I was jumping for joy. That was in December, 2007, and was in conjunction with a nationwide "Tea Party" protest of Big Government.



At our local event in Georgetown, Ron Paul supporters hosted our own fundraising event in which we wrote "Income Tax", "Federal Reserve", and "Invasion of Iraq" on boxes and tossed them out the 2nd story window of the event venue onto the streets of Georgetown.

**The "Tea Party" was a nationwide event organized by Ron Paul supporters.** Therefore the original concept of the Tea Party was libertarian — in favor of individual liberties (including personal freedoms and the ability to make any choice that does not harm another), limited government, and free markets.

The summer after the MoneyBomb fundraising success, in 2008, I participated in a Revolution March with Ron Paul supporters in DC (*that's me, with the Ron Paul sign at right*). The march was quite massive, likely with between 7,500 and 10,000 participants from all across the country. It ended with a concert in front of the nation's capital which lasted all day.

### *2009 Resurgence*

Things went quiet for a while, until early 2009. That's when Rick Santelli drew attention for his remarks made regarding the Homeowners Affordability and Stability Plan in February of last year — from the floor of the CME Group during pre-market hours. Santelli accused the government of promoting bad behavior and called for a Chicago Tea Party in response. Scattered cheers, whistles and applause could be heard from some of the personnel around the floor.

I participated in my first tea party event when I was asked to speak at the Reston Tea Party (in northern Virginia) on April 15 of last year. My speech focused on an economic issue that I believe important on tax day: repealing the Sixteenth Amendment. In my speech, I discussed how I never was duped into voting for George W. Bush, but that those who did can now redeem themselves by working for liberty in 2009, 2010, and beyond. I was well-received despite the hard rain pouring down on me as I spoke. At the time of my speech, I could tell that a broad coalition of folks were attending the Tea Party, and I surely realized that not all of them would agree with me — especially on social issues. So be it.



### *Hijacked Tea Party?*

**But it's now almost a year later, and the Tea Party seems to be transforming from a libertarian gathering to promote less intrusive government and celebrate our freedoms to a neo-con group promoting War in Iran, criticizing immigrants and diversity, and persecuting those with different religious views.** Rachel Maddow has provided excellent coverage of this transformation from the very get-go, interviewing friends of mine who believe in



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freedom like Steve Gordon and Dave Weigel repeatedly to gain their perspective on the Tea Party hijack. Maddow was shocked to learn that three so-called Tea Party supporters are now challenging the inspiration behind the Tea Party — U.S. Rep. Ron Paul — for Congress in his rural Lake Jackson/Victoria area district in Texas.

The “far left media” recently crowned Sarah Palin the new mother of the Tea Party movement.

This is problematic for several reasons. First, Palin is employed by FOX News, which has a history of propping up increased foreign intervention — including the War in Iraq. Second, Palin is closely associated with people who support increased interventionism abroad. In her most recent trip to Hong Kong, she brought a prominent media relations strategist/lobbyist named [Randy Scheunemann](#). Third, there is a correct perception that Sarah Palin is scripted — she’s using talking points from people writing speeches for her rather than sharing what she really believes. (I’m sure she has some core beliefs, but what are they?)



Increased foreign interventionism, bigger military budgets, and sending our troops to more countries abroad is the exact opposite of what the original Tea Parties were all about — so libertarians, paleo-cons, and traditional Goldwater conservatives should be rightful skeptics of the strategists who have put into motion the hijacking of the Tea Parties.

There are several national groups claiming to lead the Tea Party. These include:

\* The Tea Party Express, which created a campaign called Our Country Deserves Better. Of the \$1.3 million raised for their campaign from July to November, \$870,000 plus of it went to a single Republican campaign firm in California.

\*The Tea Party Nation, run by Judson Phillips, which organized the recent Convention in Tennessee. Libertarian-leaning groups like Ron Paul’s Campaign for Liberty and Eric Odom’s American Liberty Alliance decided not to participate after dealings with Phillips and his co-organizers.

\* The Tea Party Patriots, which is working with FreedomWorks — headed by former U.S. Rep. Dick Arme.

Be wary of any national group trying to control local Tea Party organizations.

### ***How Do We Proceed?***

This is not the first time a libertarian concept has been adopted by others. It was libertarian economist Milton Friedman who developed the concept of school vouchers, but most of the credit was never given. The same is true of the Cato Institute, which developed the concept of Social Security privatization but is rarely credited with it. And who was it that was actively calling the War on Drugs a failure from the early 70s onward? Despite that most people recognize the failure of the War on Drugs, the Libertarian Party rarely receives credit for popularizing what is now plainly obvious: that the War on Drugs has not worked.

The original message of the Tea Party — let’s take our government back! — still rings true. It’s up to us to keep fighting to reclaim our personal and economic liberties — and that includes a humble and logical foreign policy.

I would encourage people who share the Republican Liberty Caucus commitment to limited government to attend local Tea Party meetings to get a flavor for what your local branch of the Tea Party is like. Certainly the flavor of the local Tea Party depends on who is leading it. The local Tea Party objectives should determine if it’s a good fit for you. If it isn’t, start your own Tea Party.

If more libertarian-leaning Republicans were leaders in the Tea Party movement, perhaps the Tea Party movement would have a decisively more libertarian flavor.

Overall, the credit for the Tea Party concept goes to the most innovative thinkers in politics today: libertarians and Ron Paul supporters. The current Tea Party is heading in the wrong direction, but whether it can reverse its course is up to us.

There’s never been a better time to get involved in the movement to change our government to one of, by, and for the people. I challenge you to become active in your area. Joining the Republican Liberty Caucus is a great place to start.

The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect official positions of the RLC.