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# The Orphan Of The American Political Spectrum

What's Your Reaction?

Were one to design a political philosophy calculated to appeal to large numbers of "conservatives" and "liberals," it might look very much like contemporary libertarianism: tolerant and supportive of individual rights in matters ranging from sexual orientation to religion, and committed to the rule of law and free market capitalism.

For a host of reasons, however, libertarianism in the US today is politically parentless, and largely unrepresented in most of our major cultural and educational institutions, a socio-political orphan. It's an odd state of affairs, and unfortunate as well.

In part, the underachievement of libertarianism is explained by the existence of the Libertarian Party and the philosophy's concomitant lack of standing in either the Democratic or the Republican Party. But it's also a consequence of libertarianism's embrace by some as a kind of religion--thereby yielding fanatical and anarchist schemes like abolishing the state, legalizing drugs, selling the sidewalks, whatever.

Still, it's one thing to be burdened by (what shall we call them?) exuberant fans, and something else again to be ignored as a political philosophy altogether. To understand why you have to look at the roles played by others, starting with the parties of the right.

To neoconservatives, for instance, libertarianism is a direct threat to their "nation building" agenda (from the beginning many libertarians and libertarian think tanks, like the Cato Institute, were opposed to the Iraqi adventure), made all the worse by their appeal to many of the same people that the neocons attempt to cultivate and corral.

The so-called social and religious conservatives--represented by people like Mike Huckabee--represent another barrier. Particularly within the GOP, religious conservatives (not to mention religious populists) constitute a bloc that is hostile to the individualistic and freedom loving stance most libertarians espouse re social issues.

So-called K Street Republicans, and many big business groups, are also dismissive of libertarianism, preferring instead a political environment conducive to legislative and regulatory deal making, the sort of value-

free mindset that arguably led so many to blindly follow George Bush and John McCain right into a ditch.

The right's hostility, of course, isn't the only, or even the controlling, reason for libertarianism's lack of political clout. The fundamental disinterest of their sometime allies on the left, like the ACLU, is a bigger factor, and one that explains its total lack of influence within the Democratic party.

Because of the hold "economic progressives " (such as the education lobby, public employee unions, faculty lounge Marxists, and trial lawyers) have over US liberalism and the Democratic party, libertarians and their ideas are countenanced only insofar as they are useful--usually in promotion of some social issue on which liberals and libertarians agree.

If, however, the pollsters and a growing number of economists are right, this may change. According to the folks at the Pew and Gallup organizations, Democrats and liberals are at risk of major losses in next year's congressional elections. This, because of the public's unhappiness with the state of the economy, and their lack of confidence in the plans proffered by the administration, and the majority party in Congress, to deal with it.

At the same time a number of economists in and out of government are suggesting that, far from being solved, the nation's economic problems are at risk of worsening. If these economists and pollsters are right, and the Democrats take a terrible drubbing next year, it may occur to many liberals to reassess their hoary economic nostrums, and to link arms with the libertarians on economic issues, not necessarily because of what's in their hearts as because of what's in their heads.

If so, it won't be a minute too soon. Because the plain truth is that the lubricant necessary to maintain, in a country as large and fractious as the US, both our social services and our civil rights is money, and lots of it. And the only way that money can be produced in sufficient quantities is by the application of those pro-business and pro-growth economic policies that are at the very heart of libertarianism.

