

## The Boors Strike Back: LP 2022

For a good many years the wimps were in control of the Libertarian Party, nominating candidates who presented a libertarianism designed to appeal to liberals and centrists, avoiding positions likely to offend either group. In 2016 Gary Johnson, about to be nominated as the LP's presidential candidate, [wrote on Facebook](#):

I have even heard some talk of a “right to discriminate.” And of course, we have states and municipalities today trying to create a real right to discriminate against the LGBT community on religious grounds — the same kinds of “religious” grounds that were used to defend racial segregation, forbid interracial marriages and, yes, defend discrimination against Jews by businesses. That is not a slope Libertarians want to go down.

Once again, my belief that discrimination on the basis of religion should not be allowed

The dispute Gary Johnson was referring to, about the right of a Christian baker to refuse to bake a cake for a gay wedding, was argued as a conflict between religious freedom and the right not to be discriminated against. Most libertarians believe that the issue has nothing to do with religion, that there is no right not to be discriminated against, that atheists too have the right to decide whom to do business with. In the words of the 2016 LP Platform:<sup>1</sup>

For voluntary dealings among private entities, parties should be free to choose with whom they trade and set whatever trade terms are mutually agreeable.

Jo Jorgenson, the 2020 presidential candidate, tweeted:

It is not enough to be passively not racist, we must be actively anti-racist.

There is no reason why a libertarian cannot be actively anti-racist, but the view that racism is the great problem that we must all do something about goes with a different ideology. Gary Johnson was either trying to avoid offending liberals or himself enough of a liberal to believe in anti-discrimination law. Jo Jorgenson was trying to sound like a woke progressive.

Libertarians unhappy with that approach organized themselves as the Mises Caucus, endorsed by, among others, Ron Paul. At the 2022 national convention their candidate for national chairman won by a large margin; they are now in control of the party. One change they made to the platform was to eliminate "we condemn bigotry as irrational and repugnant," a phrase designed to appeal to the left and offend the right, while adding “We uphold and defend the rights of every person, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or any other aspect of their identity” and retaining:

Sexual orientation, preference, gender, or gender identity should have no impact on the government's treatment of individuals, such as in current marriage, child custody, adoption, immigration, or military service laws. Government does not have the authority to define, promote, license, or restrict personal relationships, regardless of the number of participants. Consenting adults should be free to choose their own sexual practices and

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<sup>1</sup> Also the [2022 platform](#) and, I presume, all the platforms between.

personal relationships. Until such time as the government stops its illegitimate practice of marriage licensing, such licenses must be granted to all consenting adults who apply.

The current round of the conflict between wimps and boors started when Jeff Deist, president of the Mises Institute, published the text of a [talk](#) arguing that libertarians “have for decades made the disastrous mistake of appearing hostile to family, to religion, to tradition, to culture, and to civic or social institutions — in other words, hostile to civil society itself.” He ended the essay:

In other words, blood and soil and God and nation still matter to people. Libertarians ignore this at the risk of irrelevance.

Arvin Vohra, vice chair of the Libertarian Party, in a [post](#) shared by Nicholas Sarwark, the chair, responded:

Here’s what you need to know. First, “Blood and soil” is a central Nazi and nationalist idea. It refers to the idea that people of the same blood (i.e. race) and soil, (i.e. territory) are bound into a single nation. The obvious implication is that part of that goal is to keep that nation’s blood and soil “pure” and independent. It is a central idea to white nationalism, to the belief that the U.S. should be turned back into some pure, white, protestant, christian, vaguely theocratic, racially segregated, cultural backwater.

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On a pragmatic note this means that at the current time, Mises Institute has been turned into a sales funnel for the white nationalist branch of the Alt-right.

Deist did not say anything at all about turning the U.S. “into some pure, white, protestant, christian, vaguely theocratic, racially segregated, cultural backwater.” He did, however, end the talk with a positive reference to a phrase that originated with German nationalists and was prominent in Nazi rhetoric. My guess reading the speech was that he was either trying to attract support from the alt-right, to offend people to his left, including the people then running the Libertarian Party, or perhaps both. I was told, however, by someone with close connections to the Mises Institute, that Deist was surprised by the strong negative reaction to his use of the phrase. That could mean that it had been sufficiently normalized in the circles he moved in that he did not realize how it would be interpreted elsewhere.

If his objective was to offend the people running the LP, he succeeded. In addition to Vohra’s response, implying that Deist was at least a white nationalist, perhaps a Nazi, there were comments from other members of the Libertarian National Committee, the group that runs the Libertarian Party, calling the Mises Institute a White Nationalist organization and saying that there was no room for bigots and racists in the party.<sup>2</sup> LP members who approved of the Mises Institute and disapproved of the way the LP was being run responded by creating the Mises Caucus, with the objective of taking control of the party.

It took most of five years, but they succeeded. The losers viewed that as a victory of racism and bigotry — and passed that view on to their contacts on the left.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://ivn.us/2017/08/18/libertarians-tell-white-nationalists-racists-leave-party>

Members of the of the Libertarian Party (LP) are concerned about the Mises Caucus (MC) winning control of the party at the May 26 national convention, ushering in an era of collaboration between the U.S.'s largest third party and the hard-right movement inside the Republican Party.

High-profile MC members espouse hateful rhetoric and collaborate with white nationalists and individuals linked to former President Donald Trump.

(from a lengthy [article](#) by the Southern Poverty Law Center, a left wing organization)

Looking at the Mises caucus [platform](#), [web page](#), and the linked collection of [articles](#), I found nothing to justify that claim. Searching further I found a 2019 [debate](#) between Dave Smith, a prominent supporter of the Mises caucus, and Nicholas Sarwark, then party chairman. It dealt in part with the question of whether the LP ought to try to keep racists and white nationalists out. Sarwark thought they should, Smith that they shouldn't.

Both agreed, Sarwark somewhat reluctantly, that it was possible to be both a racist, defined as "they don't like other racial groups or something like that,"<sup>3</sup> and a libertarian. Sarwark's argument was not ideology but politics, that letting in such people would make the party look bad, making it harder to recruit members and get votes. "The problem with racism within a political party is not who is in, it's who refuses to come in." Smith's response was that the LP was happy to have as a member someone who supported mass murder, meaning Bill Weld, the 2016 LP candidate for vice president, who initially supported (but later criticized) the war in Iraq.

Sarwark did not respond by defending Weld's position — apparently the view that the U.S. should engage only in defensive wars is at this point LP orthodoxy.<sup>4</sup> His response was again political, that support of the war in Iraq was sufficiently widespread that including a supporter of the war in the party would not, like including racists, cause other people to think badly of the LP and so cost votes and members. "If you support a view that's held by a majority of society, you being in the party is unlikely to keep anyone else from joining." His position appeared to be that the party should keep out people whose views, even if consistent with libertarianism, were outside the current range of acceptable opinion, the Overton window. That explains why members of his faction were outraged when someone in the New Hampshire party publicly argued for abolishing child labor laws, a position consistent with, arguably implied by, libertarianism.

His position makes sense for a political party that exists to get people to vote for its candidates, which is how Sarwark apparently viewed the LP. The obvious response is, as Smith pointed out, that if getting votes is your objective you should be in one of the parties that sometimes gets enough votes to win elections. Avoiding controversial positions makes less sense if the objective is to use the political process to draw attention to a political philosophy many of whose implications are controversial.

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<sup>3</sup> The quote is from Smith but Sarwark appeared to accept it. Later he defined racism as "thinking that people of another race are less than human, that they have some lower level of rights or privileges or humanity."

<sup>4</sup> Sarwark did eventually suggest that, if you believed Iraq was producing weapons of mass destruction, you might view our attack on Iraq as defensive.

The people who were running the LP wanted to avoid offending people on the left; the result was to water down libertarianism to something almost all of which would fit in one or another of the two major parties. What about the people now running the party?

On the evidence of what they have done so far, they do not much care about offending people to their left. Judging by Dave Smith's arguments, they are interested in attracting people to their right, racists included. Are they willing to water down libertarianism to do so?

The best evidence I have seen that they are is from an [interview](#) at the 2022 convention with Michael Heise, founder and chairman of the Mises Caucus.<sup>5</sup> Much of what he said I agreed with. But there were two disturbing notes:

Is libertarianism this thing where we get power and then enforce the NAP on everybody or is it more about self-determination and the cultures locally can kind of decide what they want to do. And maybe that culture locally isn't going to conform to your standards or my standards but they should be allowed to have them.

If libertarians do not want everyone to be bound by the non-aggression principle it seems to follow that they do not object to some people making laws that violate it, such as laws against marijuana, sodomy or prostitution, that legislators at the state or county level are entitled to pass such laws and enforce them if that fits their local culture. That looks very much like an attempt to fudge up a libertarian excuse for including in the party and the movement people who support laws inconsistent with libertarianism. It is offered as a consequence of libertarian support for decentralization — “down to the individual level.”<sup>6</sup> But if a state or county makes marijuana illegal it is taking the choice of whether to smoke it away from the individuals, so *not* decentralizing to the individual level.

Here is what Murray Rothbard wrote along similar lines in 1992 in “[Right-Wing Populism: A Strategy for the Paleo Movement](#).”

So far: every one of these right-wing populist programs is totally consistent with a hard-core libertarian position. But all real-world politics is coalition politics, and there are other areas where libertarians might well compromise with their paleo or traditionalist or other partners in a populist coalition. For example, on family values, take such vexed problems as pornography, prostitution, or abortion. Here, pro-legalization and pro-choice libertarians should be willing to compromise on a decentralist stance; that is, to end the tyranny of the federal courts, and to leave these problems up to states and better yet, localities and neighborhoods, that is, to “community standards.”

That makes it explicit that decentralism is being used to justify libertarians accepting violations of individual rights at the state and local level, which appears to be the policy Heise is supporting. Instead of dropping our position that discrimination should be legal in order to avoid offending the left we are to drop our position that pornography and prostitution should be legal in order to avoid offending the right.

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<sup>5</sup> The text of the interview is also [webbed](#).

<sup>6</sup> “We support decentralization – subsidiarity, secession, nullification, and localism – of political units all the way down to the individual” (Mises caucus platform).

Heise also said:

Open borders and private borders are not the same thing, but they are both libertarian tenets.

Private borders at the individual level are consistent with open borders, since as an individual I am free to refuse to rent a room or sell land to an immigrant or, on libertarian principles, anyone else. At any level above the individual it conflicts with libertarian principles since it means I am not free to invite a foreigner onto my property, to hire him or rent to him, if the government does not want me to. This again looks like an attempt to make libertarianism more attractive to people on the right who favor immigration restrictions.<sup>7</sup>

I had an opportunity to observe the Mises Caucus at first hand at Porcfest, a gathering of libertarians in New Hampshire organized by the Free State Project. I expressed to some of them my worry that the people now running the LP would make the same mistake as the people who used to run it, just in the opposite direction, water libertarianism down to appeal to the right instead of the left. I got a courteous reception but none of the Mises people agreed that that was happening. On the other hand, when the vice-chair of the LP gave a talk about what the future held now that they had control of the party, his example of the dangers that libertarians would face if they became politically effective was the treatment by the courts of the January 6<sup>th</sup> demonstrators. The choice of that example suggests that he sees the Trump people as “us” not “them,” allies even if not fellow libertarians.

### **BHL vs Hans Hoppe**

The division between libertarians who identify with the left and want to tweak libertarianism to appeal to liberals or progressives and libertarians who identify with the right and want to tweak libertarianism to appeal to Trump supporters and the alt-right exists among libertarian intellectuals as well. The Bleeding Heart Libertarians, discussed in Chapters XXX-XXX, support the wimp position, offering a form of libertarianism designed to appeal to liberals, including arguments to justify some amount of income redistribution. I have already discussed my disagreements with them. Hans Hoppe is their equivalent on the right.<sup>8</sup>

[I will either eliminate this bit or expand it]

<https://archive.lewrockwell.com/hoppe/hoppe4.html>

<https://www.lewrockwell.com/2020/02/hans-hermann-hoppe/hoppe-the-in-depth-interview/>

[Plumb-Line Libertarianism: A Critique of Hoppe](#) (Walter Block)

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<sup>7</sup> After listening to the interview I emailed Heise asking him to explain the two quotes. So far I have not received an answer. My guess is that “private borders” reflects arguments by Hans Hoppe, who defends national immigration restrictions, an argument I discuss in the next chapter. The LP platform still supports open borders, although it does not use the term: “Economic freedom demands the unrestricted movement of human as well as financial capital across national borders.”

<sup>8</sup> Assisted by the Mises Institute and the ghost of Murray Rothbard, who tried to appeal to the far right in his paleolibertarian period.

