

Libertarianism and the Far Right

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Much digital ink has been spilled since the hard-right Mises Caucus took over the Libertarian National Committee, the governing body of the United States' third-largest political party. The Caucus removed the party's longstanding support for abortion rights and opposition to bigotry from the platform. Mises Caucus leaders in State Parties have adopted anti-immigrant and anti-queer stances. Yet, this more open bigotry is not something recently injected into the libertarian bloodstream. It's something that dates back to the time of the movement's early days.

Rose Wilder Lane was the coauthor, with her mother Laura Ingalls Wilder, of the ever popular *Little House on the Prairie* books. Additionally, Lane is considered a "founding mother" of the American Libertarian movement, but she had unsavory associations with anti-Semitic, pro-fascist groups of the Right. Lane endorsed the publication *Right*, whose publisher, Willis Carto, went on to found and lead the virulently anti-Semitic Liberty Lobby. For seven years she wrote book reviews for the National Economic Council newsletter. The Council not only defended Francoist Spain but its founder Merwin K. Hart also adopted Holocaust denial. While Lane was writing book reviews for Hart, he was warning of the "the international Jewish group which controls our foreign policy." Lane was not a bigot, but she was willing to work with bigots in a reverse Popular Front against Roosevelt and the New Deal.

Robert Leferve, another libertarian pioneer, too made alliances with pro-fascists and anti-Semites in the early days of the libertarian movement. Leferve set up Rampart College, an unaccredited libertarian school which published the *Rampart Journal*. Historian Harry Elmer Barnes contributed to the *Rampart Journal* and his colleague James J. Martin headed the history department. Both men were nothing less than the founding fathers of American Holocaust denial.

For the *Journal* Barnes wrote that "the atrocities of the Allies in the same period were more numerous as to victims and were carried out for the most part by methods more brutal and painful than alleged extermination in gas ovens." In a different issue Barnes mocked the "almost adolescent gullibility and excitability on the part of Americans relative to German wartime crimes, real or alleged." Barnes' views were already apparent in his writings before he wrote for the *Rampart Journal*. In a 1964 article for the *American Mercury*, Barnes termed the Holocaust a "Zionist Fraud" concocted by "the swindlers of the crematoria, the Israeli politicians who derive billions of marks from nonexistent, mythical and imaginary cadavers..." Today the Barnes Review, named in his honor, is one of the leading journals for Holocaust denial.

Unlike Barnes, James J. Martin kept his disbelief in the Holocaust and sympathy for fascism mostly under wraps for a long period. Nevertheless, they were bedrock parts of his worldview. He wrote to his mentor, Barnes, to ask "When is someone going to debunk this story of the 6,000,000 Jews murdered in the concentration camps?" An interview with libertarian publication *Reason* quoted Martin as saying "I don't believe that the evidence of a planned extermination of the entire Jewish population of Europe is holding up." In his 1977 book *The Saga of Hog Island*, Martin referred to the "fables emanating from Buchenwald." In the same book he calls the well-documented Nazi destruction of the Czech town of Lidice "probably the Allies' most publicized propaganda stunt of the war."

1976 was the high point of libertarian acceptance of Holocaust denial under the guise of "historical revisionism," as seen in *Reason's* special revisionism issue. One of the contributors to the issue was Austin J. App, a pro-German nationalist, not a libertarian. App's activism went back to World War II. His FBI file places him at a rally where the mass murder of American prisoners of war by the Waffen-SS was defended. Later, he served as a member of the advisory board of the Neo-Nazi National Youth Alliance and authored *The Six Million Swindle* and *A Straight Look at the Third Reich: How Right How Wrong*. App's article for *Reason*, "The Sudeten-German Tragedy" said the infamous Munich Agreement which handed over a portion of Czechoslovakia to the Nazis "was not appeasement, but belated justice..."

Gary North, another contributor, recommended *The Myth of the Six Million* as having "presented a solid case against the Establishment's favorite horror story..." i.e. the Holocaust. North went on to be a legislative researcher for libertarian darling Ron Paul and later supported the establishment of a Christian theocracy in the United States. Percy L. Greaves endorsed the conspiracy theory that President Roosevelt allowed the Pearl Harbor attacks to happen in the issue. In 1958, Greaves was an initial board member of Willis Carto's Liberty Lobby and he joined the notorious Holocaust denial outfit the Institute for Historical Review (IHR). Greaves's obituary in *Reason* lauded him as "a long-time advocate of freedom." For some reason, there was no mention of his membership in Neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic organizations.

Several libertarian readers of *Reason* were unhappy with the magazine for publishing deniers like Martin and App and those libertarians made their displeasure known in letters to the editor. Reader Kevin Bjornsson pointed out that Martin and App had written several articles for the anti-Semitic *American Mercury* (One of those articles, reprinted in *The Saga of Hog Island*, offered a defense of Mussolini's rule) but Martin responded that Bjornsson was engaging in "guilt-by association." Another letter from Dr. Adam V. Reed attacked North for promoting the denialist tracts, warning that "History is ignored, or distorted, at one's own peril." North responded "I shall continue to recommend that those interested in revisionist questions read *The Myth of the Six Million* and *Did Six Million Really Die?*" In both cases, *Reason* gave the deniers the last word.

Samuel Edward Konkin III was one letter writer who adored the "revisionism" issue. He wrote that the issue "kept [him] up all night reading from cover to cover." Konkin, publisher of the *New Libertarian*, and founder of the libertarian school of thought known as agorism, went on to join the editorial board of the IHR. Here, he linked up with James J. Martin, who had come aboard the Institute in 1979 and stayed for the rest of his life. L.A. Rollins, also a regular *Reason* contributor made his way to the IHR editorial board to write articles like "The Holocaust as Sacred Cow."

Since the publication of *Reason's* revisionism issue, libertarians have reacted to the association between libertarianism and Holocaust denial in varying ways. In Brian Doherty's court history of the movement *Radicals for Capitalism* he notes that "movement magazines like *Reason* would devote respectful issues to [historical revisionism] in the mid-1970s." Doherty's book also mentions in a footnote that James J. Martin "shifted into questioning the veracity of standard anti-German atrocity

stories, including the standard details of the Holocaust.” Doherty’s 2004 obituary of Martin mentions his turn towards Holocaust denial as well, but he unconvincingly makes the case that Martin’s Holocaust denial was an unfortunate late career turn, not, as demonstrated, a foundational part of his worldview. Jeff Riggerbach’s obituary for *Antiwar* adopts a similar framing.

Other libertarian outlets don’t even acknowledge their early heroes’ embrace of denialism. The Mises Institute, whose leader stated weeks before the Unite the Right Rally that “blood and soil and God and nation still matter to people,” is one such outlet. The Institute (similar to but distinct from the Mises Caucus) hosts works by Barnes and Martin with no acknowledgment of their sympathy for fascism or denial of the Holocaust. *Reason* has adopted a stridently defensive tack when asked about their infamous “revisionism” issue. After Mark Ames wrote an investigative piece dredging the issue up again, *Reason* editor Nick Gillespie wrote a justification under the title “Did Reason Really Publish a “Holocaust Denial ‘Special Issue’” in 1976? Of Course Not.” Gillespie protests too much. It may be true that the issue was not solely dedicated to Holocaust denial, but many of the contributors were prominent Holocaust deniers and some did advocate Holocaust denial in the issue.

Since the Mises Caucus takeover, it has become increasingly clear that there is less and less daylight between modern self-styled radicals for capitalism and the American far-right. A gay leader in the Libertarian National Committee resigned due to leaders in Mises Caucus complaining that the party should be more focused on lowering tax rates than the murder of trans women. Anti-semitic dog-whistles have proliferated such as referring to intraparty opponents as “rootless cosmopolitans.” State affiliates have fled the organization due to the hard right turn, with the Pennsylvania branch setting up the Liberal Party, the Massachusetts and New Mexico branches disaffiliating, and the Virginia chapter voting to dissolve itself.

At the upcoming Libertarian National Convention, announced speakers include conspiracy theorist and independent Presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and former-President Donald Trump. This suggests a continued openness to the far-right within the Party and where the leadership sees their audience. It recalls the “paleolibertarian” strategy of libertarian eminence grise Murray Rothbard, who saw Klansman and Neo-Nazi David Duke as a model to reach out to “right-wing populists.”

As we approach the likely rematch between Biden and Trump, it’s probable that those “double haters” who have an unfavorable view of both candidates and are looking for an alternative will glance at the Libertarian Party. They should keep the movement’s distasteful history in mind when they do so. The Party has become just another flavor of the same reaction that propelled Trump to office in the first place.