

## Some Observations on Libertarianism

*By Louis P. Solomon*

What is Libertarianism? What is a Libertarian? Before we begin a brief discussion of the current American political scene it would be nice to have a few definitions.

A Libertarian is: One who advocates maximizing individual rights and minimizing the role of the state. My source is Wikipedia. This astonishing organization has an accuracy that ranks slightly higher than the Encyclopedia Britannica. But I am not going to be distracted by following the discussion of the accuracy of Wikipedia. The issue I wish to concentrate on is the concept of Libertarianism. It is not new. It first arose in public in 1789 and focused on issues of free-will.

This idea of Libertarianism was brought suddenly to the attention of the public because of the recent elective victory of Dr. Rand Paul. In his first run for public office he won the Republican Senatorial nomination in Kentucky. He is an ophthalmologist as well as the son of (Dr.) Ron Paul, a physician and Republican Congressman from the 14<sup>th</sup> Congressional district of Texas. Ron Paul is a member of the Liberty Caucus of Republican congressmen which aims to limit the size and scope of the federal government. His son Rand describes himself as a "constitutional conservative." Rand Paul sparked several days worth of controversial media coverage when he suggested to MSNBC's Rachel Maddow that the government had meddled too far into private enterprise in the passage of the Civil Rights Act and other legislation. The preceding is factual and undisputed. A fire storm erupted. The motives of Ms Maddow, the Tea Party, Rand Paul, Sarah Palin, former Governor of Alaska, as well as others in the political and entertainment worlds is not an issue for me in this discussion. But I do feel that the concepts associated with Libertarianism which are being brought to the public's attention merit a few remarks.

Americans have always had a distrust of government. This stems from the very first people who came to the North American continent from Europe. Their experience in their home countries had convinced them that governments were interested in their own welfare and not of their countrymen. America (the American colonies at that time) was going to be different. Less government! More Self Reliance! Do things for yourselves! Good thoughts and things to be considered. Libertarianism is a philosophical discussion and structure of these concepts. The Founding Fathers believed in this.....didn't they? Perhaps they did. But the country in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century was substantially different than the country of today. Regardless of where you think—technology, population, education, energy, transportation—was in the 1600s, they are entirely different today. In fact it could be claimed that most of those areas, and many others as well, today bear no resemblance to how they existed 400 years ago. In 1630 if you didn't like how your village behaved you could walk West.

The concepts of rugged individualism were fine, and even workable in a very sparse society. But with time circumstances changed. Consider the growth of the industry and the terrible conditions of the poor and downtrodden. This terrible world gave birth to the Labor Movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was accepted that certain behavior was unacceptable in a close knit and compact society. The same argument was made about the social inequality and racial prejudice which continued virtually unabated through much of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the first major steps taken to change how society as a whole changed the rules of behavior for some of its members was when President Harry Truman signed an executive order eliminating legal inequality or discrimination against Negroes in the armed services after WWII. The rise of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and its support from the black community and many segments of the white community lead toward the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. There have been many other adjustments in the same vein. The use of its power by the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) in making it illegal to discriminate by any establishment that offered bed and board which had more than four possible customers essentially eliminated discrimination in housing. This was in itself an interesting issue: what about the small rooming inns which can have only two or three customers? After considerable discussion the ICC agreed that personal likes and dislikes could be implemented so long as the services provided were to a very small group of customers. The number which defined small and personal compared to the general public was four.

There is something to be understood here. If the society that we know as a whole wishes to operate as a whole then all must be allowed to participate. However, if there are people and organizations that wish to pursue their own discriminatory views then that is acceptable if they are small enough and focused inward upon themselves. Can I take a highly biased posture about who I entertain in my own home? Can I refuse admittance to certain specific groups, entirely at my own choosing? I can. But, if I wish to invite the entire population of the United States to use my facilities, and enjoy the tax benefits of running such an operation, regardless of what it is, then I will have to make my services and products available to all. This seems workable, reasonable, and fair. And is the law of the land.

The comments by Dr. Paul (both father and son) may express their personal views. They are welcome to them, and under the First Amendment of the Constitution, are expressly permitted to state them. But, other Americans of all races, creeds, and points of view are equally permitted to exercise the power of the ballot box.

It is my personal view that the reason that Dr. Paul (the son) won the election for the nomination for the Senator from Kentucky is that the voting populace throughout the United States are furious with the behavior of the sitting incumbents. It seems that the mood of the electorate is that they will vote against any incumbent and sort out the new winners later in future elections. While this policy is certainly not efficient it should send a message to all incumbents at all levels of political office that they are not doing an adequate job. Maybe it is impossible in a society as complex as ours has become to do a good job, in general. But, under our system of representative government, the people who are elected to act and solve problems have to do so or fall from power. Not altogether a bad concept. In all actions and activities there are consequences. Removal from office through election is one of them, and not solving our problems will have consequences.