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Stand Up for Liberty! The Local Organization Strategy for the Libertarian Party

In 1999, I wrote a book on Libertarian Party Strategy, the strategy that a successful political party should follow. Since then, we have had a National Committee that has gone off in its own direction, a direction in which it manages the business affairs of the Party, but does not focus on doing politics itself. It seems to be an appropriate time to recall that alternative political strategies are available.

In our last segment, published in the August, 2004 Libertarian Strategy Gazette, I finished by discussing the **capture** strategy. Continuing my remarks:

An effort that claims to be an effort to capture the other parties already exists. There is a Republican Libertarian Caucus and a Democratic Freedom Coalition, each striving to import our ideas into their party. On the other hand, perhaps they are really there to lure our partisans across into their parties. It is difficult to tell. If they win, great! However, in a Republican or Democratic setting, there is no selective advantage to being a Libertarian. You're one more party faction. Libertarian Democrats and Republicans may win elections. They won't easily give us the Democratic Libertarian Party of the United States.

Individual Libertarians have run successfully as members of other parties. 1988 Libertarian Presidential candidate Ron Paul returned to Texas and entered the Republican Congressional primary in his district. He ran against a turncoat Democrat who had turned Republican after being elected to Congress. The Republicans poured millions of dollars into defeating Ron Paul. Ron Paul reminded voters that he had been their Congressman, once upon a time. Ron Paul won the primary and won the election and then re-election, giving us a libertarian Republican in Congress. Ron Paul will not easily get us the Republican Libertarian Party.

A variation on capture is provided by the fusion campaign, in which a candidate is the nominee of several parties. Libertarians have been elected to state legislatures. Except in Alaska, these Libertarians often though not always ran on multiple ballot lines, such as Libertarian and Republican. It was clear to everyone that our candidates were primarily Libertarians. However, they captured a second ballot line.

A fusion candidacy keeps your vote from being split. It may pick up voters who automatically vote for your other party. Fusion is only legal in some states. The other major parties don't depend on fusion. In the long run, we can't depend on fusion, either.

Capture has several serious flaws. For starters, we'll have to take a number. There's a long line of groups already waiting

to capture the other parties. If we try to capture, we'll be one group among many. We'll sacrifice our unique advantages. You can't do Capture in secret. Many Americans would be offended if someone tried to take over their own party. Witness the difficulties the Christian traditionalists have after they capture county or state committees. Their opponents hound them for skulking behind the scenes, accusing them of secretive political conspiracies. Fair or not, the charges are damaging. I don't recommend trying to capture another party.

Self-Reliance: There is no real historical precedent in the United States for marching out and starting a successful political party. Plenty of people have launched third parties. The parties of Teddy Roosevelt and Henry Wallace and John Anderson are one with the snows of yesteryear; parties of George Wallace and Ross Perot are fading rapidly. The closest you can find to a party created by self-reliance is the Republican. They floundered until they absorbed the fragmenting Whig Party.

As an approach, self-reliance is easy to explain. We are going to start a new major political party using the same election laws that the Democrats and Republicans often obey. We will have candidates, supporters, campaign committees and funds. We have the same objective of winning election.

As an approach, self-reliance is easy to defend. We aren't trying to corrupt their politicians into supporting our ideas. We aren't sneaking around behind people's backs trying to steal the party they worked hard to build. We're simply trying to do what the Democrats and Republicans have already done -- become a major party.

If no one has successfully launched a third party before, so what? If our ancestors only did the things their parents had done, we would be staring across the Bering Sea and the Atlantic and the Rio Grande, gazing at an unpopulated America. Doing something new is as American as apple pie and maple sugar. Our parents did something new, and we can, too.

Discussion: Historical Aside -- Has Anyone Been Here Before? Hasn't anyone built up a political party from ground zero before? When the Constitution was adopted, the founding fathers believed that American would not have political parties. Indeed, as soon as political parties appeared (election of 1800), the Constitution suffered catastrophic failure. The Presidential Election of 1800 went to the House of Representatives because the original Electoral College scheme did not work with partisan elections.

Our original parties symbolized the interests of two of the founding fathers, Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. The Federalists faded from electoral significance. After a period ('Era of Good Feelings') of one-party government, the two parties resurfaced as the Democratic Republicans and the Whigs. The Democratic Republicans became the modern Democratic Party. The Whig Party crumbled. The Republican startup failed in the election of 1856. If not for the incredible political ineptitude of President Buchanan, the Republicans would likely have gone no fur-

ther. Instead, Buchanan drove much of the Whig Party political apparatus and membership into the hands of the Republicans, leading to the two parties that have endured to this day.

In the 20th century, a long series of third parties have appeared. Most have gone by the wayside. Some, such as Theodore Roosevelt's Bull Moose party and John Anderson's Presidential campaign, were one-man efforts that vanished with their candidate. Henry Wallace's Progressive Party was somewhat more substantial. George Wallace's American Independent Party and Ross Perot's Reform Party rose beyond their patron founder, running candidates for Congress and other office and establishing functional parties in some states. In the United States, explicitly ideological parties have been rare. In post-WW1 America, the socialists elected Congressmen and state legislators.

Many socialist ideas were later put into effect by the Democrats and Republicans. Recent ideological parties include the Greens (environmental activism), Natural Law (religious), and of course the Libertarian Party. All of these parties have one thing in common: none of them have thrived or taken power.

Chapter Two Paths to Libertarian Victory

There are three widely-discussed strategic plans for advancing the Libertarian movement:

- Membership Recruitment
- Local Organization
- Moral Armament

This Chapter introduces these plans. Each plan has implementation proposals, though in most cases those implementation proposals were never formally adopted. I'll describe each plan. I'll give reasons to conclude that no strategic plan has proven its value yet.

Membership Recruitment focuses on increasing the number of dues-paying, card-carrying members of the national Libertarian Party. This strategic plan is the de facto basis for national Libertarian Party activities. Perry Willis's Operation Everywhere describes a detailed implementation path for Membership Recruitment. However, Operation Everywhere is often claimed to be a draft; it has apparently never been officially adopted.

The Membership Recruitment strategy proposes that the national Libertarian Party should assemble hundreds of thousands of members. These members will give the Libertarian Party the resources and public presence needed for electoral victory. Associated with Membership Recruitment are massive fundraising mailings, the Unified Membership Plan, and Project Archimedes. At the 1998 Libertarian Party National Convention, Membership Recruitment was championed by the successful candidacy of David Bergland for National chair.

The Local Organization strategy focuses on local action, local political campaigns, and appropriate state and national structures to support the groups that will Make Liberty Happen! Local Organization is the major alternative within the Libertarian Party to Membership Recruitment. Local Organization has been discussed for many years, but without an implementation proposal. Stand Up for Liberty! is that implementation proposal. Local Organization is associated with libertarian town clubs, masses of candidates for community and state legislative office, and donors encouraged to keep their money close to home. State and Federal organizations have important, specified roles in support of local organization. At the 1998 Libertarian Party National Convention, Local Organization was associated with Gene Cisewski's unsuccessful candidacy for National Chair.

Third, Moral Armament focuses on libertarian education and the don't-vote-it-only-encourages-them philosophy. This strategy, represented by Ayn Rand's critique of the Libertarian Party, Claire Wolfe's "101 Things to Do...", and specific-interest civil action groups, arises from the assertion that electoral action is certain to fail. In contrast, moral education and private organization to ignore the state will bring us a libertarian society. At the 1998 Libertarian Party National Convention, Moral Armament was symbolically associated with None of The Above's unsuccessful candidacy for National Chair.

In short, Membership Recruitment would advance the libertarian movement by expanding a single large national organization. Local Organization would advance the libertarian movement by cultivating local groups. Moral Armament would advance the libertarian movement by educating individual people.

Now some detail on each strategy:

MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT: The Membership Recruitment path to Libertarian victory is described in the 104 pages of the book Operation Everywhere, which remains the most explicit implementation proposal for Membership Recruitment. This eclectic volume has a remarkably broad sweep, spanning everything from general strategies through to a style manual for fundraising letters and a list of questions new members should ask their party officers.

The grand strategic objective outlined in Operation Everywhere is to build a Libertarian electoral majority at every level of government. The Conversion and Capture options are specifically rejected. To find good strategies for the Libertarian Party, Willis first considers various approaches: focus on one campaign, recruit billionaires, get equal media coverage, don't run a Presidential candidate. He concludes that a successful campaign needs candidates, contributions, volunteers, and voters. His volume implicitly claims that there is only one source for all these resources, namely members of the national Libertarian Party. It is Party members who become Libertarian candidates. It is Party members who volunteer their time and contribute their wealth to build strong campaigns. Finally, it is Party members in the

form of Libertarian-registered voters who Vote Libertarian! to provide the core vote for electoral victory.

Clearly there are a variety of paths to getting candidates, contributions, volunteers, and voters. Willis advocates concentrating our efforts on raising money, and using that money to recruit more members for the national Libertarian Party. Willis demonstrates where this path leads when he urges budding Libertarian activists to contact their state party and ask Willis's suggested questions. Of 39 questions, 24 deal with fundraising, members and donor databases, and recruiting and retaining members. Four questions deal with who is running for or in office. The notion that the budding activist might volunteer to help in a campaign does not arise. Instead, Willis suggests volunteering to help local activists take care of their databases. The balance of questions reveals the core plan: recruit a group of donors and volunteers, whose primary objective is to recruit more donors and volunteers.

Where do you find these people? Operation Everywhere advocates recruiting national Party Members from the ranks of registered Libertarian Party voters and members of other groups of Libertarian bent. The first part of this approach is restricted at most to the 28 states having registration by party. Operation Everywhere further advocates what it views as a rational division of labor, with the national party hiring professional staff and renting space, doing massive fundraising for advertising and direct mail campaigns, and circulating knowledge between state and local parties. Once they have the resources, larger state parties are expected to professionalize (i.e., hire staff and rent space), do direct mail and advertising, and support local organizations. Local parties and state parties in small states distribute literature, post signs, have booths and public speakers, and do social events.

Under the plan described in Operation Everywhere, local Libertarian parties do run candidates. The purpose of their campaigns is to mobilize volunteers. The volunteers work to identify prospective Libertarian Party members; they don't work to get their candidate elected. At some future date, when there are hundreds of thousands of Libertarian Party members, we will have more volunteers and more money than our opponents. Then we will start winning elections.

Operation Everywhere specifically rejects the notion of advancing to Libertarian victory by winning local elections. Local electoral victories are seen as a distraction: "...diverting important resources from more viable projects." Under Operation Everywhere, local elections will be won after national growth has happened; local victories are not a path toward national growth at a later date.

LOCAL ORGANIZATION: The local organization approach to politics takes its theme from the Late Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill, Speaker of the House of Representatives and party organizer. In 1948, O'Neill wrested control of the Massachusetts State Legislature from the Republicans. In O'Neill's words: All politics is local!

O'Neill's words recognize legitimate places for local, state, and national Party groups. Groups at each level have their legitimate tasks, tasks that are most effectively performed by that level. Tasks focus around running candidates and winning elections, and on building the party to run and win in the future. To perform these tasks, we need to raise money, recruit volunteers, organize, and develop information systems. However, donors, volunteers, groups, and information are prized because they help win elections, not because they are valuable by themselves.

How do we build a party that wins on every level -- local, state, and Federal? The local organization strategy says that our best path is to create local Libertarian clubs. We then elect aldermen, county commissioners, and perhaps state legislators. Each local group must cover enough area to include a critical mass of activists. Each local organization must be local enough that every member sees positive results flowing from her or his personal actions. Local Organization says that elections and outreach should be the focus of the party. Fundraising and membership drives are useful tools that help us win elections and do outreach, but fundraising and membership drives are not our primary objectives.

In the local organization strategy, political campaigns are judged on victory, synergy, and foundation building. Campaigns are judged on how successful they were, how they reinforced each other, and how they built for the future. Iso-

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lated campaigns by third party activists usually lose. Exploiting the synergy between local, state, and Federal campaigns is more productive.

What is synergy? Synergy is the process that lets weak processes reinforce each other, so that their consequences are stronger than the sum of the parts. Consider the Libertarian Presidential campaign. It is unlikely that our AD 2000 Presidential candidate will win. However, by spending her time meeting the press and appearing with local candidates, the Presidential candidate can generate publicity for local candidates. Thanks to the Presidential campaign, local candidates become more likely to win.

The link between local and higher candidates works both ways. A Libertarian activist who has been elected to local office creates an updraft, strengthening campaigns for higher office. In Wales, Massachusetts, local Libertarian activist John Brickner has been a Town Finance Committee member. In 1998, Libertarian candidates for Massachusetts statewide offices got two, three, or more times the vote than they did a few towns away.

MORAL ARMAMENT: A third approach to a libertarian future comes from Ayn Rand's critique of the Libertarian Party. While Libertarian Party activists say that political organization causes change, Objectivists say that electoral success reveals that you have already changed the system. You don't make people into Libertarians because you win elections; you win elections because you have already turned people into Libertarians.

Libertarians are said by Objectivists to put the cart in front of the horse: You can't make the sun rise by making the rooster sing. Similarly, say the Objectivists, you can't win elections by organizing a political party. Instead, you persuade people to support libertarian principles; once people become libertarians, the party takes care of itself.

How do you cause change, if not through politics? The Objectivist position is that change comes from moral education. When enough voters and politicians choose to behave morally, government will become moral. Moral education comes from philosophers and moralists. By capturing the institutions of higher learning, the schools of ethics and philosophy, future leaders will be taught correct morals. Correct morals will then triumph. Objectivists urge us to compete in the marketplace of ideas, by recruiting college professors, writers, philosophers, and intellectuals. It is these people who will lead the thoughts of the younger generation to libertarian principles.

An alternative form of moral armament is implied by Claire Wolfe's book 101 Things To Do 'Til The Revolution, a volume by an avowed pacifist anticipating that non-violent action will fail. Wolfe's position is profoundly pessimistic. She writes: "America is at that awkward stage. It's too late to work within the system, but too early to shoot the bastards. On the road to tyranny, we've gone so far that polite political action is about as useless as a miniskirt in a con-

vent...The "revolution" of the book title may never be a shooting war. I hope to hell it isn't..."

Wolfe's approach to moral armament is to encourage you: to support freedom, to learn what your freedoms are, and to guard yourself against people who want to take your freedoms away. She urges you to take non-violent action, consistent with your moral principles and sense of personal safety, to resist efforts to take away your freedoms. Wolfe proposes that events happen when it is their time. She hopes that the state of freedom will improve in this country, preferably dramatically. However, improvement will only happen when enough people choose to take freedom for themselves.

Wolfe is obscure about how people will take back their freedom. Of the electoral approach, she notes that voting is compulsory in many dictatorships. Perhaps we will all stop taking the villains seriously, so their authority collapses under waves of laughter. Wolfe proposes that the solution will involve people spontaneously organizing themselves. Until we are much closer to taking back our freedoms, we are not going to know what we are going to do. At the critical moment, if freedom succeeds, the right deeds will become totally obvious. (When will all this occur? That's hard to predict.)

These are the three strategic plans, outlining three possible paths to Libertarian victory.

As I said in the previous Chapter, our ultimate objective is a Libertarian America. The grand strategy I advocate is to get the Alphabet and the Numbers, the tools we need to win elections, leading us to the Vs of Victory.

I've described three strategies that the Libertarian movement could follow, three potential paths to our ultimate objective: Membership Recruitment, Local Organization, and Moral Armament.

*Membership Recruitment proposes that libertarians should pool their resources into a single big national group. The group's leaders develop the movement by recruiting more members and doing more fundraising. At some future date, enough members and resources will be in place, and the Libertarian Party will finally grow from the top down into a Libertarian electoral majority.

*Local Organization proposes libertarians should develop local groups in their home towns, run candidates, and do outreach. Local activists build on their successes, positive results coming together into a successful national movement built from the bottom up. When town, village, and county governments have fallen into Libertarian hands, state and Federal governments are sure to follow.

*Moral Armament proposes that we develop individual libertarians by converting Americans to libertarian ideas. We will know we succeeded when Libertarian candidates win elections regularly.

Most people understand that each strategic plan could include pieces of the other two plans. Membership Recruitment does not have to exclude local groups and outreach efforts. Local organization does not exclude running someone for President or searching for new Libertarian issues. Moral armament requires running some candidates for office: Without candidates, how can you tell that the American public has been persuaded to support your cause?

HAS ONE OF THESE STRATEGIES BEEN PROVEN CORRECT?

None of these strategies has worked. Yet.

MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT is a sophisticated version of the general strategy Libertarians have followed since the party's formation. The Party began in 1972 by running a Presidential candidate. We have had heavily funded -- by Libertarian standards -- Presidential campaigns ever since. Most Libertarian Congressional campaigns spend hundreds or a few thousand dollars.

In each of the past five election cycles, the Libertarian Party focused on its Presidential campaign. Results were mixed. Over the last fifteen years, every campaign has spent hundreds of thousands or several million dollars. Each candidate received a half-million votes (within a factor of two) and finished between third and fifth. Each candidate ran limited advertising. Some debated other third-party candidates. The most significant progress has been with ballot access; we are getting more efficient at putting our Presidential candidate on the ballot in all 50 states.

Membership Recruitment for the national Party is based on the Unified Membership Plan (UMP) and Project Archimedes. The UMP defines members of participating state parties to be national members. UMP thus increases the membership of the national Party by defining state party members to be national members, too.

However, the increase in national memberships is an accounting change, not a result of successful outreach. UMP created no new Libertarians anywhere. Before the Unified Membership Plan, many people chose to belong only to their state party, or only to the national party. These people had repeatedly been invited to join the other organization, and had declined. UMP makes these people involuntary members of both groups.

In contrast to the UMP, Project Archimedes was conceived as a method for increasing the total number of party members. Project Archimedes is a massive series of mailings to prospective Libertarians. The mailings go to people who might join the national Party, such as registered Libertarian voters, opponents of the war on drugs, tax-cut activists, and gun owners. Join the national Party! urge the mailings.

Mass mailings are a very old idea. The national Libertarian Party did mass mailings to registered California Libertarian voters in the late '80s. Few of them joined the national

Party. The yield has improved little since. Few registered voters are interested in being active in a political party.

Furthermore, many people who join via mail prospecting are not activists. They pay their dues to the National Party, read the newsletter, but don't Stand Up for Liberty! and Make Liberty Happen! in a personal way. Indeed, around half of them leave the party after a year of membership. We still need a widely-used way to turn dues-paying, pledge-signing national Party members into activists. Until we find how to turn members into activists, recruiting more members does not strengthen any Libertarian group where it needs strengthening the most.

The objective of Project Archimedes is to increase national Party membership from 20,000 to 200,000 or 100,000 or 50,000. The national Party did grow in 1998 and the first half of 1999. Growth slowed substantially after mid-Summer. Since 2000, the National party has been shrinking, falling from over 33,000 members to under 19,000.

Early announcements of Project Archimedes were often read as implying that large-scale mailings will be funded by unnamed libertarian billionaires. Alas, the only known libertarian billionaires left the Libertarian Party fifteen years ago to fund the Cato Institute. At present the Cato Institute is a far more influential libertarian voice than is the Libertarian Party. In 1999 I could write: The Libertarian Party is growing, but to reach 100,000 members in 18 months as once promised we will need at least four thousand new members per month, net of membership attrition. The actual gain over five months following the 1998 national convention was closer to four hundred members per month.

LOCAL ORGANIZATION has put more Libertarians into elective local offices. In 1998 Pennsylvania elected 38 of 74 Libertarian candidates. Of 40 Vermont Libertarian candidates in 1998, Vermont elected two. One was in 2001 our only sitting Libertarian state legislator.

We don't know if these successes are sustainable, can be made to thrive, or let us build a party that will compete successfully on the Federal level. If the Pennsylvania and Vermont results are meaningful for party-building, the number of elected Libertarians in those states will continue to increase. That hasn't happened yet. If local organization actually works as a tactic, those Libertarian office holders will lead to stronger local groups, able to elect more Libertarians in the future. If the Pennsylvania and Vermont results matter, other states can copy the strategy. If local organization works in the long term, elected Libertarians and libertarian groups will survive and thrive in the face of counterattacks by other major parties. None of these things has happened yet. There simply has not been time.

MORAL ARMAMENT tells us to create private social structures that eventually will let us ignore the state. Private groups working to replace the state need massive active support to succeed. For example, the public education industry now serves tens of millions of children, albeit often poorly. **MORAL ARMAMENT** will separate school and state, re-

placing public education with private and parochial schools, support mechanisms for home schoolers, and parents who care enough about their children that they just say no! to government bureaucrat educators. It took decades to create the current public education industry. Even allowing for government inefficiency, years and years will be needed to replace it. The enormous effort of the dedicated volunteers who made a success of the private Christian Academy system shows the magnitude of the challenge. Matching challenges exist wherever there is a government program awaiting privatization.

MORAL ARMAMENT is not a party-building strategy. You can support Moral Armament no matter which strategy the national Libertarian Party tries. Most advocates of Moral Armament do not oppose Membership Recruitment or Local Organization because those strategies are morally defective. Advocates of Moral Armament oppose the other strategies because they expect that the other strategies will waste limited Libertarian resources when they fail.

Which Strategy should we follow? Membership Recruitment, Local Organization, and Moral Armament each have their merits and partisans. I consider this question further in the next chapter.

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