

The Voluntaryist

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"If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself."

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MURRAY ROTHBARD, VOLUNTARYISM, & THE GREAT GANDHI SMEAR

By George H. Smith

(A Comment on Murray Rothbard, "The New Menace of Gandhism," *Libertarian Forum*, March 1983).

"It is the old Game of mischievous Men to strike at the Characters of the good and the great, in order to lessen the Weight of their Example and Influence."

—Samuel Adams (1778)

INTRODUCTION

When The Voluntaryists first organized, I wrote an editorial for *Frontlines* entitled, "The Movement Be Damned" (August 1982). I knew our anti-political views would face severe criticism (as they should), so I asked fellow libertarians to deal fairly with our arguments. "You may find our arguments unconvincing," I wrote. "If so, reject them. But please don't reject them for the sake of 'the movement.' If there is one thing the libertarian movement can do without, it is the movement mentality."

Despite my plea I suspected we would be the target of misrepresentations and smears. "If our ideas gain currency among many libertarians...and especially if libertarians begin resigning from the party as a result, then brace yourself for the storm. We shall be roundly denounced as subversives who threaten 'the movement'."

My prophecy has been fulfilled, unfortunately, but not accurately enough to qualify me for messiahship. I anticipated a variety of attacks, but *never* did I foresee anything resembling Murray Rothbard's "The New Menace of Gandhism."

Say what you will about Murray Rothbard (and I have plenty to say in this article), he is expert in keeping his adversaries off balance. You hear that Murray Rothbard is going to attack you in print. You become apprehensive at the thought of facing the enemy's big guns. You speculate on his strategy. You map out every conceivable tactic he might employ. The big day arrives. You brace yourself and — wham! — arguments you never dreamed of come bouncing off the wall.

And Rothbard does this with such aplomb! He almost had me convinced that I am a Gandhi-worshipping mystic who — seeking to camouflage my real purpose of dropping out — longs to be beaten senseless by pacifist-hating cops.

After reading Rothbard's article, concerned libertarians have asked my friends: (a) Has George Smith repudiated his atheism book and become a mystic? (b) Has George Smith fallen over the edge into bonkersdom? The answer to (a) is no. The answer to (b) depends on who you talk to. I feel normal, but some friends tell me that I am bonkers for ever thinking that Murray Rothbard would give voluntaryism a fair hearing.

THE ROTHBARDIAN FLIP-FLOP

One of the first times I talked to Murray Rothbard was at the 1975 California Libertarian Party Convention. Looking for a conversational topic, and having just read Arthur Koestler's anthology *The Heel of Achilles*, I mentioned to Murray one of the essays, "Mahatma Gandhi: A Re-valuation." Calling it "Gandhi revisionism," I related some of Koestler's debunking, such as Gandhi's practice of sleeping with young girls to test his vow of celibacy.

I vividly recall Murray's reaction. Stating that Gandhi was a "good guy" who was "sound" on British imperialism, Murray emphasized that one's personal life is irrelevant to one's political beliefs and accomplishments. A simple point perhaps, but it sunk in.

Considering this background, it is surprising to see the Koestler piece re-emerge. This time, however, the article (reprinted in a recent Koestler anthology) is used by Rothbard to attack Gandhi with surprising vindictiveness. Calling Koestler's piece "a superb revisionist article," Rothbard employs a Classic Comics version to argue that Gandhi was a "little Hindu charlatan."

Something changed Rothbard's view of Gandhi. Was it a scholarly assessment of Gandhi's ideas and influence? The facts suggest otherwise. Rothbard displays little familiarity with Gandhian literature, primary or secondary. He seems to think that Koestler uncovered obscure information about Gandhi, but Koestler relied on standard biographies and anthologies (as his footnotes reveal). "The time has come," Rothbard announces, "to rip the veil of sanctity that has been carefully wrapped around Gandhi by his numerous disciples, that has been stirred anew by the hagiographical movie, and that greatly inspired the new Voluntaryist movement."

What "veil of sanctity"? Gandhi's sexual theories and practices, his dietary habits, his treatment of his children — these and other "revisionist" aspects of Gandhi's life were extensively discussed by Gandhi himself, and they appear in many Gandhi biographies. This may be scintillating revisionist fare for Murray Rothbard, but not for people who have read more than a solitary article. (Rothbard apparently hasn't even seen the movie.)

Has voluntaryism been fueled by a trumped-up, sanctified Gandhi? Not one iota of evidence is given to support this claim. Not *one word* of voluntaryist writing is quoted to support Rothbard's contention that we are, in effect, Gandhi disciples.

Indeed, not one word from Wendy McElroy, Carl Watner, or

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me is quoted *anywhere* in "The New Menace of Gandhism," nor is a single article cited. Rothbard's information comes from unidentified informants, an overwrought imagination, and thin air.

As an example of Rothbard's concern for accuracy, consider the following passage: "Indeed, one of the keenest analysts of the libertarian scene attended Smith's Voluntaryist workshop at the recent February California LP convention, and reported that 'George is psyching himself up for confrontation with the state.'"

Are we talking about the same convention? There was *no* "Voluntaryist workshop" (or voluntaryist event of any kind) at that LP convention, much less one organized by me. There was a workshop on nonviolent resistance put together by two members of the Libertarian Party. Moreover, I was not even one of the speakers at "Smith's Voluntaryist workshop." (The four speakers included three LP members and Wendy McElroy.) I participated in the discussion afterwards, as did many people. Rothbard's analyst may be keen on some things, but not on getting his facts straight.

Details are troublesome little things, especially when misrepresenting an adversary, so Rothbard doesn't worry much about them. Nor is he moved by any effort personally to correct his distorted impressions. Consider this amazing statement: "Smith, McElroy and the others deny vehemently either that they are mystics or that they are courting martyrdom. I remain unconvinced."

We denied these things "vehemently" in conversations with Rothbard at the Oakland LP convention. If we take Rothbard at his word, he is stating unequivocally that George Smith and Wendy McElroy — two friends and colleagues of longstanding — have become mystics and martyrdom-seekers, despite our repeated denials. Appealing to an "inner logic," Rothbard transforms two friends into fools or liars. (A flat denial that we are "Gandhians" was obviously treated with the same contempt.)

Rothbard is fiercely determined to stop voluntaryism in its tracks, come what may, and he won't let mundane things like accuracy and common decency stand in his way.

No one owes a greater intellectual debt to Murray Rothbard than I do. I treasure his magnificent contributions to libertarian thought and scholarship. I therefore welcome Rothbard's reflections on voluntaryism, however hard-hitting they may be.

But serious criticism requires knowledge of the subject matter and a willingness to present it accurately. Rothbard doesn't even come close. From his musings about a voluntaryist descent into mysticism to his vicious smear of Mohandas Gandhi, Rothbard distorts with gay abandon. "The New Menace of Gandhism" is, in a word, disgraceful.

WHY GANDHI GOT THE AXE

There are several ways to read "The New Menace of Gandhism." You can read it as a biting "Menckenesque" com-

mentary on nonviolent resistance and Gandhi. (This leaves much unexplained, and Mencken, let us remember, usually got his facts straight.) Or you can read it as an objective, fair-minded essay written in quest of truth. (If you believe this, I have some Arizona real estate you might like to buy.) Or — and this is my candidate — you can read it as a "Leninist" Party tract, an effort to crush voluntaryist "deviationism" in its infancy and thereby steer libertarian radicals back to the Libertarian Party (or at least to Rothbard's wing of the Party).

One must understand Rothbard's flirtation over the years with "Libertarian Leninism" to appreciate his approach to movement strategy. The appellation "Leninist" is not a smear — it is Rothbard's own term. It denotes, not an agreement with Leninist philosophy, but a reliance on the Leninist model of movement organization and strategy.

Rothbard defended strategic Leninism for many years, only to renounce it later in the pages of *Vanguard*. But Rothbard's shift from Leninism related to its emphasis on centralism in Party organization. Having previously supported a party with strong central control and direction, and having condemned Party decentralists as "Konkin deviationists," Rothbard has since swung over to the decentralist side. (Yesterday's deviationism is today's Party line. After all, centralism isn't so great if someone else is in the center.)

Despite Rothbard's partial recantation, other features of strategic Leninism continue to inform his approach to movement politics. "Right opportunism," "left sectarianism," "deviationism," "vanguard," "cadre" — this standard Leninist jargon is commonly employed by Rothbard and some of his followers in the Radical Caucus (RC). These terms reflect what I can only describe as a "Party mentality." ("Party" may refer to a faction — such as the RC — within a larger organization, or to the organization itself.)

Strategic Leninism requires obedience and loyalty to the Party. All enemies, and especially *internal* enemies ("deviationists"), must be "crushed." The end (the good of the Party) justifies the means. Short of violating rights, Libertarian Leninists exhibit few constraints on their behavior. Their tactics run the gamut from gossip and personal attacks to serious misrepresentations.

Recall Rothbard's statement about the unidentified analyst who "reported" on a nonexistent "Voluntaryist workshop." We shouldn't make too much of one word, but the term "reported" is quite typical of Rothbard's style and illustrates his general mind-set. Ordinarily, if a friend tells us something, we don't say he "reported" it. A report usually implies a specific assignment passed down a chain of command. A lieutenant "reports" to his superior.

Libertarian Leninism is embraced by some RC members (by no means all) owing to Rothbard's influence. This is especially true of the higher echelon. The RC has an intelligence network of sorts (e.g., the informant "deep throat" ensconced somewhere in the "Crane Machine"), and *Vanguard* delights in printing private documents and internal memos relating to their arch-villain, Ed Crane.

Many libertarians are bewildered by the incessant Rothbardian and RC attacks on internal "deviationists," and they are disturbed by the vitriolic and often personal nature of these attacks. But these libertarians fail to comprehend the Party mentality, especially its Leninist Species. An obsession to purge deviationists (especially competitors for internal power) is almost a defining characteristic of strategic Leninists.

The Leninist sees conspiracies and plots everywhere; reactionaries and counter-revolutionaries infest the movement and threaten to sap it from within. ("Honest disagreement" is

rarely found in the Leninist's vocabulary.) Thus what appears irrelevant to an outsider, such as vitriolic personal attacks, is clearly germane — even vital — to the Leninist. The overriding purpose is to neutralize or destroy deviationism, and all else is subordinated to this goal.

Judging by the blitzkrieg against The Voluntarists in *Vanguard* and *Libertarian Forum* — the two organs of Libertarian Leninism — it appears that voluntarism is high on the Leninist hit list. It is no secret that the higher echelons of the Radical Caucus have kept a close eye on The Voluntarists for some time. RC members attend voluntarist meetings and "report" back to Bill Evers and Murray Rothbard. An RC member may be instructed to distribute anti-voluntarist literature at a voluntarist conference, with advance copies rushed to him through the mail. (When voluntarists distribute literature at an LP convention, we pay for a table like everyone else.) How to neutralize The Voluntarists has been a topic of conversation at more than one RC gathering.

There needn't be anything sinister in all this, despite the cloak-and-dagger mentality that some of the RC cadre (who see themselves as masters of intrigue) bring to their work. RC machinations are transparently obvious to anyone with one good eye and half a brain, but if this incompetent Machiavellianism makes them happy, why spoil their fun?

Although some of these antics are harmless, even amusing, others are destructive and mean-spirited. The *Vanguard* accusation of criminal misconduct against a prominent libertarian — who, not coincidentally, is close to Ed Crane — was a sickening case in point. Does anyone seriously believe this muckraking blossomed from a love of truth and justice? Is anyone naive enough to suppose that *Vanguard* would have similarly "exposed" one of its own?

"The New Menace of Gandhism" — if viewed as a serious examination of voluntarism, nonviolent resistance, and Mohandas Gandhi — is nothing more than a joke. But if viewed as an accomplished piece of "Leninist" propaganda, a salvo to crush yet another threat to the Party, it makes far more sense. The purpose of the article is to plug the leak of LPers, especially RC members, to voluntarism.

Rothbard is explicit on this point. Nonviolent resistance is not just a fallacy or mistake. True, it is "Hindu baloney," nonsense," and a "fad," but it "cuts deeper than that." It is a "menace," "a spectre haunting the libertarian movement" which "has been picking off some of the best and most radical Libertarian Party activists [i.e., RC members], ones which the Libertarian Party can ill afford to lose if it is to retain its thrust and its principles." (How such a ridiculous fad appeals to the Party's best and brightest is not explained.)

Here lies the solution to our puzzle. Here lies the difference between the 1975 Gandhi and the 1983 Gandhi: the latter is a threat to the Party, whereas the former was not.

The good of the Party required some quick, if inaccurate, revisionism, so Gandhi got the axe. Rothbard assassinated a dead man for "reasons of Party." (My own keen analyst informs me that Rothbard searched for someone else to do the dirty work; but apparently unable to locate a good hit man, he did the job himself. He was assisted by an able lieutenant and fellow Leninist who provided the murder weapon in the form of an Arthur Koestler article.) Gandhi had to go, so the weapon was found, and the deed was done.

The measure of quality propaganda is its ability to persuade and convert, not its accuracy or objectivity. "The New Menace of Gandhism" succeeded admirably in this respect. There may be a price, however. As one Radical Caucus member suggested, instead of calling Murray Rothbard "Mr. Libertarian", we should now call him "Mr. LP."

MURRAY ROTHBARD, ANARCHO-FREUDIAN?

Interpreting "The New Menace of Gandhism" as Party propaganda in the Leninist tradition is the only satisfactory way to bring coherence to an otherwise bizarre and disjointed essay. This is illustrated in the following passage. According to Rothbard, "many, if not most, Voluntarists and their fellow-travelers...begin with various forms of disillusion or exhaustion with LP activities. At this perhaps temporary moment of weakness, they seize on Voluntarism for providing them with a cosmic rationale for dropping out of a commitment to the libertarian movement."

Rothbard's psychobabble is even more outrageous in "Voluntarism and Dropout-ism" (*Libertarian Vanguard*, April 1983). "I have been maintaining for some time," intones our anarcho-Freudian, "that the main reason for the recent Gandhite craze in the libertarian movement has been the need for a high-flown theory to rationalize dropping out, not only from the LP but the libertarian movement itself."

Now that Rothbard has diagnosed the psychological malady underlying voluntarism, may we expect him to conduct "intensives" to cure the afflicted unfortunates en masse? Oh, where is Thomas Szasz when we need him?

But what is going on here? Is Rothbard the anarcho-Freudian he appears to be? Rothbard has condemned the use of "psychobabble" on many occasions, so his sudden fondness for it is startling indeed.

I cannot believe that Murray Rothbard is an anarcho-Freudian. I do believe, however, that he is a shrewd tactician and polemicist. The motives for quitting the Libertarian Party are varied and complex. But Rothbard has invented "Rothbard's razor" — an ingenious variant of Occam's razor — as a strategic weapon to slash voluntarism.

Occam's razor says that we should never multiply explanations beyond what is necessary. Rothbard's razor says that we should never multiply explanations beyond what is necessary for the good of the Party. Rothbard equates quitting the Party with abandoning the movement. The reasons for quitting are conveniently brushed aside with psychological analysis.

Does Rothbard contradict his previous position on psychobabble? This question reflects a failure to comprehend the Leninist world view. When it comes to matters of strategy, the Leninist sees the world in continual flux. The only constant is the good of the Party; it is the sun around which everything else revolves. Rothbard defends the Party by whatever means necessary. By this standard he is remarkably consistent.

ROTHBARD ON NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE

There are three related aspects of "The New Menace of Gandhism": its misinterpretation of nonviolent resistance, its misinterpretation of voluntarist interest in nonviolent resistance, and its misinterpretation of Gandhi. Although this essay deals mainly with the smear of Gandhi, a few remarks about nonviolent resistance are in order. (This subject will receive more attention in forthcoming issues of *The Voluntarist*.)

Rothbard's account of voluntarist interest in nonviolent resistance meets the intellectual standards we would expect from a Leninist tract. His introduction — an irrelevant and (by implication) insulting comment about radicals who plunge into eastern mysticism — sets the tone for the rest of his attack. Equate an interest in nonviolent resistance with eastern mysticism, and — given the attitudes of most libertarians to mysticism — you've delivered the opposition an effective

blow. Lousy logic? Yes, but good propaganda.

Rothbard is determined to peg voluntaryists as disciples of Gandhi, so I will try again to set the record straight (probably with little effect, since anything I say in Gandhi's defense will be taken as evidence of discipleship). We are no more disciples of Gandhi than Rothbard was (or is) of Lenin. Gandhi's crusade was a significant attempt to apply nonviolent resistance against a State and therefore deserves careful study. The theory of nonviolent resistance, as Rothbard knows, goes back long before Gandhi. One can investigate nonviolent resistance without being a philosophical Gandhian. (Rothbard concedes that we "are squarely in the Benjamin Tucker tradition." Does this make Tucker a pre-Gandhi Gandhian?)

Rothbard claims that the "nub of Smith's recently formed Voluntaryist movement" is an attempt to bring 'down the State by massive non-violent resistance.' No evidence is cited to support this allegation because none exists. The "nub" of The Voluntaryists is twofold: first, to convince libertarian anarchists that electoral politics is an improper and ineffective way to attain anarchist goals; second, to explore various alternative strategies.

Nonviolent resistance is one strategy among many. We believe that libertarians should give it a fair hearing. We should approach it with the same open-mindedness and flexibility that Rothbard has traditionally demanded for his pet strategies. The fate of voluntaryism does not hinge on whether libertarians eventually decide in favor of this tactic. As future articles in this journal will demonstrate, nonviolent resistance should be investigated for its strengths and weaknesses.

(A recent voluntaryist discussion group in Los Angeles covered the pros and cons of nonviolent resistance in detail, using Gene Sharp's *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* as a text. These meetings were attended by at least six LPers, including several RC members, all of whom led the discussions at various times. They can attest that the general attitude remained critical and open-minded. Rothbard's scurrilous remarks about nonviolent resistance are an insult, not only to voluntaryists, but also to LP members who understand that nonviolent resistance is an issue distinct from voluntaryism. Rothbard's attempt to place nonviolent resistance on an LP index of prohibited subjects, hoping thereby to remove temptation from the path of his flock, will backfire among the many independently-minded members of the Libertarian Party and RC who refuse to be sheep.)

Rothbard sees The Voluntaryists as a "party," in effect, so he assumes we must have a party line on strategy. We don't. Commitment to a particular strategy was *deliberately* omitted in our statement of purpose. Our intention was to explore alternative strategies. If we agree on any "strategy," it is education. Our interest in nonviolent resistance stems from its possible educational value; at times it has proven effective in delegitimizing the State. Contrary to Rothbard's fabrication, we have not said that we intend to bring down the State with nonviolent resistance. Nonviolent resistance may serve as one tool among many in the ongoing fight against State power, but this potential is far removed from Rothbard's caricature.

Incidentally, where is Rothbard's "strategy" for "bringing down the State"? Rothbard demands "alternative strategies," but this presupposes that he has a strategy to begin with. Rothbard's Leninism, combined with his praise for the success of violent revolutions, suggests that he favors eventual violent revolution in the United States. If so, then he should explain this strategy. If not, and if he rejects non-

violent revolution, then he apparently favors constitutional means, i.e., voting. Are we to believe that the State will be voted out of existence? Even one historical example of this would be nice.

Before Rothbard demands that voluntaryists present "alternative" strategies for bringing down the State, he should present one himself. And it should include more than generalities about the need for principles, education, and cadre-building. Voluntaryists disagree with none of these — and neither, for that matter, did Gandhi.

I shall not address here Rothbard's sundry criticisms of nonviolent resistance. Distinguishing the serious from the frivolous is a task in itself. (For instance, Rothbard's assertion that successful nonviolent resistance depends on "the mass of people" withholding their obedience to the State "at one blow" displays an astonishing ignorance of the entire subject.) Until nonviolent resistance receives more attention in future issues of *The Voluntaryist*, I invite the reader to examine the work of Gene Sharp and judge first-hand whether most of Rothbard's points are criticism or caricature.

SMEARING GANDHI

The most disturbing feature of "The New Menace of Gandhism" is its vicious personal attack on Mohandas Gandhi. Rothbard knows little about Gandhi, but he does not hesitate to dismiss the life and work of this remarkable man as a fraud and a sham. Why Rothbard regards this muckraking as necessary is something of a puzzle (unless we adopt a Leninist perspective). Presumably, if the man is personally discredited, then so are his ideas — a classic case of *ad hominem* and a credit to strategic Leninism.

In defending Gandhi I risk playing into Rothbard's hand. If I am *not* a Gandhi "disciple," then why do I defend him with obvious passion? One needn't be a disciple (an uncritical follower) to defend someone. Unbridgeable philosophical chasms separate me from Gandhi, but I admire and respect this man who devoted so much of his life to fighting State oppression. By any reasonable libertarian standard — the same standard we apply to a Sam Adams, a Thomas Paine, or a Lysander Spooner — Mohandas Gandhi qualifies as heroic. He cast some of his ideas in religious terms (by no means unusual even among Western libertarians, e.g., William Lloyd Garrison), and he moved in a cultural world that may seem bizarre to the Western mind, but these obstacles should not prejudice us against a fair appraisal of Gandhi's ideas and actions.

There is another reason why a defense is appropriate. Murray Rothbard has earned the status of the leading libertarian historian, and rightfully so. He has produced many brilliant books and articles, integrating history and theory in a grand fashion. All libertarians, including voluntaryists, owe an incalculable debt to this remarkable theorist, without whom the modern movement would not exist.

In addition to Murray Rothbard the intellectual, there is also Murray Rothbard the activist who engages in the rough and tumble world of political intrigue. Usually one can distinguish the scholar from the partisan. Usually one can trust the history while dissenting from the analysis and conclusion. Accordingly, even libertarians who reject Rothbard's criticism of voluntaryism and nonviolent resistance are likely to accept at face value his account of Gandhi.

Few libertarians who read Rothbard's treatment of Gandhi will suspect how terribly distorted and unfair it is. And why should they? Rothbard, after all, is an accomplished historian. But here he lets his Leninist proclivities get out of

hand. He made no serious effort to acquire a broader knowledge of Gandhi's ideas and actions. Maybe he isn't interested enough to take the time. Fair enough; Rothbard needn't immerse himself in Gandhian literature if he has better things to do. But then neither should he scribble a venomous calumny against a man he knows so little about.

Libertarian figures (and Gandhi, as we shall see, was predominantly libertarian in his outlook) have trouble enough getting a fair shake from conventional historians. Gandhi has received his share of lumps from Brits who long for the glorious days of Empire and from statists who ridicule his vision of an anarchist society. When a leading anarchist historian contributes to this villification, other anarchists should take him to task.

HOW TO WRITE SELECTIVE HISTORY

There is a sense in which all history is selective. The historian selects facts he considers relevant (based on his philosophical views and his purpose in writing) and integrates them in a coherent narrative. But there is another kind of selective history, where "facts" are wrenched from their context, distorted, and even concocted to score polemical points.

If a person is controversial, and if his life is well-documented (the personal and public details of Gandhi's life are probably better documented than any other figure in this century), then he is a sitting duck for his enemies. Unless he is an infallible, superhuman saint, there will be some parts of his life open to attack and ridicule.

Gandhi, needless to say, was neither infallible nor a saint (as he reminded his followers on many occasions). But nor was he the phony, hypocritical con man depicted by Rothbard. Interestingly, Arthur Koestler, on whom Rothbard so heavily depends, had a markedly different opinion of Gandhi. Despite his criticisms, Koestler said that "Gandhi was as near a saint as anybody can be in the twentieth century"; and he noted that "Tolerance was Gandhi's guiding star and the main source of his magic charm." (*The Lotus and the Robot*, Harper and Row, 1960, pp. 145, 150.) Insofar as Rothbard implies that Koestler shared his assessment of Gandhi, he misrepresents both Gandhi and Koestler.

The good historian brings balance and perspective to his subject. He distinguishes the essential from the nonessential. While not glossing over mistakes and inconsistencies, he explains the *fundamentals* of a person's ideas and accomplishments. Murray Rothbard achieves this brilliantly in such works as *Conceived in Liberty*, but it is tragically absent in his account of Gandhi.

It may be replied that "The New Menace of Gandhism" was not intended to be a scholarly treatment but simply a brief antidote to Gandhi worship. This cannot excuse the distortions, however, nor does it justify the blanket dismissal of Gandhi as a charlatan and hypocrite. Bad history is bad history, whatever the motive for writing it.

Let us turn the tables. Suppose Rothbard, in defense of electoral politics, pointed to the political achievements of Thomas Jefferson, who, during his first presidential term, eliminated direct taxes, disbanded the army, and gutted the navy. As an opponent of electoral politics, I pen a response. I charge that Jefferson was a hypocrite. He claimed to oppose slavery while owning slaves. He professed strict construction of the Constitution, except when it suited his purpose (e.g., the Louisiana Purchase). Supposedly a paragon of virtue, he is alleged to have had sexual relations with a female slave. He entertained some crackpot notions about the corrupting

influence of commerce and cities. And so on.

Rothbard would justifiably dismiss this response, pointing out its selectivity and irrelevance. Jefferson was a complex person with good and bad points, but he was fundamentally libertarian in his outlook. So, I submit, was Gandhi. Gandhi had his faults, but he never recommended castration for the "crime" of sodomy, as did Jefferson; nor did he, like Jefferson, demand the death penalty for violators of an embargo. He never came close to anything like this. Using Rothbard's standards, shall we dismiss Jefferson as a charlatan and moral monster?

A "ROTHBARDIAN" ANALYSIS OF SAM ADAMS

With some carefully chosen facts I can transform a host of libertarian heroes into fools, hypocrites, or villains (depending on my mood). Let's take a special hero of Rothbard's from the American Revolution — Sam Adams. Rothbard has expressed great admiration for Sam Adams (an admiration I share), but poor Sam's radiance fades quickly when subjected to Rothbard's style of analysis.

Rothbard attacks Gandhi for his (supposed) position on the Kashmir war. Okay, where did Sam Adams, a famous defender of the right to resist unjust laws, stand on the Whisky Rebellion of 1794, when Pennsylvania Farmers rose up against an excise tax? "What excuse then can there be for forcible opposition to the laws?" Adams asked rhetorically. None at all in the United States, he answered. How did Adams feel about raising 15,000 militia (requested by Alexander Hamilton) to crush the rebellion? He quite literally thanked God and praised the Federal Government for enforcing God's will: "Let the glory be given to Him who alone governs all events, while we express the just feelings of respect and gratitude due to all those, whom He honours as instruments to carry into effect his gracious designs." (*The Writings of Samuel Adams*, ed. H.A. Cushing, IV, 373. All subsequent quotations are from this volume.)

In some ways, echoing Rothbard on Gandhi, Adams was "horribly consistent" in his ardor for the American Revolution. He screamed for the punishment of neutrals who simply wished to be left alone. Every neutral was an enemy. He denounced Philadelphia Quakers as "a sly artful People." Americans who "maintained a dastardly and criminal Neutrality" should have their property confiscated by patriotic Americans. Loyalists and neutrals who fled America to escape war should not have their property restored if they return. (pp. 51, 76-7.)

"I had not thought," writes Rothbard about Gandhi, "that the libertarian movement, steeped as it is in the rationalist heritage of Rand and Mises, would ever fall prey to the wiles of this little Hindu charlatan." Okay, I had not thought that Murray Rothbard would ever fall prey to the wiles of this little *Christian* charlatan. Adams prattled incessantly about the need for Christian virtue enforced by law. If Americans "lose their Virtue," Adams warned, "they will be ready to surrender their Liberties to the first external or *internal* Invader." (p. 124) True to his incipient fascism, Adams admired Plato's totalitarian scheme for State education (p. 359), and he repeatedly advocated the brainwashing of "little boys and girls" in government schools to inculcate "in the Minds of youth the fear, and Love of the Deity . . . The Love of their Country . . . and Practice of the exalted Virtues of the Christian system." These State schools were to usher in "that Golden Age," the "Millenium," when "the Wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the Leopard lie down with the Kid — the Cow, and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down

together, and the Lyon shall eat straw like the Ox — none shall then hurt, or destroy; for the Earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord.” (p. 343)

This is obviously the old Christian baloney sliced once again.

America, warned Adams, will degenerate into tyranny if its people succumb to “Luxury and Extravagance.” When a review of the Boston Militia ended with some festivities, Adams was appalled by this “Gayety of Appearance.” “Are we arrived to such a Pitch of Levity and Dissipation as that the Idea of feasting shall extinguish every Spark of publick Virtue . . . ?” Adams, good puritan that he was, devoutly wished for “that Sobriety of Manners, that Temperance, Frugality, Fortitude and other manly Virtues . . .” (pp. 67-8)

The “Torrent” of “Levity, Vanity, Luxury, Dissipation, and indeed Vice of every kind . . . must be stemmed,” preached Adams, so he ominously called for an “Association of Men of unshaken Fortitude” in order “to do it effectually.” (pp. 123-4)

To further the “sobriety” and “temperance” generated by “honest industry” Adams, while Governor of Massachusetts, requested “Legislative aid . . . for the promoting of useful improvements, and the advancement of . . . industry among the people” (p. 392) — which would also curb the importation of corrupting luxuries from abroad.

This, in brief outline, was Adams’s plan for his beloved “Christian Sparta.” This is the man for whom Rothbard has expressed admiration on numerous occasions! So, again echoing Rothbard, I ask: Murray! “In the grand old Randian phrase, check your premises! Is *this* really the credo that you would like Americans to adopt? I personally find it odious, repellent, and extraordinarily creepy, and I venture to predict that there are damned few libertarians, let alone the mass of Americans, who will go along with it.” (“The New Menace of Gandhism,” p. 5)

Less than one hour of skimming the works of Sam Adams yielded this information. (I suspect this is twice as long as Rothbard spent on Gandhi.) And I could have added much more. For example, “many historians,” writes Rothbard, “have pointed out that India would have won independence earlier without Gandhi’s existence.” Okay. Many historians have pointed out that the Americans could have won their demands from Britain without revolution; but propagandists like Sam Adams, disguising economic motives with moral rhetoric, inflamed the colonials and brought about a needless bloodbath that cost thousands of lives.

A smear, as we have seen, is relatively easy to construct. I could build a negative case against any number of admirable libertarians from the past. The points raised about Sam Adams might be relevant to a longer study, but they are highly deceptive if offered as the essentials of his life and work.

Yet I was *more* fair to Adams than Rothbard was to Gandhi; at least I got my facts straight, selective though they be. Given my presentation, Rothbard’s admiration for Adams is incomprehensible. Who but a Christian bigot or fledgling fascist of the moral majority kind could possibly admire such a man? Moreover, my attack is immune to criticism. Suppose Rothbard denies that he is an Adams disciple, or that he ever intended to give Adams blanket approval. I model my response after Rothbard when he wrote: “Smith, McElroy and the others deny vehemently either that they are mystics or that they are courting martyrdom.” Rothbard is not fooled at all, and neither am I. Like Rothbard I simply announce, “I remain unconvinced.”

Suppose Rothbard claims that much of what I said about Adams has nothing to do with his other ideas and accomplishments. Again, I need look no further than Rothbard for a model. Writes the master: “In considering various

aspects of his thought and life, we must realize that, for Gandhi at least, they all formed part of a seamless web, an integrated whole.” Sam Adams thought the same way. A good Calvinist, he (like most religious persons) also viewed his life and thought as an “integrated whole.” So, after consulting my handy Rothbardian smear manual, I just substitute “Adams” for “Gandhi” and move on.

Thus do we relegate a libertarian — whether Adams or Gandhi is immaterial — to the oblivion of Rothbard’s inferno. Thus do we merrily hack our way through the life of a man — whether Adams or Gandhi is immaterial — who devoted himself to the cause of liberty. Thus do we distort, ridicule, and degrade a man — whether Adams or Gandhi is immaterial — in order to protect our own little corner of the libertarian movement.

It is interesting to speculate on how later historians will portray Murray Rothbard. What in his life will they select as significant, and what will they conveniently omit or distort? Let us hope that Murray Rothbard never falls victim to a historian who learned his trade from “The New Menace of Gandhism.”

ASSESSING GANDHI

Missing from my discussion of Jefferson and Adams is an eye for fundamentals. Where did these men stand on the crucial subject of the State and individual liberty? In assessing political theorists and activists, this is the place to begin a libertarian analysis. Then we may evaluate the consistency and coherence of their theories, as well as the effectiveness of their actions.

Only if we understand fundamentals can we attain perspective on errors and inconsistencies. So to assess Gandhi — to put his mistakes in perspective — we need to know his beliefs concerning liberty and the State. Incredibly, Rothbard has nothing to say on this score.

Surely it is important that Gandhi repeatedly called himself an anarchist, that he refused positions of political power, that he called for the abolition of the Indian Congress after independence, that he criticized Nehru’s government, that he desired the abolition of the Indian military and the maintenance of, at most, a minimal police force. Surely it is important that his entire social program revolved around establishing decentralized “village republics” which would use social sanctions to maintain order and which would be free of State control. Surely it is important that Gandhi was a vigorous opponent of imperialism (including Zionism), war (including WW II), censorship, and virtually every other kind of State intrusion.

Surely such facts are significant, but we don’t find them anywhere in Rothbard’s article. There is no mention — not even a hint. Instead, we are told that Gandhi was “crazy” in economics, a religious quack, a neanderthal in technology, ineffectual politically, cruel to his children, anti-education — in general, just a “Hindu charlatan.” Something is clearly amiss.

Even if the details of Rothbard’s allegations were correct — which they are not — he would still be guilty of writing selective history (like my smear of Sam Adams) for partisan reasons. But many of Rothbard’s allegations are distorted or downright false. How much space to devote to correcting Rothbard is a judgment call. Some of his mistakes — such as his claim that Gandhi was opposed to education per se — are first-rate howlers — whereas others are based on common misconceptions about Gandhi’s views on nonviolent resistance.

The interested reader should consult Gene Sharp, *Gandhi*

as a *Political Strategist* (Boston; Porter Sargent, 1979), for a more detailed corrective to some of Rothbard's allegations than I can provide here. Moreover, Sharp's interest in a serious evaluation of Gandhi's ideas and accomplishments distinguishes him from the hagiography condemned by Rothbard as well as the Gandhi-bashing practiced by Rothbard. Writes Sharp:

Opinions about Gandhi the man, his philosophy, and his political activities are easy to find and vary widely. Gandhi has been regarded as a great independence leader and also a tool of the British; as a Mahatma and also a shrewd political manipulator; as a muddling fool in politics and also an accomplished strategist and political innovator. His 'non-violence' and its role in the Indian independence movement are considered by some as completely successful, by others as a total failure, and by still others as once useful but now irrelevant.

Unfortunately, these opinions are rarely based upon deep knowledge of the subject, careful analysis, and critical judgment. It is now time for serious scholars to undertake careful research and evaluation of Gandhi, his beliefs, political technique, and actions. (pp. 88-9)

Readers of this journal will note that, insofar as *The Voluntarist* has promoted "Gandhism," it has been through reviews and recommendations of Gene Sharp's books. The above passage, which typifies Sharp's approach, reflects the voluntarist attitude and the kind of open-minded perspective we would like to instill in other libertarians. Unthinking Gandhi-worship should be condemned, certainly, but so should unthinking Gandhi-bashing. Rothbard's treatment of Gandhi is simply the reverse side of the hagiographic coin he so vigorously assails.

GANDHI'S POLITICAL VIEWS

In the enormous corpus of Gandhi's writings, we find no systematic treatise on political theory. Yet scattered throughout letters and articles we find unmistakable indications of his anarchist tendencies. It is generally known that Gandhi was influenced by Tolstoy, Thoreau, and other libertarian writers, and their impact is clearly revealed in many of Gandhi's comments. The following remarks are not a systematic analysis of Gandhi's political theory; they are offered as an outline of his fundamental approach that was conveniently ignored in Rothbard's analysis.

Many analysts have pointed out that Gandhi was in the anarchist tradition and that his anarchism was strongly individualistic. In contrast to the supposedly Oriental view that the individual counts for nothing, Gandhi argued that "the individual is the one supreme consideration". "No society," Gandhi wrote, "can possibly be built upon a denial of individual freedom. It is contrary to the very nature of man. Just as a man will not grow horns or a tail, so will he not exist as man if he has no mind of his own. In reality even those who do not believe in the liberty of the individual believe in their own."

Raghaven N. Iyer, in his scholarly and balanced account of Gandhi's social and political theory (*The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, Oxford Univ. Press, 1973, p.115), writes: "It would not be extravagant to consider Gandhi as one of the most revolutionary of individualists and one of the most individualistic of revolutionaries." "Gandhi," Iyer argues (p.121), "could not believe in the moral priority of any collective agency over the individual."

Similarly, B.R. Nanda, in his excellent biography (*Mahatma Gandhi: A Biography*, Beacon Press, p.205), says of Gandhi: "The distrust of the apparatus of government was almost as deeprooted in him as in Tolstoy. He would have agreed with

the nineteenth-century doctrine 'that government is best which governs least'."

This Jeffersonian maxim was central to Gandhi's thinking. "A society organized and run on the basis of complete non-violence," he stated repeatedly, "would be the purest anarchy....That State is perfect and non-violent where the people are governed the least." And again: "...the ideally non-violent State will be an ordered anarchy. That State will be the best governed which is governed the least." Gandhi's hatred of State oppression was as passionate and deeply-felt as any contemporary libertarian. "Any man who subordinates his will to that of the State surrenders his liberty and thus becomes a slave."

Of course, Rothbard has a predictable response at his disposal. Gandhi's anarchism does not necessarily redeem him. There have been anarchist cranks and charlatans, after all, and Gandhi falls in this category.

This rejoinder may satisfy the requirements of Leninist propaganda, but it won't do for any person concerned with objectivity. To understand Gandhi is not necessarily to agree with him. He held certain views about the impact of British imperialism on the Indian economy, and much of his hostility to industrialism and "capitalism" should be viewed in this context.

It is crucial to understand that there were two facets to Gandhi's crusade: the campaign against British imperialism, waged by non-violent struggle; and the "constructive" program of revitalizing India's villages, thereby diffusing power and dismantling the highly centralized State administration constructed during the years of British rule.

From his reading of Henry Sumner Maine, Gandhi believed that, prior to rule by the East India Company and, later, the British State, India was dotted with thousands of villages which were self-sufficient economically and politically. "Maine", Gandhi wrote, "has shown that India's villages were a congeries of republics." These "village republics" were "ruled" not by State agencies, but by "Panchayats" — village councils of five elders which arbitrated disputes and relied on the force of moral authority and social sanctions.

Gandhi knew that India had been conquered many times before British rule, but he also believed that the British had a more pervasive impact than previous conquerors. Specifically, British mercantilism required that India produce raw materials for British industry and that India not be allowed to compete with British manufacturers. Onerous internal restrictions and external trade barriers virtually destroyed the Indian artisan class, including village industries (especially spinning) which kept villages afloat during the seasonal unemployment typical of Indian agriculture.

Gandhi knew that the anarchist society he envisioned required more than expulsion of the British; it required the building of "social power" (to use A. J. Nock's term) to fill the power vacuum created by a British departure. A renaissance of the pre-British "village republics" was the centerpiece of Gandhi's constructive program. "The best, quickest, and most efficient way is to build up from the bottom," wrote Gandhi in 1942. "...Back to the villages!' has become a necessity from every point of view. ...Every village has to become a self-sufficient republic." "My idea of village Swaraj [home-rule] is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity."

These village republics, ruled by Panchayats "of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers," would rule by nonviolent methods (social sanctions, as Gandhi recognized, are more effective in small, closely-knit communities). And they would serve as bulwarks against centralized State

power.

Gandhi's social program, despite its (mainly economic) flaws, is not as "crazy" as Rothbard would have us believe. If Gandhi's longing for a pre-conquest golden age of village republics is condemned as a futile and reactionary effort to turn back the clock (a major complaint of Marxists), we should remember that many pro-liberty revolutionaries have similarly looked to the past for a model of social reform (e.g., seventeenth-century English libertarians who were inspired by the myth of English liberty prior to the Norman Conquest).

Gandhi undoubtedly romanticized the condition of pre-British Indian villages, and his focus on the spinning-wheel as the key to revitalization was sparked by faulty economics (inspired greatly by John Ruskin — a formative influence on Benjamin Tucker as well). Fallacies aside, however, Gandhi (like early American revolutionaries who admired New England townships) recognized the need for a decentralized power structure to resist the growth of a centralized State. Many of his insights were sound, and if we are to understand his shortcomings, we should keep his general perspective in mind. That is precisely what Rothbard fails to do.

(To be continued in our next issue.)

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