

The Plumb Line

The Efron affair

by Murray N. Rothbard

Libertarians from all over the country have been asking me what my response is to Edith Efron's attack—on the libertarian movement in general and on me personally—in her "Viewpoint" column in the February *Reason*. To give you an idea, consider how *you* would feel if you were well known in your community and someone, in order to discredit you and your activities, claimed in print that you had made certain damaging admissions to her—admissions you had never made, but which were so dramatic they were bound to be repeated from one end of the movement to the other. And all this looked to be done out of malice, to destroy what you had spent your life building up. Well, that's about the way I feel.

Everything that Efron wrote about my alleged disclosures to her is untrue: They are either lies or self-deceptions emerging from her own paranoid fantasies. To be specific: I never tried to "take over" any party of which Eldridge Cleaver was the head, or do anything like it (a pretty idiotic thing for me to have attempted). In working with leftists against the draft and the Vietnam War, I never had the absurd notion of converting them to capitalism, either sneakily (as Efron would have it) or otherwise. Above all, on her most dramatic point (which virtually forms the *leitmotif* of her article), no one has ever pulled a gun on me, in the ribs or in any other way. Nor, of course, did I ever tell her any of this rubbish. It is all preposterous nonsense, every word of it.

Efron needed the "gun-in-the-ribs" gambit as a major theme in order to prove to everyone's satisfaction that all leftists are thugs and hoodlums, and that a gun in the ribs is all you can expect from any dealings with them. (Apparently, *her* pals in the Pentagon are devoid of any lethal weaponry.) The fact that this unlikely canard fit in so well with the point she was trying to make in her column should have tipped off the reader to what was going on—an exercise in personal fantasy-spinning rather than political analysis.

The outrage I feel stems from the frustration of a victim who has been falsely accused in the public print. Efron makes a dramatic statement about me; I deny it; What is the average reader to think? Most

of them will say, "Well—who knows? She may be right." Or, "Who am I to judge?"—especially if they are not personal friends of either of us. Personal friends of mine have no trouble figuring out which one to believe. As one of them said, I'm not the sort of person to hoard stories. It's inconceivable that I would have told a saga as dramatic as the "gun-in-the-ribs" story *only* to someone like Efron, who has merely been an acquaintance, or that among all my acquaintances I would have told it only to *her*. Surely my friends would have heard it many times over, and someone else would have heard it sometime, somewhere. The reason they haven't, of course, is that Efron created it out of the whole cloth.

As for the rest of Efron's article, it is about on a par with her statements about me: a farrago of ignorance and malice that is simply and literally *not to be believed*. David Ramsay Steele's article in last month's *LR* barely scratched the surface in listing Efron's "untruths."

Her charge that we libertarians are lax in saluting the greatness and importance of free-market economists Ludwig von Mises and F.A. Hayek (whom she idiotically and typically places "on the conservative side") is so ridiculous it's embarrassing. I'll just say that I think what *I've* done to promote Austrian economics and particularly the ideas of the great Mises compares rather favorably with what Efron has done over the years.

Efron's charge that libertarians such as myself ally ourselves only with the Left is ignorant hogwash. We believe in allying ourselves with *whomever* has a libertarian position on issues important to us. We hail a Nat Hentoff on civil liberties and a Henry Hazlitt on economics. This is not inconsistency; on the contrary, it means that we consistently welcome people for the libertarian positions they hold on particular issues, a welcome which in no sense means that we endorse their stand on every conceivable question. But to libertarians, this is nothing new. Most of us have known for a long time that our position cuts across the conventional left-right spectrum, that we agree with liberals on some issues and with conservatives on others. That is because *we* are consistent upholders of liberty, and *they* of course are not.

Her implication that we have joined the Left in "evad[ing] mass murder in Cambodia" is false on two important counts: first, because much of the information that we have, and that she can self-righteously refer to, on the monstrosity that is Cambodia comes to us from Leftists who staunchly opposed the war in Indochina: from James Forest, Jean Lacouture, Father Ponchaud, etc.; and second, because while I myself, as she well knows, wrote a blistering attack on the Cambodian regime in *Libertarian Review*. Where and when did Efron ever write on the subject before she penned her broadside attack?

Efron's appalling ignorance of the libertarian movement is revealed by her lament that the limited government people have struck some sort of "deal" with anarcho-capitalists never to engage in discussion or debate over their ultimate ideological differences. Efron has apparently not been reading not only *Libertarian Forum* or the *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, which has published numerous anarchist critiques of Robert Nozick, but not even *Reason* itself, where John Hospers and I have squared off. The debate continues. It is only the activists in the Libertarian Party who wisely concluded that they would get nowhere facing concrete political issues if they spent their energies on such theoretical questions. These disputes, while ultimately important, are hardly relevant at present to contesting the next election or dealing with current political situations.

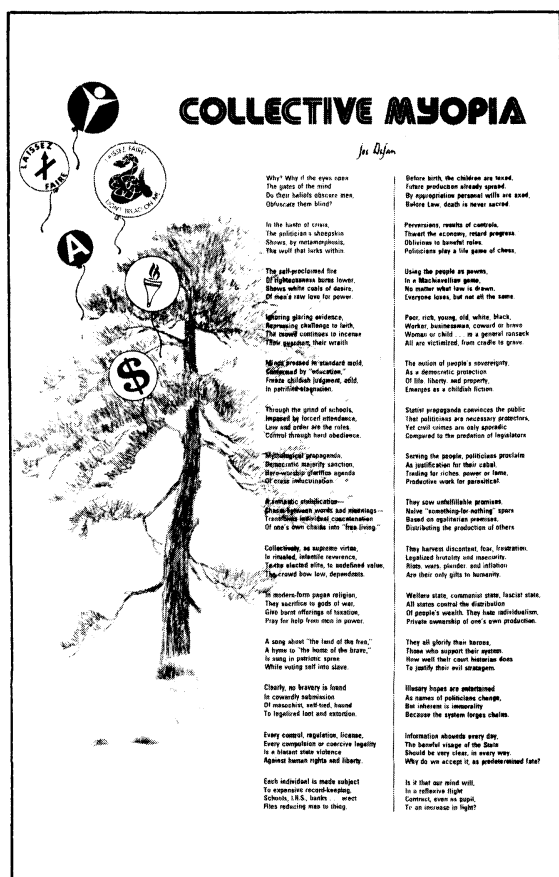
Apparently, Efron had no desire whatever to remedy her ignorance of the libertarian movement before writing about it. Instead of doing research, she seems to have relied on her imagination for facts. Her slovenliness extends even to *Inquiry*, a publication which is not, strictly speaking, libertarian, but rather a general-interest, political affairs magazine. What can we say of an alleged reporter who presumes to denounce *Inquiry* without having read *any* of it—even though she was offered a gift of the issue that had already appeared when she wrote her diatribe?

I have before me the 12 issues of *Inquiry* that have come out so far. Does it exude "sleaze," as Efron would have it? Has the enemy put one over on its editor, Bill Evers? Hardly. There are attacks on the Panama Canal treaties (by yours truly); the American, Communist and Third World governments; corruption in the U.S. Congress; the Therapeutic State; foreign aid; the post office, and public education (the last by "Maoist" Karl Hess, among others). There is the moving diary of a Polish dissident, and defenses of competition in the professions and of the rights of *real* nations (i.e., populations with a common cultural

Sometimes her article is relieved by some (unconscious) humor; thus, Efron expresses horror that a "distinguished laissez-faire economist," Roger LeRoy Miller, was asked to write a review of a book on the political economy of whorehouses. What she fails to realize is that Professor Miller has written on precisely such topics as prostitution, as has the eminent free-market economist George W. Hilton—who has even spoken at a convention of COYOTE, an organization of prostitutes defending their right to do business.

What, then, is Miss Efron? From the evidence of her article, she is certainly a “news twister” *par excellence*. But where have we seen this before, this amalgam of hysterical smears and red-baiting, joined to an ideology that scorns civil liberties and calls for love and “reverence” for the *state*? There are not many laissez-faire thinkers of the past who, though upholding limited government, have actually loved and revered it. On the contrary—for them, as for modern libertarians, love and reverence have been reserved for such values as liberty and human dignity, and even for one’s

Is this "love," this "reverence," these old bones of the 1950s and 1960s, this dissociation from reality, really what the libertarian movement is supposed to crawl back to? Certainly not, and not at the behest of someone like Efron. We are no longer an isolated sect. We are now an adult movement, we are dealing with grown-up things, and moving around in the real world, where *facts* are important. We are making an impact on the mainstream of American life, and we have just begun. ●



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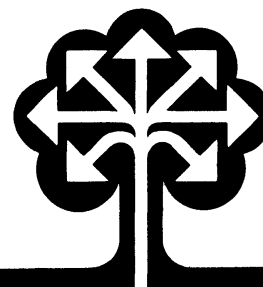
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The Revolt of the Taxpayer



LESLIE J. NEWMAN

An interview with
the elder statesman of
today's tax rebellion —
Howard Jarvis

by Jeff Rigenbach

Howard Jarvis

A spectre is haunting state and county bureaucracy," the *New York Times'* William Safire wrote early this year, "the spectre of tax revolt." And there can be little doubt that he's right. A 1977 Field Institute poll indicated that 70 percent of Americans consider their state taxes too high and 72 percent consider their city and county taxes too high. In Massachusetts, a group called Citizens for Limited Taxation is placing a proposal on the ballot to limit state taxes to nine percent of personal income. A group called National Taxpayers United of Illinois has organized a property tax strike in that state, and is demanding a state-wide referendum on tax rates. Taxpayers are organizing, demonstrating, protesting, and refusing to pay in Maine, Oregon, and half-a-dozen other states. Truly, as the *Christian Science Monitor* reported in February, "discontent with the property tax is heating up all across the United States."

The man who claims (and probably deserves) much of the credit for all this uproar is Howard Jarvis, the 75-year-old president of the Apartment House Association of Los Angeles, and cosponsor, with retired realtor Paul Gann, of Proposition 13 on the June ballot in California. Proposition 13 would amend the state constitution to impose a limit on the power of local and state government to tax property. If Proposition 13 is passed, property taxes in California will be limited to one percent of the assessed value of the property.

(The current tax rate is closer to three percent.) In case politicians try increasing the assessed values, Proposition 13 also provides a limit of two percent a year on such increases. And in case they try to impose new taxes to replace the old revenue, Proposition 13 further provides that new state taxes may be raised only by an all-but-unprecedented two-thirds vote of the legislature, and that new local taxes may be raised only by an all-but-impossible two-thirds vote of the electorate.

Not surprisingly, Proposition 13 has politicians running scared. The official estimate is that passage of the measure would cost government around \$7 billion a year. That loss, according to California State Assembly Speaker Leo McCarthy, would be "a disaster." San Francisco Mayor George Moscone agrees. "No matter how you slice it," he says, "our police, our libraries, our fire department and schools would be crippled." And Democratic State Chairman Bert Coffee told the *Los Angeles Times* in February that passage of Proposition 13 would mean "turning the state over to the current-day anarchists."

Somehow, though, that description doesn't quite seem to fit either Howard Jarvis or his partner in Proposition 13, Paul Gann. Gann is 65 years old. Since retiring from the real estate business a few years ago, he's been running a Northern California taxpayers' organization called People's Advocate, Inc. "In 1950," he says, "there was one state em-