

Trump's Reception at the Libertarian Convention

By Roger L. Simon

Like many people, I dislike being categorized, but if forced, when asked where I stood in terms of political ideology I would check off the box that said, "leans libertarian."

In other words, I'm more or less libertarian but don't hold me to it. Nevertheless, I do believe in general terms that the government is best that governs least.

But the night of May 25, while watching former President Donald Trump address the Libertarian Convention on television, I wanted to, in sixties parlance, burn my libertarian card.



Former President and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump addresses the Libertarian Party National Convention at the Washington Hilton in Washington on May 25, 2024. (Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

Who were these people? The crowd was so juvenile and

disrespectful of President Trump, and one would assume just about anybody else, jeering him throughout—who would want to have anything to do with them? (I had heard entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy was treated the same way at the convention, but with a smaller audience.)

This was just two nights after President Trump's speech in the Bronx where he was received considerably more warmly by a vastly bigger, mixed-race, and mostly working-class crowd. The comparison was, to say the least, noteworthy.

What appeared to most concern these highly orthodox libertarians (that seems almost an oxymoron, but it's not) at the convention was freedom for a man named Ross Ulbricht. They shouted "Free Ross" at every opportunity, many times drowning out the speech. Pre-printed "Free Ross" placards proliferated in the room to the extent they often blocked out President Trump from the television camera, deliberately or not.

The man in question, Mr. Ulbricht, was the founder of the darknet website Silk Road in 2011. It was a marketplace for all sorts of drugs from marijuana to heroin to LSD, as well as other "services," one of which was to gain entrée to professional hackers who could provide backdoor access to people's social media and other private data to businesses that might be interested.

Mr. Ulbricht made multiple millions in commissions from this until he was arrested in 2013, tried, and sentenced to life in prison. He has now served 11 years.

The U.S. justice system has not, to put it mildly, been particularly Solomonic in recent years, regarding President Trump and others, but I don't find Mr. Ulbricht as much a martyr as the conventioners do. Still, his sentence was excessive, although several narcotics deaths were alleged to have been connected to contacts made on his market site.

President Trump allowed that he would commute Mr. Ulbricht's sentence and also averred he would appoint a libertarian to

his cabinet. He further pledged, as he has before, to release the J6 prisoners. But none of this seemed to placate the rowdy crowd, nor did the obvious—that President Trump in his policies was the most libertarian president in years, at least since Ronald Reagan and possibly beyond. (Of course, there were exceptions, but this is the real world.)

More disturbing is the obsession of contemporary libertarians, apparently including those attending this convention, with the ability of anyone to take any drug he or she wishes. This does not wear well in an era when Americans, including thousands of naïve young people, are dropping like flies from fentanyl. In fact, it smacks of a kind of selfishness that may be inherent in the ideology when taken to extremes.

I do not mean that drug users should be unfairly punished. But I know from experience and from observation it can ruin your life and that of those around you, family, friends, and colleagues, even the society at large. It's not just about *your* vaunted freedom.

Drugs have been an obsession with doctrinaire libertarians for a while. In 2016 I interviewed for PJ Media their presidential candidate of that year, Gary Johnson, and all he wanted to talk about was legalizing marijuana, as if that were the most significant issue facing humanity.

The irony is that President Trump is known to use neither drugs nor alcohol and yet he was willing to give the crowd their way on "Free Ross." My guess is if he gave them everything they wished, they would just invent more demands. That's what ideologues tend to do.

Which leads to what I believe is the moral of the story. Political ideologies, when they go to extremes, when they replace religion as belief systems as with the famous "God that failed," communism, their usefulness diminishes and in many cases they become dangerous, again as with communism and its gateway drug socialism. Libertarianism, regrettably, has its own imperfections, many of which were on display at the

convention.

Political ideologies are imperfect in and of themselves. Even at their best they can blind us to the reality of the world around us.

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