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Part 5: Starting from Scratch

The Challenges

Starting from scratch is hard, no doubt about it. Go to politics1.com and you can find a rather long list of stillborn political parties. And because getting off the ground is hard, credibility is lost, resulting in a Catch-22 situation.

On the other hand reforming an existing political party is also very hard. There are people who have been struggling within the Libertarian Party for well over a decade in order to get it focused on doing realistic politics. The honor roll of burnouts in this cause is large and includes the leading lights of the Cato Institute.

I have come to the tentative conclusion that launching a new party to take advantage of the upper-left market niche is easier than reforming an existing party. The Libertarian Party has too many anarchists and right-wingers. The Green Party has too many socialists. The Constitution Party is overly associated with the Right. The Reform Party is yesterday's news. Anyone within these parties is more than welcome to prove me wrong.

And just what are the assets of the existing third parties? The Libertarian Party has name recognition, but this carries more negatives than positives. The LP has a donor list, but the national party has more monetary liabilities than assets last I checked. The LP has ballot access, but only wins elections in non partisan races, where such ballot access is irrelevant. The LP has a web site and a database, but so do I.

Opportunity cries out! Disgust with the existing major parties is high. The Internet, talk radio and cable television make for relatively cheap outreach. Electronic printing makes short press run outreach materials reasonable. Home computers have the power to mix quality video.

I submit that a small group of focused volunteers can do *some* of the jobs of running a political party better than the existing third parties. Other jobs can be postponed with few losses. As for the rest, that's the tricky part. Can a party bootstrap from being tiny? Or must we first recruit some big donors and/or celebrities so we can jumpstart our new party? I don't know the definitive answer, but I can provide many clues, with tantalizing indications that bootstrapping from very little is possible.

A startup party has many challenges, including:

1. **Acquiring members using limited resources.** For example, getting new members using direct mail is not an option without substantial startup capital, since the near term return on investment is generally negative.
2. **Being credible while small.** A new party has no ballot access, professional staff, brand recognition or elected office holders. What can such a party offer besides blue sky promises?
3. **Holding on to members.** When a party is small, there is little to be lost by being smaller (i.e., a sunk cost). This provides little penalty for factionalism and schism. Keeping the organization together is a challenge.
4. **Keeping overhead down.** How far can we go without paid staff, offices, expensive conventions, newspapers, etc? Which high-overhead items should we invest in first as we grow?

If we can manage to do good enough jobs with 1 and 3, then 2 and 4 take care of themselves to a large degree. But I am not going to count on doing so.

The Low Hanging Fruit

If you haven't read Part 3, stop and do so now! There, I talk about the four bottlenecks to acquiring dedicated activists. Here, I am going to look at each bottleneck, and identify the low-hanging fruit, along with the progressively more difficult options.

Remember that in the uncorrelated, linear approximation, the total fraction of voters who become dedicated activists is the product of the four bottlenecks. Ignoring any one bottleneck can cut our acquisition flow down to a tiny trickle. The key to success is to exploit *all* the low-hanging fruit for each bottleneck, and then intelligently apply the more expensive options where needed.

Awareness

In terms of cost/ease, we can roughly divide our awareness building options as:

Easy	Less Easy	Moderately Hard/Expensive	Hard/Expensive	Very Hard/Expensive
Web site. Appropriate comments on	Brochures. Bumper Stickers.	Alternative media coverage. Audio CDs.	Classes National Direct mail	Statewide campaigns Presidential campaigns

blogs and forums. Word of mouth to friends, family, coworkers, acquaintances.	Web ads Booths. Participate in local Government. Letters to the editor. Network with other groups	Books. DVDs. Local radio spots. Local Campaigns. Forums.	Ballot access Partisan campaigns Local Television Ads TV Infomercials	Celebrity endorsements National media coverage
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Feel free to quibble over my categorization of what is easy and what is hard. Keep in mind that what I consider hard is biased by what is hard for *me*. Writing a book is hard, but funding a direct mail campaign is harder. (I have done enough writing of late to the point where I am no longer intimidated by the thought of writing a book. On the other hand, all this writing/activism has put a dent in my bank account.) Should some well-heeled donors jump on board early, the order of difficulty could change.

Do note how much effort the Libertarian Party has put into the options on the far right column, even while overlooking some of the easier options. Where are the CDs describing the Libertarian Party so that people can listen while driving down the road? Where are the videos/DVDs that members can hand to friends/family/coworkers? How many radio spots are purchased promoting the party (vs. individual candidates)? Has the LP ever done an infomercial? (This worked very well for Lyndon LaRouche.)

Some of these things have been produced by the movement, but promoting a party is not identical to promoting a movement.

And even where the LP does exercise the easy options, it doesn't go full throttle. The number of bumper stickers and brochures are very limited. Activists have to buy them, vs. having the party push them into the hands of activists. Perhaps the rules have changed, but once upon a time the Hare Krishnas had ongoing outreach booths on the Mall in Washington DC. If such is still legal, a third party that can afford a DC office could be maintaining a presence on the Mall. Busloads of high school seniors arrive daily with government on their minds.

OK, this is perhaps too expensive for a startup party; I am lapsing back into criticism of existing parties. But the key point is that there are many options for getting out the word that are much cheaper than earning participation in a national televised debate, getting celebrity endorsements, or decent coverage by the national mainstream media.

If our other bottlenecks are open sufficiently, awareness can spread using just the cheapest options. If the ideas are pleasing enough and the party credible enough, those who hear by word of mouth are likely enough to spread that word. That said, I suspect that the moderately expensive options of books, CDs and possibly DVDs are worth doing early for the purpose of internal education if nothing else.

Best Ideas/Believe in the Party

Our options here are:

Easy	Less Easy	Moderately Hard/Expensive	Hard/Expensive	Very Hard/Expensive
Be moderate. Triangulate.	Hone message via informal focus groups Educate on web site Educate by personal communication	Educate by: Audio CDs. Books. DVDs. Forums.	Classes	Convert/recruit leaders Convert/recruit celebrities Convert/recruit educators Voter indoctrination

The two easiest options are covered in Part 2. Here is an area where a brand new party excels over existing parties. Note that I included triangulation here, even though triangulation is primarily for credibility. If you are in a two-way race, there are situations where not triangulating can open this bottleneck further. For example, you could run as a liberal candidate in a liberal district against a Democrat. But on the national scale, this bottleneck is opened by maximizing the number of people who like the new party's ideals more than *either* that of the Democratic or Republican parties. (OK, you can also open this bottleneck just as much by being centrist as well, so perhaps I am jumping the gun here.)

Besides my theoretical triangulation/moderation, it is possible to test market ideas. It is possible to spend tens of thousands of dollars doing so formally, but it is also possible to productively hone the message through very informal processes. I am in the process of doing so now. A campaign which includes door-knocking automatically hones its message as the candidate listens to the reaction of those he contacts.

Besides perfecting the message, it is also possible to open this bottleneck through voter education. In fact the opportunity is extremely large for a party occupying the upper-left market niche. While there is plenty of sentiment in favor of moving this country towards smaller government and more equality, most people don't know how to get there, or that an upper-left agenda is even possible.

For this reason I think education should be part of the mix right from the beginning. If you skipped Part 4, go back and read what I had to say about education vs. indoctrination. If you are a libertarian or deep environmentalist who has met a great deal of resistance to your efforts at "education," odds are good that you have been attempting indoctrination. I do not propose indoctrination as an early strategy. Let those who like big government in and of itself continue to be Democrats or Republicans. Let those who are happy with a large wealth gap remain Republican.

I could have the ordering above wrong. It could be that recruiting community leaders and/or national celebrities is easier than I anticipate. It could be that getting people to attend classes on egalitarian free market economics is easier than I

anticipate. If so, these options should be exercised early. If not, only minor trial efforts should be extended in these directions at first.

Credibility

This is the big challenge for a startup party. Given the number of failed and bogus third party efforts, it is critical to stand out early. Here are some options.

Easy	Less Easy	Moderately Hard/Expensive	Hard/Expensive	Very Hard/Expensive
Be moderate. Triangulate. Realistic plan. Avoid the baloney. Avoid paper candidates. Avoid playing the spoiler. Avoid unqualified candidates.	Quality web site, handouts. Educate. Gather sympathetic names to get conditional acceptance. Focus on two-way races. Official FEC status.	Quality CDs, DVDs, books. Geographic focus. Participate before running. Have a local agenda. Yard signs <i>in yards</i> Win some local contests.	Get partisan ballot access. Win a few state house races.	50 state ballot access. Qualified celebrity presidential candidate. Adequate funding for presidential campaign. Large membership base.

Once again, you can quibble about my ordering.

Note how the first column has many items that are simply not doing things that are bogus. Desperation tactics make you look desperate. Many a third party has adopted desperation tactics to gain awareness and lost credibility thereby. Let us be honest about our prospects. Let us not be arrogant by claiming that our inexperienced candidate is better than the major party’s experienced candidate purely on the basis of ideology. Let us not treat voting as a way of “sending a message.”

Note also how the LP has put a great deal of emphasis on items on the far right without fully exploiting the easy opportunities.

That said, we cannot expect to be credible to many with just a market position, a hefty business plan, and an avoidance of past mistakes. We do need to do some harder things right from the start. But we don’t have to go that far to obtain differentiation from 90+% of the dormant stub parties listed on politics1.com. Simply having a hefty web site with active content is more than most of these parties have. Most are obviously bogus from just a few minutes browsing the web site. Throw in a library of decent outreach materials and FEC reporting and you are already up a level. With such an appearance of credibility, you can get people to look deeper into your plans and what you are actually doing now.

One thing that a new party can do from the start is voter education. Such an effort is worthwhile to those who agree with the party's agenda even if the party never wins an election. There is a danger to relying on education for credibility too long, however. Such a strategy can result in a membership base that doesn't do real politics. Nonetheless, it is a risk worth taking, since a tiny party can do little else.

One possible way to inoculate against the dangers of becoming an educational organization instead of a party would be for affiliate parties to avoid calling themselves parties until they are ready to run credible candidates. They could be clubs at first. Let local clubs do the outreach, gather sympathetic names etc. Then, they can support local non-partisan campaigns. Only after such a base is obtained should ballot access on a partisan basis be sought.

Once again: gather sympathetic names. It is possible to open Bottlenecks A and B without opening C and D. If you do outreach booths, push polls, etc. you can build a database of names whom are aware of, and like the new party's agenda. Should this list become large enough, you then can obtain credibility by pointing out the size of this list to the members therein. At this point you attempt to activate those prone to activism. You tell the community about your support base by getting yard signs *in the yards* of your sympathizer base. (Some political experts will say yard signs are unimportant. I beg to differ. For a third party they are critical, *if* they are placed in yards vs. public right-of-ways or in front of voting areas. In yards they send a message out that you have a support base, that you are credible.)

Geographic focus and local message are concepts that deserve their own chapters.

Participation before running is a local strategy. If your local club can get a half dozen members to show up are city council meetings on a regular basis to protest injustice and praise good government, you will be noticed by locally important players: the press, angry citizens, non-party activist groups, and local business interests. A potential candidate should participate in such activities for some time before announcing a run for office. Better yet, the potential candidate should try serving on at least one appointed board. These activities provide huge credibility boosts, along with press coverage and donations.

Dedication

Open the first three bottlenecks and you have a membership base. To open them further, you need to get some of them active. Here are some options.

Easy	Less Easy	Moderately Hard/Expensive	Hard/Expensive	Very Hard/Expensive
Appeal to altruists Fun/productive parliamentary procedures	Fun culture Recruit proven activists	Internal educational materials on issues, including the details. Internal educational materials on running a local affiliate. Internal educational	Mentoring programs.	Classes.

		materials on campaigning.		
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The first two are powerful and easy. Here is an opportunity to be stronger than the existing third parties right from the start.

The Libertarian Party for the most part came out of the Objectivist movement, which called for an ethic of rational self-interest. While the party has recruited from other threads, the message still emphasizes individualism and self-interest.

The problem comes from the fact that third party politics is an altruistic enterprise. The only satisfactions are social networking and working towards a better society. Unless such a third party is on the verge of true victory, there are few other benefits. The selfish individualist is better off pursuing “freedom in an unfree world.”

Freedom can appeal to sociable people. Mercy, justice, prosperity and efficiency are all appealing to people who like people. One can be a social animal without being a socialist. Such people are the best pro-freedom politicians: they like campaigning more, and the public trusts them. (Rational self-interest within government is a formula for corruption!)

Improved parliamentary rules are an area where our new party can be better than any existing party! Robert’s Rules of Order are stifling and boring. They really break down when the room is filled with opinionated people. It is also possible to game the system to the point where determined minorities can temporarily dominate the proceedings, which magnifies acrimony.

I have come across two technologies that work better:

1. Range voting. See www.rangevoting.org. Range voting allows a group to intelligently decide between more than two alternatives. With range voting you can get away from many of the points of order and the like which lead to frustrating meetings. All variations of a motion can be considered in parallel. (With voice votes, 1-5 sentiment polling works. For electronic voting, finer gradations are feasible.)
2. Open Space Technology. To come up with and refine the options to vote on, it is well to break up the body into dynamic committees. Open Space Technology is a formalism for doing so, a mix of market and parliamentary thinking that has been embraced by many “pro-democracy” activists. See openspaceworld.org.

Note that I should probably move some of the items leftwards. Compared to the challenges of awareness, belief and credibility, *none* of these items are as hard. Internal education materials on issues can be mostly the same materials used for outreach. Activist education materials can be as simple as a library of PDF files of lessons learned on a web site. Mentoring programs need not be formal. They are simply a discipline of not asking new activists to act on their own at first; pair them experienced activists first. Holding classes can be somewhat expensive due to travel

expenses and hotel rentals. But even they are far cheaper than 50 state ballot access, running a real presidential campaign, etc.

Putting it Together

So, even from the start it is possible for a new party to have two of the bottlenecks substantially wider than for the Libertarian Party (B and D). Awareness is fairly deterministic. Tell people in person about your existence and ideas and they are made aware. Credibility is the tough one, but even here we have a few tricks that none of the other third parties have.

Still, the mathematics of a four-bottleneck stream are brutal. Suppose you reach 10% of the people, half like your message, 10% think you are credible and 10% are willing to help out. Multiply these numbers together and you get 0.05% of the electorate active in your new party.

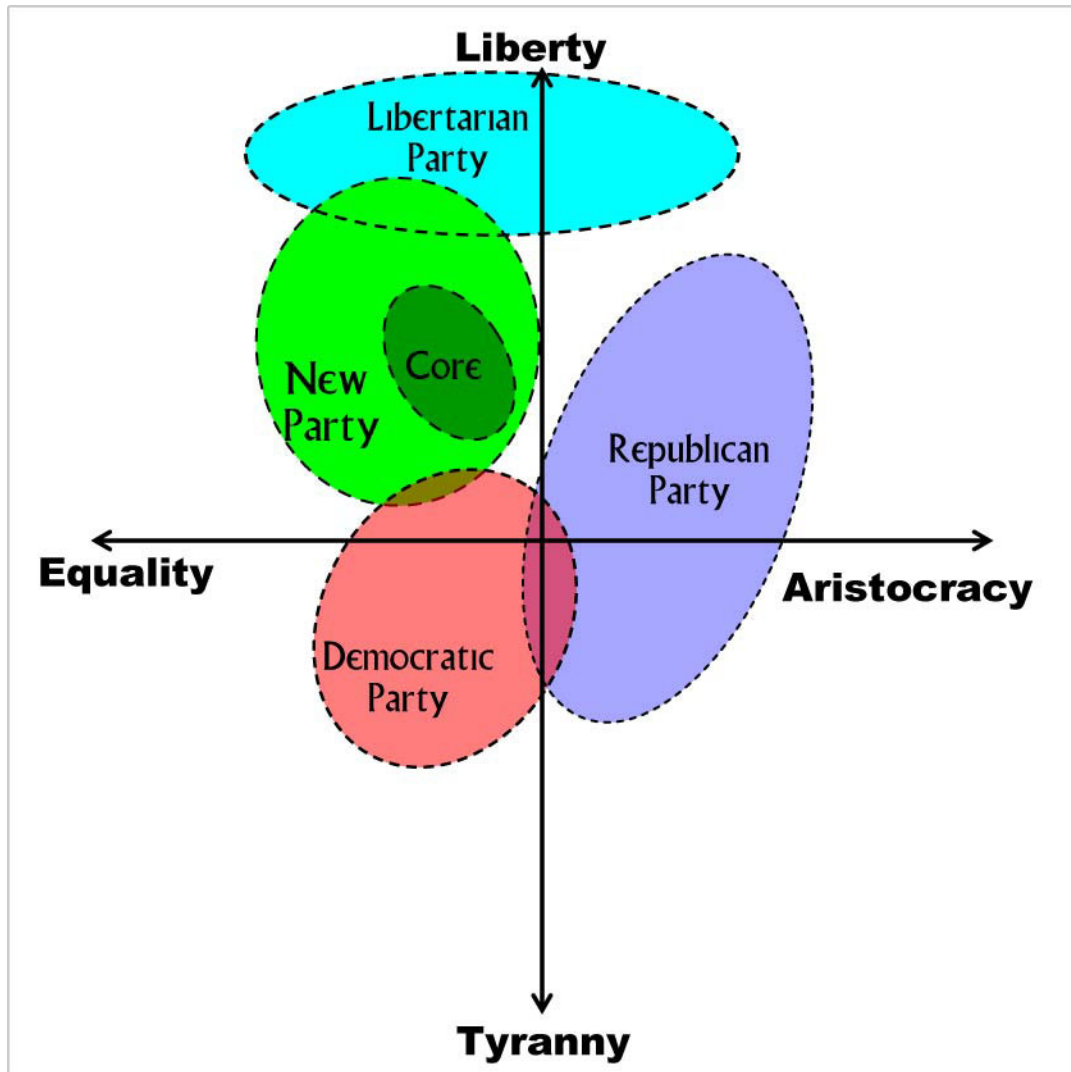
Obviously, we need to do some targeting at the outset. Once we have a big enough activist base, we can broaden the base and win elections.

That is, we need to target people who have a high likelihood of liking the message, being willing to take a risk on a new party, being indifferent to the choice between the major parties and having a high propensity for activism. Since we have a message that may require some education before acceptance, we might throw in the criterion of willingness to listen to a complex message.

This indicates that from the start we shouldn't worry about sound bites and quick messages. Web sites, personal contact, white papers, books and possibly CDs should be the way to go at first.

We also want to target local *groups* of people. It is much more productive to speak before a group of people than one-on-one. There are more listeners per hour of speaker time, and the message gets discussed between the participants. (See Chapters 3 and 5 of Gladwell's *The Tipping Point*.) Furthermore, there is more credibility when a group gets the message. If the individual participants like the message they immediately know that they are not alone in liking the message.

Indifference to the D-R choice means a more narrow focus:



So within what existing groups can we find a high density of people who fit in the core area? (When I say fit, I mean by propensity. Many who would like to be in this area may be politically elsewhere now because they need education to realize that an upper left agenda can exist.)

Some possibilities:

- John Birch Society members and related conspiracy buffs.
- Buchananite conservatives.
- Ron Paul small-l libertarians (some of).
- Blue collar individualists (some of).
- Some academics.
- Freedom loving students.
- Non-socialist ACLU types.

- Individualistic environmentalists.
- The Religious Left.
- Jimmy Carter Democrats.
- “Crunchy” libertarians (as in granola).
- Some of the hippie Luddites.
- Some of the New Agers.
- Inner city minority groups unhappy with the social Democrat agenda.
- Geolibertarians.

One possibility would be to try to recruit some from all of these groups at once. Doing so in theory gives us the maximum potential for political victory. It also requires more marketing efforts, and has a large potential for acrimony and schism from the start.

I could be wrong, but I think it may be more productive to follow the LP’s marketing consultant’s advice and focus on a subset and then add other groups in. Our criteria for which groups include:

1. Plays well with others.
2. Attractive to others.
3. Big enough to have clout somewhere.
4. Includes some largish donors.
5. High propensity for activism.
6. Roots in community.

The first criterion rules out the conspiracy buffs. The second rules out Buchananites; their borderline racism is extremely unattractive to most others. Unfortunately, these are two groups that already understand the concept of an upper-left agenda. Few of the others do.

Geolibertarians and crunchy libertarians both already get it, but are both very small groups. Since I already have contact with both, awareness is easy and they will be invited. However, I think targeting one or more larger groups is far more important, even if it sacrifices initial support from members of these two groups.

I see three main clusters of initial groups which work well together:

Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
Certain academics, individualistic students, freedom loving environmentalists, hippie Luddites, New Agers,	The Religious Left, minority members unhappy with the social Democratic agenda, Jimmy	John Birchers, Buchananites, blue collar individualists, Ron Paul libertarians

Geolibertarians and crunchy libertarians, ACLU types	Carter Democrats	
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There is overlap between these groups.

It may be best to launch three parties initially, one for each cluster, and later merge or work together later. (The Republican Party was the result of a merger.) Cluster 1 seems appropriate for the Pacific coast, Cluster 2 in the Old South. Cluster 3 might be the strongest approach in the rust belt or in the Rockies. But these are speculations; I don't know these areas well enough to say for certain. The big problem with Cluster 3 is that it is often taken for the Right, so targeting this cluster could lead to a dead end except in very red states.

My own propensity at the moment is to try for the Religious Left and minority groups. The former is a huge group with established activists, roots in the community, and significant donor base. The latter are geographically concentrated in one-party areas. The down side of this targeting is that these groups are harder to reach via the Web, and part of the general populace may be repelled by a religious themed party further down the road. (But keep in mind that both of the major parties frequently resort to religious language. Political decisions are a subset of moral decisions.)

Name and Theme

It's time to come up with a name and theme for our new party.

What should be the logo? The slogans? Which issues do we press first? Whom do we target? All these questions make up the theme.

I am going to propose multiple names/themes here. The list is not definitive. There may be a better name out there. But these should start the debate. Criteria for a name theme are:

1. Ease of attracting one of the three clusters.
2. Ability to generalize later.

The second criterion could be dropped via a merger or name change, but it is still worth keeping in mind from the beginning. Ideally we want a theme that can win *somewhere*.

Freedom Party

This is an obvious name for a moderately libertarian party. We can broaden leftwards by having three slogans:

- Freedom from the government [libertarian vision].
- Freedom from the boss. [left vision]
- Freedom from everyone else. [environmental vision]

Were I in charge of such a party I would put these three slogans on the front of the site, and have them link to libertarian, (classical) liberal, and (market-based) environmental areas, respectively. This is a good name/theme for trying to go after disparate groups from the start. We might want to quote Austin Powers as a slogan:

“It’s about freedom. baby!”

White papers could include “What is Freedom?” and “Really Natural Rights” (from holisticpolitics.org) and “A Coherent Vision of Freedom” from www.quiz2d.com/essays.

The word freedom provides wiggle room in issues such as foreign policy. One can argue either that isolationism maximizes freedom (because of less taxes, etc.) or that some intervention increases freedom (by overthrowing the vilest dictators).

Now for the down side: someone else already owns the name. There is a Canadian Freedom Party which is active, and a U.S. offshoot which is not. The Canadian party’s web site has a right-libertarian message with a Cluster 3 flavor. Recent attempts to contact the owners of freedomparty.us have been unsuccessful.

Justice Party

“It’s about Justice!”

This is a slogan that can be applied to many current defects in government, including:

- Inappropriate sentencing of criminals.
- Prosecution of people for victimless crimes.
- Complexity of the legal code.
- Lack of restitution.
- Problems that stem from warfare.
- Need for pollution taxes.
- The hideous income tax
- Pork barrel politics
- Perverse incentives
- Speed traps, and other instances of legal corruption

Take care of justice, and liberty, prosperity and peace follow. This is the proper line of causality. This idea can be found in the Bible and I have seen it on bumper stickers on hippie left cars. I think this slogan focuses primarily at Cluster 2, but it has appeal to Clusters 1 and 3 as well.

I think it generalizes well to the major party level as well. The two major parties have generic names relating to the form of government. Justice is about the purpose of government.

On the downside, this name has not tested that well when I have asked around. Those on the Right are concerned that it could be mistaken for “social

justice.” (I consider this as much a feature as a bug, but...) Others find that this is a frightening name, evoking a stern get tough on crime party. (I consider this a bigger concern.) Finally, someone else owns the domain names.

Free Liberal Party

Liberal, yet free. Free, yet liberal. Can there be a more succinct description of the upper left agenda?

This is a name that plays well to Cluster 1. It is OK for Cluster 2, but rather poor for Cluster 3. But perhaps it is not entirely unacceptable to Cluster 3, since many of its members do know what a classical liberal is.

This is a very attention getting name. It gets people to think outside of the box. It has even been tried in the field. Kevin Rollins launched a small newspaper called *The Free Liberal*. It was originally meant to be a libertarian outreach paper to the hippie/coffee shop left. Trials in the Asheville NC area were promising. The papers were read and the feedback was good. Meanwhile, the remaining freeliberal.com web site attracts both liberals and libertarians.

On the down side, this name doesn't seem to have a strong base. It is an obvious hybrid, so you have to look between movements for supporters. Few Libertarians were willing to support the paper or use it for outreach. To this day, the paper struggles for funds and volunteers, having since dropped to electronic edition only. Some of these problems could be simply lack of startup capital and 501c(3) status. *The Free Liberal* could well take off in the future, possibly becoming a national magazine.

There are signs that a free liberal movement is coalescing. See www.flowproject.org for an example. John Mackey of Whole Foods Market has been pushing for a more liberal friendly form of libertarianism. It might be possible to launch a Free Liberal party with some celebrity clout from the start.

I own freeliberal.org.

And unlike some other names, we have an obvious name for a member of a Free Liberal Party – a Free Liberal.

Methodinks this is a strong contender, but I have a few reservations:

- The word “liberal” has picked up some negative connotations.
- A party with the word liberal in its name is likely to be pro-choice on abortion, and possibly have some of the same anti-Christian bias that the Libertarian Party has. Good for some; bad for others, including me.
- Is there a ready base for such a party, or do we have to create it?

Free Community Party

This name is inspired by Don Wills' idea of a Free State Party. Free Community has many of the same virtues as Free Liberal Party, but without the negatives that go with the word “liberal.” True, the word “communitarian” has been

used to describe a modern cuddly fascism, but this usage is not universal; it is possible to steal the term. Plus, we have the word “free” as a differentiator.

The term “Free Community” can be interpreted two ways:

1. A community that is free; i.e., with little government.
2. Freedom for the community; i.e., local control. Some communities can be socialist while others can market based.

This dual meaning can be powerful.

The first meaning attracts libertarians who are interested in local issues. The second meaning attracts those who believe in local democracy, state’s rights, and bioregionalism.

There is little contradiction between the two groups. If the communities in question are small enough (smaller than a city), then we have a blurred line between what is a democratic government and what is a proprietary community.

Either meaning can apply to the same agenda: neighborhood zoning, school choice, different school boards for each school, etc.

Localist Party

This is a term Nick Wilson likes. It says much the same as Free Community. I personally find the term clunky, but perhaps my taste is not universal.

Eco Party

“A diverse ecology, using sound economics.”

This is a possible name for a non-socialist green party. It is a very utilitarian slogan. We can go after the “common sense” people who were attracted to Perot. John Hagelin also tried such a “use good solutions” message, but he was tied to Transcendental Meditation, which distracted considerably.

An Eco Party should try to target academia as well and environmentalist types. Concerted outreach to college professors should be attempted.

Advertise on Discover Channel and in *The Skeptic*. Advertise in environmental magazines and business magazines (as funds permit!). Advertise in the natural food stores.

Hold seminars on campus and in natural food stores.

I rather like this name, but many that I have talked to consider it to be too cute.

Also, ecoparty.org has been taken. But ecoparty.us is available.

Jubilee Party

“Proclaim liberty throughout all the land and unto the inhabitants therein.”

This slogan is already written on the Liberty Bell (the obvious logo). It comes from Leviticus 25, in reference to the year of jubilee, a time of release from debt servitude, and return of the land to the people.

The name and slogan can be applied readily to:

- Freeing people who have been in jail too long.
- Ending victimless crime legislation.
- Georgist single-tax ideas.
- Doing something about the national debt.
- Opening up the economy to micro-business.
- Reforming the welfare system.
- Ending subsidies to the rich.

This name/theme is obviously aimed at Cluster 2. It works well for Cluster 3 as well. We have problems with Cluster 1, due to the Biblical references. The Biblical references could be a problem for going mainstream as well.

But these problems might be surmountable. When field testing the various names, this one does fairly well, even among some of the atheists and pagans I have run it by. Some of the biggest negatives have come from Christians, worried about First Amendment issues.

Much of the animosity towards mixing religion (vs. church) and politics has come from the judgmental elements of the Christian Right who have enlisted the might of the state in order to enforce their moral doctrines on others. The gentle side of Christianity elicits admiration from these same elements. It is quite possible that many of those opposed to the Religious Right might appreciate an explicitly religious left-libertarian party that corrects the errors of the Religious Right. A local Unitarian preacher was quite interested in my “God’s Welfare System” essay, and I have seen positive links to my religion articles on a Wiccan web site.

The ideas that a Jubilee Party would set forth have found favor among many agnostics who desire liberty and justice. Robert Heinlein repeatedly borrowed from the Bible for ideas, as did many of the deist American Founders. See Heinlein’s “Coventry” (based on the city of refuge concept) or “Number of the Beast” (for a nudist Christian society whose government combines the Georgist single tax with Old Testament justice). See the writings of Thomas Paine.

A Jubilee Party could appeal to traditional Americana (it’s on the Liberty Bell) without the taint of racism that comes from citing the Founding Fathers or the Constitution. It is my hope that such a party could get traction in the inner city churches as an alternative to socialism. It contains a message of mercy and justice that could be used to criticize the drug war without sounding like a druggie.

I own jubileeparty.org. I am test marketing the idea.

This one is a mixed bag, but there are some huge potential positives. And yes, I am biased. As a Christian, I am supposed to give God the glory, and there are some excellent ideas in the Biblical law that have been overlooked, laws that are not religion dependent.

See “God’s Welfare System” and “The Law of Liberty” at www.holisticpolitics.org.

A Local Agenda

Whatever the name and theme of our new party, we need a local agenda. One of the themes that I have seen during recent attempts to reform the Libertarian Party has been that the national platform should stick to national issues and the state parties should have their respective state issues.

For a new party *this does not work!* In fact, a major problem with the Libertarian Party has been that its agenda was nationally focused from the start.

Any call to move control from the federal to the state level is a national agenda. It has to be passed by the federal congress to get implemented. A startup party does not have the resources to affect U.S. Congressional races. If the national web site (and related outreach materials) focus on this or other national issues, then the party will recruit people interested in doing things the party cannot do.

This is a major reason I turned down Don Wills’ offer to be a founding member of the Free State Party (or whatever name it eventually adopts). Its agenda is too national. If he can get state affiliates off the ground with real local solutions, it might work, so I am not writing his efforts off entirely, but I want to launch with a realistic agenda from the start (Bottleneck C).

The initial agenda for a new party should be very heavy with ideas that can be implemented at the local level, followed by state issues, and then followed by federal issues. Yes, it is proper to condemn the excess power wielded by the feds-- people will want to know where you stand regarding the most powerful level of government—but you must recruit people interested in local solutions in order to rack up some early victories.

Here are some possible issues. The list is not complete, and some of the ideas need to be done at the state level (depending on the state).

- **A property tax deductible.** Instead of a flat rate for property taxes, how about making the first \$50,000 or so tax free. This would encourage home ownership for the poor, which should help reduce crime.
- **Land based taxation.** Tax the ground at a higher rate than the improvements thereon. This has been done in some Pennsylvania cities.
- **Tax credit for private schooling.** This could be off of either property or income taxes, depending on the locality.
- **District based elections.** Yes, this sounds anti-third-party, but it is a good government issue. At large, multi-member districts squeeze out minorities, make representatives less accountable, and make campaigning more expensive. Tight districts make campaigning cheaper.

- **Range voting.** Here is where you can push for rules that are more third-party friendly.
- **A separate school board for every school.** This is an idea from New Zealand. Instead of a single board for a county or city, give each school (or at least each high school with related feeders) its own board. If each school has its own board, you can eliminate the office of superintendent and have the principle directly accountable to the board.
- **Community-based zoning.** Instead of having a citywide zoning board, let each community set its own rules. Some property taxes should also stay at the community level. This gives each community a moral hazard free choice to weigh the tradeoffs between externalities that come from having businesses and additional revenues for parks and sidewalks.
- **Community based noise and ugliness ordinances.** Some people like having the lawn police enforce beautification. Others want to work on cars in their front yard. This should be a neighborhood decision. Ditto for acceptable levels and noise and party times.
- **Proper law enforcement focus.** You cannot end the drug war at the local level, but you can determine how much it is enforced. The police do not attempt to enforce every traffic violation (except in speed traps). We don't have sting operations for every difficult to enforce law. As long as drug use is illegal, publicly detectable drug use should be enforced, as a matter of rule of law. But there need not be spies trying to catch the responsible users. And judge candidates can promise minimal sentences within the bounds of the law.
- **Give sports to the Parks and Recreation Department.** This is a backdoor way to let home school students participate in intramural sports. This is the norm in Europe. Such a policy might get the schools to adjust their priorities.
- **Let mini private schools use the public parks as playgrounds.** A playground can be a significant expense for a micro-school. This idea may require the school paying a fee for such use.
- **Tax adjustments for externalities.** Instead of setting limits and quotas, use taxes to create a market signal for the proper amount of both negative and positive externalities. Signs could be taxed on amount of area and brightness. City businesses could be given a tax break for opening up their parking lots during their off hours. City businesses could be given a tax break for opening up their restrooms to the public.
- **Separate government for city and surrounding county.** Rural areas need different rules than cities. In many states there is overlap. City residents should be free from county taxes. County government should be elected by the county – not cities within the county.

Early on, a new party should have brochures and/or position papers on such subjects for use by local affiliates. The initial activist base should have an enthusiasm for doable projects.

Geographic Focus

Elsewhere I have made the suggestion that a third party can get away more with geographic focus than demographic focus. Now it's time to flush out the idea.

We run into an immediate problem: geographic focus contradicts some of the low-hanging fruit outreach techniques. A web site is national, nay international, in scope. It may happen that many are recruited from areas that are difficult to do third party politics in.

One fair solution is to emphasize locally deployed outreach. If the national party provides outreach materials to be used at outreach tables, then those materials will get deployed by the active local parties. If the national party provides footage for television and radio spots, this footage will be used by affiliates able to afford to air this footage.

So, even though I will speculate here on where optimal geographic focus should be, there need not be much in the way of top-down decision-making. The primary decision to be made is to avoid an infill-mentality. The party should not expend resources trying to build up where it is weak for completeness sake. The central office should do the easy dispersed recruitment and provide tools for growth where there is interest.

Here are some possible way in which geographic focus could be applied:

1. Go after the small cities, especially those which have self-contained media markets. Politicians running in large metropolitan areas have a hard time buying media that is contained within a political district. This results in a need for direct mail and phone solicitation vs. radio and TV.
2. Go after small states, especially those with many state house districts. With small districts, a single active party member can get elected using personal popularity.
3. Go after states where ballot access is affordable. Save the difficult ballot access states until after the part gets big enough.
4. When subsidizing ballot access for a difficult state, also subsidize a massive membership drive so that the party can keep, or at least renew, ballot access on its own. If you cannot afford the subsidy for membership, don't bother with ballot access.
5. Very red or very blue areas allow the third party to locally be the second party.
6. Go after areas where you have sympathetic media.

7. Go after culture clash areas. Such areas are open to new ideas. (This is why I moved to Asheville, NC.)

A fair excuse for implementing Option 1 at the national level would be to do experiments with television and radio as membership tools. Such experiments are much cheaper in small media markets. Radio and TV spots are more effective when they saturate a small market vs. touch a big market. I would really love to see what would happen if a third party were to truly saturate local radio in a rural area. This could be combined with newspaper ads and direct mail.

A lottery could be used to determine which markets to try such experiments in order to preserve party unity (among qualifying markets).

Do note that these criteria for geographic focus could be suboptimal. It might be better to let the “market” determine where to focus; that is, have the central office simply support local activities where they arise.

Holding Things Together

OK, I think I have covered membership acquisition and credibility-while-small sufficiently. Should these measures be sufficient, we then arrive at the problem of keeping the membership together.

A true political party is a coalition or it is a joke. This means that agreement upon strict principles is going to be difficult, definitive platforms will be hard to craft. We will have people of very different backgrounds under the same roof, metaphorically.

Here are a few ideas directed at this problem.

1. Better parliamentary procedures. I already covered this one (under Dedication) but it bears repeating.
2. A social club model. Let there be multiple clubs in an area. The Democrats and Republicans in my area have multiple organizations within the same county. Let activists with different taste participate differently.
3. A fuzzy platform. The national message could be more descriptive than prescriptive. Conventions could try to agree on broad statements. Multiple specific solutions could conform to these principles. Different candidates could advocate different particular solutions. For example, the platform could call for simpler taxes, which preserve privacy, reduce bureaucracy, and approximate user fees. Some might interpret this as calling for the Fair Tax. Others might interpret this as a call for the Georgist Single Tax.
4. An organic program. While the platform is vague, outreach materials need to provide specific solutions. But these solution materials could be descriptive instead of prescriptive. They could describe multiple conforming solutions. The convention could elect a committee whose purpose is to generate/approve such outreach materials. This committee would be separate from the operations committee.

5. Lotteries. Where there is a need for focus, and multiple options are equally desirable, it might be best to choose by lot. This can produce less acrimony than even the best democratic procedures.
6. Set the message before recruiting. Write a manifesto, platform and program before bringing many people in. Recruit those who like the message as it originally stands. Then, future conventions will only have the task of tweaking the message, vs. flushing out a bare outline.
7. Internal education. New members should be encouraged to understand why the party takes its positions.
8. Selectively recruit the active members. Don't beg people to join. Those who are lukewarm on the message can be noted as potential votes without being asked to show up for meetings etc. (Some may ask to join. Let them. Just don't beg them.)

Note: I do not expect the last three measures to result in enshrining the initial platform for all time. I just hope to provide enough stability so that the initial recruits are happy with where the party winds up as it grows.

I definitely do not think the new party should adopt a statement of principles that requires undo effort to modify. Nor do I approve of a membership oath.

Note that the Libertarian Party has a great deal of acrimony because it has historically violated number 8 while at the same time tries to remain pure. Many a person has signed the LP membership oath without fully realizing its import. Many were shown the Nolan Chart, told they were libertarians, and then asked to join. Upon getting active, these people were then informed that they weren't actually *true* libertarians. This is the Bait and Switch tactic which is the underlying source of the LP's culture of acrimony.

Minimizing Overhead Costs

OK, so does our proposed new party need a Washington DC office with several paid staff members to function?

To answer that question, let us ask what the Libertarian Party has done with its national office, and whether these functions are necessary for a startup party. Here is my (probably incomplete) list:

1. Raises money to pay for staff and office.
2. Puts out press releases which sometimes are acted on.
3. Networks with related groups.
4. Maintains a national web site.
5. Publishes a national newspaper.
6. Maintains a membership database.
7. Supports ballot access efforts.
8. Handles governance matters with many state parties.

9. Contracts out national conventions.
10. Promotes presidential candidate.
11. Maintains a company store for propaganda.
12. Teaches classes on organizing and campaigning.
13. Runs Candidate Tracker
14. Buys some web ads.
15. Buys other advertising (rarely!).
16. Does direct mail outreach.
17. Recruits candidates.
18. Reports to the FEC.
19. Hosts national committee meetings

A small party that attempts to run on volunteer efforts can obviously do away with 1. I think in this Internet age that 5 is also optional. 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 are not always done by the LP's national office. According to this plan, 2, 7, and 10 are not to be done in the early stages.

This leaves us with 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 18 and 19. I have personally maintained web sites and membership databases as well as run a propaganda store in my own spare time. I have networked with other local groups, and I know many other Libertarian volunteers who have also networked with other groups on their own nickel, including national groups. Tony Oneka has handled the FEC reporting for the Libertarian Reform PAC on his own time. The Libertarian Reform PAC has purchased web ad and print ads as a purely volunteer supported organization. There are off the shelf solutions at places like completeCampaigns.com which may well be adequate for simplifying the FEC and database work.

What remains is hosting conventions and handling governance matters. Conventions can be contracted out. The earliest conventions can be very small. Unlike the LP, I do not think putting on grand conventions as a show of credibility is smart. Conventions should be for handling party governance matters. National committee meetings are also small and mostly funded by the attendees. A new party might opt for a smaller committee with fewer in person meetings.

Now, despite what I said above, I am not prepared to run a political party with as small a crew of volunteers as we had for the Libertarian Reform Caucus. But, I don't think a small army is needed either. Neither do we necessarily need paid staff.

So, is Bootstrapping Possible?

I have tried to scrub the requirements down to the point where I and a few other similar activists could in theory launch a new political party. Whether such a party would have enough credibility and outreach resources to grow is a difficult question. I don't claim to know the answer without more research.

On the other hand, with this requirement scrub in mind, it is possible that some major donors may opt to support a higher initial level from the start. It would be nice, but even if funds were available for an expensive jumpstart, prudence dictates attempting the more frugal growth model and holding these funds in reserve. Unexpected expenses may arise, and some areas may need a focused nudge.

My Plans to Date

So, am I starting a new party now? Is this business plan an invitation to you the reader to get on board early?

Mmmmm, not quite. There is work to be done yet before making a decision to actually start a party. In particular:

1. Market research needs to be done. Which theme has legs?
2. A manifest needs to be written supporting the successful theme.
3. An initial platform, program and bylaws need to be drafted.

These activities can be done by a very small group. If you are interested, let's talk. But should we interpret the market research differently, or have deep differences of opinion on what should go in the manifesto or initial platform, an early schism may well be in order. I'd rather start with a smaller group that is wholeheartedly on the same page, than a larger group that includes people that are making compromises.

Once the party gets going strong, it may be worth compromising to jump on board. Or, the early schism may result in multiple attempts at getting a party off the ground. Let the best idea win. Or finally, we may get several off the ground. If so, a merger may be in the offing in the future. The general ideas in this plan can be useful for several such experimental parties.

Once one or more parties get launched, it is worthwhile to set reasonable goals *and attain them*. All too often, third parties set impossible immediate goals and create a culture of failure. Some reasonable milestones:

1. Effective voter education tools.
2. Some strong local affiliates. Let's have the strongest local affiliates of any third party, even if we are active in only a couple of states.
3. Some local victories.
4. Some state house victories.
5. Hold the balance of power in a state legislature.
6. Elect someone to the U.S. House.
7. Hold the balance of power in the U.S. House.

Note what is missing here: participation in the presidential debates, holding the margin of victory in statewide races, retaining state ballot access via statewide race totals, being active in every state, getting covered in the mainstream national

media, or getting big celebrity endorsements. Some of these may happen, but they are not in the critical path.

I also did not include total national membership numbers, registered party members, or fundraising goals. Dues paying members, registered members, and funds are all useful, but they do not relate to the *purpose* of having a political party. The primary milestones should stay focused on the purpose. How we get there is uncertain.

For example, it could prove that our new party is very successful in raising funds and getting national members. If so, great! But it is also theoretically possible for a party that is much smaller than the LP and has received very little attention from the mainstream media to achieve the first 5 milestones.

In fact, there is something to be said for avoiding attention from the national mainstream media until after the first 5 for 6 milestones have been achieved. Let the mainstream press ask “Where did these people come from??” instead of saying, “In other news, the *x* party candidate was also in the debate.”