

It's the Message

By Carl S. Milsted, Jr.

OK, another presidential election and another failed LP campaign.

This time we had a candidate who was likeable, hard-working, frugal, and willing to work with the existing party organization. Talented activists from across the country put in hard work for the campaign. Talk show appearances were successfully scheduled across the country.

And with all this work Badnarik got...390,270 votes. This is an improvement of 4,206 votes, or 1.09% improvement. And I have not even taken into account the high turnout. I will be charitable. Suppose we plot this growth rate exponentially. Let's see how long until we become truly noticeable; that is, until get around 5% of the vote -- 5 million votes to make it even. We need to improve by a factor of 12.8. So we need to solve $1.0109^N \geq 12.8$, where N is the number of presidential races. Taking logarithms...we have $N \geq 235$. Multiply by 4 and we can expect to be credible enough to get into the debates in just under 950 years! Wheeeeeeee!!

I do not expect to live that long.

With projections like this, we need to rethink our strategy, or simply give up and have fun while there is freedom left. And, of course, with such projections in mind, many libertarians will do just that regardless of my gloomy writings with the result being little to negative growth for the LP.

As for further down the ticket, did we win *any* new *partisan* seats this November? If so, there is no explicit mention on lp.org.

So what was the problem?

Was it media blackout? No, we got ample media in the smaller markets. Badnarik got plenty of press when he passed through Asheville this year. This month I was on the radio three times as LP-Buncombe chair and I wasn't even trying.

Was it ballot status? We got it in all but two states.

Was it BCRA? Just how many millionaires are itching to donate more anyway? And if there are any, I would like to point out that the state house races in Virginia next year have *no* limitations. Millionaires, point your checkbooks in that direction!

Like it or not, the problem is our message. Anarchy is not popular. Crack cocaine is not popular. Waiting for America to be attacked before fighting back is not popular. Starving out the widows currently on Social Security is not popular. Scrapping our current monetary system is not popular. Defaulting on the national debt is not popular. Selling the national parks to Disney is not popular.

Some people have said on the Badnarik blog that we need to do a better job of marketing. Well, they don't know what marketing is. Marketing is finding out what the customer wants and then selling it. What they are talking about is selling, not marketing. If we were serious about *marketing* liberty, we would poll the populace to figure out how much liberty the public is willing to buy and *then* try to sell it to them.

Here is an experiment: take 20 people at random in your district and try to sell them on libertarianism *as defined in our platform*. I will be generous: you have five hours per person to make your case – this is the equivalent of a serious media saturation campaign! At the end of this effort how many would agree that the libertarian position – radicalism and all – is superior to the

Republican or Democratic position? If you don't have at least 5 people, the cause is hopeless. You really need 7, but I am going to be optimistic once again and assume that statistical fluctuations went against you.

Looking back at my career as a libertarian purist, I would be surprised if you found even 1 person in relative agreement with a sample of just 20. Oh, you can get more than that if you cover up some embarrassing points in the platform, but that's cheating. In a real campaign your opponent will bring them up if you don't.

So unless your district is far more radically libertarian than any place I have ever been, I would suggest that running as a non-Libertarian is the better way to get elected.

Real Marketing

For those who have said that it is a problem of "marketing" I would point out that serious attempts have been made at selling this hardcore message. While I do not agree with Ayn Rand's philosophy, I will fully concede that she was a brilliant and powerful writer. Rothbard wrote well also. Indeed, when comparing the quality of the libertarian literature with Marxist literature, we win hands down. The Advocates for Self-Government and Michael Cloud have introduced the movement to quality salesmanship, and Mary Ruwart did an excellent job of sugar-coating our message in *New Age Speak*.

But people are not buying, because they don't want what we have to sell. Build a worse mousetrap and people will flee your store.

This is not to say that people do not want more liberty. It is just that people realize that governments do at times work to promote liberty. They are willing to pay taxes to have a military to protect liberty – or even promote it abroad on occasion. They realize the value of private property, but also realize that public roads and other rights of way are essential to maximizing liberty. They consider it better to have bankruptcy than to have debt slavery, even though the former is a violation of contract. They would rather have a few government regulations than have a few corporations buy up everything.

Can they be sold on less government? Absolutely! Can they be sold on lower taxes? Maybe, *after* the national debt has been paid down and the Social Security obligation has been financed. Can they be sold on legalizing marijuana? Maybe. Legalizing crack cocaine? Not likely.

So the first rule of marketing liberty is to moderate the message to one that can be sold. *Then* sell it. (And after people have a taste of freedom, they will probably come back for more.)

Positioning

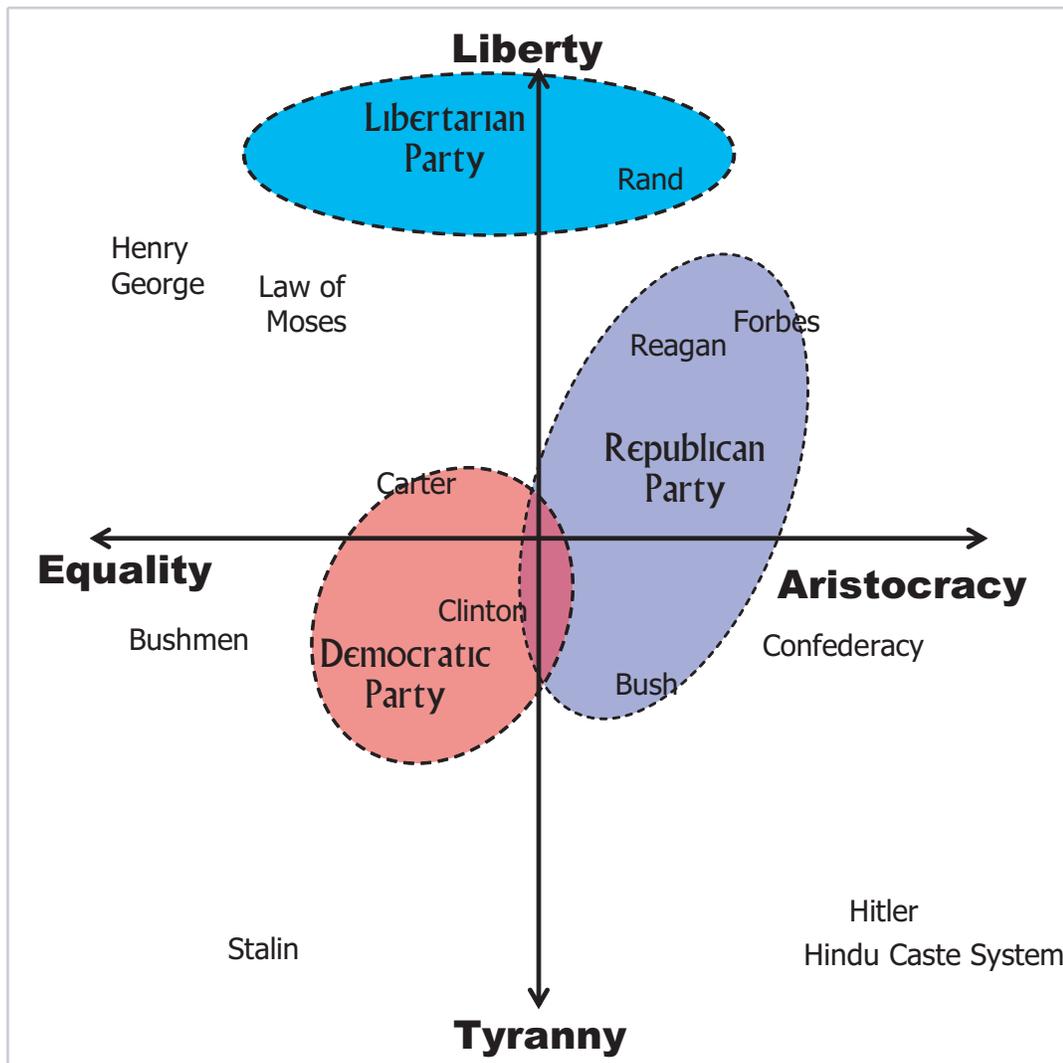
Actually, moderation is not enough. Moderate the wrong way and the LP could look too much like the Republican Party. This is a recipe for falling victim to the "Lesser of Two Evils" dilemma. And yes, I have seen dozens of rationalizations on why people should vote Libertarian despite this dilemma. Frankly, they are all irrational. People vote in order to sway elections. The only people who would rationally waste their vote are:

1. People in unbalanced districts/states. That is, Badnarik would have had a better vote total had he concentrated efforts in *non* swing states.
2. People who have little preference between the Democrats and Republicans.

So, if we drop the non-initiation of force oath, and soften into being "conservative on fiscal policy and liberal on personal freedoms" we might have a chance.

But I think we can do much better with a different positioning. My work in the field indicates that few liberals are willing to drop their economic positions in order to protect personal liberty. This is true even for doper activists. Also, if we emphasize these personal liberty and non-intervention issues in order to differentiate ourselves from the Republicans, we look too much like the party of sex, drugs and anti-patriotism.

Fortunately, many on the left *can* be swayed in the direction of economic freedom as long as the leftist egalitarianism is preserved. This can be done. The original classical liberals *were liberal!* The anti Corn Law movement in England was a movement *against* the aristocracy. Adam Smith wrote about *lowering* profits and increasing wages. Embrace the extended theory of natural rights of people like Tom Paine and Henry George and you could place the Libertarian Party to the left of the Democratic Party.



There is a market niche on the map above. It is near the center, so it is potentially big enough to win elections. Will the Libertarian Party move to fill this niche? Or will the Green Party beat them to it? (The Green Party is socialist now, but I have talked to a fair number of Green Party activists who could fit into this area.) Or do we need a new party to exploit this opportunity?

I have been in the LP for over 20 years. I do not intend to continue suffering its defeats for another thousand years. If the LP wants to win elections and make this country freer, then I

will work for it. If the LP wants to remain pure, then it is time to start another pro-freedom party, one designed to win.

Which shall it be?