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Purism Is Practical

Those who advocate ending, instead of reforming, the welfare-warfare state are often accused of being “impractical.” Some of the harshest criticisms come from libertarians who claim that advocates of “purism” forgo opportunities to make real progress toward restoring liberty. These critics fail to grasp the numerous reasons why it is crucial for libertarians to consistently and vigorously advance the purist position.



First, and most important, those who know the truth have a moral obligation to speak the truth. People who understand the need for drastic changes in foreign, domestic, and, especially, monetary policy should not pretend that a little tinkering will fix our problems. Those who do so are just as guilty of lying to the public as is a promise-breaking politician. Attempting to advance liberty by lying is not just immoral; it is also a flawed strategy that is doomed to fail.

The inevitable failure of “reforms” that do not eliminate the market distortions caused by government intervention will be used to discredit both the freedom philosophy and its advocates. The result will be increased support for more welfare, more warfare, and more fiat money. Thus, those who avoid discussing the root causes of our problems, not those they smear as impractical purists, are the ones undermining liberty.

For example, many Obamacare opponents refuse to advocate for true free-market health care. Instead, they propose various forms of “Obamacare lite.” By ceding the premise that government should play a major role in health care, proponents of Obamacare lite strengthen the position of those who say the way to fix Obamacare is by giving government more power. Thus, Obamacare lite supporters are inadvertently advancing the cause of socialized medicine. The only way to ensure that Obamacare is not replaced by something worse is to unapologetically promote true free-market health care.

This is not to suggest libertarians should reject transitional measures. A gradual transition is the best way to achieve liberty without causing massive social and economic disruptions. However, we must only settle for compromises that actually move us in the right direction. So we should reject a compromise budget that “only” increases spending by 80 percent. In contrast, a budget that actually reduces spending by 20 percent would be a positive step forward.

Those who advocate a so-called extreme position can often move the center of political debate closer to the pure libertarian position. This can actually increase the likelihood of taking real, if small, steps toward liberty. More importantly, the best way to ensure that we never achieve real liberty is for libertarians to shy away from making the case for the free society.

Sometimes ideological movements are able to turn yesterday’s “fringe” ideas into today’s “mainstream” position. Just a few years ago it was inconceivable that a significant number of states would legalize medical, and even recreational, marijuana or that a majority of states would have passed laws allowing citizens to openly carry firearms. The success of these issues is not due to sudden changes in public



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opinion, but to years of hard work by principled advocates and activists.

The ever-growing number of Americans who are joining the liberty movement are not interested in “reforming” the welfare-warfare state. They also have no interest in “fixing” the Federal Reserve via “rules-based” monetary policy. Instead, this movement is dedicated to auditing, then ending, the Fed and stopping the government from trying to run the economy, run the world, and run our lives. If this movement refuses to compromise its principles, we may succeed in restoring a society of liberty, peace, and prosperity in our lifetimes.

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