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Hans Hoppe is No Revolutionary

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Hans Hoppe entered my world through the Ludwig von Mises Institute which had invited him to its headquarters in Auburn, Alabama to give a lecture in the College of Business at Auburn University. At that point in time, he as an unknown in American academia. The date of the lecture was mid-1986, as I recall.

As I remember it, the lecture was very well attended by the standards of modern academia. The Dean’s large seminar room was completely full. Hans’s lecture was on the subject of public goods theory, and he read the written transcript of this lecture. His German accent was thick in those days, and he spoke for the entire period of the lecture. He proceeded to tear public goods theory apart in every and all respects in the same way someone might butcher an entire cow on the kitchen table.

The audience was stunned, and no questions were asked. The lecture was adjourned.

My appraisal was that based on his nearly emotionless presentation, dark German accent, and serious academic tone, that Hans had intimidated the audience. This was probably the closest thing many of the economics department faculty, educated almost exclusively in Southern State research universities had come to a Karl Marx figure—no insult intended Hans.

Moreover, Hans had attacked the foundation of one of the pillars of modern economics. Most of the faculty had no interest, research or otherwise, in public goods theory. However, it was a pillar of mainstream economics. That day I saw Hans as a revolutionary; bold, courageous, and forthright.

The audience also saw him in the same way, as a revolutionary, but in a bad way. In their minds, he was crazy because ho professor at a state university would go around saying such things.

After the seminar I tried to use the tactic of agreement. I would agree that Hans *was* crazy, but that in previous conversation with individual faculty members that they had agreed with 80 to 90 percent of what he said regarding public goods theory. It did not work.

Over time I realized that the shock value of the presentation had led me to consider Hans a revolutionary. His shock value has led others to consider him a reactionary, a fascist, a bigot, and more. That’s all wrong.

The two most noteworthy injustices to Hans have come about by reactionaries and egalitarians. The first is the idea that monarchies make for better States based on his straightforward property rights analysis. Hans’s analysis is correct, but democracy reactionaries howled, usually without addressing the analysis or maybe even reading his writings.

The second was an introductory classroom lecture where Hans used the example, for illustration purposes, of homosexuals having higher time preferences because they could not bequeath their wealth to their children (at the time it was extremely difficult for homosexuals to adopt children).

Again, there were egalitarian howls of protest around the profession and within his own university calling for his head and, again, no debate or discussion about the merits of his analysis. I and many others had used the exact same example in class, at least until that point in time. Hans’s character assassination marks the ultimate victory of political correctness in American academia, something from which it will never recover.

My own blemish is to have thought of Hans as a *revolutionary* at all.[[1]](#footnote-1) I am using the term here to mean someone who wants to change society from what it is, to what they envision for the future. They do not want to suggest a return to what worked in the past or what happen naturally. They want to take control of a nation by taking control of the State and remake in their own image to suit their own goals and interests.

In this sense, Hans Hoppe is not a revolutionary. He is just an objective analyst of the past and present. Of course, he is a natural rights theorist who attempts to check his analysis with economic theory, well-established history, and the thoroughly well agreed upon aspects of the nature of man.

The three historic western revolutions provide plenty of evidence for all libertarians to oppose, if not to abhor *revolution*, as in revolution of the political sort.

The American Revolution is a good place to start. Yes, Americans are happy to have an independent country and love to celebrate July 4th and they hold the Bill of Rights dear. But that is not the right place to start.

Prior to the illicit passage of the Constitution of the United States, the American Colonies and Confederation had beaten the world’s greatest economic and military superpower. Under the Articles of Confederation, the colonies had declared themselves independent States and were associated for limited purposes. The Constitution created a central government that has only grown in power relative to the States. It has made worse all the problems it was meant to solve, such as tariffs and inflation. Finally, it has grown to become the biggest threat to liberty and human existence the world has ever known, rather than 13 independent and jealous small states.

The French Revolution is supposed to be a mixed bag. It rid the country of the Bourbon dynasty and monarchy, the epitome of the absolutist State. It enshrined concepts such as liberty and equality in government. However, there were excesses during and after the Revolution that are considered unfortunate. Boys will be boys.

As evil as the dynasty was, the Physiocrats and the great Turgot and many others thought that it could be reformed simply by reestablishing rules of authority and budget constraints. Many of them joined the Revolution to accomplish that. However, political revolutions once started are unstable and unpredictable and in this case the results were disastrous. Half a century of instability and murderous campaigns would follow. The sanctity of private property, the pillar of Western Civilization had been forever scared if not destroyed. Democracy would bring the once great French nation to its knees.

The Russian Revolution is perhaps the greatest lessons of why revolutions are a bad thing and not to be desired by libertarians. Through a largely unplanned series of knee jerk reactions on the part of the Czar and foreign governments, the most unlikely of all Russians, Lenin, was brought into supreme power from which he launched the dastardliest assault on human life and property rights ever contemplated and accomplished.

Hans Hoppe is the opposite of a revolutionary in this sense. His career is exemplary for his devotion to science, objectivity, and the truth. He does not want to change society for his personal purpose, but to allow it to be natural in the absence of a predatory State. The history of modern revolution underscores and mandates that libertarians not follow the “revolutionary” path.

**References**

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1. Rothbard explained the difference between the common conception of revolution as merely the violent overthrown of a regime and the libertarian conception which is a “mighty, complex, long-run process, a complicated movement with many vital parts and functions” for the achievement of human liberty. In this latter conception Hans Hoppe can be rightly considered a revolutionary leader and theorist. See Murray Rothbard, “The Meaning of Revolution,” *Libertarian Forum* 1, no. 11 (Sep. 1, 1969; https://mises.org/library/periodical/libertarian-forum-1969-1984), reprinted in *idem, Egalitarianism* *as a Revolt Against Nature, and other Essays*, 2d ed. (Auburn, Ala.: Mises Institute, 2000; https://mises.org/library/book/egalitarianism-revolt-against-nature-and-other-essays). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)