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Newt Gingrich Is No Libertarian

E. J. Dionne is wrong in identifying the Republican elites, in particular the Gingrich faction, with the libertarian revolution [op-ed, Dec. 6]. The truth is that since we have been stuck with a two-party system, any electoral revolution against big government had to be expressed through a Republican victory. So it is certainly true that Newt Gingrich and his faction, as well as Robert Dole, have ridden to power on the libertarian wave.

But to speak, as Mr. Dionne does, of "the rise of libertarians as a key party constituency and the centrality of libertarian ideas to many of the party's new leaders" is going a bit too far.

As Ralph Nader--no libertarian--pointed out, it took less than a month for Gingrich, Rep. Dick Arme

Clinton's foreign policy for not being interventionist *enough*.

What could be a clearer example of the rift between the Gingrich-Dole-Arme Republican elites and the mass of the American public? The American people couldn't care less about Bosnia or Somalia or Haiti; they resist government-made multinational trade cartels, and they oppose foreign aid. Yet the Republican, "conservatives" are at least as enthusiastic as Democratic liberals about these programs.

The same is true on the domestic front. The libertarian Old Right was born in opposition to Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal. Yet Gingrich has repeatedly emphasized his devotion to FDR ("the greatest figure of the 20th century"), to his statist political program ("the truth is we would have voted for much of it"), and to his legacy ("He did bring us out of the Depression"). Accepting as truth the most damaging anti-capitalist cliché of the century, Gingrich reveals his ignorance of history as well as of economics.

Gingrich's support of the libertarian revolution is, so far, only lip service. His concrete proposals would likely *expand* the welfare state's burden on the taxpayers, for example, by forcing states to create and operate a vast array of government orphanages and group homes. Instead of being rearranged, spending should be slashed and the money returned to its original owners.

The Gingrichians had petty reservations about the Clinton crime bill, but they enthusiastically supported the dangerous nationalization of crime-fighting functions, which, according to both libertarian precepts and the Constitution, are supposed to dwell exclusively in the states and local communi-

ties. And we should never forget that Gingrich advocated a compromise with the president on health care.

Indeed, if a Democrat had delivered Newt Gingrich's acceptance speech, calling on the nation to "reach out together as a family" and promising to right every social wrong, Republicans would have ridiculed him as another Mario Cuomo. But call social engineering the "opportunity society" and it becomes "futurism."

Dick Arme, who in his early years in Congress was indeed, as Dionne says, influenced by the libertarian Ludwig von Mises, has also succumbed. In addition to his vote for the WTO, Mr. Arme has emphasized his strong support for the "untouchable" Social Security.

Social Security, now the largest government program, was also the biggest single tragedy of the New Deal. It plunders income and savings, wastes them in government spending, and then taxes people again to pay for the "insurance" benefits. No libertarian could pronounce this bankrupt and disastrous racket to be sacrosanct.

As Dionne would be the first to understand, though, none of this means the prognosis is hopeless. The Republican sweep has brought to Washington a number of libertarian-minded backbenchers. They will pressure the Republican elites from the libertarian right, reflecting both passionately held ideology and the libertarian mood of the people who elected them.

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others to betray the new revolution by collaborating with President Clinton and a discredited Congress to push through the World Trade Organization, which institutionalizes government management of world trade, complete with punitive sanctions and fines.

Anti-interventionism (smeared as "isolationism") is at the heart of the Old Right, as Dionne mentions, and it is also the source of the libertarian split from the conservative mainstream during the Cold War. Yet, now that the Soviet Union and the Cold War are happily dead and gone, the Republican and Democratic elites continue in lockstep to favor pushing other countries around for their own alleged good, while imposing vast burdens on the American taxpayer. Gingrich and Dole, in fact, criticize Mr.