

Liberty's Champion

“Give me a short description of his thought and contributions,” a reporter requested of me following the January 7, 1995 death of free market giant Murray N. Rothbard at age 68. But how do you sum up Beethoven’s music or Dante’s poetry?

In 45 years of teaching and writing, Dr. Rothbard produced 25 books, thousands of articles, and three generations of students. He was a teacher who never stopped learning, an intellectual prizefighter who always punched cleanly. At once a genius and a gentleman, his causes were honesty in scholarship, truth in history, principle in politics, and — first and foremost — human liberty itself.

Filled with laughter and principled beyond measure, Dr. Rothbard rejected the compromises and pretensions of the modern world. He was unaffected by intellectual fashion, undeterred by attacks, and untempted by opportunism. Quite simply, nothing stopped him. He was, as *Forbes* magazine termed him, the “Happy Warrior” of economics, who made singular contributions to banking history, price theory, monopoly and antitrust, and business cycles, to name just a few areas.

Truth and Principle

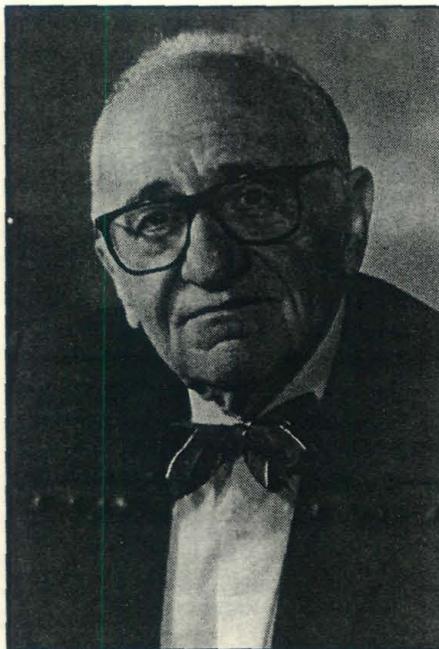
If there were justice in this world, Murray Rothbard would have received the Nobel Prize. Indeed, a consortium of European scholars nominated him for the prize in December 1994. Dr. Rothbard never got the recognition he deserved, but truth and principle were always more important to him than money and prestige.

For many years he taught economics at Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute, working in a windowless office on the fifth floor, surrounded by Marxists. He never complained, except to wonder why an engineering school couldn’t make the elevator work. His admirers celebrated his appointment in 1986 as the S.J. Hall Distinguished Professor of Economics at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

Volumes one and two of Dr. Rothbard’s history of economic thought ap-

pear in early 1995. Published by Edward Elgar, this is the most important work of its kind since that of Joseph Schumpeter. And this spring, a two-volume compilation of his important economic articles, totaling more than 1,000 pages, will appear in Elgar’s *Pioneers in Economics* series (Mark Blaug, editor).

As a theoretical economist, Murray Rothbard produced the classic *Man, Economy, and State* (1962), a treatise in



Dr. Murray N. Rothbard

the Austrian School tradition. In many ways, it rescued economics from its mostly deserved reputation. Instead of the dismal, statist, and incomprehensible pseudo-science students are used to, Dr. Rothbard gave us a tightly reasoned, sweeping case for the free market. This work is still in use in classrooms all over the world.

Dr. Rothbard’s *America’s Great Depression* (1963) refutes the common anti-capitalist slander that the market caused the 1929 crash and the economic downturn of the 1930s. He shows that the villain was government intervention, in the form of credit expansion and Herbert Hoover’s high wage policies. Paul Johnson adopted the thesis for his *Modern Times*.

Dr. Rothbard was once asked to write

a short book of American history. He agreed, and it eventually appeared — as the four-volume work *Conceived in Liberty*, covering the years 1620-1780. It is masterful, revisionist, and a pleasure to read. But what happened to the original project? Dr. Rothbard explained that he had discovered much (tax revolts! uprisings! betrayals! power grabs!) that was left out of conventional accounts.

Dr. Rothbard hardly let a moment go to waste, teaching through the day and writing through the night. His wife of 41 years, JoAnn, tells of being awakened once by his newest discovery: “That b***** Eli Whitney didn’t invent the cotton gin after all!”

“Necessary Condition”

Dr. Rothbard headed the academic programs of the Ludwig von Mises Institute, edited the *Review of Austrian Economics*, wrote a monthly column for *Free Market*, spoke at Mises Institute conferences, and lectured at its summer schools. He will be dearly missed. But how can we characterize his thought? By letting him speak for himself:

I see the liberty of the individual not only as a great moral good in itself, but also as the necessary condition for the flowering of all the other goods that mankind cherishes: virtue, civilization, the arts and sciences, economic prosperity. But liberty has always been threatened by the encroachments of power, power which seeks to suppress, control, cripple, tax, and exploit the fruits of production. Power, the enemy of liberty, is consequently the enemy of all the other goods and fruits of civilization. And power is almost always centered in and focused on that repository of violence: the state.

Logical, radical, sweeping, and profound — that was Murray N. Rothbard. The cause of liberty has never had a greater champion. ■

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