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**"WAR IS A RACKET!"  
THE EMERGENCE OF THE LIBERTARIAN DISCOURSE ABOUT WORLD WAR I IN  
THE UNITED STATES**

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**Abstract**

"It is not a coincidence that the century of war coincided with the century of central banking," wrote Ron Paul, the libertarian candidate "sensation" for the presidential elections in 2008 and 2012, in the book *End the Fed*. This discussion explores in short, the powerful pamphlet by Major General Smedley Butler, "War is a Racket", demonstrating, specifically, who profited economically and who, in turn, bore the weight and violence of WW1, assuming that a war is never fought with the acquiescence of the population. However, this monograph goes further, looking for a reinterpretation of the official American history of the First World War through the lens of libertarian discourse. The aim is thus to understand, from another perspective, the fundamental cause of the paradigm shift from nonintervention to intervention taking place during this war, linking it to the project which led to the creation of the League of Nations and the growing importance of the US in the world. Finally, a fundamental connection will be established, exploring the theories argued in the book *A Foreign Policy of Freedom*, between the policies of Woodrow Wilson and the foreign policy of the United States throughout the 20th century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Key Words:**

Ron Paul; First World War; Woodrow Wilson; Libertarianism; Foreign Policy

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**"WAR IS A RACKET!"  
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*"Possibly a war can be fought for democracy;  
it cannot be fought democratically"*

Walter Lippmann

On the centenary of the beginning of WW1, many nations and organizations have prepared initiatives and commemorations with the intention to remember (or not to forget) the horrors of this war. Few, however, seek to reconsider the foundations of the war. Ron Paul, former Congressman and libertarian Republican candidate for the US presidency (2008 and 2012), is one politician that brings into question the discourse, more or less official, of the war, regarded as the "war to end all wars" (Butler, 1935: 13; Paul, 2007: 367).

Interestingly, in 1935, General Smedley Butler, who had participated in the WWI - among many other campaigns<sup>1</sup> - published a small pamphlet "War is a Racket"<sup>2</sup>. Besides describing the artillery armament compositions that, later, would be used in World War II (1935: 2-3), Butler makes one of the first significant objections to the "military industrial complex", accusing those who "for 33 years deceived him in order to serve the interests of US corporations' profiting(eering) with the business of war (Paul, 2011: 82; Fleming, 2003: 42; Keene, 2010: 513).

Far from seeking to classify General Butler as a libertarian, the objective of this text is to identify and comprehend a libertarian discourse about WW1. In a first part, the intellectual influences of Ron Paul are considered, confronting these with his public positions, domestically and abroad: a policy based on a restrictive reading of the Constitution, a minimalist government, the rejection of any market manipulation, and defense of a "sound currency".

In the second part, the discourse of Paul (2007: 267, 347) on WWI will be analyzed, as well as the reasons why he argues that Wilson was the first "neo-conservative"

<sup>1</sup> The general participated in many military actions. He fought in Cuba during the Spanish-American War, in the Philippines during the Philippine-American War, in China during the Boxer Rebellion, the Banana Wars in Central America (Honduras and Nicaragua), the taking of Veracruz in Mexico (where he earned his first Medal of Honor, the highest American medal awarded to a military member, by the President of the United States in the name of the U.S. Congress), and the occupation of Haiti, earning his second Medal of Honor. He also participated in the First World War and, again, in China.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to compare this charge of Butler, with the French "Indignados", for whom "c'est la dette du racket" was attributed. Both charges could quickly be read as "populist"; however, they should be considered the seeds of concern in the important discussion of "democracy".



American president. According to Paul (2011: 50; 2007: 75), WWI was the first American intervention that "derailed" the country from the traditional non-interventionist course, in accordance with the "Founding Fathers" vision, to the role of "global police force".

For the former congressman and presidential candidate, the truth is that, since this moment (WWI), no substantial distinctions exist between the Republican and the Democratic Party in US foreign policy<sup>3</sup>. Perhaps because of intellectual honesty and resilience (or stubbornness)<sup>4</sup>, but expressly for foreign policy, Paul, as a presidential candidate, received more political support and funding from American military personnel than the other candidates during both campaigns (Egan, 2011). Notwithstanding some of his other "radical" positions, the arguments about US foreign policy deserve attention and pose pertinent questions about the "democratic" mechanisms that led the country to war.

### The Intellectual Influences of Ron Paul

The former congressman is regularly branded as a founder or inspiration of the controversial "Tea Party" political movement (Botelho, 2010: 107). The reality is, however, far more complex and, despite some common ideas, there are certain positions of Paul that diverge fundamentally from this movement<sup>5</sup>. One of them is, unquestionably, his vision of US foreign policy (*Ibid.*:108; Mead, 2011: 6, 7; Benton, 2012; Paul, 2011: 49).

Paul is, first and foremost, a "rare animal" in American politics, maintaining independence from the Republican Party "establishment". He has even voted against the party line on key issues such as the so-called "Patriot Act" and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Botelho, 2011: 108). Why?

To understand this independence, it is useful to appreciate the intellectual and political ideas influencing the senator's outlook. Ron Paul, in the book, *End the Fed*, outlines a precise description of how his intellectual journey, readings and moments, shaped his worldview, in which, contrary to liberal doctrine, economics and policies are absolutely inseparable.

Specifically, the Austrian School of economics, of which von Mises and Hayek are the greatest exponents, is the political school of intellectuals who provided "the answers for which he longed". Incidentally, Paul admits, "even the experts took literally centuries to understand the nature of money" (2009: 37).

<sup>3</sup> Although, it must be pointed out after the First World War, the United States reverted to traditional isolationism. Among the factors were the depression of 1930, "the memory of tragic loss the First War", the investigation of senator Nye, the publication of the book *Merchants of Death*, and the said "War Is a Racket" (Fleming, 2003:488). Thus, Paul's position is not entirely accurate, since "Wilsonianism" did not arise from Wilson, who witnessed the League of Nations rejected by public opinion (Fleming, 2003: 477-9; Bagby, 1955: 575; Keene, 2010: 520). Only after the Second World War, the USA assumed, in full, a new role in the world and became increasing bi-partisanship in the foreign policy.

<sup>4</sup> Paul is even known as "Dr. No" for voting against all bills that are not explicitly authorized by the Constitution, but also by maintaining an incredible consistency of positions for more than three decades in Congress (Botelho, 2010: 108).

<sup>5</sup> Despite his son, Rand Paul, Senator for Kentucky, being touted as the current central figure of the Tea Party.



When the US left the gold-dollar standard and officially dismantled the Bretton Woods system, for Paul, understanding the nature of money and the economy turned out to be more important than ever<sup>6</sup>.

Another inspiration for Paul is the late economist Murray Rothbard, author of several books on the US Federal Reserve, the role of government in the devaluation of the dollar, the cause of the Great Depression, and economic bubbles (Paul, 2009: 47). Ultimately, the rejection of any kind of government intervention is the major issue that unites economists, like Mises, who believes that "Socialism always fails because of the absence of a free market to structure the price of goods" (*Ibid.*: 42)<sup>7</sup>.

Likewise, Paul, like the Austrian economists, rejects government intervention at a political level. The key, says Rothbard (2011: 11), is the "right to be free from aggression... and not be robbed by taxes and government regulations". Alternately, as Paul explicates, the only political and economic philosophy worth expounding is the proper defense of "individual liberty, private property and sound money" (*Ibid.*: 49).

### Paul's Foreign Policy

Many libertarian theories seem problematic. For example, arguing that the state is always the "bad guy"<sup>8</sup> negates centuries of social contract tradition, the basis for the hegemonic model of understanding the contemporary relationship between state and citizens.

That being said; this discussion will not, in this context, undertake a critical analysis of Libertarianism. Consistency exists between Paul's discourses on domestic and foreign policy and is, therefore, mentioned. H. Rockwell notes in the foreword of *Foreign Policy of Freedom*, written by the former congressman (including his Congressional speeches), that Ron Paul "binds the national and international issues from the libertarian point of view".

Furthermore, according to the Paul (2008: 28), this was also the view of the "Founding Fathers" who "recognized that the government is no more honest or competent in foreign policy than in domestic policy" because, "in both instances they are same people operating with the same incentives". Nonetheless, reducing Paul's suspicion to the government, nor with politics, or with any other institution that deserves mistrust might not be fair.

The fundamental point the former congressman's argument is this: The rejection of the state's right to do what its citizens cannot do (Paul, 2013). This idea essentially implies a rejection of what Max Weber called "the legitimate monopoly of violence" - violence to tax or confiscate property, to print money, to physically assault or to start wars (*Ibid.*).

<sup>6</sup> According to his autobiography, this event led him to run for Congress (Paul, 2009: 38).

<sup>7</sup> However, unlike the current majority consensus around the functioning of the so-called "free market", Paul (2007: 275) criticizes the deep "lip service ... Given to the free market and free trade, [while] the entire economy is run by special-interest legislation favoring big business, big labor and, especially, big money".

<sup>8</sup> Paul was known to have a poster in his office, that read, "Do not steal. The government hates competition".



According to Paul, the rejection of the state's right is how the libertarian philosophy converges, economically and as a policy, at the international and domestic political level (Paul, 2012). Furthermore, Ron Paul's follows a strict interpretation of the US Constitution, which he claims has been disregarded throughout most of the twentieth century and continues today, principally to declarations of war:

*"Instead of seeking congressional approval of the use of the US Armed Forces in service of the UN, presidents from Truman to Clinton have used the UNSC as a substitute for congressional authorization of the deployment of...armed forces" (Paul, 2007: 145).*

*"Citing NATO agreements or UN resolutions as authority for moving troops into war zones should alert us...to the degree to which the rule of law has been undermined. The president has no war power; only the Congress has...When one person can initiate war, by its definition, a republic no longer exists" (Ibid.: 117).*

### **The non-interventionist crusade against "world government"**

*Quid* so what about the democratic process? Paul has been described as an "isolationist" (Botelho, 2010: 108; Mead, 2011: 6) who rejects all multilateral institutions in which the US participates and seeks to "avoid contact with the world" (Mead 2011:6). Paul confirms the rejection of these institutions (2007:126). However, the charge of avoiding contact with the world is unsubstantiated.

Paul reiterates that the "Founding Fathers" wanted "peace, commerce and honest friendship with all nations, alliances with none". Resurrecting a warning of Adams: "she [America] does not go looking for monsters to destroy. She will command... by sympathy her example" (Paul, 2008: 15). Likewise, he concludes, "I favor the total opposite of isolationism: diplomacy, free trade, and freedom of travel" (*Ibid.*: 14).

Paul is an "exemplar"<sup>9</sup> (Edwards, 2011: 255) that believes the exceptional mission of the United States is not - unlike many politicians - a willingness to go to war. He rejects, specifically, the transfer of national sovereignty of what Robert Cox dubbed "nébuleuse" and what he refers to as the "One-World Government" (Paul, 2007: 222). After all, if Paul rejects, in principle, the government, he certainly rejects "the biggest government of all, the United Nations, which constantly threatens our freedoms and the sovereignty of the USA?" (*Ibid.*: 210)<sup>10</sup>.

The Ron Paul opposition to world government is not only confined to the United Nations. He disputes all institutions that "threaten the national independence of the

<sup>9</sup> Whether or not one agrees with the argument of exceptionalism (American or any other nation), and although Ron Paul seems unconcerned by this principle, the choice of a (not intervention) mission "exemplar" avoids the "need" for US military engagement in other countries.

<sup>10</sup> Botelho (2010: 108) states, "His (Paul's) economic liberalism leads him to advocate the withdrawal of the United States not only from the World Trade Organization and, paradoxically, NAFTA". For Paul, what is paradoxical is the existence of agencies that regulate the supposed "free market". As he states: "One-world government goals are anathema to non-intervention and free trade" (Paul, 2007: 222).



United States" and whose support always comes from the "elites and never from ordinary citizens" ultimately for the benefit of "well-connected international corporations and bankers" (Paul, 2007: 143, 155, 302).<sup>11</sup> Expatriating the warnings of the *Founding Fathers*, Paul opposes all complex alliances "with the United Nations, IMF, World Bank and WTO" (*Ibid.*: 222).

Additionally, the transfer of sovereignty and involvement in economic, political or military alliances, for Paul, is contrary to the letter of the Constitution, although, this is not his only objection to American foreign policy. The problem is that the US, while participating in the formation of the said "World Government", concurrently pursues a policy of unilateral imperialism, with presence in "140 countries and 900 bases" (Paul, 2012) and "dictating...to the other sovereign nations who they should have as a leader ... and what form of government they should establish" (Paul, 2007: 124):

*"Unilateralism within a globalist approach to government is the worst of all choices. It ignores national sovereignty, dignifies one-world government, and places us in the position of demanding dictatorial powers over the world community... An announced policy of support for globalist government, assuming the...role of world policeman, maintaining an American world empire, while flaunting unilateralism, is a recipe for disaster" (Ibid.: 241).*

Paul labels this policy "military Keynesianism" (*Ibid.*: 81) which is a justification for the continued presence in other countries under the pretense of "nation building" and preventive war. However, as the former congressman states, "fabricating and exploding bombs and missiles can not raise the standard of living for American citizens" (*Ibid.*: 81). Although war increases GDP - besides all the moral reasons to oppose it<sup>12</sup> - this "imperial" policy creates a type of tax on all American citizens,<sup>13</sup> and war becomes ubiquitous, restricting the "possibility of living in a free society" (Paul, 2011: 49).

### **"The enemy within" - The Federal Reserve and the Military-Industrial Complex**

Who ultimately benefits from this policy? Why and how could the US invade and establish a presence in so many countries during greater part of the 20th century and early 21st century? Leaving aside political justifications, called hypocrisy by the former Congressman, what "logistics" or power allowed construction of an "Empire"? Those "guilty", for Paul, are easy to find: the Federal Reserve and the "military-industrial complex" (Paul 2007:58, 157, 261).

<sup>11</sup> A similar criticism is pointed at foreign aid. Paul states that behind the noble ideals and objectives are "foreign dictators, international bankers and industrialists who enrich some Americans" (2007: 47). Likewise, and in accordance with libertarian principles, to "help those who seek to be free to expropriate funds from innocent Americans is unjustifiable" (*Ibid.*: 57).

<sup>12</sup> For Paul the results of this policy are that: "Innocent people die, property is destroyed, and the world is made a more dangerous place" (2007: 82).

<sup>13</sup> And the world as demonstrated later in the discussion.





### a) The Federal Reserve

The Federal Reserve was created in 1913, with the "Federal Reserve Act" signed by President Woodrow Wilson. According to Paul, "after the creation of the Federal Reserve, the government... found other uses for the elastic money supply<sup>14</sup>... (which) would prove useful to finance the war" (2009: 52). Having the ability to "print money... tax limits were removed for war" (*Ibid.*), i.e., the choice of classical economic theory, between producing guns or butter was, "no longer necessary" (*Ibid.*: 55; Lewis, 2014).

Without fear or responsibility of bankruptcy or fiscal ruin and with the possibility of expanding the existing money through inflation and debt creation, "each *special interest* has the possibility to get what it wants". As discussed later, Paul identifies President Wilson as the man responsible for this change and the creation of a "welfare-warfare state" (2007: 103). However, there is another juggernaut that feeds this power to create money from nothing.

### b) The military-industrial complex

As stated earlier, it was Gen. Butler that identified the "military-industrial complex" (1935: 1-5). For Paul, however, the link between foreign policy, bipartisan support (2007: 13; Cox, 2000: 220; Anderson, 2008: 4) and actual industry, is much stronger. As he affirms, instead of rejecting the "search for monsters abroad", "every week, the US must find an infidel to assassinate... and (that) keep the military-industrial complex humming" (*Ibid.*: 92; Eland, 2007: 3).

Like external alliances and the Federal Reserve, the military industry "enjoys a better standard of living at taxpayer expense due to the interventionist policy and constant preparation for war" (*Ibid.*: 225). It is ordinary citizens who lose, the libertarian believes. Similarly, it is an industry in which even Hollywood is engaged in order "show the good side of the army" with public money (Paul, 2007: 155; Wolf, 2012; Giambrone, 2013).

If war, as Joseph Goebbels declared, is not waged with the people's consent, the question that Paul seeks to answer is why, and, especially, when the policy recommended by the "Founding Fathers" is altered to allow "corporate and banking influence over foreign policy to replace the wisdom of Washington and Jefferson" (Paul, 2007: 217). This moment was, for America, the First World War and the presidency of Woodrow Wilson.

### And everything Wilson changed?

In the book, *A Century of War*, Denson states that, "revisionism is necessary because the truth is often the first casualty of war" (2006: 11). In commemoration of the

<sup>14</sup> "Money supply", is the amount of money available in the economy. With the creation of the Federal Reserve, the ability to decide how much money could be made available to the economy, either by shortening or increasing the money supply, without being subject to any form of "ballast" was established, hence, its "elasticity".





centenary of WW1, what is the importance of looking for another explanation for the first "total war"? What changed with the Wilson presidency and the participation of America? Ultimately, who was president Wilson? Moreover, what were the reasons for US entry into the war?

Through the libertarian lens, the challenge is to understand why Ron Paul accuses Wilson of being the first interventionist president and "neo-conservative". Furthermore, and contrary to conventional belief, why is Wilson not considered a naive idealist and why were the American military exploits directed for economic interests rather than moral principles? For the Libertarian, it was Wilson, by certain fundamental decisions, which restricted the freedoms of Americans and allowed the state to grow to unbearable levels.

In actuality, until 1917, the American public opposed entry into the war (Keene, 2010: 509; Fleming, 2003: 33). Since the Monroe Doctrine, the American policy was to avoid intervention in European conflicts.<sup>15</sup> President Wilson, who won the 1916 reelection with the slogan "keep the country out of war," hesitated at length before leading the US into a distant conflict (Keene, 2010: 508; Cooper, 2011: 420-2).

Officially, the reason for going to war was the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915 and the subsequent decision, in 1917, of indiscriminate German submarine warfare against belligerent and neutral ships; the last straw finally exhausting Wilson's patience. However, is this the whole story? How can a libertarian interpretation illuminate the black holes of WWI?

### **Wilson – idealistic interests or self-serving idealism?**

Kissinger, in the book, *Diplomacy*, challenges the "neo-Wilsonian" impulse to shape American foreign policy more by values than interests (Ikenberry, 1999: 56). Though, for Paul, there is nothing "neo" in this impulse, as American foreign policy (intervention) has never been dominated by "values" or morals (Paul 2007: 218). Indeed, President Wilson is, in Paul's view, far more pragmatic than he might initially appear (*Ibid.*: 250, 339; Cox, 2000: 235-6)<sup>16</sup>.

For the libertarian, Wilson's vision was clear: "orchestrating US entry into WW1 ... to implement a strategy of world government under the League of Nations" (Paul, 2007: 283; Cox, 2000: 237; Anderson 2008: 4). Paul rejects the historical narrative, according to which there was something moral in Wilson's conduct. The very "mission" to spread democracy around the world - by force, if necessary - is classified, at least, as hypocritical (*Ibid.*: 339; Denson, 2006: 24-5)<sup>17</sup>.

Incidentally, before the Great War, it was the president who had "broken through Latin America", invaded Haiti, Mexico, Dominican Republic, the Philippines, and supported the Spanish-American War (Eland, 2007: 14; Hallward, 2004: 27; Paul, 1987: 50; Butler 1935: 3; Fleming 2003: 22, 469). Can all these incursions be truly justified by

<sup>15</sup> Maintaining, however, a "paternal supervision" of Latin America (Gilderhus, 2006: 6).

<sup>16</sup> There are, however, different interpretations, even libertarian, of Wilson's character. Take, for example, Anderson (2008: 3) and Denson (2006: 25).

<sup>17</sup> Belgium, for example, as Fleming states, "was as democratic as Germany, [it] had a parliament that... attributed to three votes to the wealthy... a similar system to that of Prussia" (2003: 60). On the other hand, the same Fleming (*Ibid.*: 58) notes that in view of the colonized countries like the Congo, Belgium (and other colonial powers), in the face of atrocities committed, would hardly seem democratic.



idealism? Were there were other interests "far less idealistic" (Cox, 2000: 222) that shaped Wilson's US foreign policy?

Furthermore, was Wilson, seen as an ardent democrat, internationalist, and exponent of international liberalism, in fact, an elitist aristocrat with racist positions against the national determination of certain people (Cooper 2011: 433, 474; Fleming, 2003: 74)? This question, amplified by his biographer, Michael Cox (2000: 235-7), considers certain views of the American president:

*"We should... not forget that Wilson did nothing for the Irish or the Chinese at Versailles; that 20 years earlier he had endorsed the brutal American takeover of the Philippines; and that he was not in favor of independence for all peoples, especially if they were brown or black".*

*"Wilson had far more in common with the patrician views of... Hamilton and... Madison - neither of whom could... be regarded as genuine democrats - than he did with the populist Jefferson... If Wilson had a restricted concept of democracy... he had forthright views about race".*

### **The war economy**

What finally motivated Wilson in his crusade, after being re-elected and promising not to enter WW1? The response of the General Butler is definite: "money". Corroborated by other authors (Fleming 2003: 80-1, 84; Cooper, 2011: 421, 426; Keene, 2010: 510), Denson also explicates that when the "allies refused to pay their debt [of war], the US would be on the brink of economic disaster" (2006: 25). This theory is, likewise, confirmed during episode related by Butler, in the pamphlet "War is a Racket":

*"The President summoned a group of advisers. The head of the commission spoke. Stripped of its diplomatic language... he told the President and his group:*

*'There is no use kidding ourselves any longer. The cause of the allies is lost. We now owe you (American bankers, American munitions makers, American manufacturers, American speculators, American exporters) five or six billion dollars. If we lose (and without the help of the United States we must lose) we, England, France and Italy, cannot pay back this money... and Germany won't" (1935: 13).*

Was this a war to save democracy or the financiers? But financial interests were not the only priority during the Great War. CJ Anderson (2006: 1) and Fleming (2003: 53-4) argue that, "Britain became involved in the war for economic reasons and the navy" since "German industry had overtaken the English, and the German navy constituted a



real threat to the Royal Navy, the last hope of the country for world domination" (2003: 53-4).

Ron Paul also traces the American "obsession" for oil to the First World War. He believes that the US, from WWI onward, began the "gradual involvement in the international arena with the objective of controlling global economic interests, with a special emphasis on oil" (2007: 218).

Furthermore, the former congressman believes that, the "chaos" that exists in the "Middle East has a lot to do with securing the oil fields for the benefit of Western nations" (*Ibid.*: 325). Ironically, when Britain seized the oil fields, declaring themselves "liberators", "jihad was declared against them, forcing them to leave" (*Ibid.*: 334).

### **The first propaganda war?**

How was it possible to convince citizens and, in particular, young Americans to fight a war in Europe, away from national shores? How was a war fought for economic interests that, in the end, benefited only big industrialists and bankers, "sold" to Americans? What threats or events were used to beat the "drums of war" even harder?

The First World War was perhaps the first war entirely promoted by propaganda, in which agents such as Lippman and Bernay, hired by Wilson, proved crucial in persuading the public of the "German danger" (Redfern, 2004: 3; Anse Patrick and Thrall, 2004: 2; Keene, 2010: 510; Fleming, 2003: 55, 90). Others also identify the emerging mass media as responsible for the creation of the fear campaign and the "necessity" of the United States going to war (Anderson, 2008: 2).

However, the sinking of the British cruise ship *Lusitania* by a German U-boat persuaded the unconvinced. This was the "special" event, without which it would be more difficult to sell a policy of preventive war where members of 'our' army would be killed." Such incidents, "served to promote a war that our leaders wanted" (Paul, 2007: 274).

Moreover, if there was anyone still in doubt, "Beautiful ideals were painted for our boys sent to die. This was 'the war to end all wars' "(1935: 9). Butler also mentions the war ribbons - nonexistent until the Spanish-American War - "that facilitated recruitment". (*Ibid.*) If perhaps all this were not enough, young men were compelled to "feel ashamed if they did not enlist in the army" (*Ibid.*).

In this way, conscription was introduced for the first time as "patriotic duty" (Paul 2011: 34; Paul, 2007: 285). A service that is, in the eyes of Paul, intolerable and one of the greatest examples of what former congressman called "Wilson's devastating attack" (*Ibid.*: 30) on individual liberties of Americans.

### **The war, "big government" and the erosion of liberties - chapter 1**

Paul, like other libertarians (Eland, 2007: 5-6, 8; Denson 2006: 25, 99; Anderson, 2008: 4), consider Wilson's presidency and, in particular, World War I, the first moment of extensive government growth in the United States. This war was the first chapter of what libertarians regard as the "advent of permanent '*big government*'" and its intrusion into the lives of American citizens.



Likewise, this war, though fought abroad, led to a significant concentration of power in the hands of Wilson and the government, that controlled "almost all production of war" and "assumed new powers... to control dissent" (Eland, 2007: 8; Keene, 2010: 508; Cooper, 2011: 451-2, 459-62). Moreover, the same author adds that war "strengthened his presidency", and that as a general rule, "any war centralizes power". This considered, Denson (2006: 30) recalls Tocqueville's warning about the costs of war:

*"No protracted war can fail to endanger the freedom of a democratic country...War does not always give over democratic communities to military government, but it must invariably and immeasurably increase the powers of civil government".*

Consider now how many "non-military wars" the US conducts against terrorism, drugs, and poverty. This is not counting military incursions, the preparation for constant war and the climate of fear, fostered by the government and media. As Paul (1987: 51) says, "in times of war, individual freedoms are threatened at home".

Although the term "individual freedoms" can be considered vague, the libertarian discourse has a fundamental importance. By clearly recognizing the first stage - of what could culminate in drone wars, massive surveillance programs, military alliances and "Empire" America - advocating a instinctive distrust of government is not only a reminder of the price of security but also the price of what citizens consider as "freedoms".

### **The challenge of libertarianism**

This article argues that two distinct phenomena are interconnected in the figure of Dr. Ron Paul - his candidacy for US President in 2008 and 2012 and the immense campaign - culminating in the emergence of libertarianism as a moving and meaningful discourse in American politics.

In the first part of this article, the theoretical lines that guide "Paulist" action and discourse were defined. In the second part, the libertarian narrative on Wilson's policies, with special attention to the First World War, identified as the moment when "the Republic became an Empire" and the "wise" policies of the *Founding Fathers* were ignored and rebuffed, was assessed.

If the libertarian rhetoric against the Federal Reserve (and the bankers) is dismissed as populist, selfish, or even cynical, for undervaluing foreign aid and the problems of other nations (or conversely, even something as *naïve* as imagining that the disappearance of the state would imply a "dilution" of power and therefore greater "freedom"), it does have its merits, particularly in civil rights and to foreign policy concerns.

Surprisingly, even though the libertarian movement in the US is identified with "the Right", in foreign policy, it unites with "the Left" by rejecting the role of the United States as the world police force (Edwards, 2011: 266). While not necessarily agreeing with what the US role in the world should be (and vice versa), both (the Left and



Libertarians) agree that the current US mission is unacceptable and undermines not only American citizens, but also everyone else.

Finally, for the global anti-war movement, the biggest lesson from Ron Paul should be considered. In his own words (2007: 326-7),

*"(those) who want to limit the costs of war and militarism... have to study the monetary system, through which government... finance their adventures abroad without the responsibility of informing the public of their costs or to collect the funds needed to finance this effort".*

If, for many, it is now easier to understand the links between the banks, the government and the war - and the financial crisis - a small share of the credit is due to Ron Paul and the libertarian movement.

The liberalists, likewise, help to expose the "vicious circle" of the dollar as the world reserve currency, which is trusted mainly due to confidence in US military power. At the same time, the dollar serves to amplify that military power, manipulated by the Federal Reserve, and jeopardizing the vast majority of citizens, creating a "tax" through inflation (Paul 2007: 328), but especially removing any decision-making power over key decisions in everyone's life.

Although Paul rejects the democratic model preferring the Republic, and even rejecting the cosmopolitanism of a world government, his advice can be understood as a call for a more transparent policy, built on ideas and coherence - a model that the ex-congressman and former presidential candidate always follows. In short, a system that is more "democratic", in the fullest sense of the word.

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