

“Peak Libertarianism?” No, Thom Hartmann is Just a Sore Winner

“We have now reached peak Libertarianism,” Thom Hartmann informs us at *CounterPunch*, “and this bizarre experiment that has been promoted by the billionaire class for over 40 years is literally killing us.”

That claim is so bizarre on its face that it’s easy to dismiss. On the other hand, even the craziest claims can fool people if nobody takes the time to debunk them.

Even in its most watered-down, weak-tea form, Libertarianism calls for “smaller government.” That’s not its real focal point (opposing aggression is), but let’s give Hartmann the maximum benefit of doubt here and have a look at American government since 1980.

As of 1980, the US government’s total spending came to a little less than \$600 billion. As of 2019, that number was nearly \$5 trillion. Even adjusting for inflation, the US government spends about three times what it spent 40 years ago (that number will be WAY up for this year due to COVID-19 “relief” and “stimulus” spending).

Of course, spending isn’t the only indicator of size of government. There’s also regulation. As of 1980, according to George Washington University’s Regulatory Studies Center, about 100 new pages were added to the Code of Federal Regulations each year. After trending generally upward for 39 years, that number has exceeded 180 new pages each year since 2016. As for total pages published in the Federal Register, that’s gone up and down, but is about the same now (70,000 pages or so) as it was in 1980.

Perhaps Hartmann is thinking of something like the number of cops out there enforcing laws? I couldn’t easily find numbers going back to 1980, but from 1992 to 2012, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the number of full-time law enforcement officers went up from fewer than 800,000 to more than a million, from 3.05 cops per thousand US residents to 3.43 cops per thousand.

Or maybe it’s the “social safety net” Hartmann has in mind?

Social Security outlays are way up in both nominal and wage-adjusted dollars since 1980, and steady as a percentage of GDP.

As of 1980, about 21 million Americans received average monthly benefits of \$34.47 through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (when I was a kid, we called it “food stamps”). As of 2019, more than 35 million Americans received average monthly SNAP benefits of \$129.83. SNAP benefit growth has out-paced inflation and the number of

beneficiaries has out-paced population growth.

The actual numbers say America hasn't moved so much as a whisker in the direction of "peak Libertarianism" over the last 40 years. Rather, it's continued steadily down the road toward "peak Hartmannism" ever since LBJ's Great Society, with relatively few bumps in that road since FDR's New Deal.

Faux-"progressive," actually reactionary, Hartmann desperately wants to fob the blame off on Libertarians for the consequences of 85 years of failed policies he still supports.