

The Myth of 19th-Century Laissez-Faire

Editor's Pick. Written by Roderick Long.

Last week Michael Lind asked a silly question: if libertarianism is so great, why hasn't any country tried it?

The question is silly because the libertarian answer is obvious: Libertarianism is great for ordinary people, but not for the power elites that control countries and determine what policies they implement, and who don't welcome seeing their privileged status subjected to free-market competition. And ordinary people don't agitate for libertarian policies because most of them are not familiar with the full case for libertarianism's benefits, in large part because the education system is controlled by the aforementioned elites.

Lind's question is analogous to ones that might have been asked a few centuries ago: If religious toleration, or equality for women, or the abolition of slavery are so great, why haven't any countries tried them? All such questions amount to asking: If liberation from oppression is so great for the oppressed, why haven't their oppressors embraced it?

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