



Episode 1,107: Lew Rockwell on Standing Against the Tide

Guest: Lew Rockwell

WOODS: I asked people in my private group what I should talk to you about. They had a lot of suggestions, and some people said just talk. Just riff. Just see where the conversation goes. I mean, we do have some good conversations, not all of which would be suitable for podcast episodes, let's say, but there are a lot of times I hang up and I think, *Gee, that would have been a good episode*. But anyway, let's start with things just going on in the world these days. We're hearing now about steel and – was it steel and aluminum? I forget what the other one was.

ROCKWELL: Steel and aluminum.

WOODS: Yeah, steel and aluminum tariffs are on their way, and I guess we can't say we weren't warned about that. On the other hand, George W. Bush I guess was in favor of tariffs on steel as well.

ROCKWELL: Yes, and in fact, his were higher than Trump's, 30% as versus 25%.

WOODS: But because he gave speeches in favor of free trade, he gets off the hook or something.

ROCKWELL: [laughing]

WOODS: I don't know. Just crazy. But either way, regardless of that, it's still just a – it is a really wretched way of thinking. And the fact that the AFL CIO is cheering it is almost all you need to know. On the other hand, so many bad guys are opposed to it that it throws me a bit, to be honest. What, have these people really learned economics? Not sure what's happening here.

ROCKWELL: It's funny, Murray used to point out that the steel industry was the oldest protected industry in the country, a more than 200-year-old infant industry –

WOODS: Yeah, "infant industry," right.

ROCKWELL: – that needed help and protection. So it's a terrible thing. On the other hand, the U.S. is not exactly a pure free trade operation. We have many tariff and non-tariff barriers and always have had them. But of course, adding more tariffs is a bad thing economically, it's a bad thing politically. It's very unfortunate.

WOODS: It does appeal to his base, though, which won't see or understand the consequences elsewhere in the economy when prices are higher for certain goods. All they'll see – it's the classic Bastiat thing. All they'll see is the steel industry jobs and the higher wages or whatever. That's what they'll see. They won't see anything else.

ROCKWELL: No, it's true, and I noticed in Pat Buchanan's latest column yesterday talking about how evil it was to have given tariff cuts to China and that's led to them becoming a monster and they're going to take over the U.S., they're going to take over the world. And it's a terrible thing. But of course he's part of that anti-free trade lobby, and a lot of what is called free trade is actually managed trade. They called NAFTA, the NAFTA treaty with Mexico and Canada a free trade treaty. It was not a free trade treaty. It was a managed trade treaty. And I'll never forget going down to, in the days when you could only see the treaty at the U.S. printing office in Washington and their other offices, and seeing this gigantic, two-volume thing, thousands of pages. And so I spent some time looking at it, and it was nothing except special deals for big American companies, and of course big Mexican and Canadian companies too. And this was not free trade. It was a horrible, horrible thing. So Trump is right to be against NAFTA, although given his record, he'll probably come out for NAFTA. But he's right to have spoken out against it. He's right to have spoken out against TPP and these other managed trade treaties, but of course, tariffs of any sort of a bad thing.

WOODS: Now that we've talked about politicians, let's get away from that completely. Let's talk about a guy who just before our eyes has just skyrocketed to unbelievable prominence in the world, and I mean Jordan Peterson. I've had him on my show twice, and he was already on the rise at that time, but I couldn't have predicted exactly where he was going to go or that he'd have the number one book on Amazon for weeks and weeks and weeks at a time. Something is going on beyond even him. In a way, he's like Trump in that he represents something that goes beyond just him, even though in Peterson's case, Peterson is much more impressive than Trump in a lot of ways. But he represents something. What is your impression of him, and what do you think he represents?

ROCKWELL: Well, I like him a lot. I think he is of course extremely articulate, extremely smart. But what I find quite wonderful and amazing is his appeal to young men. He's right that young men are being persecuted. All the public schools, for example, are anti-boy and are run by people who are extreme feminists. And there are virtually no male teachers anymore, for example. Everything is feminist. And it's true in colleges. Boys who go to college are constantly told for four years that they're part of the reason the world is such a mess. They're responsible for everything evil in the world and they'd better, I don't know, give over their money and become some kind of a slave for other groups. And it's had a very bad effect on boys.

And the appeal that he has to boys and young men is really something quite extraordinary, and he's doing it right. His 12 principles are excellent in his bestselling book, and he just is extraordinary. I wonder whether the University of Toronto will let him come back, just because he's just such a star and such a star in the wrong way from their standpoint. But I think he shows us what can be done. It shows us what is being done by some people. I hope it will be done by many more people. And if anybody has not seen his interview with Cathy Newman, the British leftist, it's quite an extraordinary event. It's on YouTube. I think it's had 5 or 6 million views. Add yourself to it if you haven't seen it. So this guy is just unbelievably smart.

And I must say I don't think of psychology as a right-wing operation, although in the past, like sociology, it was right-wing. But of course it's been highly left-wing for a long time. He's a professor of clinical psychology who's had lots of experience with individual patients as well as in groups, and now in humongous-sized groups. And I think he's helping to change the world.

I think it's very, very heartwarming and thrilling that he's having the success that he is, and it's great you've had him on your show. He's been on many important shows, and they can't get him. The left tries to get him, tries to get him. They can't get him, in part because he's right, in part because he's smarter than they are, and I think it's one of the thrilling developments of our time. Really something quite extraordinary and wonderful.

WOODS: And it's interesting that, how unlikely that it would be a professor psychology? Isn't that interesting?

ROCKWELL: From a very liberal university, too.

WOODS: Yeah. It just goes to show all we needed all this time was one person to stand up fearlessly – and also it doesn't hurt to have brilliant things to say. But really, more than the brilliant things are just his willingness to say, "I won't do it." But I shouldn't say maybe more than the brilliant things, because, my gosh, have I seen testimonials from young men for whom the brilliant things mean everything, who say he turned my life around, he helped me sort myself out, he helped me get grounded, he helped me get over a lot of my problems. And that's incredible, and it's just this one man and YouTube really against the world.

And you know what's interesting, Lew? I had a chance to talk to, let's say, a Republican group. I don't want to say which one, but a fairly substantial Republican organization, and it was a pretty large audience. I was invited to address their dinner, and my policy is I address pretty much any dinner, just about any dinner. Feed me a dinner, I'll come address you. And I talked about Jordan Peterson a bit. Nobody knew who he was. That's how out of it the rank and file of the GOP at this point, especially the silver-hair types – no offense. I'm also one of those now. But they have no idea what's going on in that – They know about trivial political things, but a major, major cultural phenomenon, they had no idea. They were very glad to learn about him, but they had to learn about him from me. So I don't know what they're reading or what is up with the conservative movement. They had no idea who Jordan Peterson was.

And then likewise, recently I saw an old friend from college who's about my age, who's very, very mainstream Republican. No idea who Jordan Peterson was. This phenomenon is crashing through society and is affecting so many young men in so many positive ways, and they have no idea – I found that was astonishing how out of it these people were.

ROCKWELL: You know, Tom, speaking of standing up for the right, the way he first came to people's attention was his refusal to obey a new Ontario law that said it's illegal to use a transgender's or really anybody's preferred pronoun. And apparently at the time this happened, there were 35 pronouns. I think now there are 60. And he said he wouldn't do it. And of course they were threatening him with jail, and the university threatened to kick him out. But he said, "This is crazy. I'm not going to do it." And they told him, "Look, you just have to have your class list and you put the person's preferred pronoun next to them and then you're careful to use that pronoun. If you don't say zhe or zher or whatever these other made-up words are, you're in trouble." And he said, "It's ridiculous. I'm not going to do it." And that,

his refusal to go along with the latent hysteria in Canada — and of course we're not far behind here — made everybody stand up and take a look at him, either in hate or in wonderment, and eventually in love.

Also, I wouldn't say he's typically religious, but he is religious and that's an important part of what he does, and of course that's something else you're not supposed to be these days. So he's —

WOODS: Yeah, he checks almost all the boxes.

ROCKWELL: You're going to have to tell me off the air who this group was.

WOODS: Yeah, I will. I guarantee you'll know who they are.

ROCKWELL: [laughing]

WOODS: And I actually said it because, believe it or not, there really were some decent people in that audience, so I don't want to put the whole group down. It's just it astonished me how out of it they were that I was the one telling them about Jordan Peterson. What news are you people reading? Whatever it is, it's trivial.

And then also, I think I've probably mentioned this on the show before, but he was on some television news program, like a discussion program in Canada, and it was most of the people on there were against him. But what I liked was that moment where he said, "Look, if" — because the host said to him, "You do realize that this could mean really serious consequences for you." And he said, "Yes, I do." And then he said, "But if they fine me, I won't pay. If they send me to prison, I'll go on a hunger strike. But I'm not doing it." Now, that also, the fact that he would say that — it's not just, "I'm not doing it," but no matter what you bring against me, I will defy you. This is the opposite of what they want. They want to terrorize you into silence. They don't really care if in the depth of your heart whether you really believe it. They want the outward conformity, and they want to terrify you into exhibiting it. And he can't be manipulated in that way. That's the amazing part about him.

ROCKWELL: Well, as you indicate, he's a very brave guy and extremely smart, extremely right, and he definitely came along at the right moment.

WOODS: Yeah, exactly.

ROCKWELL: Because I think in this country too, he strikes a huge blow against transgender craziness and political correctness in general.

WOODS: Yeah. In fact, how will you be able to tell the history of all of this without mentioning his name, forever? In the future, looking back on this period and all those phenomena, you'll have to mention the phenomenon of Jordan Peterson right alongside it.

Now, likewise, when we look back at — here's a ham-handed segue — when we look at the libertarian movement, it'll be hard not to mention the Mises Institute and LewRockwell.com. And I had somebody asking, "I'd like to hear about the rise of LewRockwell.com." Here it is an extraordinarily prominent and heavily trafficked libertarian website. That surely took some

effort worth hearing about, and so I think people are just curious about the story of LewRockwell.com. And are we close to the 20th year?

ROCKWELL: We are. We're in the 19th year, and so yes, one more year. It all began when Clinton was bombing Serbia, and I had a big rolodex and I started to send out things to people, to people's email addresses against the war that Clinton was running, and it got a good response from people. And it led me to think, well, really I should have a website about this sort of thing. And so I started the website, and I must say it got a pretty quick positive response from people. Of course I got hate mail, and Jonah Goldberg didn't like it, and other things that really struck at my heart.

WOODS: [laughing]

ROCKWELL: But I think there was a place for it. And I should give credit to Drudge, because I was inspired by his old-fashioned, no-change look to his site to design mine. And it's gotten a good response. And so yes, it's 19 years old, and I hear from a lot of young people – not Jordan Peterson-like, but a lot of young people tell me they started reading it in high school and it had a good effect on their lives, so they felt.

WOODS: Yeah.

ROCKWELL: So it's been a lot of fun. I look forward to doing it every day, and I enjoy the emails I get. And I don't get that many hate mails anymore, which, I don't know whether to feel bad about that or good about it. But there are a lot of positives, a lot of people who like it of all ages, but especially young people. And I think it's had a good effect. I think it's helped bring maybe Murray Rothbard to more people's attention, not that he wasn't already very famous in libertarianism and otherwise. So I must say it's been a huge amount of fun, and I'm very glad that it happened and I'm glad it's still going.

WOODS: You know, when you said the thing about hate mail, it made me think, that's funny, I've gotten so little hate mail that I've actually forgotten all about the phenomenon of hate mail. I don't get it anymore either. And I think at least – I don't want to speak for you, but in my case I can say it's because I think people have come to the conclusion that I'm too hopeless to be reached. It's not a good use of their time to send me this email, because it isn't going to change a thing.

All right, we'll get back to my conversation with Lew Rockwell after we thank our sponsor.

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Lew, we are coming up upon – this is going to be, this year, 2018, it's 25 years since I first came to a Mises Institute event. I can't believe that. 25 years, Lew. What is happening? I went to the Mises University summer program. It was out at Claremont McKenna at that time, and it was just an – I just cannot say enough about what a life-changing experience it was. I mean, I was already libertarian-oriented, but it really, really helped to make me who I became. I did go through my paleocon phase for a little while after that, but I more or less emerged from that and became a hardcore Austro-libertarian by the turn of the century. So you of course are the founder and chairman, and we have talked a bit about the story of the

Mises Institute I think in the past, but looking ahead, what would you like to see the Mises Institute do in the future?

ROCKWELL: You know, I'm just going to reminisce for a moment about 25 years ago when you were at Claremont, and I had talked to Murray Rothbard about the fact that you wanted to speak to him and were very much worth speaking to. And I said he's what you've always wanted. He's a top historian who knows economics. And Murray, what? So I remember introducing the two of you in sort of the central area of the Claremont campus, and I left you two talking, and more than an hour later, I came back by there, and you're still both of you just standing close to each other just talking, talking, talking. And it was so heartwarming, and I thought this was a very, very good development for libertarianism and correct history and correct economics and so forth, as of course it indeed turned out to be.

So I think the institute has 35 years ago. We've had a very good effect. I won't mention who it was, but there's a so-called libertarian economist who's not a fan of the institute, and he keeps saying we can't use the words "Austrian economics" anymore, because if you put that into Google, the Mises Institute comes up rather than our group.

WOODS: [laughing]

ROCKWELL: And so they've had three or four different name changes, and then of course they always come back to Austrian economics because that's the only thing about them that's interesting, even if their version of Austrian economics is slightly warped.

So I think the sorts of things we're doing with young people, we've reached tens of thousands of young people in serious ways, not only through our programs in residence of the sort that you attended twice as both the Mises University and also in our summer fellows program. But I think we've just reached especially probably in Eastern Europe, interestingly enough, the United States second, Western Europe next, Latin America, Asia. So we keep seeing, for example, more and more Chinese students coming. Pat Buchanan, please forgive us. That's another terrible thing we're doing. So we have kids from – we've had a huge effect on Poland, for example. There's a vast Austrian movement in Poland. And people ascribe their refusal to go along with EU orders to nationalism, and that's part of it, and to religion – that's part of it. But they also, a tremendous number of young people in Poland understand economics.

WOODS: And a lot of those key people were without a doubt trained at the Mises Institute, because I got to know them when I was there.

ROCKWELL: That's true. So we want to keep bringing in young people. One thing we would like to do – and this is something that Guido Hülsmann worked on when he spent several years with us some time ago – we can't give degrees. The state makes it impossible in terms of the amount of money and hundreds of thousands of library books you have to have and that sort of thing. We've got a very large library. We've got about 45,000 books. It's a uniquely magnificent Austrian and libertarian library. But we'd have to have many more faculty, we'd have to have tenured faculty, all kinds of regulations. So we can't do that, but we did think that it's possible for us to have a structured giving, maybe we'd call them licentiates, maybe we'd call them certificates. It can't be a bachelor's or a master's or a PhD, but other kinds of degrees are open to us.

And we think not only would students be interested in this, but there are plenty of people on Wall Street and in their careers otherwise who would find it a good thing on their resume and also of course a great thing for their mind to do some serious study of Austrian economics and to get recognition of that, where we'd have exams and so forth. So this is something I would very much like to see in the future to increase the number of people, smart people interested in Austrian economics.

And I think the whole – Jordan Peterson is showing this. The whole typical university system I think is cracking. I mean, when you think of the top universities in this country and the top colleges seem to have gone insane, how much longer are boys, for example, going to go to college if they're being nothing but denounced and smeared and libeled for a lot of money for four years by a bunch of left-wing boobs? So I think that there may be other sorts of structures that can come up. I think the Mises Institute can play a very important role in this, in alternative structures of higher education. It would be a lot cheaper than, of course, what they're doing.

So that's sort of my secret dream for the Mises Institute, that we would become in effect not really a university – that has a specific meaning, but an institution of higher learning, much cheaper than the others, much more effective, and I think much more powerful. So I look forward to a lot of the bricks and mortars crumbling, and I think that there are libertarian ways to circumvent them and to provide what people need and want. And of course it could be broader than Austrian economics. It could be history and philosophy and other areas too. So that's one thing I'd like to see.

WOODS: Lew, I rather suspect you're not particularly fond of the term liberty movement, but you know what's meant by it. What would you say is your sense of where it stands right now, as compared to, let's say, where we were in 2011 when Ron was in the heat of his second Republican campaign?

ROCKWELL: Well, I'm afraid we've retarded. I think that left-wingism has not only taken over universities and colleges; it's made huge in-roads into the libertarian movement, or the so-called liberty movement. And they're ultra PC. Recently the Libertarian Party announced to Ron Paul that if he wanted to come to speak at their convention, they weren't going to allow him to.

WOODS: Yeah.

ROCKWELL: So then they backed down. They said, well, of course we didn't really mean it. He can speak. But they hate Ron Paul. They hate what he stands for. There was a guy at the Cato Institute, not Ed Crane, who when Ron was running for the Libertarian Party nomination said he's no good, he's too white, he's too straight, he's too middle class. So this kind of stuff has been around for a very long time. That was in 1987. And I'm afraid it's metastasized. So there's still a lot of good people in the Libertarian Party in the outer reaches, in places like Texas and so forth, but the Washington movement of all sorts – which is pretty much the Koch movement, Cato, *Reason*, etc., the Libertarian Party allied with them – they're all leftists. And they're all bitter leftists, and they really are not that much different from the kind of people that Jordan Peterson is fighting at the University of Toronto. We're just slightly behind, if that's the word, their progress.

On the other hand, the ideas of liberty are so powerful and so true and just so attractive that I think – and of course we keep having more and more young people come up, and I think they're not poisoned by leftism like an older generation. So I have great optimism for the future, but I think it's going to be a few years before we're back to where we were in the days of Ron Paul.

WOODS: Somebody else wanted to know – and I think we'll probably wrap up with this – what is your opinion on the question of whether, in addition to the nonaggression principle, in order for liberty to be successful and sustainable it's necessary for people to have additional ideas, whether about gender or family or tradition or whatever.

ROCKWELL: Well, I think it's true. I think it's obviously true. Nonaggression axiom is a political statement, but as Murray Rothbard always said, you have to have a lot more than politics. You have to have ethics and religion and history and many other things. So I've come to dislike the word "gender," I must say. There are just two sexes. Gender has to do with the French language or whatever. But I think that we have to have a culture. There's no question that – I mean, I'm a thin libertarian in the sense that I think libertarianism is just the nonaggression principle in one sense, but I think Hoppe's right that there are certain cultural norms that provide a better ground for libertarianism to grow in, and certainly leftism is anti-libertarian, and no matter how much they claim that to be a libertarian you have to be a feminist, you have to be all the rest of the politically correct groupings, you have to support those, and you're not a libertarian if you don't. Also these people tend not to be in favor of the nonaggression principle. I think not exactly unusual, because they're all for civil rights laws and they're all for fining and jailing people for having the wrong views, in their eyes, on race or sex or many other things.

So I think – Bionic Mosquito, for example, the blogger, does a lot of work on this, but clearly there are – well, as Lord Acton said, that liberty was the key political end of life, but of course, as he said, that's not the only thing there is. Rothbard held exactly the same views. And in fact, I've often thought – there was a traditional Mass chapel opening in Las Vegas shortly before his death, and he told me he was interested in checking it out. So I've always thought that maybe that meant that Murray was having religious interests too. I think there were some other indications of that towards the end of his life. But there are many more things. There's family, society, just 101 other things besides libertarianism. On the other hand, libertarianism is essential to a free society and to a decent society and to a healthy society, but it's not sufficient.

So I do think that we need more than that, but of course as libertarians, we should be concentrating on libertarianism, which doesn't have properly thought of – which doesn't exactly overwhelm with sponsors and adherents. But it is the correct idea. We have a tremendous legacy of great thinkers and genius thinkers, not only Mises and Rothbard, but Acton and Raico and so many others. We have a burden on us to carry this forward. But it's not all there is in life. There's music. There's many different things that are also so important.

WOODS: Lew, I want to of course urge people who have not done so yet to go to Mises.org. We have a lot of people who go to LewRockwell.com. If you're not one of those people, you've got to do that, because that's how you start your day. Then you go check out Mises.org. And if you go to Mises.org, you could potentially never come back because of everything that's there. If you really look around, you're going to say, "Oh my gosh, this is all I need. I don't need one other thing." As Steve Martin said in *The Jerk*, "I don't need one other thing."

ROCKWELL: I know a young guy who got to spend a year at home, and so what he did was he listened to everything on the Mises site, which he said he didn't actually get to it all in a year.

WOODS: Yeah.

ROCKWELL: But he said that it changed his life and he was very grateful for it.

WOODS: It's incredible. It's courses, it's articles, it's books, it's entire print runs of scholarly journals that are of tremendous significance in the history of the libertarian movement. Almost anything you can think of is over there at Mises.org. And then again, for really terrific commentary, of course you've got LewRockwell.com. These are indispensable to me and so important to me, and they really help me clarify my thinking. Sometimes some issue will come up, and I don't automatically know what the right way to think about it is. Sometimes I need some input from friends. And I look at these sites, and they help me clarify my thinking. Really, really important.

I hope everybody will support both of these things too. It's nice to visit them, but it's also important to support things we believe in so that we can say as libertarians that we really mean it when we say that civil society will be able to support itself because we will all support things that we cherish. Well, go ahead and do it. And two really, really worthy things are LewRockwell.com and Mises.org. Lew, I am thinking I may come to the conference later this month, so presumably I'll see you then.

ROCKWELL: Tremendous. We'll roll out the red carpet.

WOODS: Ah, thanks. Okay, thank you so much for your time today.

ROCKWELL: Thank you, Tom.