



# Strictly Confidential: The Private Volker Fund Memos of Murray N. Rothbard

*Murray N. Rothbard, Murray Rothbard*

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The hugely influential memos by Murray Rothbard, written in the 1950s and early 1960s, were kept under wraps for fifty years. They were commissioned by the William Volker Fund and concerned most every important thinker and book of the period. Through them, Rothbard provided guidance for the publishing and philanthropic efforts of the Fund itself, which was the main flame for liberty in these dark times.

Rothbard's writing is deeply insightful, brazenly honest, and penetrating in every way, as he treats every subject from strategy to historical scholarship. These memos have never before been published, and they provide a different perspective on the mind of a great and pioneering thinker.

The first book to bring some to light came with Roberta Modugno's *Rothbard Versus the Philosophers*.

Strictly Confidential heats up the legacy of these writings with pages sometimes marked Strictly Confidential. And you can see why. Rothbard is merciless towards the enemies of liberty and relentless against those who are unwilling to follow through on the full logic of what liberty demands. Edited (but never censored) by David Gordon, and with an introduction by Brian Doherty, Strictly Confidential presents 40 full memos by Rothbard.

The William Volker Charities Fund was a philanthropic organization established by the William Volker Company of Kansas City, Missouri, a western furniture distributor. Loren "Red" Miller, a municipal reformer who had fought the Pendergast political machine, becoming in the process a dedicated friend of laissez-faire liberalism, became acquainted with William Volker and converted Volker and his nephew, Harold W. Luhnnow, to the cause. By the late 1940s, Luhnnow, as head of the Volker Fund, undertook to subsidize libertarian scholarship in those dark days of triumphant New Deal corporatism and overseas adventurism.

Luhnnow provided funding for Ludwig von Mises at NYU and for Friedrich von Hayek at the University of Chicago. With dedicated staffers such as Herbert C. Cornuelle, Richard Cornuelle, Ivan Bierly, and others, the Volker Fund provided much needed support for the small number of rising libertarian scholars. Alongside a handful of other free-market organizations, the Volker Fund played an indispensable role in the post-war free-market revival.

Rothbard began his consulting work for the Volker Fund in 1951. This relationship lasted until 1962, when the Volker Fund was dissolved. A major part of Rothbard's work consisted of reading and evaluating books, journal articles, and other materials. On the basis of written reports by Rothbard and another reader Rose Wilder Lane the directors would decide whether to undertake massive distribution of particular works to public libraries.

The Volker Fund also asked Rothbard to submit reports on particular questions, such as how to rank sundry economists in terms of friendliness to the free market, surveys of the literature on monopoly, Soviet wage structures, etc. Rothbard's memos number several hundred, covering works in economics, history, philosophy, and political science. The memos, which range in length from one page to seventy pages,

provide a window into the scholarship of the period and Rothbard's views on that scholarship. They thereby shed much light on Rothbard's emerging worldview and his systematic defense of liberty.

Some of the thinkers evaluated by Rothbard: Willmoore Kendall, Charles Black, Leon Bramson, Charles Percy Snow, Charles Beard, Jackson Turner Main, R.S. Van Alstyne, Robert V. Remini, George B. DeHuszar, Douglass C. North, William Appleman Williams, Edgard Eugen Robinson, Paul W. Schroeder, J.Fred Rippy, Alexander Gray, T.S. Ashton, Ro

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