

"Liberal" is Not a Dirty Word

A Democratic NewsGroup Posting

[Presented Here as Later Revised for Review]

August 9, 2003 (Rev. February 18, 2004)

The Right has pulled the Center too far to the Right.

The "ideal" candidate, for either party, is generally described as "conservative" on fiscal matters and "moderate" on social issues. The conventional wisdom is that it is not only "politically incorrect" but also political poison to be branded "liberal" on any issue (when absolutely necessary, one may gingerly call one's position "progressive").

Why must "liberalism" be so roundly condemned as a dirty word? Is "liberalism" foolish or immoral, inherently repugnant to Americans?

John F. Kennedy declared that "liberalism is not so much a party creed or set of fixed platform promises as it is an attitude of mind and heart, a faith in man's ability through the experiences of his reason and judgment to increase for himself and his fellow men the amount of justice and freedom and brotherhood which all human life deserves. ... For the liberal society is a free society, and it is at the same time and for that reason a strong society."

The United States of America was founded upon quintessentially liberal principles, of which it has been a champion in the world ever since.

It was inherently liberal, not conservative or moderate, to bravely seek religious freedom and a new life in the wilderness of a New World.

It was liberal, not conservative or moderate, to establish effective services for all the public, from the post office, public libraries, paved roads, and city lighting to public hospitals and police and fire-fighting forces (Thank you, Dr. Franklin).

It was liberal, not conservative or moderate, to break away from the monarchy of the Mother Country; to establish the modern world's first great democratic republic; and to establish a Constitution with a separation and balance of powers within the federal government and between the federal and state governments as well as a Bill of Rights for the individual citizens.

It was liberal, not conservative or moderate, to establish public education; to free the slaves; and to extend voting rights to non-landowners, African Americans, women, and 18-year-olds.

It was liberal, not conservative or moderate, to establish laws protecting workers in the workplace and consumers in the marketplace; to bust trusts; to create Social Security; and to devise federal regulations to protect the banking and investment industries and, hence, the life-savings of our citizens and the economic life of our nation.

It was liberal, not conservative or moderate, to fight and defeat worldwide the forces of fascism—as far to the Right as anarchy is to the Left.

It was liberal, not conservative or moderate, to not repeat our mistakes after World War I—to rebuild our former enemies and to establish the United Nations—to increase international cooperation, to guarantee fundamental human rights, and to prevent apocalyptic world wars.

It was liberal, not conservative or moderate, to outlaw racial segregation, to protect voting rights, to care for the least of our brothers and sisters, and to create Medicare.

It was liberal, not conservative or moderate, to vow to set foot on the Moon and to achieve that daring dream, as old as mankind, as it was to establish the EPA and to govern rapacious interests here on Earth.

It was liberal, not conservative or moderate, to end a war with no end in Southeast Asia and to expose and root out corruption at the highest levels of government.

It was liberal, not conservative or moderate, to devise safe and effective means of birth control;

to protect a woman's right to choose to do as she sees fit with her own body; to at least try to guarantee equal pay for equal work by both the sexes; and to outlaw discrimination based upon marital status, sexual orientation, or physical abilities.

And it was inherently liberal, not conservative or moderate, to extend human knowledge—and, thus, power—to billions worldwide via the Internet. Just ask anyone denied such information by the censors in a dictatorship.

Of course, conservatism has its uses—as by balancing budgets, we can afford to sustain progressive causes—as does moderation—anything can be taken to extremes.

But the fact remains, without liberalism, America would not have become the America we know and love today. Let us not be radical, but let us not be ashamed to call ourselves liberal whenever we strive to increase human liberty.