

RADICALISM

THE LIBERTARIAN IMPERATIVE

What Radicalism Is

Radicalism, contrary to popular opinion, does not refer to any specific ideology or set of ideals.

In the American political and philosophical culture, the most consistent forms of collectivism, such as socialism and communism, are thought to be radical. At the same time, however, these philosophies in other contexts and other cultures are considered to be conservative or even reactionary, as some forms of socialism are considered reactionary in Soviet Russia.

Throughout the history of political thought, the advocates of a great variety of ideas have attempted to attach to such terms as these a definite and specific philosophy. Yet all such attempts are doomed to failure as long as the possibility of innovation remains. All of these terms: radical, liberal, progressive, conservative, reactionary, have retained their relativistic connotation.

Once these facts of intellectual definition are recognized, it becomes evident that a philosophy which defends the right to human life and advocates an end to coercion, a philosophy which advocates Capitalism in the cultural and moral collectivism of the present time, is truly a radical philosophy. Advocates of such a philosophy seek a drastic and fundamental change in the *status quo*, a change which will never be accomplished through the mundane methodology of those who call themselves "conservatives".

Conservatism

Conservatism never was nor never could be a concept which could represent the ideal of the right to life. What is more, this fact has been recognized by the great majority of libertarian thinkers. We do not seek to *preserve* any great portion of the current American political institutions or principles. The value of the American Revolution has been prostituted and diluted to the point where it now bears only the most distorted resemblance to the original ideal of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness".

The word "conservative" is not associated with the movement for human liberty in either the popular or the intellectual mind. In fact, it is a misrepresentation and a grave tactical mistake to attempt to pass it off as such. To the intellectual, conservatism recalls Metternick, and Bismarck, and Herbert Hoover; men who never placed liberty as an ideal above all else.

Conservatism, to almost any mind, refers to a variety of statism which resists even positive change in favor of established institutions. On any grounds: tactical, moral or semantic, the words should be cast from the vocabulary of any thinking libertarian.

Ethics and Radicalism

The essential radicalism of libertarian thought must be recognized and acted upon. As with any other political theory, a system of ethics lies at the base of libertarian thought. This system and the profound nature of its essential moral principle, has been ignored for too long. Any philosophy — its existence and its effective propagation—depend on the effectiveness with which the proponents are able to present the basic ethic of their case.

Just as the philosophies of collectivism and statism have prospered with their ethical justification of altruism, they must be defeated with the morality of life. If collectivism is ever to be defeated, it must be on the grounds of morality and ideology.

These are the essentials of any intellectual confrontation and they are precisely the weapons of greatest effect. It is impossible to fight the philosophical culture of collectivism with the platitudes of "free enterprise" and Republicanism. Boldly, fearlessly, and without guilt, the banner of Capitalism and human freedom must be thrust into debate and essay as, and with, a crusade for morality.

It is astounding to see how quickly the Leftist pretense to the "common good" and humanitarianism will collapse when they are forced to recognize that collectivism is merely a rationalization for slavery and murder. The right to life means abolition of the initiation of force. The ideology of libertarianism is based upon this precept and so must the tactics of libertarianism be based upon it if they are to be effective.

The Battle for Liberty

The battle for human liberty can not be won in the petty internal politics of the Republican Party or in merely opposing collectivism. All political conflict is first and primarily determined by the content of the prevailing intellectual climate. Once the intellectual battles have been won, the rest will follow as a matter of course.

Ultimately, collectivism is impotent. Just as slave labor can not compete with a market system, the collectivist intellectual is mortally handicapped

by his disdain for life and the right of the individual. How can the collectivist and his corollary—the statist—possibly attempt a moral defense of such a system when he professes his willingness to negate life itself, which the concept of morality is necessarily dependent upon?

Radicalism means going on the offensive; not by attacking what is evil, but by advocacy of what is good. The defensive rear guard action that is being fought by those who call themselves "conservatives" is doomed to failure. They are not willing to consistently defend the right of man to his life and his property, and to this extent they are in agreement with the statist and they cannot base their defense of freedom on the moral base of the prohibition against the use of force. Their concern with practical and short range goals of politics has cut them off from the intellectual and from any possibility of success.

Professor F. A. Hayek has made a comment on this, a comment which has become a credo of the libertarian cause:

The main lesson which the true liberal must learn from the success of the socialist is that it was their courage to be Utopian which gained them the support of the intellectuals and therefore an influence on public opinion which is daily making possible what only recently seemed remote. Those who have concerned themselves exclusively with what seemed practicable in the existing state of opinions have constantly found that even this has become politically impossible as the result of changes in a public opinion which they have done nothing to guide.

Unless we make the philosophic foundations of a free society once more a living intellectual issue, and its implementation a task which challenges the ingenuity and imagination of our liveliest minds, the prospects of freedom are indeed dark. But if we can regain that belief in the power of ideas which was the mark of (classical) liberalism at its greatest, the battle is not lost. The intellectual revival of liberalism is already under way in many parts of the world. Will it be in time?

The intellectual revival of libertarianism has begun, as a simple review of literature will show. For this process to succeed it is necessary for its advocates to become conscious of their goals and dedicated to a radical presentation of the ideals of liberty.

The proper place of the radical is to lead the progressive forces and to facilitate the polarization of the intellectual community so that their ideas may spread, through this process, to the world of day-to-day politics.

BUILDING THE FREE SOCIETY

"The birth of S.I.L. marked the beginning of the modern libertarian movement. We are in the midst of an enormous advance of libertarian ideas and activities. In this existing ferment, S.I.L. has an increasing role to play, especially among young people and on college campuses."

Dr. Murray N. Rothbard
CATO Institute

"I must commend you on what is, I believe, the longest and largest libertarian educational effort in world history: S.I.L., its publications and activities. I cut my teeth on S.I.L. position papers in college back in 1969."

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Dr. Ludwig von Mises

"From my observation, since its inception in 1969, the Society for Individual Liberty has been an important factor in introducing and disseminating libertarian ideas. It has helped to provide a cohesive link for libertarians."

Robert LeFevre

The Society for Individual Liberty was the first national educational and activist organization dedicated to the principles of libertarianism. For more than ten years, S.I.L. has been promoting the goal of a free society in America through leadership, development of Libertarian clubs, dissemination of ideas, and encouragement of activist projects.

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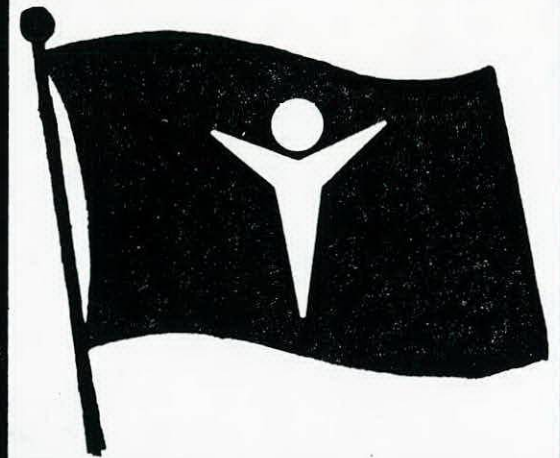
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