

Rhetorical tide drowns conservatism's prosperity

The tide of history currently opposed the long-term health and continued prosperity of conservatism as a viable political alternative. Even though apparent counter examples exist to such a claim — with the continued popularity of President Reagan as the most forceful counter example — it is obvious that conservatism has failed to draw and inspire many adherents among Third World nations, minority groups and intellectuals.

The rarity of converts among these groups does not bode well for the continuation of the impressive recent gains of the political right.

Jim Rogers

The problem lies in the rhetoric of the right. One of the striking distinctions between the rhetoric of the right and that of the left is the inclusion of the powerful term "justice." This term is within the popular vocabulary of the left; however, its absence is noticeable within the popular vocabulary of the right.

Simply reflecting on the number of times Democrats used the term in their convention speeches, in contrast to its rare use in Republican convention speeches, demonstrates the point.

The rare use of the justice metaphor among conservatives can be traced to economic justifications for conservative beliefs rather than political justifications. Or, utilitarian justification replaced the natural rights justification. This emergence occurred in the late 19th century and obscured the conservative political tradition that inherited its thought from philosopher John Locke. (Although Locke's concern with justice and the unwarranted use of government violence can be traced through theologians of the Protestant Reformation and ultimately to arguments produced because of the papal revolution of the 11th and 12th centuries.)

It is within the Lockean tradition that conservatives may rediscover the strong affirmative vision of justice. When properly articulated, the vision of justice will provide the force of belief

strong enough to resoundly defeat leftist ideologies.

One idea that must be communicated is the fact that the civil government enforces its decrees through violence or the threat of violence. Imprisonment is the dominant form of government violence today.

The basis for a truly just society exists only within the historical tradition of American conservatism, causing a society that does not sanction the initiation of violence against anyone.

The term "initiation" is understood in the sense of origination in a series of violent events. Thus, the state does not "initiate" violence when it punishes a criminal. The state merely responds to the criminal's initiation.

This understanding of justice underscores the perversity of the left's use of the term "social justice" or "economic justice," because the term is attached to what in reality is the massive and continuing use of state-initiated violence against people who are not morally responsible for harming anyone.

This reaction to leftist claims does not mean that conservatives should ignore the injustices of the past. Rather the distinction between the left and the right is the picture of the continuing and massive violent intervention of the state. This is the picture of the socialist state or even the state with a mixed economy as currently understood.

In contrast is the approach outlined by Harvard philosophy professor Robert Nozick in his

seminal work "Anarchy, State, and Utopia," where he advanced a generally Lockean understanding of the state:

"Although to introduce socialism as the punishment for our sins would be to go too far, past injustice might be so great as to make necessary in the short run a more extensive state in order to rectify them."

Conservative social theorists thus must be concerned with advancing claims of rectification for

past injustices that may justify a larger state in the short run. This is opposed to continuing interventionism of the leftist state advanced by the claims of equality and the vision of an immoral and violent egalitarian society.

Our culture — the culture of Western Europe — has been a violent culture. The legacy that the West currently is leaving to the non-Western world is the legacy of violence as encapsulated in the powerful secular ideologies of so-

cialism and Marxism. Rarely has the world seen more continual bloodshed than where the words of the French Revolution have been repeated: Equality, fraternity and liberty.

Justice, not a violently imposed economic equality, is the way of lasting peace. It is this peace that exists in conservatism's forgotten heritage. If rearticulated, this justice will insure continued prosperity of conservative resurgence.

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