

the Bush domestic policy team turned up its collective nose, insisting that any new tax relief should go to corporate America, not parents and children or even family businesses.

On family questions, then, the Bush legacy is mixed. Initial personnel decisions, social policy at the UN, the selection of judges, and early policy initiatives at HHS draw high marks. But whenever natural family values went up against the war in Iraq, the manpower needs of the Pentagon, corporate interests, or even political expediency, there was no contest: families were ignored. ■

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Conservatives Follow the Leader

By **Llewellyn H. Rockwell Jr.**

The relationship between the Bush administration and the conservative movement was hardly unexpected. Conservatives were disappointed when George W. Bush was nominated, since he is not a card-carrier. But when The Democrat arrived on the scene, pushing the usual panoply of bad ideas, conservatives changed their tune and backed the GOP. They always do. Indeed, they assembled in full force to elect Bush.

Of course, he moved left after the election. Many months went by before Bush did what every Republican president does: invite “movement leaders” to the White House for a special briefing. Craven doesn’t quite describe it. Conservatives will sell their firstborn to get a meeting at the White House. The leaders emerged to tell their followers and the press that they had inside information that the Bush administration was on the right track, so there was nothing to worry about. We can easily imagine Bush’s staff guffawing at these fools after they left the room.

After their meeting, the new conservative love for the GOP president lasted for a couple of years, and then it was time for another election and the whole charade started over again. Conservatives issued a warning that the president had

better shape up or he wouldn’t earn their support. So they got another meeting and a photo op and again promised fealty to the Republican Leviathan. In the end, of course, they have nowhere else to turn. No matter how dreadful the president is, conservatives fear the alternative more. So they end up as willing propagandists for the regime.

But this reliable support by conservatives for the Republican president confronts what psychologists call “cognitive dissonance,” which is to say that people will not forever live with a massive contradiction between what they do and what they believe. Eventually, the beliefs come around. So it has been for the conservatives who, in the 1990s, blasted Clinton’s big budgets and nation-building and then ended up celebrating far larger budgets and a vaster military empire around the world. The result has been an amazing intellectual bankruptcy on the Right.

The culminating event was the financial bailout of the Wall Street plutocrats, which contradicts everything that conservatives allegedly stand for. It was socialistic in every way. It rewarded market failures. It ripped off average families for the sake of billionaires. It was the worst form of Keynesian planning. It was an open conflict of interest, as the CEO of Goldman Sachs funneled vast sums to Goldman Sachs. It had exactly zero chance of helping the economy. In fact, by draining productive private resources necessary for economic recovery, it makes a bad situation worse.

And yet, no surprise, conservatives came around. You could check in with the Heritage Foundation or *National Review Online* and find rousing endorsements of this outrage, complete with pieties: “In normal times, we’ve been against government intervention, but these are not normal times...” And what did they get out of it? Nothing but the satisfaction of knowing that they helped sanitize and baptize what may be the worst piece of legislation in half a century.

So we have to ask the foundational question: what is it about conservatism that leads it to do these sorts of things? How is it that a philosophy that it is partly rooted in a concern for human liberty ends up embracing its opposite? It has something to do with a contradiction at the heart of what we call conservatism. In its modern incarnation, it began with William F. Buckley’s *National Review* in the middle 1950s. Half the articles were on the evil of the state. The other half cheered on the state to step up massively the socialistic, global central planning, regimenting, and big-spending government program called the Cold War. Buckley had even championed a “totalitarian bureaucracy within our shores” to fight the Russkies, while criticizing big government.

Conservatives were urging the government to be expansionist and aggressive abroad, and smaller at home. This is like attempting to train the python to be a cuddly pet. The earlier anti-FDR Old Right understood the relationship between the welfare state and the warfare state: they are essentially inseparable, especially in the American context. A regime scheming to overthrow governments abroad will hardly hesitate to dominate companies and communities in America. There is also the problem of political dynamics. If you are really dedicated to the warfare state, what are you

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willing to sacrifice to get it? Conservatives have been willing to give up their entire domestic agenda.

Then the conservatives added “cultural issues” to their panoply of concerns. In the old-time liberal framework that conservatives claim to inherit, culture and politics were completely separate. But in the 1980s, that began to change. That was when the Republicans discovered that they could gain electoral advantage by pushing hot buttons having to do with religion, sex, marriage, flag burning, and the like. Bush excelled at pushing these buttons and watching conservatives cheer.

To be sure, cultural problems abound, given the warfare state and the welfare state. But the answer is hardly to put the feds in total charge. Just as religion must be free from state interference, so must the culture, which is informed by religion. But once conservatives helped make these issues part of the political agenda, the state happily developed an aggressive strategy for shaping the culture in its image, through a wide variety of legislation and spending.

So when it came time for Bush to rally conservative support, he pushed very bad ideas like putting religious charities on the government dole. You might think that this would be opposed by anyone who valued religious independence, charitable autonomy, free enterprise, and limiting government. But no: conservatives stood foursquare with Bush, and even had their hands out for contracts.

In similar fashion, the Bush administration corrupted conservatives’ longstanding support for law and order. After that federal growth opportunity called 9/11, the central government exploited this feeling, and soon conservatives began

celebrating the right of the Bush administration to arrest and jail people without trial, to disappear and torture people abroad, to wiretap and otherwise spy on citizens, to use federal power to intimidate any and all political dissidents. How the defense of local law enforcement against centralization turned into a full-scale celebration of the police state is an ugly tale of a bit of truth turning to madness.

Now, it is not the case that conservatives surrendered every modicum of concern for human freedom. The problem is that the issue is low on their list of priorities. They are like someone ordering from a menu at a restaurant. Yes, he likes potatoes and vegetables, but the meat and dessert always appear more exciting. By the time he eats the stuff he really likes, there is no room left for the things that are needed. You know this if you have ever been to a conservative gathering. The sessions on taxes or trade attract a handful of geeks. But let someone get up to decry pornography and the evil of Islam—or Communism or any other foreign enemy of the day—and the multitudes will scream with approval.

Every Republican president can count on the conservatives eventually supporting whatever policies he dishes out for one simple and profound reason: they hate the Left more than they hate the state. So in the end, they will back anything that keeps the Left out of power. By anything, I mean anything—military dictatorship, fascist central planning, state management of the whole of the culture. One wonders what horror they think they are preventing by opposing the Left.

The answer is that they do not think. Most people calling themselves conservatives pay no attention to the history of ideas. George W. Bush certainly took no such interest. His understanding of American history, economics, and world affairs is thin and superficial. His goal as president was not to accomplish anything as such but merely to be president and do presidential things and hope to land on the right side of history.

More than anyone to occupy the White House in a very long time, moreover, Bush has been completely uninterested in public opinion and impervious to outside input. He created his own reality and surrounded himself with people willing to protect his illusions. For Bush, the conservatives badgering him and coming to visit him were just part of the passing scene, with no relevance at all. But the conservatives who fawned over him had to ignore that fact in the interest of maintaining the source of personal validation that has ruined their movement: their link to the state. ■

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The Right Lesson

Conservatives moved to the middle after Goldwater. That was a mistake.

By Paul Gottfried

BARACK OBAMA'S VICTORY has left the Republican Party and its allies reeling, groping frantically for a path back to power. Luckily, or not, the conservative establishment already has a handful of recently published critical works to guide its meditations. These include David Frum's *Comeback: Conservatism That Can Win Again* and Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam's *Grand New Party: How Republicans Can Win the Working Class and Save the American Dream*, as well as columns by the *New York Times'* house conservative, David Brooks. All of these emphasize the need for a new social direction for the GOP and conservative movement.

These sources teach that Republicans have foundered because they have failed to move with the times. Whether it is Brooks asking us to treat homosexual marriage as an expression of "family values," Frum exhorting the GOP to ditch the Religious Right on abortion and gay rights—but obviously not on Zionism—or Douthat and Salam pushing for government subsidies for the working poor and "earned legalization programs" for undocumented aliens, the common theme is that the Right and the GOP should downplay, if not concede, contentious social issues and engage more purposefully in income manipulation. This move would supposedly help the Right get into sync with voters.

What is most striking here is that these authors are advocating more of the same. They are trying to push the conservative movement farther in the direction in which it has been going

since the mid-1960s. Frum, Douthat, Salam, and Brooks would keep the GOP essentially in its present mold as a provider of social programs, a pale, albeit more militaristic, imitation of the Democratic Party. Yet this trend already belongs to the past. It took off more than 40 years ago, after the crushing defeat of presidential candidate Barry Goldwater in 1964, a rout that dragged down many Republican congressmen and looked very much like the most recent election.

McCain may hold the Senate seat that was once Goldwater's, but he is in no way his philosophical successor. The 2008 election was a contest between two varieties of the Left—between an actually left-wing candidate, Barack Obama, and a spurious, one might say "adjusted," right-winger, McCain. By contrast, 1964 was the real thing. As a critic of the New Deal and a passionate opponent of any attempt to expand it, Goldwater questioned the rationale for an American welfare state. Even more ominously, he combined his known desire to privatize Social Security, the TVA, and other federal projects with a strong Cold War posture. He not only spoke about the importance of defending the U.S. against Communist aggression, he famously—or infamously—wished to support anti-Communist insurgencies, and he hinted at the possibility of using nuclear weapons to end the incursions of North Vietnamese armies into the south. Only in his readiness to resort to force has McCain followed in Goldwater's footsteps.

The Republican candidate of 1964, significantly to the right of McCain, faced much greater vilification. He had the full power of the press and world opinion arrayed against him. Typical of this hostility was the remark by Martin Luther King, which was seconded by Gov. Pat Brown of California, that "we see dangerous signs of Hitlerism in the Goldwater campaign. All we need to hear [at the Republican convention] is 'Heil Hitler.'" By fall 1964, when Johnson ran a television ad featuring a small girl picking flowers juxtaposed with images of a nuclear catastrophe caused by Goldwater's foreign policy, the election was already all but over.

But movement conservative interpretation of the 1964 campaign, as found for example in Lee Edwards's *The Conservative Revolution*, is that Goldwater's landslide defeat was in no way conclusive. Indeed, it became the prelude for much greater things. A Goldwater backer who broke into GOP politics because of his support for the Arizona senator, Ronald Reagan, went on to become president. And Reagan allegedly picked up where Goldwater left off, advancing the "conservative revolution" against the New Deal and achieving victory in the Cold War, which had been Goldwater's explicit aim. Such movement stalwarts as William F. Buckley Jr., Russell Kirk, F. Clifton White, and Milton Friedman moved from backing Goldwater to endorsing Reagan. Certainly some argument for continuity can be made here, even if one hesitates to go all the