

The trouble with the American judiciary is that its members cannot be removed so easily. And the judiciary since World War II has taken an increasingly large share of what Mr. Califano calls "governing America." How, for example, did American democracy settle the questions of egalitarian schooling, of abortion, of prison reform, of pornography? The answer is that American democracy did not decide; the American courts decided. Even if some judges are elected by popular suffrage, the judiciary cannot be a democracy. The allegiance of the judiciary is not to the people's will but to the law, and the law is what the judiciary says it is.

When all is said and done, democracy offers America's only prospect of escape from the twin clutches of the bureaucracy and the judiciary, whose powers have been so greatly increased by the enactment of liberal legislation and the diffusion of the liberal ideology. So long as democracy has a voice there is hope for freedom. Senator Paul Tsongas's book<sup>†††</sup> is instructive in this respect, since it shows how he has had to change his tune in order to succeed in

<sup>†††</sup>*The Road from Here: Liberalism and Realities in the 1980's*. By Paul Tsongas. Vintage Books, \$5.95.

practical politics. A student radical of the 1960s at Dartmouth College, Tsongas rose swiftly in the Democratic party; a member of the House of Representatives in 1974, he stood in Massachusetts for the Senate in 1978, and while all the time asking for more blacks in politics, opposed the only black Senator, the impeccably progressive Senator Brooke, and defeated him. Obviously, Tsongas could not have moved so far so fast if he had stuck to the abstract dogmas of liberal theory.

In the old days, he admits, he encouraged his public to go on buying their German and Japanese cars "to save gas"; now he has learned the importance of helping American industry, if only to relieve unemployment. Once he voiced the liberal demand for all-out support for the public sector of the economy; now he urges that the government should "encourage the private sector." Once Tsongas was all against nuclear energy; now he argues that "there is no other alternative to nuclear power in the middle term." Once he championed workers' trade union rights above all else in industry; now he gives priority to productivity. He has moved from the antiwar rhetoric to calling for a vigorous response to Soviet aggression in Afghanistan. There can be no doubt that he has changed his policy on all these matters because his political career has

forced him to listen to ordinary people and seek their votes. Unfortunately, when it is safe for him to press a hard-left line, Tsongas still does so, and it is doubtful whether the leopard really has changed his spots. On the crucial question of foreign policy, Tsongas goes on advocating support for some of the worst Marxist-Leninist despots in the Third World, even in Ethiopia, where he has seen with his own eyes what is going on. He is a fierce exponent of the Marcuse doctrine of intolerance toward conservatives, and was a star performer in the Senate witch-hunt of Ernest Lefever.

The left-liberal ideology has less and less popular support in America, and to that extent democracy has halted its advance, at least in its overt and unequivocal form. But it is still fashionable in many quarters. It cannot be written off as out of date. It is deeply entrenched not only in the bureaucracy and the judiciary, but in the universities and the media, and in many of those places it has become a vested interest, as jobs, prestige, and advancement depend on adherence to it. So there is no ground for optimism. The left-liberal ideology will not die because it is incoherent and intellectually impoverished; the objectives are still fixed and the passions behind them are still violent. □

Robert Lekachman

## RIPOSTE FROM THE LEFT

An eloquent critic of Reaganomics and conservatism proffers his dissent.

If I were a Marxist—and just to avoid misunderstanding I boldly confess that I find Marxism a frequently useful tool of analysis—I should be inclined to interpret recent American experience as a vintage illustration of two important Marxist concepts: the relationship between base and superstructure and the notion of false class consciousness. Just for the fun of it, I shall yield to temptation and, for a space,

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pursue the line of analysis just identified.

In his introduction to the 1888 English edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, Engels attributed to Marx what he described as that great polemic's "fundamental proposition":

That in every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch; that consequently the whole history of mankind . . . has been a history of class struggles, contests between exploiting and exploited, ruling and oppressed classes; that the history of these class struggles forms a series of evolutions in which, nowadays, a stage has been reached where the exploited and

oppressed class—the proletariat—cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class—the bourgeoisie—without at the same time, and once for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinctions and class struggles.

There's the stuff for the troops! The point of this and similar passages is the powerful claim that at the root of alterations in intellectual fashion, artistic forms, political institutions, and assorted developments in religion, music, literature, and popular culture is a set of rumblings in technology and the forms of property ownership congruent with it that constitute the "material base." In short, it is technology and the law of property which distinguish slavery in ancient Rome and

Greece from feudalism in the Middle Ages, and the latter from the commercial, industrial, and finance capitalism which removed feudalism from the stage of history.

In evaluating events of the recent past, let's start with political and public culture, elements of superstructure. Undeniably, the contrast is sharp between the mid-1960s and the opening years of the 1980s. In the earlier period, the political agenda was congested by Great Society trumpet calls in behalf of neglected constituencies, among them the poor, the handicapped, the black, the young, and even the homosexual and radical. Very briefly, it seemed possible to finance an expanding war in Vietnam and a new set of social programs without inflation. Even more astoundingly the Johnson cornucopia included sweets for winners as well as losers. Congress as a companion piece to the War on Poverty enacted in February 1964 substantial reductions in personal and corporate income taxes. Indeed on close inspection the lion and the lioness's share of social expenditure flowed to the middle class. Even today social security and Medicare owe their relative invulnerability from David Stockman's budget bleeders not to the nonvoting poor but to politically alert, middle-class Gray Panthers and members of the American Association of Retired Persons.

Although in the giddiest moments of the 1960s the rhetoric of liberation vastly inflated the reality of political action, it is true that for several years advocates of Women's Liberation, gay power, black reparations, affirmative action, and many other good causes dominated the sensation-hungry media. Forgotten firebrands like Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown declaimed fiercely against the honkies on the seven o'clock news. At the end of the 1960s, Charles Reich in *The Greening of America* celebrated in *Consciousness III* the liberating role of the laid-back young. Tom Wolfe's malicious assault upon radical chic skewered wealthy radicals who took up Black Panthers and others of their ilk as fashionable causes.

Again, I must clarify my own position. Insofar (and it was not terribly far) as the Great Society confronted racial inequality, the exclusion of minorities and the poor from the political process, and dangerous concentrations of wealth and income, I clapped vigorously with both hands. In retrospect, despite major flaws of conception and application, the Great Society impresses me as the most serious stab at progressive reform since the New Deal. Vietnam tragically swallowed up the money required to ensure success for social invention and diverted public attention from domestic concerns to gaudy events in Southeast Asia.

All the same, the Great Society suffered from a serious weakness even in its short

heyday. Few of its enthusiasts were card carrying blue-, white-, or pink-collared proletarians. As the 1972 McGovern candidacy made brutally clear, blue-collar types on the whole supported the Vietnam war and proved themselves able, without straining, to suppress enthusiasm for school busing, affirmative action, gay rights, and the more extravagant versions of women's liberation. The pre-Watergate Nixon preceded Reagan in capitalizing on these attitudes in both his narrow victory over Hubert Humphrey in 1968 and his slaughter of McGovern four years later.

As Kevin Phillips has pointed out in his perceptive *Post-Conservative America*, Watergate temporarily interrupted an ideological swing to the Right manifest as early as 1968. That ideologically ambiguous politician Jimmy Carter edged out Jerry Ford as the beneficiary of Watergate and Ford's own blunders. Temporizing between his own moderate impulses and the claims of McGovern constituencies, Jimmy was done in partly by his indecisiveness and, for the rest, by bad luck: another energy crisis in 1979 and the long-running Iranian hostage soap opera. Reagan's 1980 campaign strategy, which featured masterly orchestration of renewed growth, more jobs, and opposition to abortion, secular humanism, and "soft" treatment of welfare cheats, pot smokers, cocaine sniffers, and other bad actors, registered and praised public disapproval of *Consciousness III*.

As with politics, so with the academy and fashionable journalism. The very same Norman Podhoretz who in the 1960s featured in *Commentary* Paul Goodman, Edgar Friedenberg, Norman Brown, James Baldwin, and Norman Mailer turned his magazine a decade later into an influential neoconservative organ and him-



self into a recruiting agent for the Reagan Administration which from time to time he advises. Ex-radicals and ex-liberals like Irving Kristol and Nathan Glazer edit journals such as the influential *Public Interest*, *Public Opinion* (Ben Wattenberg and Seymour Martin Lipset), and the *New Criterion* (Hilton Kramer). The *New York Review of Books*, an excellent barometer of intellectual fashion, has drifted toward the liberal middle and opened its pages to enlightened conservatives like Kevin Phillips and corporate liberals like Felix Rohatyn. On the op-ed page of Nixon's scourge the *Washington Post* regularly appear Jack Kilpatrick, William Buckley, Evans and Novak, and George Will (not to mention *The American Spectator's* own R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.). Magazines like this one attract readers, myself among them, and flourish in the land.

If anything the rightward drift of opinion is even more noticeable on the campuses. Of course even in the 1960s most academics were respectable Democrats or Republicans. Still, a sufficient number of well-known scribblers based in the Ivy League did make loud enough radical sounds in important editorial contexts to lend credence to the rumor that Ivy League social scientists resembled Charles Reich more nearly than Nathan Pusey.

Things have changed. Although Marxists do survive in numbers sufficient to alarm Arnold Beichman and the Heritage Foundation, few gain tenure and most young scholars worry more about their employment prospects than the intricacies of revolutionary doctrine. In my own depressing specialty, economics, a sign of the times is the declining popularity of political economy (usually taught by radicals) and the spread of Chicago, free-market ideology from the mother campus.

So much for superstructure. What about the material base? Americans are accustomed to regarding themselves as exceptional, richer and luckier than lesser breeds. As long ago as 1906, the German economic historian Werner Sombart asked the crucial question in a book title *Why Is There No Socialism in America?* His answer sounds familiar. America the blessed lacked a feudal tradition and enjoyed a degree of social equality between workers and capitalists unknown to Europeans. In our land of opportunity, plentiful helpings of roast beef and apple pie diverted the sturdy working man from defining himself as a proletarian. The seeds of European ideologies fell on unfertile soil in America.

Urban streets never were paved with gold, but until recently much of the American experience justified optimism. In the generation which progressed from youth to middle age after World War II, living standards steadily improved and with them the percentage of families able to acquire homes, cars, color TV's, boats,



and annual vacations. Parents whose formal education stopped at high school or earlier routinely sent sons and daughters to college. In the nurturing atmosphere of economic growth without end, practically everybody can reasonably expect almost annual additions to real income. Rising tides notoriously lift all boats.

By the end of the sixties, the precarious coalition of workers, minorities, and the middle class began to dissolve for the sufficient reason that economic growth, the source of material improvement, slowed, sputtered, and in the last decade practically stopped. For the political Right, the villains were easy to identify. Here, for example, is how the Stanford and Hoover Institution economist Michael Boskin phrased his diagnosis:

The United States economy has veered off course, and much of this malfunction can be traced to man-made disincentives to produce income and wealth and to allocate resources efficiently.

Boskin's course of treatment presaged the remedies actually pursued at least in the first eighteen months of the Reagan era:

There is also a clear consensus that our major economic goal for the 1980s must be to restore healthy noninflationary economic growth and that this can only be accomplished in an environment with a more stable, predictable, and slower rate of monetary expansion, a slower rate of growth in government spending, and a concerted effort to remove disincentives that obstruct working, saving, investing, and innovating.

Oddly enough, Marxists and their sturdiest free-market opponents concur on a crucial point. In any capitalist community, business enterprise is the central actor. When corporate profits shrink, investment diminishes, fewer new jobs are created, and debility in the business sector quickly infects the remainder of the economy. For Marxists, persistently declining profit rates signalize the imminence of general crisis. For friends of capitalism, Charles Wilson had it right when he

remarked that what was good for General Motors was good for America. In slightly grander language, at least since Adam Smith partisans of competitive capitalism have asserted harmony between the pursuit of private interest and the advancement of public interest.

For partisans of Reaganomics, there is logic to policies which enlarge the corporate share of national income at the apparent expense of low and moderate income families. The point of the exercise, as some mean-spirited critics have charged, is not to enrich Ronald Reagan's California friends nor to make Bohemian Grove rites more exuberant than ever; it is to help the poor by encouraging the rich to save and invest, for as Mandeville two centuries ago argued in the *Fable of the Bees* even the luxuries of the rich give employment and income to their financial inferiors.

In representative democracies, politicians win elections by persuading sufficient numbers of their constituents that candidates cherish the interests of the voters only slightly less than their own. Why else did 43 percent of union members desert Jimmy and embrace Ron? They were betting on a return of good times and all the more willing to give a Republican a whirl because no plausible party of the Left was in the running. European socialists, social democrats, laborites, and Communists represent potent constituencies of mostly but far from exclusively working-class citizens. From time to time, separately or in coalition, one or other of these parties of left forms a government, most recently in France. In the United States, the glaring absence of such political groupings testifies to massive false class consciousness, readiness to accept business claims that corporate and general interests coincide. Respectable political opinion ranges from Teddy Kennedy to Howard Baker. Ronald Reagan constitutes an interesting and potentially explosive

departure from the tendency of Presidents and congressmen to hunt feverishly for the center of the political spectrum. Of this, more shortly.

In the clash of interest groups, business dominates because it is perceived as the major provider of jobs and wages, but also because it is best able to disburse the currency of electoral triumph—coin. Increasingly sophisticated corporate Political Action Committees have learned to target lavish funds to retire incumbent liberals and replace them with sound conservatives. In the TV era, shortage of funds usually is followed by shortage of office. In New York, Lew Lehrman, a successful entrepreneur known only to family and friends a year ago, has spent millions of dollars of his own money to capture the Republican gubernatorial nomination. His frequent commercials have turned him practically into a member of our family.

Unions lack plausible alternatives to existing social and economic arrangements. They are also uneasily aware that one important aspect of American exceptionalism has been rendered obsolete by the joint operations of American multinationals and successful foreign invaders of the American market for consumer and producer goods. Within living memory, this country could operate with only occasional attention to the impact of its policies upon the remainder of the globe and little heed to adverse repercussions from their impact. As recently as August 1971, Richard Nixon could sever the link between the dollar and gold, impose a unilateral 10-percent import surcharge, and clamp wage and price controls upon enterprises and unions secure in the knowledge that he could safely discount European and Japanese retaliation. In the last decade the United States has become a full member of the world economy. It follows that unions which push too hard for better pay and benefits or in hard times resist givebacks risk plant closures and movement of capital to Taiwan, the Philippines, Singapore, or other hospitable political climates where authoritarian regimes understand the simple needs of American multinationals and keep local unions under tight control.

For American workers, it is a no-win situation. Even if domestic employers keep open their American plants, the voracious Japanese threaten to gobble up larger pieces of such key markets as autos, steel, consumer electronics, semi-conductors, and, on the horizon, passenger planes. Unions that give back benefits and cost of living adjustments will be rewarded by corporate use of their labor savings to purchase robots, steel-collared substitutes for men and women, who never take coffee breaks, never disappear during the hunting season, and never, never file grievances. Capital is far more mobile than labor. Thus far, unions possess no political instruments capable of multinational action against multinational employers.



Frustrated wage slaves tend, as the shrinks might say, to displace fruitless anger against their employers upon alleged welfare and food stamp cheaters, profligate politicians, and big government. Although the business community itself is divided on many specific issues, its members almost invariably unite in support of preferred candidates and broad economic policies. Misplaced class consciousness afflicts corporate elites as well as workers. At least since the New Deal when Franklin Roosevelt rescued private enterprise,\* business has usually profited more from Democratic than Republican regimes.

In this exceedingly conservative country, it is more politically popular to blame victims than villains—welfare clients and laid-off workers rather than the heads of mismanaged corporations and the compliant politicians who serve their interests. Recent public policy focuses tax rewards upon the mismanagers of the private sector and benefit reductions and unemployment upon the casualties of their blunders.

## II

A trifle earlier in this amiable essay, I implied that Ronald Reagan was something other than a conventional politician. Indeed he is not conventional, for unlike Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, and Jerry Ford, Ronald Reagan does not content himself with a bit of social program trimming and a few favors to business interests. Our paladin matches the Oxford English Dictionary definition of a reactionary as an individual who favors "a movement toward the reversal of an existing tendency or state of things . . . a return, or desire to return, to a previous condition." Throughout his political career, Reagan has made no secret of his dislike of social security, opposition to progressive taxation, aspiration to load welfare and Medicaid upon states and cities, and unswerving admiration of the private sector as problem solver for all seasons. To return to the Coolidge era is, one need hardly note, to repeal both the New Deal and the Great Society.

As our first reactionary President, Ronald Reagan plays politics closer to European than American rules. Leading a party of wealth and property, he identifies its interests with the public good. His Republican predecessors behaved quite differently. With varying adroitness, they practiced coalition politics and took care to maintain their ties with organized labor, farmers, consumers, and even environmentalists. None other than Richard Nixon signed into law the Clean Air Act. It was

\*The rescue operation did not stop the business community from furious opposition to the policies of their savior, any more than the American Medical Association was able initially to comprehend that Medicare would do more for the incomes of members than any innovation since anesthesia.

Jerry Ford who in late 1975 came belatedly to the rescue of New York City.† However much pre-Reagan Republican Presidents sympathized with businessmen, they respected the claims of other groups.

Nature and Ralph Waldo Emerson's law of compensation strongly implies that militant ideologies of the political Right invite echoes on the Left. As Reaganomics continues to devastate the hopes and dreams of family farmers, small businessmen, property developers, and their humbler fellow citizens, it may begin to occur to timid Democrats that scant mileage remains in the conferring of additional gratuities upon corporate leaders whose major recent achievements seem to be inventive mergers and personal acquisition of golden parachutes‡ which shield them from the rude impact of their own mis-, non-, and malfeasance.

I hazard the speculation that as liberals and mild radicals recover their confidence, they will begin to consider seriously such alternatives to conventional enterprise as worker ownership, community sponsorship of housing and public utilities, and outright public management. Such heresies are platitudes among our democratic allies. We devote 10 percent or so of GNP to health care. Canadians devote a smaller percentage to state health services without demonstrably inferior statistics of longevity, infant mortality, and other measures of public health. In Britain public housing shelters a larger percentage of families than here in good part because council houses are open to middle-class as well as working-class applicants.

†Ah, the irony of it all! Ford just might have won New York and renewed his White House lease save for that famous *Daily News* headline, the work of an anonymous mover and shaker of history, "Ford to City: Drop Dead."

‡A semantic improvement over the British "golden handshake," the retirement emoluments showed upon departing executives by their colleagues. By contrast, golden parachutes translate into lavish severance payments to top managers displaced by reorganization or merger.



Did I hear someone in the back of the room mutter the word "socialism"? Fair comment. It is the appropriate response to the disappointments of recent years. For those disappointments, corporate America is responsible. No advanced industrial state treats its businessmen as favorably as we do. If they don't do their job, blame properly should be deposited at their corporate doors. Current political responses are inappropriate. Democrats have vied with Republicans to invent new incentives to business investment. They appear to have encouraged instead speculation and unproductive mergers. Politicians who continue efforts to awaken dormant business energies remind one of that famous, anonymous definition of a fanatic as "one who redoubles his efforts after having forgotten his aims."

To reiterate, a serious response to current economic crisis is in American terms radical. It challenges the primacy of business as provider, inspects with skepticism asserted coincidences of corporate and public interest, and explores without trepidation alternative modes of economic organization and production. To set a date for the next political convulsion is rash, but just as foolish is the assumption that convulsion will never occur. The politics of the rest of the 1980s and the early 1990s are likely to differ substantially from those of the preceding decade and a half. Ronald Reagan has led the way to sharper choices and a politics which will come to resemble western European models.

We are at a watershed in American history. Downward mobility has never been novel but for the first time large numbers of middle-class families confront the probability that their progeny will live less well than their parents. Already the newly married or otherwise affiliated drive smaller cars, live in less space, and encounter tougher professional competition. Ours has never been a classless society. It has been more accurately characterized by mass aspiration to rise from the working to the middle class. This aspiration has weakened group solidarity, turned American unions into mild business organizations, and encouraged general admiration of the wealthy. With luck, we may join them someday.

Radicals will owe a debt of gratitude to Ronald Reagan if his Administration's blatant pursuit of class interest persuades average Americans that their future prosperity depends on their own class action. Thus I am inclined to conclude (did that voice in the rear say thankfully, "None too soon"? ) that the single most important change of opinion in the last fifteen years has been the spreading, reluctant recognition that American problems resemble the difficulties of other nationalities. The next fifteen should lead to recognition that solutions also require attention to European social democracy, worker self-management, and outright socialism. □



Josiah Lee Auspitz

## THE TRUE LIBERAL

A political thinker reminds us of liberalism before the donkey ears were placed upon it.

Though many American exports have fallen on hard times, the United States unquestionably leads the world in purveying the term "liberalism" in an entirely debased and sectarian way that gives no clue to its historic meaning. Elsewhere, the word still has some intellectual force. It stands for admired practices of civility, constitutional liberty, and representative government, as in the phrase "liberal democracy." It evokes, too, a rich and disciplined culture, as in the phrase "liberal education." There are even countries, not all of them Western, in which political parties are proud to bear the name liberal and to aspire to the ideals associated with it, as in the ruling party of Japan. It is liberalism in its most fundamental sense that is the continuing issue in Poland, where freedom of association and procedural guarantees are still being sought. Liberalism, in its rudimentary form, is the aim of the human rights movements in Argentina and the Philippines, and indeed the very vocabulary of human rights, wherever it arises, is indelibly and recognizably liberal.

All over the world, the United States is looked to as the bearer *par excellence* of an ideal that combines three dictionary senses of the word liberal: generosity, freedom, toleration. The liberal idea has endured long enough to have acquired a settled conceptual character that can be disentangled from the many other notions with which "liberalism" has been confused (notions such as capitalism, Protestantism, rationalism, individualism, anti-Romanism, optimism, interest-group pluralism, laissez-faire, and the bourgeoisie). And the American variant of this liberal idea can be discussed philosophically in terms which show its important place in the civilized heritage of all mankind.

But you would never guess any of this from listening to our contemporary political debates. Here in the United States,

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liberalism is simply the catchword for one of the two teams on which you can place side bets in two-party politics. In addition to the Republicans versus the Democrats we have in each party "liberals" versus "conservatives," though the liberals among the Republicans and the conservatives among the Democrats call themselves "moderates," both to disarm fanatics and to appeal to that great bulk of Americans who, with Dwight Eisenhower, can't figure out what the terms mean. "I have never found anyone who could convincingly explain his own definition of these political classifications," Ike said from retirement on his Gettysburg farm, doubtless aware that his chief speechwriter, Emmett John Hughes, had devoted a book to exposing the philosophical inadequacies of "liberalism" (by which Hughes meant the individualism and laissez-faire of the "conservative" wing of the GOP).



But then Hughes, a former columnist at *Newsweek*, had worked in Manhattan, which is one place where people take these labels in dead earnest. New York happens to be the only state where peculiarities of the electoral law have permitted the rise of endorsement slates bearing the names Liberal Party and Conservative Party, so that there the terms actually have concrete referents. What a tribute to the role of the Empire State as the financial and communications capital of the country that these labels, which New Yorkers can use with so much more confidence than the rest of us, have come to dominate our national political debate.

Only New Yorkers, many of whom live in Connecticut or summer in New England, can make truly refined discriminations about Liberal-Republicans, Conservative-Democrats, neoconservatives, neoliberals, radical-liberals, libertarian conservatives, and other exotic varieties. How significant are these distinctions? As Al Smith, a great governor of that state, put it, "No matter how thin you slice it, it's still baloney." When new ideological fashions churn out of Manhattan as quickly as tailfins used to change in Detroit, no one should be surprised if our politics like our transportation is taken over by foreign imports.

Come to think of it, in their debased meanings, the terms liberal and conservative are themselves foreign imports. They are borrowed from British politics of the Victorian Age. They have, to give them their due, added a touch of class to our native political journalism. The young Walter Lippmann, for example, was able to transform himself from a Harvard socialist, which was ungentlemanly, to a "liberal," which was high-toned, without any initial wrenching of his views on government. Later, other Americans, inspired perhaps by the set paper on Gladstone and Disraeli administered at Oxford to so many visiting colonials, were transmogrified from Babbitts into squires with the label "conservative," which conjured up stained glass, the family silver, and riding to hounds. —