



A Collapsible Tent

The Republican Roosevelt and Progressive Reform

The last presidential election exposed a deep fissure within the Republican Party that has festered for several generations. The roots of the party's philosophical wounds go back to the crucial days of Theodore Roosevelt's administration when American politics was in transition. It was during Roosevelt's presidency that American society was at the height of a wave of social reform that would saturate its social, economic and political landscape for over 100 years.

Looking Forward

The Progressive Movement originated from a spirit of reform that had permeated American society by the early 20th century. Some chroniclers date the publication of Edward Bellamy's 1888 novel *Looking Backward* as the beginning point of a national awareness of the unintended consequences of an unfettered capitalism. Set in the year 2000, Bellamy's book depicts a utopian society run with the hierarchical efficiency of a military battalion. The workers in Bellamy's idealized world belonged to a unified industrial army that labored in an economy controlled by a group of central planners that was more productive than a primitive capitalism.

Progressivism was an upper-middle-class movement, largely located in the urban areas where human deprivations, poverty and squalor were most visible. It arose in response to the opulence and material excesses of the *Gilded Age* that emerged in the unregulated capitalism of post-bellum America. Its leaders were recruited from the milieus of law, medicine, politics and social work. As well-educated members of a professional elite, their Gnostic sense of self-righteousness inspired them to apply pressure on city governments and corporations to improve housing, recreational and health conditions in America's cities.

Reforming the social conditions was just the tip of their ideological iceberg. Progressives sought reform as a means of replacing the old cultural order with a more modern structure that would extend the *American Dream* to millions of Americans through a calculated distribution of upper-class wealth. A bulwark of the old order was a John Wayne-esque *rugged individualism* that had brought

the country into the 20th century. Progressives saw individualism as symptomatic of all that was wrong with America. They argued that a more collective approach would heal society's ills.

The Whig Theory

At the heart of progressive thinking was the notion of continual progress. This was not the limited economic progress of the General Electric ad campaign that boasted in the 1950s that *progress is our most important product*. Progressives thought in terms of the *Whig theory of history*, which proclaimed that history was an *inevitable march upward into enlightenment*. Progress was inevitable because of the Enlightenment's deification of science and human reason in the 18th century.

While the progressives paid lip service to maintaining America's individual freedoms, their plan to intervene in the daily lives of millions of Americans in order to ensure the general welfare for the poor and downtrodden gave the lie to that hollow promise. But like all great theories, the idea of eternal progress had its detractors. Originally they were known as *Tories*. Today the mainstream media labels them *conservatives, obstructionists and reactionaries*.

In their minds, progressives see the inherent beauty in mankind while conservatives focus only on the flawed nature of human beings while relentlessly clinging to their old traditions of faith, economics, morality and law. Progressives believe that science and evolution endow their policies with an infallible certainty that never should be challenged. Progressives believed that their reforms would eventually create modern forms of liberal democracy, an optimistic outlook not unlike the Republicans' recent foreign policy in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Progressive Bible

In American history reform movements have come and gone. Progressivism owes much of its longevity to magazine editor Herbert Croly. The editor of *The Nation*, Croly published his *The Promise of American Life* in 1909. His book provided both the revolutionary

theory and the practical methodology for the Progressive Movement's success. Croly's *Progressive Bible* deftly synthesized the federalist thinking of Alexander Hamilton, the country's first Secretary of the Treasury, with the secular humanism of its third president, Thomas Jefferson.

Hamilton believed in a strong central government that promoted and protected national business interests. Jefferson believed that the *best government was that which governed least*. Illustrative of his thinking was his policy of defending America's extensive coastline with a flotilla of small boats. His opponents quickly labeled his boats the *mosquito fleet*. Jefferson also disdained American businessmen while idealizing the agrarian community as the epitome of the America's goodness and virtue.

In what can be termed a feat of pure Hegelian brilliance, Croly took Hamilton's thesis of big government and combined it with Jefferson's antithesis of social concern to create a paradigm where big government would work to foster the welfare of the lower level of humanity on Thomas Hobbes' pyramid.

Under Progressivism government would become the guarantor for Jefferson's ideals, using Hamilton's means. Instead of favoring business success and creating millionaires, the state would now work to spread the wealth to America's lower classes, which had been left waiting at the dock of America's never-ending prosperity.

A Kingdom of Cultural Myth

Croly's progressive synthesis not only created a roadmap for buying future political elections through the judicious use of pork and earmarks, it also bled into the culture, causing a transformation that heralded the decline of American exceptionalism. For this cultural transformation, progressives looked to the classroom as the most obvious place to start.

Until the mid-19th century, education had been the province of the American family. Religious education had always been an important part of their education, with the Bible serving as their textbook. In his 1848 *Communist Manifesto* Karl Marx argued for free public education, which would transfer cultural education from the family to the secular schools.

If Croly was the progressive enlightenment's Diderot then its Rousseau was progressive educator John Dewey. Dewey and others like him, such as sociologist Lester Ward, argued that the country needed a universal system of public education. In his book *Ethics of Democracy* Dewey lauded Plato's idea of the *perfect man in the perfect state*. To Plato's ideal, Dewey wedded Hegel's conviction that *the state is the divine idea, as it exists on earth* so as to create the perfect man. According to historians Thomas West and William Schambra, Dewey not

only put *unlimited faith in the unlimited powers of government to elevate mankind*, he wanted the state to supplant the private sector.

In stark contrast to America's founding principles, Dewey wrote that freedom is not *something that individuals have as a ready-made possession*. It is not a *gift of God or nature*. Like human rights, freedom was a beneficent gift of the state. Since human beings were not naturally free, natural rights or natural law did not exist. Therefore, Dewey concluded, *natural rights and natural liberties exist only in the kingdom of mythological social zoology*.

Alice's Twins

Many Republicans blamed Roosevelt's Progressive Party challenge in the 1912 election as the cause of incumbent William Taft's devastating defeat. Their complaint misses the fact that well over 75% of the voters cast their ballots for progressive candidates, including socialist Eugene V. Debs. According to Judge Andrew Napolitano's 2012 book *Theodore and Woodrow*, Roosevelt and Wilson were *nearly indistinguishable* as candidates. One only needed to look into Alice's looking glass to see that Roosevelt's *New Nationalism* and Wilson's *New Freedom* were as distinct as *Alice's Tweedledee and Tweedledum*.

Teddy, the *Republican Roosevelt*, was the perfect warrior for the Progressive Reform Movement among America's ruling elite. It was at Harvard that he first supped at the table of moral outrage and guilt that engendered a visceral reaction to the deplorable living conditions in America's eastern cities. During his two years as police superintendent of New York City Roosevelt was appalled by the decline of morals and general lawlessness that allowed bordellos, gambling parlors and opium dens to sully New York's public image.

Like most of his patrician friends, Roosevelt believed in what the French called *noblesse oblige* or a moral obligation, not only to help the poor and unfortunate but also to change their behaviors. Like America's current president, Roosevelt also had a characteristic disdain for big business. He believed his role was to divest the wealthy of their money and power while indirectly embedding ordinary people as dependents on government's largesse. This put him at odds with the GOP's old guard, such as Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge.

As president, Roosevelt was an indefatigable *trustbuster* who promised to hold businesses accountable for their indifference to American poverty. As the nation's first environmentalist, Roosevelt wanted to conserve America's natural resources. Overall his progressive ideas sought to revolutionize American political history while changing the nature of American society and its culture. His social and economic reforms set the country on a dangerous path, lined with socialist brambles and Marxist vines.

Both Roosevelt and Wilson internalized the basic principles in Croly's book and concretized them in their respective political positions on the economy, social needs and the environment. Roosevelt and Wilson's differences were essentially the accidents of birth, geographical upbringing and religious belief. Wilson was a Southerner with the soul of a Calvinistic preacher and the mind of an Anglophile academic. Influenced by the South's racial prejudice, Wilson had little trouble in accepting the eugenic philosophy that fleshed the soft underbelly of Progressivism.

Roosevelt's Progressivism was tied more to his social class while Wilson's religious faith sent him on a divine mission to right the wrongs of the capitalist world. Roosevelt was more traditionally Protestant but also subscribed to the eugenics beliefs that the white Anglo and Aryan Protestant race was superior to all others.

Both Roosevelt and Wilson believed that the Constitution was anachronistic and posed a threat to their duty to implement their reforms. Their perspective dovetailed with the progressives' notion of an *evolving or living Constitution*, which, like all living beings, could rightfully be expected to grow and to adapt to changing circumstances. To the progressives, there were no absolutes, so that the Constitution had to conform to the changing times. As Napolitano stressed, both were determined to *use the presidency to redistribute wealth, regulate and change personal behavior and consolidate executive power at the expense of the United States Constitution*.

The Big Lie

In the 100 years of its existence, Progressivism's Hegelian synthesis has become standard fare for American politics. The Republican establishment has not been shy in its deliberate participation in big-government politics since the *Republican Roosevelt*. The *Big Lie* in Washington is that the parties are substantially distinct. Both parties have been comfortable with increased government spending programs in Washington because they have been a proven formula for political longevity.

When conservative interlopers come along every generation or so, the progressives of both parties see their livelihoods threatened. They cringe at the thought that groups such as the Tea Party, pro-life organizations and the NRA will redirect the American people's distracted natures toward the old values of constitutional government and individual freedom. The establishment is convinced the Republican Party cannot win any national election solely by appealing to its base of traditional-values constitutional and social conservatives. The Republicans' tired leadership still thinks that the way to win elections is to outdo the Democrats in their specific outreach to immigrants, women, Hispanics and blacks, the poor, homosexuals and other minorities.

What they refuse to understand is their *big tent* approach not only is a failed policy but is likely to alienate their traditional voters and cause their political tent to collapse around them. As a dodge they blame the conservative wing that repeatedly rocks their gravy boat. Their scorn for the Tea Party, conservative talk show hosts and evangelicals has become a regular exercise in missed opportunities.

RINOs

As a result many Republicans have earned the sobriquet of *RINO* or *Republican In Name Only*. This term's inherent meaning can be traced back to 1912 when Roosevelt, Taft and Wisconsin Senator Robert La Follette denounced each other before the general election as not representing true Republican values.

In the 1930s and '40s, RINOs were called *Me-Too Republicans*, running on a platform that was nearly indistinguishable from that of the Democrats. The best example is two-time presidential candidate Thomas E. Dewey, who ran against Franklin Roosevelt in 1944 and Harry Truman in 1948. While Dewey supported Roosevelt's New Deal, he promised Republicans would run the programs more efficiently and with less corruption.

Dewey was illustrative of a long line of failed *RINO* presidential candidates that included Alf Landon, Wendell Wilkie, Gerald Ford, Bob Dole, John McCain and Mitt Romney. Their inability to resonate with conservative Republicans spelled defeat at the polls. The only anomalies were the two terms of Dwight Eisenhower, whose laid-back style and wartime credentials were the perfect salve for postwar America.

Richard Nixon's two elections were largely due to the repercussions of the Vietnam War in 1968 and the overt extremism of the Democratic candidate, George McGovern, in 1972. Nixon's late discovery that he was a Keynesian served as a complete rebuke of the traditional Republican values he once held. True conservatives such as Robert Taft and Barry Goldwater, who rallied against *me-too Republicans*, were quickly marginalized as outside the Republican mainstream. Ronald Reagan was able to bridge this gap only by accepting moderate George H. W. Bush as his running mate.

Republican Centurions

According to economist Thomas Sowell, the progressive idea of *me-too Republicanism* or *RINO* is alive and well in the post-2012 Republican Party. Their continual call for an *inclusion* that will house every political view just demonstrates their intellectual and moral vacuity.

During the Great Depression most Americans had too much pride to accept a government dole. Today billions of

dollars cascade into all levels of American society as a matter of entitlement. It took 100 years but progressives have transformed the nation from a Republic to a Democracy. In doing so the Democrats have stretched the Constitution out of shape by dismissing its internal safeguards, such as checks and balances and separation of powers. President Obama's frequent use of executive orders and privileges and constant dismissal of Congress has made the Constitution virtually irrelevant.

Today progressives of both parties continue to embrace Marxist-derived concepts such as diversity, "green" environmentalism and homosexual marriage. Promises of shutting down entire departments or cutting trillions in spending are mostly talk because once a department becomes funded it is here forever. The significant difference in the two parties is the speed of their approach to the political abyss where the piper will have to be paid.

Roosevelt Republicans have undermined most conservative attempts to restore the culture, return the country to economic solvency and re-establish constitutional government. Traditional Republicans are reminiscent of the protagonists in Joseph Wambaugh's 1970 novel *The New Centurions*. In the novel Los Angeles police officers were the last barrier between the barbarians in the streets and total social breakdown.

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Hungarian Bishop Visits CMF, Lauds Cardinal Mindszenty's Legacy, Notes Progress Toward Beatification

The Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation hosted Bishop Ferenc (Francis) Cserhati, auxiliary bishop of the Esztergom-Budapest archdiocese in Hungary, on May 22 in St. Louis. While on a pastoral tour to meet with Hungarian Catholics in several North American cities, Bishop Cserhati expressed a desire to learn more about CMF's work. His archdiocese was formerly the seat of Cardinal Mindszenty himself, and Bishop Cserhati serves on the board of a Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation based in Europe.

Bishop Cserhati reported on progress in the process to seek beatification for Cardinal Mindszenty, which has been moved to Hungary and is fully endorsed by the Hungarian episcopate. Three of five volumes of material in support of beatification have been completed and the other two will soon be forthcoming, to be presented to the Holy Father and the Congregation of Cardinals.

"Pray for beatification as soon as possible. It would be nice to meet in Rome for the beatification," Bishop Cserhati said. He added that Cardinal Mindszenty's memoirs show "the real face of Communism." Anyone wanting to learn more about Communism should "read his memoirs." CMF still has a few copies of the memoirs available for sale for \$25 (limited supply).

The bishop praised the work of CMF over the last 55 years in ensuring that Cardinal Mindszenty continues to be "a meaningful person in the U.S." and in perpetuating the "universal ideal of freedom."

Bishop Cserhati serves on the board of an organization founded by Cardinal Mindszenty under Liechtenstein law to take ownership of his papers, manuscripts and library. Those items are now housed in Hungary and the organization is involved in assembling materials for the beatification process. A Hungarian website with more information is www.mindszenty.katolikus.hu.



CMF board member John O. Shields, operations manager Caroline Corley, Bishop Ferenc Cserhati, CMF co-founder Phyllis Schlafly, Fr. Alphonse Skerl