

CONSERVATIVE SOCIALISM

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THE MODERN CONSERVATIVE, who is in fact not a conservative at all,* is one that has adopted—on a rhetorical level—perspectives that were classically liber-

This essay was first published by Llewellyn H. Rockwell, Jr. at Alexander S. Peak, “Conservative Socialism,” *LewRockwell.com*, 24 September 2005, <http://www.lewrockwell.com/orig6/peak1.html>.

* When I first authored this piece, part of my objective was to convince self-described conservatives that they should not support the things they hear from other self-described conservatives merely because they describe themselves as conservatives. Toward this objective, I opted to outright claim from the beginning that the modern conservative was not truly a conservative in any proper sense. If a self-described conservative holds, for example, that conservatism is a scepticism of large or intrusive government, then indeed the modern conservative is *not* a true conservative. Contrariwise, however, it can be and should be argued that the modern conservative *is* properly a conservative. See *e.g.* Murray N. Rothbard, “Left and Right: The Prospects for Liberty,” *Left and Right: A Journal of Libertarian Thought* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1965): 4–22, where the author describes conservatism as “a dying remnant of the *ancien régime* of the preindustrial era” (p. 4). The prime difference between this classical conservatism and the neoconservatism of today isn’t that one supports and the other opposes the aggrandisement of power in the hands of the state, but rather that the latter strongly values the democratic process while the former did not. Neither ultimately has a principled objection to statism or central planning.

al (especially in regards to market liberalism), but yet has perverted these perspectives into something distinctly authoritarian. The perversion is not uniquely their own, however. Neoconservatism adopts an ignorant, self-denied love for New Deal-styled socialism and increased regulation.

Lies are nothing new to politics. It's arguable that neoconservatives have lied to us on a regular basis on a variety of issues, ranging from foreign policy to the supposed destruction of the nuclear family, which they claim would result from allowing homosexuals the same rights held by heterosexuals. But in each of these cases, the lie's impact is diminished by a healthy level of scepticism. The most successful lie propagated by neoconservatives would have to be the conclusion that they are fiscal conservatives. Few of us, unfortunately, question the existence of a free market appreciation within the ranks of these "compassionate conservatives."

Give the people a few small tax cuts, call your opponent a fiscal liberal, sit back, and let the votes roll right in. After all, your capitalist credentials are set, right? Forget that you're bleeding the economy through deficit spending. Forget that you approve huge spending bills loaded with pork. Forget your fiscal irresponsibility. Why focus on the petty details?

Rep. Tom DeLay, employing doublethink as best

anyone can, recently claimed an ongoing Republican victory against wasteful federal spending. “Yes, after eleven years of Republican majority we’ve paraded it down pretty good.”* This was Rep. DeLay’s response to whether or not the government was running at peak efficiency. It should come as no surprise that Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW) named Rep. DeLay (and Rep. Don Young) “Co-Porkers of the Month.”

This is really nothing new. When the Republicans gained control over Congress in the mid-’90s, many hailed it as the changing point: the new age of fiscal responsibility in government. The Contract with America, as it was called, had begun.

And eleven years later, if we’re to believe DeLay, pork is dead and fiscal discipline reigns supreme.

This must explain the \$2 million wasted on the USS Sequoia Presidential Yacht.

Oh, and the \$6.3 million wasted on wood utilization research. We just gotta have...wood utilization research. Without it, how will we ever know how to utilize...wood?

These are not things we need. These are merely pork-barrel projects, slipped into large bills for poli-

* Amy Fagan and Stephen Dinan, “DeLay declares ‘victory’ in war on budget fat,” *The Washington Times*, 14 September 2005, <http://www.washtimes.com/national/20050914-120153-3878r.htm> (accessed 22 September 2005).

tical gain. When Congress passed a \$388 billion spending bill last year, it contained a provision allowing the House and Senate appropriations committees or their agents access to “Internal Revenue Service facilities and any tax returns or return information contained therein.”*

Since the disaster wrought by Katrina, the federal government has approved \$62.3 billion worth of contribution, most of which will go to the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Many have been calling for congress to offset the spending by making cuts elsewhere, but not Rep. DeLay, whose response “to those that want to offset the spending is ‘sure, bring me the offsets, I’ll be glad to do it.’ But nobody has been able to come up with any yet.”† Perhaps Rep. DeLay has never heard of Citizens Against Public Waste, but their “Congressional Pig Book” identified 13,977 pork projects just in the fiscal 2005 appropriations bills. Combined, this fat totals \$27.3 billion that could be saved.‡

But subsidies (such as the \$20 billion a year spent on farm subsidies which benefit large farms and

* It’s unlikely that any of the politicians responsible for this provision even read the spending bill before voting on it. See, for example, Harry Browne, “Congressional & Presidential Irresponsibility,” *HarryBrowne.org*, 3 December 2004, <http://harrybrowne.org/articles/SneakyBills.htm> (accessed 22 September 2005).

† Fagan and Dinan, *op. cit.*

‡ *PR Newswire*, <http://releases.usnewswire.com/GetRelease.asp?id=53708> (accessed 22 September 2005).

agribusinesses, according to the Heritage Foundation) aren't the only indication that the modern conservative opposes free markets. We must also take into account the regulations supported by these Brave New Pseudo-capitalists.

I'm thinking of course about CAFTA, the "Central American 'Free' Trade Agreement" which passed in both houses of Congress, and which was applauded by neoliberals and neoconservatives alike. Rep. Ron Paul, known by many as the taxpayer's best friend, stated:

We don't need CAFTA or any other international agreement to reap the economic benefits promised by CAFTA supporters, we only need to change our own harmful economic and tax policies. Let the rest of the world hurt their citizens with tariffs; if we simply reduce tariffs and taxes at home, we will attract capital and see our economy flourish.*

CAFTA, which was similar in many respects to NAFTA (the North American "Free Trade" Agreement), opened the door to international regulation over dietary supplements and vitamins, an issue of concern for many people. It is a cruel joke played on anyone who supports these bills because of their

* Ron Paul, "CAFTA: More Bureaucracy, Less Free Trade," *House.gov*, 6 June 2005, <http://www.house.gov/paul/tst/tst2005/tst060605.htm> (accessed 22 September 2005).

titles, since the regulations they enact do nothing to truly liberalize the markets.

This can also be said of international regulatory agencies such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These are essentially unelected bureaucracies whom are not responsible to any of the people they affect. Yet the WTO is not only supported by neoconservative elites, but is touted as a promoter of free trade. This is also true in the distorted eyes of the media.

On November 14, 2001, Pres. George W. Bush said,*

I commend the decision by the world's trading nations, meeting in Qatar, to launch a new round of global trade negotiations. This bold declaration of hope by the World Trade Organization (WTO) has the potential to expand prosperity and development throughout the world and revitalize the global economy. It also sends a powerful signal that the world's trading nations support peaceful and open exchange and reject the forces of fear and protectionism.

Today's action advances the United States' agenda to liberalize world trade—something that will benefit all Americans. By promoting

* George Bush, "Statement by the President," *WhiteHouse.gov*, 14 November 2001, <http://tinyurl.com/qabswh> (accessed 22 September 2001).

open trade, we expand export markets and create high-paying jobs for American workers and farmers, while providing more choices and lower prices for goods and services for American families.

One has to wonder if he actually believes what he says.

The modern conservative is a new animal, not a supporter of small government as many would claim is the inherent nature of conservatism, but rather a supporter in strengthening the Leviathan for security. The inevitable result is more Big-Government in all spheres of public life, from inappropriate restrictions on rights resulting from bills like the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 and the REAL ID Act of 2005 to exorbitant federal budgets and appropriation bills.

It seemed no one in Congress wanted to acknowledge that the last budget Bush signed into law was too big. All anyone talked about on Capitol Hill were the cuts, and how they would improve (or hurt) our economy. Were cuts made? In places. But overall, the budget increased seven percent from the previous year. That was 41% higher than even Clinton's biggest budget.*

* Janet Hook, "Despite Proposed Cuts, Bush Budget Is Bigger," *the Neil Rogers Show*, <http://news.neilrogers.com/news/articles/2005020827.html> (accessed 22 September 2005).

Since the completion of the Clinton-years, Democrats have been losing ground in political battle after political battle. But there is a solution waiting for them, if they're willing to embrace it. If the Democrats want to regain their political relevancy, they'd be well-advised to borrow a page from the libertarian handbook and begin looking critically at the "spend-first, ask-questions-later" fiscal policy of modern conservatism. Of course, to be successful this would necessitate a welcome change in the Democrats' approach to economic policy. It would be a smart and decisive move, catching the GOP completely off guard. Although it's a change I'm not actually expecting to see, my fingers are crossed.

AFTERWORD

SINCE WRITING THIS nearly four years ago, we have seen an interesting series of events. In 2006, Democrats gained a sweeping victory around the country. If there had been a Republican Revolution of '94, this was the Democratic Revolution of '06.

Democrats won because the voters had become fed up with the GOP's interventionist foreign policy and its addiction to government spending. Libertarian voters in particular had decided to switch their vote from the red to the blue team because of these increasingly-statist characteristics of the Republican Party.

The Democratic Party had a libertarian mandate, therefore, just as the Republican Party had had in 1994. But just like the Republicans had in 1994, the Democrats in 2006 gave a half-hearted and short-lived libertarian show before shifting right back into

the statism characteristic of both Establishment parties.

On the war-front, the Democrats half-heartedly acted to end the war. But they did not push. Mike Gravel honourably admonished his party on this, saying that if they were truly dedicated to ending the war, they could have. All they had to do was push. Had they put forward bill after bill, the Republicans would not have been able to continuously strike them down. Their popularity would drop too low, and they would have to capitulate.

Instead of pushing, and in spite of having a majority in Congress, the *Democrats* capitulated. They gave up. Many believe they did this because they ultimately didn't *want* the Iraq war to end just yet. If the war were still roaring in 2008, they calculated, they would win even more seats and probably take the White House as well, since the public still saw this as the Republicans' war. The Democrats calculated well, and it won its additional victories. And here we are, the middle of 2009, and the war still roars on.

On the spending front, Democrats did cut pork in their first year of power. But, after this they went right back to pushing and supporting pork projects. In 2009, despite running on a platform of opposition to pork, the new Democratic president Barack Obama signed into law a bill chuck full of them.

I have now become convinced that whenever a change in power occurs between parties in a Democracy, it is always on a libertarian mandate from the people. Nevertheless, neither party adheres to its mandates. Democrats are just as unlikely to support peace, marriage equality, and drug reform as the Republicans are to support drastic reductions in taxation and spending.

Any politician wishing to retain the respect of the electorate are still encouraged to remember and adhere to the libertarian mandate they receive from their electorate. But, as for me, it's getting a bit hard these days to still keep my fingers crossed. Politics is corruption. We need change, and it becomes more and more unrealistic every day to think that it will come from the Establishment.