

people can only end in another, and more rapid, disaster. ■

“Fiscally Conservative, Socially Tolerant”

by M.N.R.

“Fiscally conservative, socially tolerant” has become the favorite mantra of Left-libertarianism, from Cato Institute types to libertarian Republicans. But what exactly does this slogan mean and where does it come from? If you can excuse the expression, let us proceed to deconstruct this text.

Libertarian politics acquired modern form when a determined isolationist group took control of the Libertarian Party and platform at its New York convention of 1975, and nominated the LP’s first nationwide candidate for President in 1976, Virginia attorney Roger Lea MacBride. The victorious LPers capsulized their platform, then and since, in three parts: “laissez-faire in economics (economic freedom), civil liberties (personal freedom), and non-interventionist in foreign policy.” In short; a determined opposition to government interference in the economy, in personal life, and in international affairs.

While LP candidates have generally been true to this triadic principle, libertarians have generally displayed no interest whatever in foreign affairs, and so it was not surprising when LP founder Dave Nolan shortened libertarian doctrine into a two-axis grid, with economic

freedom on one axis and personal freedom on the other. The original Nolan chart had the Good Guys, the libertarians, in the upper-right hand diagonal corner, and the Bad Guys, “authoritarians” in personal and economic life, in the lower-left diagonal corner.

Nolan tried unsuccessfully to popularize an LP logo as an arrow going upward and to the right, symbolizing a thrust toward liberty on both fronts, but critics pointed out that the logo had something of the look, either of an obscure sex cult, or of some discredited ultra-right-wing political group in the *Mittel-Europa* of the 1930s.

Bad ideas never completely die, however, and the Nolan Chart was later resurrected by Marshall Fritz of the Advocates for Self-Government, and popularized in Fritz’s chart and “World’s Shortest Political Quiz.” Fritz essentially moved the Nolan chart 45 degrees to the left, so that the Good Guys came out at the top of a diamond, with the Bad Guys on the abject bottom.

Even so, the current slogan is a huge come-down, even from the Nolan or Fritznik chart. For what, after all, is “fiscally conservative”? “Economic freedom” or “laissez-faire” is admirably clear; it means getting government off

the back of the private economy: deregulation, taxes nearly down to zero, massive privatization, the gold standard, the works. But “fiscally conservative” is a horse of a very different color. It simply means: a desire to cut the *rate of increase* of the government budget to a respectable amount. Notice that absence of government intervention, or tax slashing, or privatization, has all but gone by the board; the slogan only calls for a certain modesty in swelling government spending or the ranks of the bureaucracy. Weak tea indeed.

And, after all, in this age of enormous, \$400 billion, annual deficits, *everyone* has to be a little bit fiscally conservative, even Bill Clinton. This is hardly

a test of anyone, much less of a staunch conservative/libertarian.

But “socially tolerant” is even more defective as a criterion for a Good Guy politician. In fact, it is a far cry from civil libertarian. For “personal freedom” or “civil libertarian” is a meaningful, let alone worthy, political position. But what kind of meaningful political stance is “socially tolerant”?

Tolerance, indeed, is not a political category at all, but only a *personal* quality in social interaction.

To describe a political person as “socially tolerant” is what

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philosophers might call a "category mistake": the mixing up of two very different categories, the personal and the political, trying to add up oranges and horses. It's like saying that Politician X is "fiscally conservative" (or "laissez-faire in economics") and "socially smiling." Or to say that Politician is "fiscally conservative" and "socially grumpy." Meaningless twaddle.

One reason that civil liberties has dropped off the Libertarian map is because the old Cold War verities are gone with the wind. Before the end of the Cold War, mapping conservatives and liber-

als, Republicans and Democrats, was simple. Conservatives (Republicans) were "good on economics," but "bad on civil liberties." On the other hand, liberals (Democrats) were the reverse: "good on civil liberties," but "statist in economics."

That picture made sense before the late 1980s, but is totally obsolete now. Now that there is no longer a Communist threat, rightists are no longer a menace to civil liberties. In contrast to left scare tactics, there is *no one* on the Right who has any desire for the state to break down bedroom doors and arrest anyone. No one has the desire to bust down doors or enforce sodomy laws. (Abortion

is a different story, since murder is alleged to be involved.) In fact, the grave threat to civil liberties now come overwhelmingly from the Left, from the sniffers after "hate crimes" and "hate thought," from the ferocious enforcers of Political Correctness, from those who would make ogling a sex crime virtually equivalent to rape.

In the current world and in the foreseeable future, then, it is the Right, or sections thereof, that is the repository of all the political virtues: economic freedom, civil liberties, and even non-intervention in foreign affairs.

In considering the current slogan, then, it should be clear that "fiscally conservative" is a weasel phrase that means very little, and is but a pale, measly shadow of its ancestor, laissez-faire. But at least it is a political category.

In far worse shape is the loving phrase "socially tolerant," which can have no meaning at all. Since it is really meaningless, it must be one of these modern "code phrases" that become close to gibberish to those of us who lack the code book. The best I can figure, "socially tolerant" is a code phrase for those who would use government to interfere in our lives and enforce "non-discrimination" and affirmative

action quotas in every walk of life: on behalf of blacks, Hispanics, the handicapped, women, male homosexuals, lesbians, and whatever other group they care to designate as officially "oppressed."

Let's retire the phrase altogether, and even return to the grand old capsulization that prevailed from MacBride to Ron Paul. Let's retire "fiscally conservative" pronto. And as for the other half of the slogan, whenever I hear the word "tolerant," I reach for my revolver. ■

Fluoridation Revisited

by M.N.R.

Yes, I confess: I'm a veteran anti-fluoridationist, thereby—not for the first time—risking placing myself in the camp of "right-wing kooks and fanatics." It has always been a bit of mystery to me why left-environmentalists, who shriek in horror at a bit of Alar on apples, who cry "cancer!" even more absurdly than the boy cried "Wolf!", who hate every chemical additive known to man, still cast their benign approval upon fluoride, a highly toxic and probably carcinogenic substance. And not only let fluoride emissions off the hook, but endorse uncritically the massive and continuing dumping of fluoride into the nation's water supply.

First: the generalized case for and against fluoridation of water. The case for is almost incredibly

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