

The Art Of Dismissing Progressives

July 1, 2011 Category: Domestic Politics

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Progressives are incessantly demeaned, berated, castigated, and mocked for being unrealistic, naive idealists...by the professional politicians in the *Democratic* party. DP leaders call Progressives “fucking retarded” (Obama’s chief of staff) and whiners (Obama’s VP) and “unrealistic” (Obama himself).

Meanwhile, the litany of preposterous epitaphs lobbed from the ultra-far-right at Progressive are nothing short of surreal. In conservative circles, Progressives are accused of being—among other things—the embodiment of evil itself, demons sent from the depths of Hades to carry out some diabolical plot to destroy the country, Nazis, Maoists, Stalinists...or even “liberals”. *Booga-booga*.

Also in the right-wing repertoire are those scare-words that have been coveted by reactionaries for over a century: “intellectual elitists”, “communists” and “socialists”. Lions ‘n tigers ‘n bears, oh my! Those on the far-right wing have a special contempt for humanitarian activists, proponents of civil rights, free-thinkers, bona fide scholars, and cosmopolitans. Such “lefties” almost never play along with the right-wing agenda, so—the thinking goes—they must be vilified at all costs. How else to shut them up?

The invective customarily employed by the ultra-right-wing is so absurd as to be borderline comic. The way right-wing polemicists talk about Humanism, one would think it was the worldview to which Kim Il Sung and Pol Pot subscribed. (According to the standard right-wing narrative, Juche and the Red Cambodians are both the quintessence of secularism, free-thought and humanitarian outreach. Genocide is what happens, in other words, when movements are insufficiently right-wing.)

In reality, the so-called “left” has always been the champion of civil rights. Yet, in the “conservative” mind, it is somehow equated with horrific regimes that were horrific primarily because they DENIED civil rights to all people. This train of thought is nothing short of bizarre...yet it has proven astonishingly appealing to the more zealous reactionaries. Indeed, right-wing propaganda, no matter how preposterous or inane, always seems to gain traction amongst society’s most insecure, credulous, and un-informed. When a certain ideology is *consistently* the one that appeals to society’s least educated, it may be wise to assess the nature of that ideology. Why does it always appeal to THAT group, and not to others? Simply put: it is only the uneducated and credulous to which such an ideology CAN have some sort of appeal.

The use of derogatory labels and adolescent name-calling has always been the right wing’s main strategy for arguing against Progressivism (i.e. humanist principles). This strategy is quite straight-forward:

STEP ONE: Relentlessly fustigate the opposition—using a market-tested onslaught of caustic verbal assaults. Select emotionally loaded terms that can be used to negatively stigmatize the opposition—thereby ensuring that the opposition’s ideas will be *associated with* awful things.

STEP TWO: Repeat step one over and over and over again, in perpetuity, at every possible moment, for all eternity.

Resorting to stage-managed vitriol is convenient for those with no other way to put down their interlocutors’ ideas. Instead of, “Here is why your theory doesn’t work, and here’s the evidence for my claims,” one need only declare: “If you think that idea is a good idea, then you are a maniacal minion of darkness who is hell-bent on installing a tyrannical regime! Q.E.D.” Lost is the notion that the *point of*

civic discourse is to have CIVIL discourse. Lost is the notion that the POINT of having a public debate on a matter is to partake in a productive discussion involving reciprocal critique, a modicum of mutual respect, and honest, critical reflection.

The point of any worthwhile discussion is to eventuate better understanding for all parties involved—not to “pick a side” and then to wage war against the designated nemesis. This idea is anathema to reactionaries, who operate based the whim of their amygdalas more than any judgment yielded via their prefrontal cortexes.

A brief survey of history reveals that fear-mongering married with incendiary rhetoric is the mainstay of right-wing movements. Such material boasts a potent appeal to certain kinds of people. Namely, those who are:

- Easily seduced by charismatic salesmen
- Highly susceptible to manipulation and conditioning
- Highly prone to groupthink and hyper-dogmatism
- Uninformed
- Frustrated / resentful

Right-wing polemic, then, has a target audience. ***The nexus of credulity, ignorance, and heteronomy is precisely where that target audience dwells.*** Add to the mix those who are frustrated and insecure, and *presto*: The perfect storm for rallying a crowd around a right-wing agenda.

This has been demonstrated time and time again. One need only observe the followers of the professional bloviators on the ultra-far-right to see this pattern. Sensationalized bunkum is passed off as serious commentary. Provocative balderdash and snazzy hokum transplants genuine, critical analysis. Rattling off bromides, mindlessly regurgitating right-wing boilerplate, reciting scripted talking points, feeding the listeners catchy sound-bites—all if it is passed off as substantive discussion. The public discourse degenerates to a theater of amusement and sophistry. People will get riled up and believe almost anything that is offered—and will defiantly cling to it forever.

The right wing has recruited a bevy of talking heads to deliver the material to the malleable audience. Most of us KNOW why these people do what they do. Money. But why do so many in the Democratic Party—those for whom Progressives often vote—capitulate to the social pressures exerted by such asinine shenanigans? The answer, tragically, is the same: Money.

The difference between the corporatism of the *moderate* right (the DP) and the corporatism of the *ultra* right (the RP) is that the former is more apologetic—more reticent—in its catering to corporate power...while the latter’s full-throttle service to big money is flagrant. The blatant, unapologetic corporatism of the RP is consummate with the mindless fanaticism that surrounds it. Looking at the mobs that join the G.O.P. (a cult movement through and through), we see the typical mendacity, pathology, militancy, and groupthink indicative of *all* cult movements. This makes sense when fear, anger and ignorance are the conditions on which the movement is predicated.

The dismissing of Progressives by the DP becomes unsurprising once it is understood that the DP is simply a diluted RP. That is, it is a less extreme (i.e. more moderate) version of the G.O.P. That it is less to the right than the RP doesn't mean that it is Progressive. It is still corporatist in nature...and will consequently consistently side with corporate power and the interests of the most affluent over the general welfare (i.e. the interests of the rank and file).

The case that the DP is merely a watered-down version of the G.O.P isn't difficult to make. Behold the examples of flagrant capitulation by the DP to the far right (since Obama took office):

- § Caving in on genuine healthcare reform
- § Gutting substantive Wall Street / financial industry reform
- § Prolonged public infrastructure de-investment
- § Perpetuation of corporate socialism. (Continuing to feed the horrifically bloated military industrial complex, the agri-industrial complex, the Pharma-industrial complex, the financial-industrial complex, the petrol-industrial complex, AND the prison-industrial complex.)
- § Continuing the war in Afghanistan
- § Continuing the irresponsible, pointless tax-breaks for the super-rich
- § Ignoring Palestinian grievances and the appalling human rights abuses perpetrated by the despicable, right-wing Israeli government

All of this couldn't be more straight-forward. The arguments against such inexcusable measures are OBVIOUS, not to mention EASY TO MAKE...IF one actually wanted to make them. From the Democratic Party, we hear a deafening silence. Regarding these capitulations to the far right, we can ask certain questions of Obama:

When will supply-side economics die? Obama still uses advisors enthralled by supply-side theory, conducting himself as if the Neoliberal paradigm had any credence at all...and refuses to take a stand against the hogwash that is incessantly, relentlessly churned out by the right-wing propaganda machine. How can an administration that is intellectually honest persist in paying lip-service to an economic ideology that has been proven wrong over and over and over again—and proven horribly destructive time and time and time again? We should be flabbergasted by this.

Obama has engaged in blatant corporatism. When will the his boondoggle with Big Pharma / AHIP, his unabashed collusion with the investment bankers, his pandering to the super-rich, his acquiescence to the Likud Party, and his catering to war profiteers END?

These questions are rhetorical—as the answers are eternally unclear. One thing IS quite clear: A genuine Progressive would do far, far better.

The complicity of the Democrats in the right-wing agenda needs to be candidly noted before it can be addressed. The recalcitrance of the Democratic Party needs to be openly recognized, lest it persist in its role as a right-wing organization posturing as THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE to the G.O.P. If we barely acknowledge a problem, how can we be expected to fix it? We must call the Democratic Party what it is: Republican Lite. A true alternative would be a genuine Progressive Party.

Some say starting a Progressive Party is a quixotic venture—Teddy Roosevelt tried it, and look what happened! To say such a “third option” doesn’t have a chance is to make two mistakes. First: Its not having a chance is a self-fulfilling prophecy, not a foregone conclusion. Second: It is a SECOND option, not a third. Choosing between two factions of the Business Party (ultra-right or moderate right) is not choice worth respecting.

Of course, the DP doesn’t even begin to match the mendacity and outright fanaticism of the RP. The problem is that we’ve set the bar so LOW (read: rightward) that even a right-leaning political party like the DP seems acceptable. Holding the Democratic politicians in juxtaposition to their further-right counterparts in the RP, they almost appear kinda-sorta quasi-Progressive if you tilt your head and squint. It’s all relative, of course. It’s why Obama looked to be so wonderfully refreshing to some Progressives in 2008: We’ve set the bar so gosh-darn low that even a MODERATE corporatist seems to be magnificently progressive...or even...gasp!...”left”. The Reality, we’ve been reminded, is quite different than Obama-mania may have envisioned. We shouldn’t have been surprised by his flagrantly-less-than-Progressive conduct once he secured office.

A brief diagnosis of the problem is as follows:

The DP takes the *non*-right-wing portion of the electorate for granted—knowing full well that there is no better VIABLE alternative than the DP. And so it goes: As a rule, Progressives need to settle for the DP *by default*. Democratic leaders are well aware that Progressives are—essentially—trapped, and that, consequently, they don’t need to worry about doing anything significantly Progressive. As long as they are LESS right-wing than the RP, then they’ve got ANYONE who’s to the left of the G.O.P. locked in.

That’s the situation in a nutshell.

It is no secret that the G.O.P. would literally cease to exist if the U.S. had a well-educated citizenry. This couldn’t be more straight-forward. That is, the RP’s existence is predicated on the maintenance of certain social conditions: an ill-informed general populace with atrocious critical thinking skills and colossal credulity. This is what has enabled the right wing to use well-orchestrated, relentless propaganda to shift the Overton window so far left that the DP appears as though it is THE “left” alternative. The propaganda machine is incredibly well-funded by the very people who benefit from the current state of affairs: the plutocrats.

It must be realized: The leaders of the DP don’t wake up in the morning thinking about how to diminish corporate power, reduce the military–industrial complex, invest more in PSI, or empower organized labor...because THEY DON’T NEED TO. *Why should they?* While Republican politicians actually *sleep better* at night knowing about the IG’s current conduct in Palestine, no Democratic politician has ever *lost* a wink of sleep worrying about human rights abuses in Palestine. Why are we so surprised, then, every time the DP is merely a watered-down version of the RP?

It’s *no wonder* the DP is often ineffective in standing up to the G.O.P.: they really DON’T WANT to stand up to them. They’re not different enough from the RP. They simply don’t care enough to counteract the right wing because they *themselves* are slightly to the right. They have no incentive to challenge right-wing policies any more than they need to in order to minimally differentiate themselves from the even-worse-alternative. (We should remind ourselves: Joe Lieberman used to call himself a “Democrat”. He could never possibly have ever called himself a Progressive” with a straight face. What does this tell us?)

Rectifying the rightward phase-shift of the political spectrum is crucial if we are to remedy this dysfunctional state of affairs. Until the Overton Window reveals genuine Progressives to be in the

(absolute) *political center*, people will continue to take the Republicans and the Democrats, split the difference, and call *that* “the middle”. This is asinine. But such queer logic dictates our public discourse.

It’s high time for an alternative to both factions of the Business Party. Progressives of the country, unite!