

POLITICAL EXTREMISTS AND THE CONSTITUTION

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Extremism is a word with different meanings to many people. Obviously it can be temporo-centric and geographically bound. No doubt early advocates of rights for women and blacks were considered extreme by most Americans. And it is also likely that persons wishing to advance the ideas of press freedom and competitive private enterprise have been viewed as extremists in the Soviet Union, but especially in Albania and North Korea. Thus we have the problem: What do we mean by extremism and just who may fairly be labeled a political extremist.

Realizing long ago that there is probably no definition of extremism which would satisfy a majority of scholars, and believing that extremism is more a matter of style and tactics than of goals, I have delineated six common characteristics exhibited by the overwhelming majority of those inhabiting the far left and far right portions of the U.S. political spectrum:

- 1) **Absolute certainty they have the truth.** Which, among other items is that
- 2) **America is controlled to a greater or lesser extent by a conspiratorial group.** In fact, they believe this evil group is very powerful and controls most nations. It is not surprising then that extremists exhibit
- 3) **Open hatred of opponents.** Because these opponents (actually "enemies" in the extremists' eyes) are seen as a part of or sympathizers with "The Conspiracy," they deserve hatred and contempt. Due to the aforementioned factors it is not surprising that extremists have
- 4) **Little faith in the democratic process.** Mainly because most believe "The Conspiracy" has such influence in the U.S. government, and therefore extremists usually spurn compromise and show a
- 5) **Willingness to deny basic civil liberties to certain fellow citizens,** because enemies deserve no liberties. Therefore extremists have no qualms about resorting to
- 6) **Consistent indulgence in irresponsible accusations and character assassination,** such as calling fellow citizens Communists, Insiders, Amoral Secular Humanists, Fascists, Nazis, Racist Pigs, etc., and constantly imputing wicked

motives to those who openly oppose them.

These characteristics are found in far leftists such as communists of all varieties (Soviet types, Trotskyists, Kimists and Maoists, and Independents), and left anarchists. They are also displayed by Christian Crusaders, Christian Voicers, John Birchers, and Moral Majorityites, and by the more "far-out" types of rightists such as neo-Nazis, Farrakhanites, the various KKKers, and other assorted "nuts among the berries."

In addition to their common characteristics, left and right extremists differ from each other in three general ways:

- 1) Leftists favor destruction of the existing system and replacement with a Marxist variant. Most feel this can be done only by violent revolution. Most rightists believe the "true" system has been perverted and desire to return to the way they imagine it once was.
 - 2) Leftists are generally nonreligious but claim to love humanity. Most rightists are rather religious but often promote religious and ethnic bigotry.
 - 3) Leftists are generally internationalist in outlook with some factions aligned ideologically with foreign powers such as China, Cuba, Albania, North Korea or the Soviet Union. Rightists are usually intense nationalists and, while not aligned with foreign powers, look with favor on a number of noncommunist dictatorships.
- In contrast to the extremists, those in the mainstream:
- 1) Accept at least gradual change within the existing system.
 - 2) Seldom impugn the motives nor loyalty of opponents, questioning instead their judgment, reasoning and sources of information.
 - 3) Have a commitment to, at least, democratic ideals, including basic civil liberties.

We now turn to extremist views of that venerable document, the Constitution, and will deal with three parts: the first amendment, second amendment and article 6.

The first amendment states in part "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press..." These items, speech and press, have been major

concerns of extremists throughout the twentieth century. And in the eighties there have been aggressive attempts to prevent certain invited speakers from appearing on college campuses and certain books from being used in high school libraries and classrooms. Let's deal first with campus speakers.

Being generally anti-civil-libertarian in outlook, both left and right extremists have consistently opposed opening campuses to the flow of ideas they strongly oppose. Radical leftists have shouted down former UN Ambassador Jean Kirkpatrick, racial hereditists Arthur Jensen and William Shockley, and Nicaraguan contra spokesman Adolf Calero who was also subjected to a threat to his physical well being when a red liquid (either paint or blood) was thrown on him during an attempt to speak at Northwestern University. Instigators of the "Calero shutdown" were members of the International Committee Against Racism (InCAR), a front of the independent communist Progressive Labor Party. They were led by assistant professor of English, Barbara Foley, who stated "We are not going to let him speak" and "He should feel lucky to get out alive" (Epstein 1986).

While not so blatantly rude and threatening as the radical leftists, the extreme rightists have been aggressive in attempts to prevent controversial speakers, especially communists, from appearing. Gus Hall, leader of the CPUSA, has been targeted for censorship attempts and Angela Davis, also a leading CPUSA member, was the subject of rightist wrath against the University of Oklahoma both before and after she spoke there in January of 1986.

State Representative Bill Graves, who qualifies as a far rightist on nearly all counts, complained,

It is not academic freedom to allow the enemies of freedom to use a public institution to try and destroy that freedom. The appearance of Angela Davis...was an injustice and insult to all of the Americans who bled and died in Korea and Vietnam. The officials who allowed her to speak deserve our disapprobation and condemnation. (Graves 1986)

Bruce Foster, minister and Moral Majorityite, wrote to me (2-17-86), "You defended the communist speaking on property owned by the citizens of this state. You didn't defend

freedom of speech."

Of course Angela Davis has shown her feelings about free expression for others on a number of occasions. One excellent example was when she was approached by a group of Czech dissidents who asked her aid in freeing comrades imprisoned because of their beliefs. Dr. Davis answered: "They deserve what they get. Let them remain in prison" (Silber 1975). Hence, the extremist mentality--an irresponsible double standard for "friends" and "enemies."

Turning our attention to extremists and the press we find they favor limiting the freedom to read. This is especially true regarding which books and periodicals *should not* be available in stores, public libraries, high school libraries and classrooms.

Radical leftists have favored banning books and periodicals they consider racist, anti-feminist, "pro-war" or pornographically degrading to women. Perhaps foremost among the classics which leftists (in cahoots with rightists!) have tried to censor is *Huckleberry Finn* which, they maintain, is racist. After all, the word "nigger" appears often. The most interesting account of attempted censorship of *Huck* I have encountered is a "factional" (factual fiction) one by the civil libertarian columnist Nat Hentoff (1983).

A more recent radical left manifestation of censorship has to do with pornography as being degrading to women. Principal leader of such actions has been Andrea Dworkin who has called for banning not only displays and descriptions of sexual intercourse, but of intercourse itself. Dworkin has even characterized women who say they enjoy it as

collaborators, more base in their collaboration than other collaborators have ever been: experiencing pleasure in their own inferiority; calling intercourse freedom. (Levine, Currie 1987)

Dworkin and her comrade Cathrine MacKinnon have been most active in influencing city ordinances which state that much pornography is a form of discrimination against women and thus government has a compelling interest in eliminating this "evil." In other words, most pornography is a violation of female civil rights. Federal courts have disagreed and have struck down such ordinances as unconstitutional.

The extreme right has long been in the