

An Appeal to Conscience

Liberals courted at the Democratic Convention

by Roy Beck
Washington Editor

CHICAGO
During the second day of the 1996 Democratic Convention — in which party strategists sought to keep from public view the decidedly liberal leanings of most delegates — a group of immigration reformers here called on the party to return to its liberal roots.

“The Democrats sincerely believe that they represent the interests of minorities and working men and women,” said Joseph L. Daleiden, an economist and president of the Midwest Coalition to Reform Immigration which sponsored the press conference in downtown Chicago. “However, if I were to design a policy to destroy the living standards of Americans, especially those at the bottom of the economic ladder, I could think of none better than the one to permit an unlimited supply of cheap labor.”

Democratic delegates had been electrified the first night of the convention when disabled actor Christopher Reeve challenged the country to honor what he called a great overarching principle of President Franklin D. Roosevelt: that Americans don't force the weak to fend for themselves.

By that standard, the Democratic Platform plank on immigration fails miserably, the immigration reform speakers said. The platform even suggests that it is illegitimate to express concerns for America's weak in connection to immigration; it deplores those who publicize any links between immigration and adverse effects on Americans. Meanwhile, it supports a policy that brings in hundreds of thousands of foreign workers and their families each year, most of whom will compete with the weak for jobs, education, housing and social

services.

Immigration reformers called on the Democratic Party to stand behind its principles — to stand behind Americans who are vulnerable and who should not have to fend for themselves while the full force of the federal government uses immigration against them.

“It is obvious that immigration is not the only factor at work here, but it is a significant one,” Daleiden said. “Any person taking Economics 101 knows that it is the supply and demand that determines the price of any product, including labor. If we had not increased the labor supply through the tens of millions of legal and illegal immigrants, the tighter labor supplies would have driven up wage rates far beyond their present level and the American worker would have benefited accordingly.”

Compassion is a major measure of liberalism, said Ed Levy, a professor at Yeshiva University in New York City who proclaimed pride in his liberal political credentials. When considering how many immigrants to bring in annually, liberals should weigh compassion for four groups:

- for potential immigrants,
- for people already in the United States (including past immigrants),
- for the people left behind in the sending countries,
- for future generations in this country.

Unfortunately, Levy said, liberal Democratic delegates' compassion stopped at the first category, with no sign of concern for the other three.

“Liberal Democrats have forgotten what they are supposed to stand for and whom they are supposed to represent,” he said. He and other speakers said the Democratic Party through its immigration policy has turned its back on the working class, the poor, on blacks, on Hispanics, on the environment, on the impoverished people in immigrant-sending countries and on future Americans.

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“Why do liberals do this?” Levy asked. “By being what liberals should never be — prisoners of the past. They should never try to solve the problems of today and tomorrow with yesterday’s slogans. Yet, once liberals spout the slogan, ‘We are a nation of immigrants,’ they stop thinking.”

Harvey C. Roberts, a financial and business consultant from Brooklyn, said he was especially concerned about the lack of compassion shown by the Democratic immigration plank toward underprivileged minorities, especially blacks: “During the civil rights movement, we American blacks thought we would advance into mainstream society. I truly believe that immigration has thrown us into one of

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the biggest crises of this century. American blacks are being grievously hurt, losing significant pre-1975 economic-political-social gains because of this unprecedented flooding.... We are not reaping the benefits of our civil rights struggles, although most immigrants are.”

Daleiden pointed out that he recently had met with the Chicago-area association of black construction contractors. While they attempt to maintain \$8-an-hour wages for their workforce (predominantly black Americans) they are being put under tremendous threat by contractors hiring immigrants for minimum wage or even less. “The result has been a steady loss of building trades jobs for African Americans,” Daleiden said.

Roberts said President Clinton has been hypocritical in his praise for Barbara Jordan, the former congresswoman who was the president’s appointed chair of a bipartisan immigration reform commission at the time of her death last winter. When Jordan was alive, Clinton backed her commission’s recommendations that legal immigration be cut in order to reduce unfair competition to America’s own lower-skilled and

lower-educated workers. But soon after eulogizing Jordan following her untimely death, Clinton “caved in to special-interest groups” and opposed the very reforms Jordan had said were necessary, Roberts said.

Especially incongruous, said the immigration reformers, was the liberal Democratic delegates’ support for high immigration while complaining about Clinton’s welfare reform which forces recipients to find a job. As noted by the delegates, the news media, and many others, the country does not have nearly enough low-skilled opportunities for all the people now on welfare, yet the Democratic Convention resoundingly supported continuing to import foreign workers for those very jobs.

“It appears particularly cruel to bring in millions more immigrants at this time who will compete for those jobs,” Daleiden said. “The result is entirely predictable: lower wages, worse working conditions and greater numbers of Americans living in poverty.”

Concerning the impoverished people left behind in immigrant-sending countries, Levy asked: “What is compassionate to other countries in taking teachers from Haiti, nurses from the Philippines, doctors from India and energetic entrepreneurs from Asia and Africa? Where are the leaders of those lands to come from? To prefer immigration for the few who come instead of genuine help for the many left behind is a phony compassion; it is hypocrisy.”

Perhaps the most illiberal aspect of the present immigration policy, speakers indicated, is the destroyed natural environment and social infrastructure it promises to create for future generations of Americans.

“At present rates of legal and illegal immigration, we will add more people than the entire population of Russia in less than 50 years,” Daleiden said. “The effect it will have on America will be nothing less than catastrophic.” Levy asked how it can be compassionate to run a program that will force the nation’s children to live in a country of a half-billion people.

If liberals won’t reduce immigration in their own compassionate way, conservatives will do it in their own way because the American people are ready for it, Levy said. □