

Liberals and Immigration Reform

by Edward Levy

[This article is adapted from a speech given by Dr. Levy in conjunction with a national gathering of Democrats.]

Liberals seem to have forgotten what they are supposed to stand for and whom they are supposed to represent. Ronald Reagan made “liberal” into the dirty “L” word; and that tactic worked so well that too many liberals, even today, are so intimidated that they are making Reagan’s characterization shamefully accurate.

For example, liberals are supposed to sympathize with the middle class — workers, professionals, and small (not big) business people. Liberals are also supposed to help wage earners and farmers raise their earnings. But today our middle class is shrinking and liberals who support large-scale immigration are helping to speed that shrinkage. That is, immigration over-supplies our labor market, helps depress wages, and dissolves the middle class.

The widening gap between rich and poor caused by this dissolution of the middle class is dangerous both economically and politically because a two-class society of only rich and poor is a characteristic of countries without democracy. No middle class, then, means an end to our way of governing ourselves, a process already evidenced by low voter-turnout — even for presidential elections.

Thus, strengthening the middle class should be part of both the liberal and conservative agendas, since only a strong middle class makes a democracy possible, and we should all be interested in that. If immigration

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facilitates the weakening of the middle class, then both liberals and conservatives should strongly support reducing the levels of immigration.

Consider some of the ways that political leaders are skewering the middle and lower classes by allowing immigration to continue at peak levels:

- Immigrants’ children overcrowd our schools, especially inner city schools, making a decent education virtually impossible.
- Immigrant workers fill unskilled jobs, making entry-level jobs unavailable to anyone else.
- Immigrants are recruited for skilled and semi-skilled jobs along with positions at universities because they work more cheaply. This not only helps shrink the middle class but makes mobility from the underclass to the middle class less possible. Training our own citizens becomes unnecessary, and the poor stay poor.

By supporting mass immigration liberals are betraying their constituents. Supporters of large-scale immigration are playing into the hands of the Libertarians and the *Wall Street Journal* editorial board in their demands for an over-supply of cheap labor.

Another portion of the population that liberals have traditionally represented is minorities. But immigration harms minorities, most particularly the immediately preceding group of immigrants, since *all* the new immigrants are competing for the same jobs. For example, Cesar Chavez energetically organized the migrants workers in California, but continuing waves of both legal and illegal immigrants undid his work.

Unions worked to help raise workers’ wages from the 1920s through to the 1960s when they had to be coerced into opening their ranks to blacks. At the same time that these employment doors were opening to blacks, Congress was opening the doors to wave after wave of immigrants. Immigration has always harmed America’s minorities — the blacks, of course, and the

Native Americans as well.

It's happening now. Businesses prefer importing immigrants to hiring our own citizens. How can liberals justify and participate in this hard-hearted behavior and

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support large immigrant flows? They hide behind a cloak of “humanitarianism” while advocating a policy lacking in compassion for the underclass in their midst.

But mostly, liberals are prisoners of the past, trying to solve the problems of today and tomorrow with the slogans of yesterday. They react reflexively and without thought to well-worn stimuli — “We are a nation of immigrants” is mouthed as if we were the only such nation on the planet. Once the slogan is repeated like a mantra, all clear thinking is avoided.

But is continuous immigration still appropriate today as it may have been in the past? Liberals should offer today's solutions to today's conditions. Is immigration the basic source of America's greatness? If so, who did not other nations of immigrants such as Brazil or Mexico become great as well? If immigration is the master key to success, we have in front of us a simple, practical solution to the economic and social problems of Central and Eastern Europe, Africa, Latin America and most of Asia. Migrants should be sent there. If continuous immigration is the basic act that made America great, then immigration can make great nations out of Bosnia, Afghanistan, Mexico, Ethiopia and Rwanda as well.

No. Clearly immigration is not the answer; something else is at work here. America became great because it had a relatively sparse population and an

abundance of resources. This is what allowed our middle class, our democracy and our well-being to develop. Populations appropriate to resources could help many nations to emulate that greatness.

Where, however, are the liberals — or, for that matter the conservatives — who might work to create the population base that would preserve our resources for the future?

Immigration is destined to increase our population by 100 percent, that is to double our rate of population growth. Meanwhile our water supplies are depleted through overuse, misuse, abuse, waste and ever-increasing demand. We encourage the paving over of our land with housing, roads and shopping malls and exult in the increased demand for more and ever more land to begin yielding its final crop: asphalt or concrete.

And faced with all these challenges the media and the environmental protection groups are silent, at least about the basic cause of all environmental damage — population ever growing beyond an area's carrying capacity. Liberals have apparently forgotten that they should care about the future.

Who should Liberals care about?

Liberals are supposed to be guided by compassion, and immigration is not always compassionate.

There are four groups to be considered. First, the migrants themselves. Probably two billion of the world's population live in some sort of misery and deserve better. Immigration to industrialized Western countries helps a small proportion of these. But what about the other three segments?

The second group of people, far larger than the first, consists of the citizens of the receiving country. At least in the case of the United States this means over-crowded schools, glutted labor markets, diminished opportunities, depressed wages, ethnic tensions, increase in crime, depletion of water supplies, air pollution, crowded roads, loss of farm land as well as wilderness and green space — and an overall weakening of democratic process. Population growth beyond our environmental, social and political carrying capacity hurts most of our citizens. And immigration is now doubling our growth rate.

The third group affected by immigration consists of the people left behind in the sending countries. What is compassionate about taking the teachers from Haiti, the dissidents from Cuba, the nurses from the Philippines, the doctors from India and the energetic entrepreneurs from

Asia and Africa?

And what is compassionate about spending so much money here on immigrants when those funds could be used much more effectively and with more long-term benefit for many more people by building schools and hospitals and supporting small businesses there? To prefer immigration for the few who can come, to genuine long-range help for the many, is hardly compassion — it is an instant gratification “feel-good” that smacks of hypocrisy.

And the fourth group — these are the yet-to-be-born, the generations to come. Using up resources for a quick profit today is no less a crime than stealing from the future. Ethics is dependent on imagination and we need to do more imagining of our grandchildren doing without wilderness and park land, struggling over depleted water supplies, staring at wall-to-wall concrete. If present trends continue our population will double in sixty years. Children now born will be living in an America of one billion people, which is the current population of India. Can we imagine what double looks like — double the people, double the houses, double the roads, double the traffic, double the lines at every public venue? If we can, we should imagine our grandchildren making their way in such an America.

What should Liberals be Doing?

Liberals should be supporting self-help projects in those countries that want our assistance — help to build schools and hospitals, help to build small businesses whose owners form a middle class and foster democracy, help to limit population size. Instead of their being uprooted for migration we should help them “bloom where they’re planted.”

Liberals should be advocating a reduction of immigration numbers to traditional levels so that America can have time to “digest” the newcomers and rebuild adequate schools, hospitals and roads as well as assessing the impact of numbers of people on our

resources and our environment.

Liberals should support actions in Congress to clarify the language of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. Its intent was to help the descendants of American slaves become full citizens but it has been re-interpreted to grant citizenship to any person born on U.S. soil. This loophole of interpretation can be easily closed by Congressional legislation so that aliens will not come to the U.S. to have “anchor babies” who are eligible later in life to sponsor further migration of family members.

Liberals should encourage support of the INS and make sure it is adequately funded to enforce our laws in the interior of the country as well as at the borders. Cooperation between local law enforcement agencies and the INS should be permitted and fostered. Those who commit marriage fraud, H1B-visa fraud and asylum fraud should be prosecuted along with the immigration lawyers who advise their clients to commit such frauds.

Liberals should be listening daily for the remarks of fellow citizens that need to be corrected. The statement “immigrants will work harder for less money” describes exploitation, not productivity. “Trickle down” theory should be replaced with “trickle up” theory where fair wages create consumers who will build the economy and help business without constant dependence on population growth. Charges of “racism” and “nativism” are not helpful in understanding the effects of mass immigration. We are not so much “a nation of immigrants” as a nation of democracy and no matter what immigration was or may have been, continuing it now on its current scale threatens democracy.

Liberals need to remember that Americans, by a majority of four to one, want immigration reduced to traditional numbers. We still have a chance to prove that Reagan was wrong when he made the “L” word dirty by doing what liberals once did: representing and standing up for the majority. •