

Immigration Control:

Is there a liberal constituency?

by Miles D. Wolpin

ABSTRACT: Among participants in the immigration reform movement are many conservatives and some liberals. Advocacy research of the liberals tends to highlight such concerns as population density, urban sprawl, employment opportunities, wage depression, etc. The implied premise of Liberal response to these issues is questioned in this analysis. Has the ideological evolution of Liberalism rendered such appeals problematic during the last quarter of the 20th century? If so, is it still possible to generate support for immigration reform from sectors of Liberalism's mass constituency?

Within the frequently overlapping Euro-American defense and immigration control movements, concerned thinkers are anything but ideologically homogenous. While “organic” (or “paleo”) conservatives may be dominant, there are also many nationalists, populists, and “patriots” as well as a dynamic liberal minority. Asserting the indisputable — that a broader coalition is imperative for success — the latter maintain that greater energy and resources should target potential liberal supporters.

Would this strategy be a cost-effective use of resources for a movement that boasts few corporate/foundation benefactors and modest numbers of activists? If not, as many conservatives believe, should the proposal be rejected in its entirety? Whether a useful strategic initiative can be derived ultimately depends upon an assessment of contemporary Liberalism's ideological

Miles D. Wolpin teaches political science at the State University of New York at Potsdam. He is a frequent contributor to The Social Contract, most recently on the “defection” of labor movement leadership from the goal of protecting the wages of American workers (The Social Contract, Winter 1999-2000, p.134).

parameters.

Stratifying the Liberal Sector

A tentative, yet considered response to the argument for liberal inclusion requires that we distinguish among those generally lumped together. Liberals differ in two ways that parallel conservative divergences.

First, there are some factional disagreements over issues such as free trade. These, as I shall make clear, are less significant within Liberalism — and particularly for immigration reform advocates — than those over globalism between neo-conservatives on one hand, and nationalists or paleo-conservatives on the other.

The second much more crucial difference involves internalization of the Liberal ethos. Here three groups may be identified. First are the 5-10 percent who may be designated as ideologues. This elite stratum dominates leftist interest groups, much of the media, academia, mainline churches and many foundations, as well as certain public sector bureaucracies and the national Democratic Party.

Another somewhat larger sector of perhaps 15-20 percent have only moderately assimilated the ideological principles infusing modern Liberalism. They constitute an attentive public and reliable followers of the ideologues. Many are employed by, or the immediate constituency of, the previously mentioned Liberal-dominated institutions and interest groups.

Beyond the ideological cadre element and its attentive support sector is a much larger (70-85 percent) nominal constituency, which frequently supports Liberals for “group benefits” rather than ideological reasons. Here responses are evoked by beliefs that a narrow or broadly defined group's interests will be defended or enhanced by state paternalism. The sometimes-conflicting groups include the poor, wage and lower level salary earners, minorities, and those who are young, old, ill, variously disabled, or gendered.

A Necessary Strategic Exclusion

Certain immigration reform advocates, organizations

(e.g. FAIR, CIS) and publications (e.g. *The Social Contract*) have devoted considerable attention to such liberal concerns as poverty, wage depression, job displacement, excessive demands upon limited public sector resources, urban sprawl and other ecological problems. Yet these appeals encounter a veritable "brick wall" insofar as the Liberal elites and their attentive followers are concerned. Few are responsive and virtually none offer support to the immigration reform movement.

Some, of course, may honestly believe that immigration reform liberals are mistaken or even dishonestly shielding — or being used by — vile "conservative" nativists. Such misperceptions are reasonable given the high and increasing level of Liberal intolerance and civic distrust. Similarly, others may react negatively because of strong Liberal group loyalty or fear of sanctions, which deter critical questioning of ideological tenets in normal times.

For these and many other Liberal "true believers" however, the dominant ideological paradigm has a transcendent immunity from such "minor" empirical defaults. Not only can the latter be met with methodological critiques or counter arguments, but from the standpoint of the contemporary Liberal vision, they are of secondary importance. Indeed, with a little more generous welfare statism, they can be ameliorated.

The underlying deficiency of liberal immigration reformers is their failure to acknowledge the radical transformation of Liberalism in the 20th century. This has involved three broad relational areas in which two are especially pertinent to the recalcitrance of Liberal ideologues.

In point of time, the first major evolutionary change, which began in the late 1700s culminated during the second half of the 19th century. Under the combined impact of the scientific and industrial revolution in the context of philosophical idealism and universalistic modern norms, Liberalism became increasingly internationalistic. As Mundell (2000: A30) underscores, the nation state was perceived as an anachronistic "barbarism" that impeded progress.¹

During the late 19th century, national rivalries were viewed as the primary cause of war. Liberals began an institution-building program reinforced by a succession of treaties first in the interstate conflict area and then focusing upon economic relations. Most recently, the

"world community" and "human rights" have been added to this "globalist" jihad.

Thus, by the late 20th century, Liberalism was essentially universalistic in its normative pretensions (if not practice) and globalist in vision. Nation-states and their sovereignty are in the process of being superseded while nationalism is viewed as an archaic impediment to "progress" in strengthening the world "community." This is a far cry from the 18th century particularistic Euro-American liberal paradigm.²

Liberalism's internationalist evolution was to a

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limited degree accelerated by competition for mass support with a radical socialist 19th century offshoot of liberalism and Hegelian idealism. Marxism, however, had an even more pronounced impact upon the other two transformations of Liberalism. The first was its assimilation of egalitarian "social justice" norms which involved rejection of limited government and laissez faire (i.e. liberal) citizen-state relationships. Thus 20th century Liberalism (Social-Democracy in Europe) became strongly committed to welfare-statism geared to both Keynesian and redistributive (neo-Marxian) goals.

If it can be said that dialectically Liberalism in our century engaged in a successful competition with the Marxist Left by partially assimilating its statism and egalitarian economic values, this has also occurred most recently in the socio-cultural area encompassing race, ethnicity and gender. Only here — paradoxically despite the collapse of its Communist rivals — Liberalism has proceeded to incorporate New Left radicals, and their socio-cultural egalitarianism in its most extreme version — one more radical and intolerant in certain respects than the politically correct Soviet version.

Thus, “multiculturalism” represents the third great transformation. Employing a neo-Marxian paradigm, Third World peoples along with other minorities of color, women, homosexuals, etc. are “oppressed” and victimized by exploitative white (Euro-American) males and their power structures. The rule of law is a myth while equal opportunity is meaningless in the absence of statist outcome leveling.

Here the traditional Leftist direct assault against property and liberty has been replaced by an indirect erosion through taxation, regulation and a proliferation of collective “rights” and “victim” claims. Similarly, national traditions, institutions and identity are gradually eroded from within by incessant deconstructionist “de-mythologizing.” Marcuse and Gramsci are very much alive!

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Today, then, Liberalism is liberal in name only. Liberty, the rule of law, freedom of association, property rights and even free speech are all under sustained vitriolic attack by so-called Liberals. Many have gone so far as to operationally ignore egalitarianism by systematically according ascriptive group preferences to “oppressed” collectivities. And these via non-elected bureaucratic and judicial institutions in those numerous cases where legislatures are recalcitrant. Imposition by decree belies their “democratic” pretensions. The Liberal intelligentsia, then, as Lasch (1995) and others have stressed, is estranged from and almost at war with their “own” Euro-American native stock. The “culture war” is for the future America to become a Third World-dominated “multicultural” society characterized by many ethnicities rather than a single national identity!

A Cost-effective Strategy

To direct “liberal” immigration reform appeals to

such alienated utopian ideologues is unlikely to evoke favorable responses. Neither citizenship obligations (Geyer, 1996) nor national interest are meaningful frames of reference for such de facto open borders cosmopolitans. Indeed, “immigrant rights” which equal or even trump those of many native-born citizens, is their mantra for illegal aliens.

Liberals, in short, have emerged during the last three decades as the foremost coalition partners of employers, militant ethnics and neo-conservatives in weakening the immigration control infrastructure. Like Left Socialists, Communists and most Greens in Europe, they demonize even defensive nationalism as “racism” or xenophobia.

Even those who have *partially* internalized the mutually reinforcing globalist and multicultural visions are unlikely to “listen” short of a major crisis. In the 1950s or early 1960s before internationalism had become fully institutionalized and radical multiculturalism a major force in Liberal circles, this strategy might have yielded modest dividends. But in that era the “American Dream” was a reality while a largely unskilled and culturally alien migratory invasion of 1.5 million/annum was not threatening to our national unity and well-being.

Since then not only have the last-mentioned variables changed radically, but so has the structural paradigm of Liberalism. Thus “liberal” economic arguments for immigration control are rendered nugatory by supervening egalitarian ethno-cultural and globalist loyalties. The “think globally and act locally” strategy is to seize control of global institutions (e.g., WTO, IMF, UN) and impose a “progressive” Third World “people” dominant New World Order. The latter would effectively eradicate the twin evils of Euro-American and corporate capitalist hegemony in America and elsewhere. That is the long-term agenda of social radicals who have progressively transformed Liberalism since the civil-rights campaigns of the 1960s.³

Rather than dilute limited resources in vain appeals to egalitarian Utopians, immigration reformers can generate support by directly targeting some if not all of their welfare state constituency groups. They neither understand nor identify with globalism or multiculturalism, yet frequently support Liberals to enhance their socio-economic security or opportunities. Many in this sector retain some degree of identification with the nation state, its protective roles and even traditional values (family, church, rule of law, etc.)⁴

Thus the Keynesian dimension of Liberalism which has the greatest resonance at the mass level also happens to be consonant with the socially protective goals of immigration control. Yet proponents of the latter who seek major defections from the nominal Liberal constituency — most of whom neither understand ideology nor consider themselves as Liberals — must be willing to compromise on matters of labor or consumer protection, reformed safety nets, national health insurance, etc.⁵ Improvements can be financed by the currently externalized costs of mass immigration estimated at \$60 billion per annum. Reduction of massive fraud and waste could generate additional funding!

The foregoing proposal does not require uncritical acceptance of welfare state excesses associated with wasteful, ineffective or socially degenerative Liberal policy propensities. On the contrary, it only implies last resort compassion and help — in the most cost-effective way — for deserving citizens who can thus again contribute to the national community.

Toward a Symbolic Alternative

Intellectually rationalized arguments even when limited to such policy issues and well founded empirically, only resonate with the narrow, more educated stratum. Most of the latter, however, fall within Liberalism's "core" and attentive ideological sectors. Thus 60 percent of the Sierra Club's members rejected border controls two years ago, as do the dominant elements in most other environmental organizations.

Clearly, there is a residual defensively nationalist liberal minority of mostly attentive followers within these and other interest groups such as labor. This is also true with respect to consumer, women's and even some minority (especially Native American tribal) organizations.⁶ In a crisis, many will defect from Liberal misleadership, yet their numbers are relatively modest.

Thus the popular following that is needed can only come from the semi-literate, poorly informed mass base that currently supports Liberal elites. Here an inspirational symbolic appeal rather than a narrow interest group single-issue approach is necessary. Immigration control, other bona fide welfare measures and a non-aggressive foreign policy must be embedded within a broader patriotic and regenerative nationalist party or movement that can elicit their affective loyalties. Effective leadership — ideally charismatic — would be optimal.⁷

Such a populist movement advocating an accountable protectionist state can cost-effectively utilize limited resources — this through its own communications infrastructure reinforced by mass organizing from below. While initial progress may be modest, at the first ethno/racial and/or economic crisis, it will veritably "take off." Tactically, it should combine a positive vision of restored American greatness and shared prosperity with dramatic appeals that tap mass fears of Balkanization and decline due to Liberal corruption and betrayal.

Dogmatic libertarians and neo-conservative "free marketeers" who defend mass immigration should also

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be targeted for these and other nationally destructive policies as well as their ubiquitous cowardice vis-a-vis Liberal multiculturalism, hypocrisy and high level perfidy. In doing this, many of their non-ideological supporters can also be incorporated into an emergent American National Movement.

In Western Europe a similar process is unfolding with new adherents being attracted from the mass base of both the Social-Democratic and traditional (now largely neo-conservative) Right. Hence while the latter has moved toward adopting a free market "American model," nationalists here may derive insights and advantage from the growing appeal of culturally defensive national movements upon that continent — ones that have already indirectly succeeded in pressuring many European Union governments to more effectively control their borders. •

NOTES

¹ "The classical economists were virtually unanimous in their support for a common unit of money. Economists like John

Stuart Mill deplored the nationalism that made it impractical: ‘So much of barbarism, however, still remains in the transactions of most civilized nations, that almost all independent countries choose to assert their nationality by having, to their own inconvenience and that of their neighbors, a peculiar currency of their own.’”

² As late as the mid-19th century, liberal principles such as the rule of law, limited and representative government, liberty and tolerance were not regarded as universally applicable to non-Europeans. Despite self-righteous efforts in the 20th century to export these Euro-American values, and thus universalize them, institutionalized success has been rare in non-Euro-American culture areas. In many of the latter, this universalizing mission has been and is denounced as cultural imperialism.

³ Pertinent sources on the radicalization of pre-Vietnam War era Liberalism include: (Bernstein, 1994); (Buchanan, 1997); (Collier and Horowitz, 1997; (D’Souza, 1992); (Emery, 2000); (Fallon, 1998); (Francis, 1998); (Geyer, 1996); (Gross, 1997); (Hoff-Sommers, 1994); (Jatras, 1998); (Lasch, 1995); (Lindstrom, 1993); (Lynch, 1992); (McDougal, 1997); (Moody, 1998); (Murphey, 1993); (Nelson, 1994); (O’Sullivan, 1998); (Patai, 1998); (Post, [2000]); (Richert, 1998); (Schmidt, 1997); (Sowell, 1996); (Sunderland, 1993); (Taylor, 1992); (Thibodaux, 1994); Weissberg, 1998).

⁴ Thus, the “Reagan Democrat” support in the 1980s along with Republican majorities in the Congress and most of the states during the 1990s. During the latter decade survey research revealed that only a small American minority (10 percent among union members) identified as “Liberals.” Toward the close of the decade women shifted to favor regulation of abortion — 53 percent by 2000. At the same time, in excess of 70 percent of Americans have consistently favored more immigration control.

⁵ Along with education, these are the primary issue areas which account for Liberal mass support. A laissez-faire paradigm can be used only to qualify and criticize welfare state excesses or incentives that unduly undermine personal responsibility, merit, freedom of association, etc. In its pure form, however, “free market” symbolism fails to evoke positive support from those lower middle and working class sectors that frequently support Liberals. It implies the rejection of a state role that is protective and optimally compassionate for non-parasitic deserving citizens.

⁶ Nor should one necessarily write off all ordinary Hispanics. Geyer (1996:224) reports that:

... the stunner of them all was the 1993 Latino National Political Survey, conducted by Rodolfo O. de la Garza, the respected professor of government at the University of Texas at Austin, ironically with funding from the Ford

Foundation. (It surely did not expect the outcome, and there were indications that it tried to downplay the embarrassing results!) This comprehensive poll of Hispanic-American attitudes, goals, and hopes illustrated once again how ethnic political leaders were not advocating the causes that their communities supported. It found that 80 percent of Puerto Rican-Americans, 75 percent of Mexican-Americans, and 66 percent of Cuban-Americans wanted to reduce immigration to the United States. It also showed that most “Hispanics” think of themselves as neither Hispanic nor Latino. Most consider themselves moderate to conservative ideologically and support a common national agenda that includes traditionally liberal positions on domestic issues; and most do not have a particular interest in Latin America.

But an even greater shocker was the fact that fully 90 percent of those interviewed said that none of the ethnic organizations spoke for them or for their ideas. (Peter Skerry had already found that only 8 percent of Hispanic-Americans even used the word “Hispanic” to describe themselves.) They spoke English better than Spanish and thought newcomers should use English. As to motivation, they were surely reacting on a self-interest level as well as on a patriotic level, and trying to keep foreign competitive labor from destroying their lives and lifestyles. Then, really challenging the suppositions on which the activists’ policies were based, a majority denied ever having been discriminated against.

⁷ Given the extraordinary level of citizen alienation — ranging from 70-90 percent (Ferguson, 2000:12) — the attitudinal climate clearly favors such an “outsider” who confronts discredited elites that today are ignored by approximately two-thirds of our citizenry.

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