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Uniting the Right

Freedom is the idea that can bring our fractious movement together.

By David Horowitz

Anyone who pays attention to politics can see that when Democrats attack, they speak from the same text, and when they vote, they march in lockstep. If one Democrat says the wealthy must pay their “fair share,” all Democrats do — regardless of the merits of the charge. If their leaders say Republicans want to shut down the government in order to deny Americans affordable care, the rest of the party will follow their lead — whether the claim is true or not. When a key program like Obamacare is the issue, not only do Democrats back it with one voice, but every player on the political left — journalists, professors, talk-show hosts, union heads, MoveOn radicals, and Occupy anarchists — falls into line and promotes it with virtually identical words. They act in “solidarity” in fair political weather and foul, and they do it even for a program like Obamacare, which (as some of them must surely see) is ill-conceived, falsely presented, incompetently executed, and fiscally unsustainable.

When the voices of the Left all come together, the amplification is stupefying. The result is that a morally bankrupt, politically tyrannical, economically destructive party is able to set the course of an entire nation and put it on the road to disaster.

Republicans, in contrast, speak with multiple voices, and in words that often have no relation to each other. If one Republican says “defund Obamacare,” another says, “fund the government,” even if that might mean funding Obamacare. The argument and the dissension are over tactics, not substance, since all Republicans oppose Obamacare. If one Republican says “don’t intervene in Syria,” another says “don’t hesitate”; if one says “Obama-supported immigration reform is a dagger aimed at American sovereignty,” another says “opposition to immigration reform is a death-knell for our party.” This, again, is a tactical division, since all Republicans support enforceable borders.

These contending party voices are multiplied by conservative talking heads in the nation’s media who march to their own political drums. The result is a cacophony of talking points, which in the end point nowhere. Because Republicans speak with many voices, their message is often difficult, if not impossible, to make out.

Internal dissension not only blunts the Republican attack; it hands Democrats a convenient stick with which to beat them. No one on the right, whether conservative or Republican, thinks this is a healthy situation. Why, then, is it the case? What is it that unites Democrats that Republicans lack?

It’s not a party whip to enforce discipline, since both parties have them. Moreover, there are no whips to rein in factions like the grassroots, or media voices that command larger audiences than members of Congress. That goes for both sides. Democrats also lack a formal means to bring their media sympathizers and grassroots allies into line. So how do they do it? What unites them as they go to battle?

It is the power of a unifying idea. A unifying idea is not a consensus over policy or an agreement on tactics; unanimity in these matters is difficult to achieve and impossible to sustain. Instead, their unity is inspired — *forged* actually — by a missionary idea. On the eve of his election in 2008, Barack Obama said to his followers: “We are five days away from fundamentally transforming the United States of America.” That idea of transformation is what unites the Left. Unity in embracing a future goal — the fundamental transformation of society — is what motivates them to march together. It is what makes them “progressives” in the first place. It is their identity in the same way “Christian” and “Jew” are identities of people with a religious faith.

“Progressive,” “socialist,” and “liberal” are interchangeable terms that describe members of a moral crusade. The goal of the crusade is “social justice,” or its equivalent: *equality*. The quest for this utopia of social and economic equality is what forges their alliances, defines their allegiances, and justifies the means they use to get there. They may differ on particular policies and tactics to advance the cause, but if they are Democrats or supporters of the Democrats, they see the party as the practical vehicle for making the idea a reality.

To transform society, you need the power of the state; it is the only way their future can be achieved. That is why they are willing to follow the marching orders of a party that can control the state, and that is why they want to advance its fortunes. The Democrats’ perennial campaign message — Republicans are conducting a war on minorities, women, working Americans, and the poor — rests on the central idea that unites progressives behind the party: *We are for equality, they are against it.*

The reasoning behind such behavior was revealed by Leon Trotsky when he explained why he would not

leave the Bolshevik party even after Stalin — who would eventually murder him — became its absolute leader: “We can only be right with and by the Party,” Trotsky said, “for history has provided no other way of being in the right.” “If the Party adopts a decision which one or other of us thinks unjust, he will say, just or unjust, it is my party, and I shall support the consequences of the decision to the end.”

Non-Bolsheviks may not share Trotsky’s metaphysical certitude, but they will recognize the principle. If the cause is about changing the world and there is only one party that can acquire the means to do it, then even though it may be wrong on this or that matter, its fortunes must be advanced and its power defended. This commitment is magnified when the opposition party is viewed as the enemy of the noble cause. If Republicans are seen as the party of privilege at war with minorities, women, and the poor, then their ideas are not only wrong but evil. As President Obama’s political mentor, Saul Alinsky, put it in *Rules for Radicals*: “One acts decisively only in the conviction that all of the angels are on one side and the devils are on the other.”

Here is another statement from *Rules for Radicals*: “We are always moral and our enemies always immoral.” The issue is never the issue. The issue is always the immorality of the opposition, of conservatives and Republicans. If they are perceived as immoral and indecent, their policies and arguments can be dismissed, and even those constituencies that are non-political or “low-information” can be mobilized to do battle against an evil party. In 1996 Senator Bob Dole — a moderate Republican and deal-maker — ran for president against the incumbent, Bill Clinton. At the time, Dick Morris was Clinton’s political adviser. As they were heading into the election campaign, Clinton — a centrist Democrat — told Morris, “You have to understand, Dick, Bob Dole is evil.” That is how even centrist

Democrats view the political battle.

Because Democrats and progressives regard politics as a battle of good versus evil, their focus is not on policies that work and ideas that make sense, but on what will make their party win. Demonizing the opposition is one answer; unity is another. If we are divided, we will fail, and that means evil will triumph.

They have a saying that expresses this attitude: “We are on the right side of history.” President Obama placed a carpet in the Oval Office on which these words are inscribed: *The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice*. That’s *their* justice, their cause. The issues are never the issues; the issue is always what will bring power to those who are on the right side of history, because their cause — not any particular policy or tactic — is enlightened and just. This intoxicating belief is the key not only to the power of the party but to the sense of individual achievement and self-worth of its members, as soldiers in a moral cause.

The coalition of the Right is extremely diverse and at present lacks a unifying idea. Conservatives do not speak from the same page generally, or march in lockstep; their divisions are open for all to see, and for their opponents to exploit. The conservative media is frequently at odds with the Republican party, and the Republican party is often at odds with itself. The Tea Party has emerged and flourished because of dissatisfaction with the way Republicans conduct themselves in conflicts with their progressive opponents. To be sure, on the other side, there is also a progressive grassroots faction that has significant disagreements with the Democratic party. But when it comes to election time, when it comes to who gets the power, the progressive grassroots fall into line. They do it for the good of the larger cause. To be on the right side of history.

In contrast, conservatives are not averse to sitting on their hands at election time, or even voting for the other camp. Why do conservatives do this? Because they think elections are about particular policies, and they don't see the larger cause. Republicans do not frame their broader political cause as a moral crusade, and do not project a unifying idea. Consequently, their focus is on policies and tactical issues. This inevitably promotes divisions in the ranks of Republican officeholders and frequently puts them at odds with their political base. As previously noted, the schism over whether to defund Obamacare or keep the government solvent was purely tactical, since all Republicans and conservatives oppose Obamacare. Yet by most accounts the fallout from the division was serious enough to pose a threat to the GOP's electoral chances in 2014, when a defeat would make Obamacare a permanent feature of the nation's life.

If policy and tactics were Democrats' main concerns too, they would be as divided as Republicans. The fact that Democrats are united behind the ill-conceived, unpopular, and unworkable Obamacare legislation is a prime example of what happens when a policy is regarded as a pillar of the transformative cause. The troops bury their doubts and give it unanimous support because they understand that it is essential to the progressive dream.

Here is the bottom line: If conservatives continue to ignore the fact that their opponents approach politics as a religious war, if they fail to organize their own resistance as a moral cause, they will eventually lose the war and everything that depends on it.

Naturally, the first reaction of conservatives to this advice will be to reject it. Conservatives do not want to behave like leftists, who see politics and government as a means for transforming the world and the

people in it. Temperamentally, conservatives are cautious because they know that the problems the world faces are caused by human beings, not by the social institutions that progressives plan to change. Social institutions reflect who we are far more than they shape what we will be. Therefore, all political “solutions” are imperfect; all will fall far short of their goals; all will require constant reforms to fix the additional problems they create. The legislative pillars of the progressive future — Social Security and Medicare — are already bankrupt, while the welfare state has created more — and worse — poverty than it was designed to cure.

Conservatives are realists who believe in the constitutional skepticism that guided the Founders. They know that human nature — not society — is the insurmountable obstacle to equality and justice, and that a democracy works only through compromise and respect. Democrats pay lip service to this wisdom but don't really believe it. There is no compromising utopian goals, and they will accept no lasting *modus vivendi* with those who oppose these goals.

Fortunately, the objections of conservatives are not an obstacle to getting behind a unifying idea. The conservative cause already has a moral core; it is just not currently a political theme, the way equality is for Democrats and progressives. But it *can* be made into one.

Conservatism is by nature a defensive posture. It is about protecting the constitutional system created by the Founders. But the creation of this constitutional arrangement was a revolutionary act. It provided a political framework to maximize individual freedom and allow citizens to exercise their talents and enjoy the best possible lives. What conservatism is about is freedom, and this is its natural unifying idea.

Individual freedom and ordered liberty made possible by the imposition of limits on government is the idea that unites conservatives and Republicans, and should be their rallying cry. The idea is fundamentally opposed to the “equality” that is the goal of progressives and Democrats. Progressive equality — that is, racial, gender, and class equality, or equality by collectives — is not what the Founders fought for and not what the constitutional framework guarantees. There are no ethnicities or genders identified in the Bill of Rights; the words “male” and “female,” “black” and “white,” do not appear in the Constitution. There are only individuals who are, in the Declaration of Independence, proclaimed equal in the eyes of their Creator and endowed with unalienable rights that government cannot take away.

The equality enshrined in the Declaration is incompatible with the equality that progressives support. The equality in the Declaration is not an equality of abilities or deserts. It is an equality of importance in the eyes of Nature’s God, and therefore in the eyes of the law — equality not as men and women or whites and blacks but as individuals, and individuals alone.

The equality proposed by progressives and Democrats is a declaration of war on individual freedom, and therefore on the American constitutional framework. The steady erosion of that freedom is the consequence of progressives’ political successes. This is the war that divides Left and Right. Conservatives must recognize that it is a war, and prosecute it as a war to defend individual freedom. That should be the unifying idea of the conservative cause.

The American republic was designed by its founders specifically to preserve individual freedom and to thwart the redistributive ambitions of the progressives of the day, ideals that are now referred to as “social justice.” In the words of James Madison, these included “a rage for paper money, for an abolition

of debts, for an equal division of property, or for any other improper or wicked project.” Freedom exists, Madison explained, only when the unequal endowments and unequal abilities of individuals — what he called their “diversity of faculties” — are respected and protected. This very diversity is the source “from which property rights originate” and “the protection of these faculties is *the first object of government.*” Note that the first object of government is the protection of the *inequalities* that arise from the natural abilities and talents of its citizens — because government is instituted to guarantee the unalienable rights that constitute individual freedom.

This freedom stands in the way of the progressive schemers. The idea of equality of results, which mobilizes, organizes, and inspires the Left, can be truly achieved only by the abolition of private property and the suppression of individual freedom. This is the real conflict that divides our nation between conservatives and progressives, between the defenders of freedom and its would-be destroyers. The progressive agenda is the systematic constriction of the realm of freedom — the private sector — and its replacement by the power of the state.

Economic redistribution is not “fairness.” It is a war on property rights and individual freedom. Massive deficits are not accounting problems; they are a war on the freedom of the individuals — particularly the young — who must work to pay off the government debt instead of working to enhance their lives. Massive welfare projects that make individuals dependent on government are not implementations of “social justice” but wars on the independence and freedom of the underclass that progressive policies have served to create. Obamacare mandates are not merely harbingers of increased medical costs and diminished medical care; they are infringements on the freedom of individuals to pursue their best

possible lives. The Democrats' failing public-school systems and opposition to school choice are infringements on the freedom of minorities and the poor to pursue the American dream. This is the moral language that Republicans should use to indict their opponents as enemies of justice and social fairness, and to unite their political base.

Framing the political argument in moral terms takes the battle to the adversary's camp, while at the same time communicating to conservatives that they are all in the same fight. It was the fight for freedom that gave Republicans national majorities during the Cold War with the Communist bloc and liberated a billion captive people. Since 1988, which was the last presidential contest before the Communist collapse, Republicans have won a majority of the popular vote in only one national election. During the Cold War, national security was the key to Republican victories because it framed the conservative cause as a moral crusade in defense of freedom. Now national security is virtually absent from the political debate.

National-security issues are off the political radar because the Left wants to keep them off and because conservatives who are focused on economic-policy issues have simply let them do it. But in a democracy like ours, national security is first of all about freedom and its defense. That is why the Left is not particularly happy with national-security matters and wants to shrink our military and open our borders. It does so in the name of equality — of nations.

The attack on our military and our borders is an existential threat to our freedom, the first in our modern history with such a strong domestic component. Unfortunately, conservatives and Republicans have been reluctant to frame national security as an issue in that way. Meanwhile we are confronted by a new totalitarian enemy in political Islam as promoted by the Muslim Brotherhood and the regimes in Syria and

Iran. It is no accident that our president and his party have supported the Brotherhood — the spearhead of political Islam — at home and abroad, and appeased our Islamist enemies in Egypt, Syria, Libya, and Iran.

The very struggle that inspired the Right in the Cold War era — the battle between tyranny and freedom — is once again staring us in the face, but we are reluctant to name it. We have gone almost silent instead. The silence must end. It is time to connect the battle for individual freedom at home and the defense of our free society abroad, and to make them one. That is the way to advance the conservative message and unify the political forces on which the future of our nation depends.

— *David Horowitz is the author of The Black Book of the American Left, which will encompass ten volumes when it is completed. The first volume, My Life & Times, will be published tomorrow, November 5, by Encounter Books.*