

American Conservatism and Right-Wing Dictatorships



Speech given at a Hollywood Symposium on Freedom, Fall, 1961

It is a great honor to follow my colleagues and friends William Buckley, James Burnham, and Frank Meyer, at this podium.

I come to you, as our chairman has indicated, direct from the Dominican Republic—not, to my good fortune, by way of Cuba, though my plane fight used to stop in that country back in those pleasant days before we knew the names of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. I come to you, a little more remotely, five weeks to be exact, from two happy years in Spain, so that I stand before an English-speaking audience for the first time in a long while—not only out of practice but also out of touch, so that when we come to question-time I should be asking you questions, and listening to your answers, rather than the other way around; and I for one wish it might be that way.

For I come with my mind full of two sets of related questions—one set about the so-called upsurge of conservatism in the United States: Is it an upsurge? Is it conservative? And another set suggested to me by my more or less recent experience: Both Spain and the Dominican Republic are, and have been for over 25 years, so-called Right-wing dictatorships, where basic policy-decisions have been made by one man, and not necessarily with much opportunity for other men to discuss and criticize, and little or no opportunity for other men to compete freely for political power—so that the second set of questions has to do with conservatism and Right-wing dictatorships: What about Right-wing dictatorships in general? What attitude should conservatives—the conservative upsurge if it is an upsurge, and perhaps therefore able to have its way about American policy, and if it is conservative, that is based on a clear grasp of conservative purpose and conservative principle—what attitude should conservatives adopt toward Right-wing dictatorships in general and the Dominican Republic in particular? And you will readily see, putting it that way, why I say the two sets of questions are related: in order to deal with

the last of them, What attitude should conservatives adopt toward Right-wing dictatorships, we must tell ourselves sooner or later what conservatives believe in and are trying to accomplish, which is going to be the main business in tonight's address. Then, weaving back and forth between that and a clear picture of what Right-wing dictatorships are, we can hope to decide whether conservatives should support them, or oppose them, or—a third possibility of course—adopt toward them a position of neutrality, or indifference.

First, then, let us get before us some general statements about contemporary Right-wing dictatorships in general. We have, I think, four major instances to get in mind: the Franco dictatorship in Spain; the Chiang Kai-shek dictatorship in Formosa; the Syngman Rhee dictatorship in South Korea; and the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic. And, with their names in front of us, several arresting points leap to our minds. 1) They have all, throughout the period of history in which they have figured, been staunch allies of the West, and so of the United States—nay, more, they have been allies of the West, even been on the West's side, even at those moments when some of us have wondered whether or not the West was on the West's side; they have been on the West's side, and ready and eager to fight and spill blood against the West's great enemy the World Communist movement, any and everywhere there has been fighting to be done, or blood to be spilt, against the Communists. We may fairly take as our symbol of this point Chiang and his half-million man army, pawing the ground year after year in Formosa, impatient to resume the war against Red China (whether on the mainland or in Korea), and being forever restrained by a West so frightened by its own shadow that it will not even permit others to fight for it. Second, the four Right-wing dictatorships are *uniquely and exclusively* associated, in the events of our day, with the handful of victories—how strange the word falls on our ears, we who are in the habit of always losing to Communism!—that have been achieved over Communism, modest victories perhaps, but victories all the same and, however remote the second-hand, *our* victories. Tick off the major thorns in the side of the Communists: The Communists' complete inability to reverse or begin to reverse the defeat they suffered at Franco's hands in Madrid, represented by the American Strategic Air Command bases in Spain; the Communists' impotent battering away at Quemoy and Matsu, which to their consternation don't seem

thus coming a little closer to the heart of the matter—the history of American Right-wing support (to say nothing of Right-wing support in Europe) for the Right-wing dictatorships, as also the picture as regards present support, is strangely, almost incomprehensibly, checkered. Syngman Rhee was driven out of Korea, almost certainly at the instance of left-wing ideologues in the DOS and CIA, without a single Right-wing voice being raised in his defense—as, in the subsequent chaos in Korea, no Right-wing voice has shown the good sense to wish for him back. Trujillo also never succeeded in striking any responsive chord in the heart of Right-wing America: no Right-wing tear was shed over his assassination, nor has any Right-wing organization or publication—with one honorable exception—shown any concern about what might happen, in the post-assassination period, to the interests (if any) Trujillo defended. With Franco and Chiang, however, the situation is quite different: each can today count on a hard-core of Senators, Representatives, publicists, and academics in Right-wing America who are constantly mobilized on their behalf, who keep a constant eye on the machinations—anti-Franco, anti-Chiang as the case may be—of their enemies, who if not always able to get all they want for Franco and Chiang are always there to ward off any new blow directed at them by the Liberals. To put it otherwise: if Rhee went down, if Trujillo's collaborators in the Dominican Republic prove unable to pursue Trujillo's policies, the reason is or will be that they failed to win for themselves the vigorous and vigilant kind of support that some American conservatives regularly give to Franco and Chiang, and the question arises, Why does the American Right, not all of it of course but enough, support Franco and Chiang but refuse to go to the assistance of Rhee and Trujillo or, if you like, Trujillo's heirs? I do not, as I have already intimated, know the answer to that question, which is why I used the word “incomprehensible” a moment ago. At most I am sure (very sure, however) that the answers that come most readily to mind will not wash, for example: That Rhee and Trujillo were conspicuously more wicked than Franco and Chiang, so that we, nice fellows that we are, can touch Franco's and Chiang's pitch without being defiled, but must not touch Rhee's and Trujillo's because it is so much blacker: all four have been charged with, and have probably been guilty of, the same alleged crimes, with only minor differences of detail. Not, either, because American interests, or even American Right-wing interests,

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to mind much, with Chiang safe and supreme there on Taiwan, untouchable, and Red China's coveted membership in the UN as a symbol of political frustration; the consolidation of the frontier between North and South Korea (not the thorn perhaps that some of us would have liked to thrust into the side of the Communists, because the point of that thorn would have penetrated to the Yalu River, but still a horn and one that the Communists do not know how to get rid of) and, lastly, the Dominican Republic, still there after twenty years of Communist scheming and conspiring and invading and character-assassinating—these, I repeat, are apart from Berlin *the* thorns that draw blood out of the side of World Communism; and in each case we have the Right-wing dictators to thank for them. Third—a similar but not identical point—the countries we have named as Right-wing dictatorships are, again uniquely and exclusively case by case, *the* countries in which the Communists have suffered what is for them the least acceptable of all defeats, namely: the defeat that makes it impossible for them to operate, except underground and upon well-understood pain of the severest punishment, on the home territory of an enemy they intend to destroy. “Right-wing dictatorships” is, then, merely another name for the countries in which there *is* no Communist movement, the countries that have made so firm a decision against Communism that they refuse to hear the so-called merits of Communism so much as discussed, and refuse to leave at large persons so mad, or so evil, or so misguided, as to wish to gain adherents for the cause of Communism, or to organize on Communism's behalf. Fourth, they are or have been—let us not trip up over the grammatical difficulty that the Rhee dictatorship is gone, and that the status of the Dominican Republic is at present in doubt—they have all been countries, regimes if you like, that have brought down on their heads the hatred and distrust of American and European Liberals, *all* Liberals, one is almost tempted to say all Liberals dead, living and unborn, and hatred and distrust in its most venomous and vindictive and voracious form—hatred and distrust that never never sleep, that demand the total destruction of the thing hated and distrusted, hatred and distrust that know no scruples about the means—misrepresentation, trickery, what have you—with which to accomplish the desired destruction. Fifth—let us think now not about whether American Conservatives *should* support the Right-wing dictatorships but whether they have supported them and do support them,

are more directly involved in Spain and Formosa than in Korea and the Dominican Republic (if that seems so today, it is *because* of Right-wing support for Franco and Chiang, *not* the other way round). And not because we are more ignorant about Korea and the Dominican Republic. More ignorant we are, but not more ignorant than we were once about Spain and Formosa (here again we must not mistake the result for the cause). The reason, I imagine, is something like this: that Franco and Chiang have been more intelligent and more assiduous in seeking and finding that original core of Right-wing American support that, by effort and education, can be snow-balled into the "enough" I have spoken of. Or if not more intelligent and assiduous then luckier, in the sense that *some* American Right-wingers just happened, in their cases but not in the others, to get busy and do the job. But it has been, in all four cases, the *same* job, and I think we may soon be paying very dearly for the fact that the job has *not* been done for the Dominican Republic. If it makes sense, makes sense that is on Conservative principles, for the American Right to frustrate Liberal and Communist designs on Franco and Chiang, then on those same principles it would have made sense to frustrate Liberal designs in Korea, and would today make sense to frustrate Liberal designs on the Dominican Republic. The issues at stake there are the same, and the American interests at stake are if not identical at least of the same character. And those issues are: First, whether a political regime that is more on the West's side than the West is, a regime that is a thorn in the side of World Communism that really hurts, is to survive, or go down the drain. And whether a situation that the Communists are determined to dominate is or is not to be thrown open to Communist and Communist-front infiltration, subversion, and mischief-making.

To put it otherwise, the Liberal and Communist designs on the Dominican Republic, especially the Liberal designs right now because they must succeed before the Communist designs become relevant, are certainly present, and seem to be carrying the day—seem to, that is, in the absence of Right-wing efforts to frustrate them.

Let me sketch the main facts we need to flesh out that statement.

Item. Trujillo was assassinated at the end of May—assassinated, incidentally, late at night, on a lonely road, without a guard, though he must have known himself to have more enemies, who desired his death, than any man in the world. The assassins, so far as we know,

were local soreheads, since no evidence has come to light of foreign intervention in the plot.

Item. Shortly before Trujillo's death the Office of American States—whether at the Department of State's instigation we need not say—had found Trujillo guilty of participating in an assassination plot against President Betancourt of Venezuela. The Office of American States had called upon its members to break off diplomatic relations with the Dominican Republic, and had imposed economic sanctions upon it. The United States, for example, has today no diplomatic representation in Ciudad Trujillo, and the Dominican Republic did not benefit from the transfer of coveted sugar quotas from Cuba to other sugar producers. And let us pause over that item a minute: the Office of American States, with U.S. approval and participation, has gone into what we may call the ostracism business, claiming the power, so to speak, to read nations out of the American community, and to do so, so to speak, on grounds of moral turpitude. But the first victim of its ostracism is the Right wing, anti-Communist dictatorship in Hispaniola, not the quasi-Communist, pro-Communist dictatorship in Cuba.

Item. The economic sanctions against the Dominican Republic have begun to draw blood: foreign exchange is scarce, and the formerly solid and proud Dominican peso is under pressure; business is slowing down, unemployment is growing, much-needed imports are in short supply; the pace of the deceleration is, moreover, rapid, and may within the near future run the Dominican Republic into insuperable economic difficulties, with political repercussions unpleasant to think about. What Castro is doing to the Cuban economy in the name of nationalism, which is to say ruining it, the Dominican Republic's neighbors are doing to it in the name of some newfangled international morality; and our government, yours and mine, is helping every day to pull the noose tighter.

Item. No-one, least of all the Dominicans, knows what the Dominican Republic must do to purge itself of its guilt and rid itself of the hated sanctions; all one can say is: attention has shifted from Trujillo and the assassination plot against Betancourt to—by what magical process of transubstantiation no one can say—the quality of the "freedom" enjoyed by the individual citizen of the Dominican Republic as such. As matters originally stood, with the Dominican Republic being punished for a personal act by Trujillo, one might

have expected the punishment to cease with Trujillo's death—as, clearly, the victim of the punishment is the Dominican people, who certainly had not participated in the famous assassination plot. But no, the point now is that potential opponents of the existing regime are not as free to “oppose,” to speak their minds and organize, as certain persons outside the Dominican Republic think they should be, and that the Dominican Republic is to purge itself by improving matters in that regard—or, more accurately, by convincing persons outside that matters have been improved in that regard. Improved how much? The Dominicans do not know. Over how long a period? Again the Dominicans do not know. How establish the fact of the improvement? That they know least of all; for there is no established tribunal to which the relevant proofs might be brought.

Item: The Office of American States did, after Trujillo's death, send a commission of observers to the Dominican Republic—to look into that little business of freedom to oppose. The commission's report has yet to be published, some cynical observers say because it gave the Dominican Republic a cleaner bill of health than the commission's masters expected and desired, while other observers offer no explanation at all.

Item. The press—what we at *National Review* call the “Establishment Press”—has clamped down on the Dominican Republic a news blackout unlike anything this speaker has ever seen. The only way the Dominican Republic can get its name in the newspapers these days is by some “incident”, of one kind or another, which suggests or might seem to suggest that the Dominican regime's opponents, known or potential, are being terrorized. Outside opinion, in other words, learns about the Dominican Republic only those facts, or alleged facts, that would appear to justify, under the present rules of the game, continuance of the sanctions.

Item. The castigation of the Dominican Republic has given joy in Liberal and Communist circles comparable only to that which, we are told, the soul of the sinner saved gives to the heavenly hosts on high. The Dominican government—it is, indeed, made up of friends of Trujillo, so the fact that the Generalissimo is six feet under need not be overstressed—is over exactly the barrel they have always wanted it over: it must set the people free! or else starve—or, as we have noted, perhaps *both*. And it is worth pausing over the apparent logic of the joy, which is: The victors in a really-free Dominican

election, it is confidently believed, will be the opponents of Trujillo and all his works—that is, a government with policies as unlike his as it is possible to imagine; that is, a government—for this surely is the point—with ideas as like as possible to those of, say, Trujillo's great enemy the Venezuelan government; that is, a Leftist government, not likely to offend anyone by its excessive and hysterical anti-Communism; that is, a government acceptable within the sacred precincts of the Office of American States. In a word: the Dominican Republic is to purge itself by getting itself a Leftist government.

Item: The Liberals and Communists should be joyous about the barrel the Dominican government is over, but for a different reason, out of a different logic, than that just named—should, that is, if all they want is to get rid of the Trujillo regime and the devil take the consequences. For the barrel, when carefully examined, turns out to be this: The elections are many, many months off. During those months, unless it is to abandon the hope of getting rid of the sanctions, the Dominican government must admit to its territory pretty much any exiled Dominican who alleges a political reason for wishing to return, or who might, if not admitted, claim that he was refused on political grounds. And it must not only admit him: it must leave him free to speak and to organize, to agitate and incite, to do any of the things that by the widest stretch of the imagination can be brought under the term “electoral freedom.” Let the government turn someone down; let it try to silence someone on the grounds that what he is saying is *not* electoral activity within any civilized definition of the term, but incitement to hatred and violence; let it—oh most unthinkable of thoughts—crack down on some demonstration that has got out of hand, on some meeting that threatens to turn into a riot; let it do any of those things, and they will say, out over the Hemisphere: just as we thought. The terror continues. Let it do any of those things and then win the election, and they will say out over the Hemisphere that the elections were not democratic, and that the officers newly elected have no proper mandate. The Dominican government has been dealt a hand with which it must lose even if it wins.

Item. Either the present rulers of the Dominican Republic are the most accomplished liars this speaker has ever listened to lies from, or they have no fear of a fair election. They are confident they will win such an election, and win it hands down, against any opposition movement that might offer a serious alternative to existing policies,

that will participate in fair debate as to what the Dominican Republic ought to do. What they are afraid of is Communism—not of course electoral victory by a Communist Party with a Communist program that is offered as frankly that to the Dominican people, but long-run *military* victory by a Communist movement that will act largely by conspiracy and in secrecy, that will do its business as, at first, it did in Czechoslovakia, by infiltration of strategic positions in Dominican society, and that will express itself not in votes but in a military *putsch*—probably like Castro's, off in a corner of the country, from which—with arms supplied in all likelihood, by Castro himself or his Soviet allies—it will proceed to conquer the country. What the Dominicans fear is, in a word, Civil War; what they see clearly is that the recipe of electoral freedom being imposed from outside is a recipe for disorder, and disorder from which only the Communists can emerge victorious because only they know how to profit from disorder, how to turn it to strategic advantage in the naked struggle for power, how, progressively, to disarm a government in its attempt to prevent disorder. And—for we have come full circle—American Conservatives seem content to leave the Dominicans to their fate, to withhold from them the support they would surely give to Franco and Chiang if they were put over such a barrel; and I ask, Can the withholding be squared with Conservative principle? And if not, should not the struggle against the Dominican sanctions be raised, in the months ahead, to the highest level of priority for the Conservative upsurge—if indeed it is an upsurge and if indeed it is Conservative. And I propose to try to say, briefly, what Conservative principles are—a question that we can best work our way into by asking, quite simply, Who are the American Conservatives?

Now:

1. The usual procedure for dealing with that question—even among people who ought to know better—is this: “the Conservatives” are people who are trying to “conserve” something handed down out of the past; and the problem is to identify that moment in the past when men we know to have been conservatives were making their voices heard. Let us study attentively what those men said, and get clear in our heads what their principles were; and let us, thereafter, apply the word Conservative to those men and movements in the present who have remained faithful to those principles.

You are, I am sure, familiar with this way of slicing the problem;

and the first point I want to make tonight is that it won't do. There is no moment in history you can point to and say, “This is when the Conservatives showed their true colors”; we can, perhaps, identify, voices out of the past that were articulating Conservative principles; but the only way to recognize them is by knowing, *beforehand*, what principles we are listening for.

Another mistaken procedure rests on the simplistic notion that Conservatism is sheer opposition to change. Among the writers of our day, Professor Clinton Rossiter—that Trojan Horse that the Liberals have spirited into the Conservative camp—has done most to popularize it, and to conceal the fact that it is root and branch wrong. Wrong, first of all, because it identifies something called Tradition, about which Conservatism is passionately concerned, with something with which Conservatism has no concern whatever, namely, a merely static state of affairs. Wrong, secondly, because it makes no distinction between opposition to change and opposition to change in undesirable directions. And wrong, thirdly, because it conceals the fact that the essence of Conservatism often expresses itself in an insistent demand *for* change—sometimes, indeed, in a demand for *drastic* change. Professor Rossiter and his allies merely obscure our problem before us. Their purpose is not to explain or define Conservatism, but to make it look foolish.

Nor, thirdly, can we define Conservatism, as some people are always trying to do, by spotting the “real” American Conservatives of the present. I take no pleasure in recording the fact, but the *dramatis personae* of contemporary American politics includes no adequate spokesman of the Conservative approach. Senator Bricker, for example, did yeoman's service for Conservatism when he pressed the struggle for the famous Bricker Amendment, and any Conservative worth his salt had to wish him well in that struggle; but we must not forget that Bricker's voting record on many other matters was hardly less Liberal than, say, that of Senator Douglas. The late Senator Pat McCarran earned the undying gratitude of all Conservatives when his Internal Security Committee forced the facts of the Communist conspiracy upon American public opinion and, later, when he initiated the rapprochement between the U.S. and Spain, but McCarran was also the spokesman of the silver states, and by playing that role made the sort of compromise with principle that Conservatism most deplors. Senator McCarthy's battle against the bureaucrats for a

tough loyalty-security program in the government service was a Conservative battle; but his voting record on, say, agricultural subsidies was one over which the Conservative can only shudder. Representative Francis Walter, whose task it is to fight off the Liberals' semianual attacks on our traditional immigration policy, can be sure that the nation's Conservative elements will always rally behind him; he is, for that one purpose—the purpose of preventing further inroads upon our nation's cultural homogeneity—a Conservative; but I seldom encounter his name in connection with other Conservative causes. Senator Byrd, similarly, speaks for Conservatism on the budget; Senator Knowland used to speak sound conservative sense on foreign policy and, most particularly, on the falsity of the ideal of world government as Barry Goldwater does today, and as Barry Goldwater has been doing of late on the very different topic of Newburgh; both Knowland and Goldwater, however, have cast many a strange Senate vote on many another issue.

In short: one of the peculiarities of American public life is that whereas there *are* Liberals (Senator Humphrey, Senator Douglas, Representative Celler, the learned justices of the United States Supreme Court come to mind) who go down the line with Liberalism, so that the stand they will take on any given issue is readily predictable, there is no comparable phenomenon on the Conservative side.

Nor, fourthly, can we get far into the problem with the idea, a prominent Liberal propaganda theme, that the American Conservative tradition is a "Conservative tradition" with a "Liberal content." Like the other heresies to which I have alluded, this one has, to be sure, its element of truth, namely: The great political decisions of recent decades *have* to some extent reflected Liberal ideas, and Conservatives have gone along with them to some extent. But to leap from this statement about the immediate past to the conclusion that the content of our Conservative tradition is Liberal—that, as Myrdal would have us believe, what Americans are bent on conserving out of the past is a frenzied zeal for Liberal reforms—is in my opinion to miss the point about our politics, which is: The Conservative tradition in America is not only Conservative but profoundly Conservative, with a profoundly Conservative content; which, if I may put it so, explains why our politics in this country tend to be about Liberalism. To put it otherwise: The basic inertia of our politics is a forward Conservative inertia. When American society "changes" it changes

for the most part—as Conservatives wish it to—in the proper direction; that is, in the direction in which it must change in order to become more and more like itself at its best. Changes in that direction—the various steps in the evolution of our present party system are conspicuous examples—tend, however, to take place quietly, unobtrusively, and without becoming sharp political issues. Of late, to be sure, our politics have tended to be very noisy indeed; but the reason is that the Liberals, here as everywhere rebels against our Tradition, do not wish American society to become more and more like itself—wish it, rather, to become something very different from itself. They are, therefore, constantly putting forward proposals for making it over in their image of what a society should be like—proposals born of their instinctive dislike for the American way of life and for the basic political and social principles presupposed in it, and certain, therefore, to run up against vigorous and uninterrupted Conservative resistance. And "presupposed," come to think of it, is just the right word. For the fundamental beliefs involved in a way of life tend, I believe, to remain inarticulate—to be lived rather than spoken or argued about—until a political force arises that is capable of destroying it. Liberalism is not (or at least not yet) such a force. But its proposals are, increasingly, the subject-matter of American political discussion.

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And this explains, it seems to me, why we have in our political life no consistent and articulate spokesmen for Conservatism. Since the American political tradition itself *is* a Conservative tradition with a Conservative content, and *is* clearly understood as such by those who live the American way of life and love it, it has—up to now at least—required no political party to represent it, no political theorist to set it down in black and white, no statesman to embody and symbolize it. The "Conservative" political leaders who arise to fight off Liberal attacks upon the tradition's content do not vote together, do not support each other, indeed, do not particularly like each other; they do not go down the line with a corpus of Conservative doctrine, because there *is* no line to go down, no corpus of Conservative doctrine to be faithful to. Senator Byrd rallies the resistance on this

Liberal proposal, Senator McCarran on that one, Representative Walter on yonder one; and because Liberalism, though not strong enough to dominate our politics, is strong enough to keep them confused and on the defensive, each tends to play out his Conservative role merely with respect to the one or two issues *he* happens to have got mobilized about and understands. The Conservative position, in consequence, is the sum-total of their respective positions on the series of issues the Liberals are pressing; and up to now, I repeat, no greater unity among them has been needed. They make up, so to speak, the machinery through which our Conservative people defend their way of life. And the absence of unity among them is a sign not of weakness but of strength; as the mood, the animus, and the political philosophy that underlie their stands on their respective issues add up to Conservatism.

Let me illustrate what I mean by trying to put into words what seems to be the Conservative position on three of the current Liberal attacks on the American tradition, namely:

First, the Liberal attempt to construe the First Amendment as a firm mandate for an "open" society, which involves the entire Liberal stand on such matters as the current persecution of the Communists, academic freedom, and the fundamentally religious basis—that is, the Judeo-Christian basis—of American society. Second, the Liberal attempt to transform the American political system into a *plebiscitary* system. And, third, the Liberal attempt to construe the American tradition as an egalitarian tradition, friendly to the kind of levelling whose predictable result would be world-wide uniformity—of economic status, of subordination to something called the Conscience of Mankind as expressed by something called the United Nations, of religious or rather irreligious belief, and of political philosophy or organization.

On the first of these matters, the question whether the First Amendment to the Constitution is to be treated as a mandate for an open society, the Conservative takes his stand in line with the Great Tradition in political philosophy. He assumes, with Plato and Aristotle and Hobbes and Rousseau, that any viable society has an *orthodoxy*—a set of fundamental beliefs, implicit in its way of life, that it cannot and should not and, in any case, *will* not submit to the vicissitudes of the market place. He assumes, again with the tradition, that no society can survive—or should survive—without foundations

driven deep in religious belief. And he assumes, with the authors of the Declaration of Independence, that no *good* society can be conceived that does not regard itself as moving through History—I take the phrase from Eric Voegelin—under God, ultimately therefore under a law whose source is the divine will, for a purpose that lies outside History. He finds in the First Amendment no mention of a right to think and say whatever one pleases, or of a duty on the part of American citizens to tolerate and live with and interminably discuss any and every opinion that their neighbors may take into their heads. And he holds that if the First Amendment *does* recognize such a right and such a duty, then the moment is coming when the First Amendment will itself have to be brought into line with Conservative principles regarding the character of the good society.

The Conservative, then, views with pride the fact that the American people have always construed the First Amendment, despite what it says about an established religion, as *not* forbidding them to acknowledge God on their coins, or in their oath of allegiance, to exempt religious institutions from taxation, to open sessions of their national legislature with prayer, or to retain chaplains in their armed forces. The Conservative views with horror the thesis of Mill's *Essay on Liberty*, according to which a man can hold and publicly defend any opinion, however repugnant to morality, and still be regarded as a good—or even acceptable—citizen. And—to come to the main point—he regards the present clear determination of the American people not to permit the emergence of a Communist minority in their midst—their determination, as I like to put it, to place the price of being a Communist so high that no American is likely to pay it—as a manifestation of good sense that he can only applaud.

In a word: If by an open society is meant a society built on an unlimited right to think and say what you please, with impunity and without let or hindrance, then Conservatism holds that American society is *not* such a society, and must not become such a society. And, to tie that back to the Dominican Republic, we should expect the Conservative to take a dim view of, to oppose, Liberal attempts to force other societies to become open societies.

Secondly, Conservatism views with profound disapproval American Liberalism's increasingly clear intention to realize what let's call the plebiscitary potential in the American Constitution. Conservatism does not deny that that potential is present in the Constitution:

Article V, which deals with amendments, is obviously an authorization for—if not an invitation to—the submission of even our most fundamental institutions to popular debate and, ultimately, majority-rule. The plebiscitary potential—the majority-rule potential—is, I say, there as far as the Constitution is concerned, but the American political tradition, happily, has always taken a dim view of it; and the American people—who, I repeat, have proved themselves to be better carriers of their political tradition than any individual among them—usually choose to operate their Constitution as if its plebiscitary potential were absent—and have, to that end, developed four political *habits* that have been clung to in a way that enables us to regard them as established American institutions. First, the habit of not abolishing the filibuster in the U.S. Senate. Second, the habit of not upsetting the apple-cart as regards the seniority system in congressional committees. Third, the habit of not organizing themselves—we are speaking, remember, of the American people—in political parties of an ideological or programmatic character, which might separate them off into huge, sharply-opposed groupings, capable of turning American elections into plebiscites. And, fourth, the habit of being difficult to mobilize for political purposes, especially the political purposes of amending the Constitution.

Here, entirely outside and independent of the Constitution, are the real guarantees in America against plebiscitary elections and unlimited majority-rule; and they reflect, as I see it, a sober and sustained judgment on the part of the American people that nationwide plebiscites are not good instrumentalities for making public policy, and that even if they were, we must not use them because of their tendency to divide us, to make us bad friends with one another.

These four habits, however, are precisely the points in the American political system upon which the Liberal intellectuals keep up their most insistent pressure. The filibuster, they repeat over and over again, must go, for how else can we get integration in the South? The seniority system, they shout from the roof-tops, must go; for how else can we get rid of Representative Walter? What the nations needs, they tell us, alike in their speeches and in the textbooks they write for our political science courses, is two parties that *really* disagree, so that every election will provide a real *mandate* for a clearly understood program. The instinctive refusal of the American people to mobilize for political purposes, they assure us, is just what is *wrong*

with American politics; let us, therefore, tie more and more people into the political process, into a mass-communications network that keeps people's minds on politics to the virtual exclusion of all else.

Well, on all four points, Conservatism can only say: You are breaking with the American political tradition, which is Conservative and therefore not that sort of thing at all; and we will resist you to the last. And, again tying back to the Dominican Republic, we should expect Conservatism to take a dim view of, to oppose, Liberal attempts to force majority-rule on other countries.

Which brings me to my third and last issue, namely, the increasing tendency of Liberals to appeal, if I do not misunderstand them, to the principle of equality in its crudest form. I for one seem to sense such an appeal in much of the current argument in favor of foreign aid, where the idea seems to be that *because* we are rich and they are poor, it is our duty to share our riches with them. I seem to sense such an appeal, again, in much of the current argument against segregation, where the idea seems to be that if anybody enjoys privileges everybody else doesn't have then something ought to be done about it. I seem to sense such an appeal in the current propaganda in favor of a United Nations Bill of Rights, each draft of which seems to come closer to saying: nothing will do except a world-wide cooperative commonwealth of equal men.

Well, either the appeal is there, or it is not; either the Liberals are saying, in effect, one drunken wife-beater equals one gentleman, one ignoramus equals one scholar, one lazy pauper equals one hard-working merchant; either they are saying that, or they are not. But if they are saying it, Conservatism can give only one answer, which is the answer it believes the American people have consistently given to Liberal leveling proposals. *Rights and privileges are correlative to duties: a man has a right to those rights and privileges that he earns by the performance of his duties.* People differ enormously, moreover, in their capacity and disposition to discharge duties, and in the energy they can put into the attempt; and the good society is good just to the extent that it confers rights and privileges on those of its members who perform their duties, and withholds right and privileges from those who do not perform them.

And this, of course, is the point that should make it easiest for American Conservatives to identify and accept their obligation to go to the assistance of their beleaguered allies in the Dominican Republic.

lic. All that can possibly come out of the present American policy toward the Dominican Republic, that American policy which I believe American Conservatives could yet call a halt to were they to act *soon*, must be to level the Dominican Republic as Castroism has leveled Cuba, as the USSR has leveled Russia and the Iron Curtain countries, as Mao Tse-tung has leveled China—to destroy those meaningful distinctions of rank, of privilege, of wealth, of prestige and position that any decent society develops and builds into itself as it grows toward achievement of the purposes that called it into being as a society—to snuff out of existence one further component of that West, that Christendom, that Communism and Liberalism set out to obliterate more than a century ago. We of the American Right—stupidly, irresponsibly—permitted it to happen in Cuba; we must not permit it to happen again in the Dominican Republic. All of our principles—the three basic principles I have tried to lay on the line tonight—require us to rescue the Dominican Republic from our own Department of State.

(Fall, 1961.)

Basic Issues Between Conservatives and Liberals



The topic of this article: those two groups of politically-conscious people out in American society, the "Liberals" and the "Conservatives," and the whole question of what the disagreement between them is about. Should I tarry to argue with the man, ex-President Eisenhower for instance, who insists that no such groups actually exist—as witness the impossibility of drawing a meaningful line between them? I think not: the groups seem to have little difficulty identifying themselves, and can, paraphrasing Descartes' *enthymeme*, say "Nous nous identifions, donc nous sommes"; and as for the contention that no-one can say what they disagree about, let us dismiss it as question-begging.

My thesis is, then, that we know what we mean when we make to one another such statements as the following: The Liberals support Medicare; the Conservatives oppose it. The Liberals would like to broaden and deepen our social security system until it is finally applicable from womb to tomb; the Conservatives think we'd have been better off if we had never gone in for that sort of thing to begin with. The Liberals take seriously the so-called disarmament negotiations with the Soviets, and take them seriously because they favor disarmament—would, if the Russians too would only be serious about disarmament, actually *disarm* the U.S.; the Conservatives regard the disarmament negotiations as essentially fraudulent, and would not think of disarming even if the Russians were willing. The Liberals dream dreams of out-lawing war, of establishing an international authority empowered to prevent war, of an indefinite future in which the nations will live side by side in peace and unity; the Conservatives dream no such dreams; they regard even the existing United Nations organization with suspicion, would not hesitate to challenge its authority if ever it tried to call the United States on the carpet, and take it for granted that wars have quite a future on this planet just as they have had quite a past—in short, Conservatives dislike the orientation of American foreign policy toward pacifism and world govern-