

Posted to the Gilder forum - September 14, 2000

Hayek and Election 2000

From the Preface to the 1956 USA edition of "The Road to Serfdom" by F. A. Hayek.

"The fact that this book was originally written with only the British public in mind does not appear to have seriously affected its intelligibility for the American reader. But there is one point of phraseology which I ought to explain here to forestall any misunderstanding. I use throughout the term 'liberal' in the original, nineteenth-century sense in which it is still current in Britain. In current American usage it often means very nearly the opposite of this. It has been part of the camouflage of leftist movements in this country, helped by the muddleheadedness of many who really believe in liberty, that 'liberal' has come to mean the advocacy of almost every kind of government control. I am still puzzled why those in the United States who truly believe in liberty should not only have allowed the left to appropriate this almost indispensable term but should even have assisted by beginning to use it themselves as a term of opprobrium. This seems to be particularly regrettable because of the consequent tendency of many true liberals to describe themselves as conservatives.

"It is true, of course, that in the struggle against the believers in the all-powerful state the true liberal must sometimes make common cause with the conservative, and in some circumstances, as in contemporary Britain, he has hardly any other way of actively working for his ideals. But the true liberalism is still distinct from conservatism, and there is danger in the two being confused. Conservatism, though a necessary element in any stable society, is not a social program; in its paternalistic, nationalistic, and power-adoring tendencies it is often closer to socialism than true liberalism; and with its traditionalistic, anti-intellectual, and often mystical propensities it will never, except in short periods of disillusionment, appeal to the young and all those others who believe that some changes are desirable if this world is to become a better place. A conservative movement, by its very nature, is bound to be a defender of established privilege and to lean on the power of government for the protection of privilege. The essence of the liberal position, however, is the denial of all privilege, if privilege is understood in its proper and original meaning of the state granting and

protecting rights to some which are not available on equal terms to others.

On a related note on words, one of my favorites, "gay," has been misappropriated by the homosexual community to disguise their sadness. To argue the contrary would be to say that heterosexuals are the sad ones!

Denny

"Demand creates queues. Supply gets rid of them."