

LIBERALISM: An Enlightenment Theory of Individualism and Government

(Liberalism was a theory developed to oppose hereditary aristocracy and the “divine right of kings”)

I. Liberalism and Freedom

- A. Necessity of freedom to achieve every desired aim
- B. Moral worth and absolute value of the essential dignity of the human personality
- C. Individual as an end in itself (primary worth)
- D. Political liberty -- the power to do what does not injure others (limits are determined by law)
- E. Therefore opposed to absolute authority of state, church, party or mass which would limit freedom
- F. Goal -- To free the individual from unjust and hampering restraints imposed on him by governments, institutions, and traditions.
- G. Society can safely be founded on the self-directed power of individual personality
- H. Freedom to associate -- add weight of like-minded individuals to exert political power.

II. Liberalism and Equal Rights

- A. Civil Rights
- B. **NOT** equality of ability or moral perception **BUT EQUAL RIGHTS UNDER THE LAW**
- C. Universal, equal suffrage
- D. Equality of opportunity

III. Liberalism and Government

- A. **Social Contract Theory**-- Individual gives up some liberty for safety
- B. Chief end of government is to uphold the liberty, equality, and security of all its citizens
- C. Rule of law emanates from a law-making body freely elected by citizens
- D. Limitations on the power of government
- E. Civil liberties are inalienable
- F. Government of law, not men.

IV. Liberalism and Intellectual Freedom

- A. Freedom of thought and expression
- B. Abolish censorship
- C. “The ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas -- that the best test of truth is the power of thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market.”
-- Oliver Wendell Holmes (note metaphor)
- D. Capitalism (How does Capitalism embody some of the same values as Liberalism?)

V. Rationality

- A. Conviction that Man is essentially a rational creature (so that people may reason together)
- B. Objective truth is discoverable through reason and the scientific method

VI. Progress

- A. Increased knowledge leads to **REFORM** which leads to a **slowly** better life **for all**.

VII. Values and Embodiment

- A. Declaration of Independence
- B. Bill of Rights

- C. Social Contract Theory of Government
- D. Constitutional Government
- E. Individualism and Individuality (liberty)
- F. Rationality
- G. Progress
- H. Balance between liberty and safety; individual and government
- I. Ideology of bourgeoisie (especially rising bourgeoisie)

Declaration of Independence

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. --That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

Declaration of the Rights of Man - 1789

The representatives of the French people, organized as a National Assembly, believing that the ignorance, neglect, or contempt of the rights of man are the sole cause of public calamities and of the corruption of governments, have determined to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, unalienable, and sacred rights of man, in order that this declaration, being constantly before all the members of the Social body, shall remind them continually of their rights and duties; in order that the acts of the legislative power, as well as those of the executive power, may be compared at any moment with the objects and purposes of all political institutions and may thus be more respected, and, lastly, in order that the grievances of the citizens, based hereafter upon simple and incontestable principles, shall tend to the maintenance of the constitution and redound to the happiness of all. Therefore the National Assembly recognizes and proclaims, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of man and of the citizen:

Articles:

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.
2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.
3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.

- 4.** Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law.
- 5.** Law can only prohibit such actions as are hurtful to society. Nothing may be prevented which is not forbidden by law, and no one may be forced to do anything not provided for by law.
- 6.** Law is the expression of the general will. Every citizen has a right to participate personally, or through his representative, in its foundation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally eligible to all dignities and to all public positions and occupations, according to their abilities, and without distinction except that of their virtues and talents.
- 7.** No person shall be accused, arrested, or imprisoned except in the cases and according to the forms prescribed by law. Any one soliciting, transmitting, executing, or causing to be executed, any arbitrary order, shall be punished. But any citizen summoned or arrested in virtue of the law shall submit without delay, as resistance constitutes an offense.
- 8.** The law shall provide for such punishments only as are strictly and obviously necessary, and no one shall suffer punishment except it be legally inflicted in virtue of a law passed and promulgated before the commission of the offense.
- 9.** As all persons are held innocent until they shall have been declared guilty, if arrest shall be deemed indispensable, all harshness not essential to the securing of the prisoner's person shall be severely repressed by law.
- 10.** No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law.
- 11.** The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law.
- 12.** The security of the rights of man and of the citizen requires public military forces. These forces are, therefore, established for the good of all and not for the personal advantage of those to whom they shall be entrusted.
- 13.** A common contribution is essential for the maintenance of the public forces and for the cost of administration. This should be equitably distributed among all the citizens in proportion to their means.
- 14.** All the citizens have a right to decide, either personally or by their representatives, as to the necessity of the public contribution; to grant this freely; to know to what uses it is put; and to fix the proportion, the mode of assessment and of collection and the duration of the taxes.
- 15.** Society has the right to require of every public agent an account of his administration.
- 16.** A society in which the observance of the law is not assured, nor the separation of powers defined, has no constitution at all.
- 17.** Since property is an inviolable and sacred right, no one shall be deprived thereof except where public necessity, legally determined, shall clearly demand it, and then only on condition that the owner shall have been previously and equitably indemnified.