

Progressive Movement

Just as the end of the Cold War opened up divisions among conservatives, it should serve to heal them among progressives. The post-Cold War world offers the prospect of a new coalition of liberalism and the Left, which have had little fruitful collaboration since the Progressive Party movement of 1948 drove a wedge between them. William F. Buckley used anti-communism to hold together a "fusionist" coalition among the conflicting branches of conservatism in the 1950s, but the demise of Communism (which has split conservatism into feuding factions again) now offers the opportunity for a progressive "fusion" at the junction of liberalism and the Left -- reviving the grand tradition of populism, progressivism, democratic socialism, and New Deal reforms. The components of this progressive fusion remain to be formulated, but would likely include a full employment economy that competes with Japan and Europe in the world market, a defense of social justice and human rights in the fullest sense, a new system of global security based on international institutions for conflict resolution, and global environmental protection with sustainable economic growth for developing countries.

In the 1930s President Franklin D. Roosevelt knitted together the New Deal coalition of labor, liberals, big city machines that mobilized working class white ethnic groups, urban blacks in the North, and lower and middle income Southern whites. Without explicitly saying so, the New Deal incorporated much of the reform spirit and program of earlier populist, progressive, and socialist movements. The coalition held together through Harry Truman's Fair Deal and eight years of Dwight Eisenhower's "Modern Republicanism" (which accepted the New Deal reforms as a given) to John F. Kennedy's New Frontier and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society.

Cold War liberalism was a response to Stalin's consolidation of control over Eastern Europe in 1947. President Truman announced his "containment" doctrine, supporting Greece and Turkey against Communist insurgents, and proposed the Marshall Plan of economic aid to revive Europe. Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) formed in 1948, specifically excluding Communists, who helped organize Henry Wallace's Progressive Party campaign against Truman. The Progressive Party fiasco marked the end of Communist influence in the labor movement and set the stage for Senator Joseph McCarthy's demagogic attack against the Left in the early 1950s. The National Committee for an Effective Congress (NCEC), founded in 1948, was a pioneer liberal political action committee in tune with ADA but taking a looser, more pragmatic approach to electing liberals to Congress. Both ADA and NCEC were on the defensive during the anti-communist assaults of Senator Joseph McCarthy and Dwight Eisenhower's presidency, only to revive with John F. Kennedy's election in 1960.

Lyndon Johnson defeated conservative Barry Goldwater in a landslide victory in 1964, but just four years later he declined to run again -- virtually forced from office -- and the New Deal coalition fell apart. Since 1968 Republicans held the White House for 20 of the next 24 years. What happened? The mid-1960s produced a political divide that split the Democrats along new fault lines. The Vietnam war divided Democrats into a Cold War liberal wing headed by Senator Henry Jackson and Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who

would hold the line against Communism at all costs, and a new liberal wing led first by Senators Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy and later George McGovern, who would reassess America's Cold War foreign policy. A backlash to the civil rights movement and urban riots in the black inner cities pulled away the "George Wallace Democrats," Southern whites and Northern urban white ethnics who gravitated toward the Republicans, at least when voting for president. The counter-cultural radicalism of the late 1960s seemed to blend into the feminist, gay liberation, and environmental movements of 1970s, further alienating the culturally conservative working class base of the Democrats.

The New Left that emerged in the early 1960s took little guidance from either liberals or the Old Left (although some of its early leaders were "red diaper babies," children of Old Leftists). When Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) developed its platform for participatory democracy (the Port Huron Statement) in 1962, it established a "non-exclusionary" principle that ignored as irrelevant the anti-communism of the Cold War liberals. SDS found a student civil rights counterpart in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which produced a new generation of black leaders. Both SDS and SNCC disintegrated by the end of the 1960s, with some post-student SDSers regrouping in a democratic socialist organization, the New American Movement (NAM) in 1971, while others went into various organizations termed "the new communist movement" (also termed "Maoist" groups). One wing of SDS began the Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP) in the mid-1960s. Out of the ERAP community organizing experience came several people who helped start new community organizing projects in the 1970s -- which became the Citizen Action network in the 1980s. Another outgrowth of the civil rights, anti-poverty and anti-war movements of the 1960s and early 1970s was the liberal ecumenical religious lobby in Washington, DC.

The old Socialist Party was also pulled apart in 1972 by the Vietnam War and the question of backing George McGovern's Democratic campaign to unseat Richard Nixon as president. One faction, led by ex-Trotskyist Max Schachtman, supported the war and formed the Social Democrats USA (SDUSA), drawing closer to its allies in the AFL-CIO leadership and the Democrat's Henry Jackson wing. Another faction led by Michael Harrington opposed the war and formed the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC). In 1982 NAM and DSOC merged to form the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which worked to support social movements and build a left wing in the Democratic Party. SDUSA became part of the neoconservative movement that supported Ronald Reagan in the 1980s.

Reforms in the Democratic Party primary process initiated by McGovern opened the party to new activist constituencies -- including white collar teacher and public employee unions, blacks, women, gays, environmentalists, and peace advocates. Republicans portrayed the Democrats as captured by the "special interests," attentive only to the concerns of upper-middle class "limousine liberals." Democrats could not find the language and programs to mediate these new constituencies, defend the economic and cultural concerns of its working class and lower-middle class base, and articulate a vision of the public interest and the common good. Conservatives captured the "values" issues -- portraying themselves as the defenders of family, work, neighborhood, and patriotism.

The progressive center gained the most ground during the 1970s. John Gardner launched Common Cause in the "good government" tradition, attracting "procedural liberals" working for campaign finance reform and ethics in government. Common Cause supports a moderate progressive reform agenda similar to the League of Women Voters, but finds its constituency of men and women primarily through direct mail. Seeing that Gardner could do it, Ralph Nader in 1971 started his first direct mail membership organization -- Public Citizen -- building on his consumer protection record to promote corporate accountability and responsive government. Nader's Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) developed a constituency on college campuses in some 20 states.

The Greens emerged in the late 1980s out of the environmental movement, the counter-culture, and New Age thinking. Inspired by European Green parties, The Greens took several years to wade through its participatory, consensual process and formulate a program and strategy. Divided into grassroots movement and political party wings, the electoral Greens eventually became dominant, creating a national structure of state Green parties. After the "death of communism" and the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, remnants of the Marxist "vanguard" parties and other independent Marxists began an agonizing reappraisal of their experience -- and drifted in many directions, including minor party activity, union staff jobs, or academic teaching.

Progressive bloggers and online activists have added a new dimension to organizing and political fundraising. MoveOn.org, which began as an effort to move beyond the campaign to impeach President Bill Clinton, has combined online contact with face-to-face "meet-ups" that bring neighbors together for political action. Blogs like Daily Kos attract hundreds of thousands of viewers who have contributed millions of dollars to progressive Democratic candidates.

In the 2006 election, Democrats elected majorities in the House and Senate, ending several years of Republican domination of all three branches of the federal government. Democrats also made substantial gains in state legislatures. By mid-2007, the declining popularity of President George W. Bush and the Republican Party seemed to indicate that the "emerging Democratic majority" -- led by women, professionals, and minorities (with Latinos beginning to tip strongly in favor of Democrats) -- predicted by John Judis and Ruy Teixeira was back on track.

Annotated Bibliography

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How conservatives tipped the balance of power away from liberals is the subject of Thomas Byrne Edsall, *The New Politics of Inequality* (Norton, 1984); his recent book with Mary Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights and Taxes on American Politics* (Norton, 1991) continues the analysis. Robert Kuttner, *The Life of the Party: Democratic Prospects in 1988 and Beyond* (Viking Penguin, 1987) also follows the fate of the Democrats during the Reagan administration. For an incisive analysis of liberalism and conservatism from the 1960s to the 1990s, see E.J. Dionne, Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics* (Simon & Schuster, 1991), which concludes with a plea for a new political center. The founders of MyDD and Daily Kos, Jerome Armstrong and Markos Moulitsas Zuniga, have written their manifesto on the power of bloggers, *Crashing the Gate: Netroots, Grassroots, and the Rise of People-Powered Politics* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2006). John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira, *The Emerging Democratic Majority* (Scribner, 2002), predicts a new majority which appears to be back after being deflected for several years by the attacks on September 11, 2001.

For current commentary, see *The New Republic*, which has editors and writers ranging from liberal to neoconservative; the neoliberal *The Washington Monthly*; *The American Prospect*, which seeks to revive liberalism in the New Deal tradition, and on the left side, *Mother Jones*, *The Nation*, *The Progressive*, and *In These Times* .

New Left: The connections between the Old Left and the New Left that emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s are illuminated in Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer...The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (Basic Books, 1987). A contemporary history of the New Left's leading organization is Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (Random House, 1973; Vintage 1974). James Miller reviews SDS from the vantage point of the 1980s in "*Democracy is in the Streets:*" *From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (Simon & Schuster, 1987); sociologist Todd Gitlin, a former SDS leader, presents a wider perspective in *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Bantam, 1987). The journey of a number of New Left veterans into the "new communist movement" of the 1970s and

1980s is traced in Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (2002; Verso, 2006). From a democratic left perspective, Paul Berman *relates A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968* (Norton, 1996).

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We often forget that the 1960s produced the New Right as well as the New Left. Two books analyze this split in the Sixties generation: Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, second ed. (Oxford Univ. Press, 2004); and Rebecca E. Klatch, *A Generation Divided: The New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Univ. of California Press, 1999).

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Old Left. The Russian Revolution of 1917 divided the Left into two primary components, democratic socialists and communists, usually at odds with each other. For a history of the socialists, see David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America* (Macmillan, 1955; Quadrangle, 1967); and James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (Knopf, 1967); Vintage, 1969). All the arguments are assembled on an old question in Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (Norton, 2000). Four distinct Lefts (Lyrical, Old, New, and Academic) are defined by historian John Patrick Diggins in *The Rise and Fall of the American Left* (Norton, 1992).

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