**Saturday Evening Post, 2009**

Commentary on events and people of the day from a progressive perspective. By Jack Jodell.

**A PROGRESSIVE MANIFESTO**

## http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_3_wLjLrpYJM/SviPKWa34PI/AAAAAAAAAvM/hn8IfpJF8oY/s400/MANIFESTO+(2).jpgAs I surf the net and read articles and blogs of all shades of political and economic persuasion, I have become convinced of one thing: conservatives (and perhaps even some moderates and independents) simply do not understand in the least what the progressive viewpoint is all about. They evidently greatly fear that which they don't understand, for they constantly make wild, unfounded claims and accusations against us and distort our positions on issues and the bills our legislators propose. They cynically accuse us of deviousness and lying (perhaps because THEY are so inherently devious THEY find it necessary to lie so often?) and distrust everything we say. This is not civil discourse or behavior, and not what our democratic form of government is supposed to be all about. Regardless of whether these errant conservative suppositions are borne of fear, frustration, anger, hatred, or mere misunderstanding is immaterial. They are wrong - false - mistaken - untrue - pure fiction. So, to help clarify what we progressives are all about and exactly where we are coming from, I thought I would now begin a series clarifying our positions on matters of the economy, the role of government, religion, foreign policy, national defense, social mores, civil liberties, cultural issues, taxation, and perhaps a few other topics which affect all of our lives as well. I will not pretend to speak on behalf of all progressives in this, my progressive manifesto. I will be speaking for myself, but I do believe what I present in this series will will find resonance with a good many other progressives. Likewise, I will not pretend to have all the answers to all of the problems we currently face. I will only offer analyses of, and broad blueprints for possible progressive solutions of, the issues we all face today. Hopefully, this will make the progressive viewpoint seem more understandable and logical, and even more palatable and less fearsome, to those who profess to be conservatives. At the very least, my hope is to see them become less shrill and over the top in their disagreements with and objections to our positions. Maybe they'll even come to realize that we, just like they, are people who deeply love and care about this country, and are not wild-eyed, disheveled thieves hell-bent on taking all their money or destroying America.

## *THE ECONOMY*We progressives believe in equal economic opportunity for everyone, and that no one individual or small group of elites should hold a gigantic amount of the country's wealth all unto himself or themselves. We believe our country has the ability to provide for a comfortable, quality existence for all of its citizens. We oppose the concentration of too much wealth in too few places, and we also oppose the effort of some to grab nearly all the wealth for themselves by unfairly denying portions of it to others through market manipulation, price-fixing, wage freezes and cuts, or regressive taxation favoring the wealthy. We view those actions as redistributing the wealth upward to the wealthy, who don't need it. We do not oppose wealth, nor do we wish to take the vast majority of the wealthy group's riches to forcibly redistribute to everyone else. We simply believe that the gap between the ultra-wealthiest and everyone below them is unjustifiably high, and has been made artificially and undeservedly so. We believe human needs should come before, or at least right alongside of, profits. We therefore oppose acts like shipping good paying jobs to cheap foreign labor markets solely for the purpose of creating much greater profit for business. We oppose the paying of unjustifiably large salaries and bonuses to poorly performing business executives, and we oppose government bailouts to large banks and businesses without a strict accountability and an active repayment process by said banks and businesses. We favor heavier taxation on the very wealthy and on giant corporations. Those with huge stores of concentrated capital should pay a higher percentage of their incomes in taxes than do very small businesses and those on the bottom rungs of the income scale, simply because those at the top would still enjoy a far greater amount of wealth for further investment or merely as disposable income. We do not view higher taxes on the rich as a form of punishment to them for having riches, but rather as a way of bearing responsibility for maintaining high living standards for our society as a whole. We do not favor stifling taxation rates of greater than 65% as are found in some foreign countries, nor do we favor the current 35% rate on the highest incomes, as we believe it is far too low. We favor a more progressive form of taxation than exists today, perhaps something akin to a 45% tax rate on the highest incomes. That, coupled with tax cuts of 15-20% for the poor and middle class, would spur more consumer spending, thereby creating more jobs for workers and more wealth for business owners, a situation where everybody would win instead of a mere few. Business owners would still be free to save, invest, or spend as they wish, but rather than stagnant capital concentrations occurring, capital would flow more freely and fairly, creating even greater economic opportunity for all. We believe that people suffering and dying due to starvation, lack of proper sanitation and health care, and from unnecessary exploitation and deprivation while there exists huge pools of relatively unproductive concentrated capital, is an immoral situation that must be acted upon and changed. So long as things stay just as they are today, with the upper 5% of the population holding more than 50% of the wealth, needless stress, suffering, and early death will continue for the other 95%, particularly among the lowest 5%. This is indefensible and unsustainable. We are a nation built on law. The law provides us with a sense of required order and stabilization which permits all to thrive. Our legal system is not structured so that only 5% of the population can enjoy great freedoms and liberties. It is structured so that ALL may enjoy said liberty. So, too, must it now be with our economic system!

***THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT***

Teddy Roosevelt was a very influential and immensely popular Republican President.
**Republican Teddy Roosevelt was a progressive** who firmly believed government had the right and the obligation to look out for and protect the best interests of all the people. In an Osawatomie, KS speech given on August 31, 1910, he declared, "The object of government is the welfare of the people. The material progress and prosperity of a nation are desirable chiefly so far as they lead to the moral and material welfare of all good citizens." With this statement, he defined the progressive belief that government is an entity whose major responsibility is making certain that ALL citizens' needs are met, not just those of a particular class or income level. This was further reinforced by another 1910 speech he gave to an audience at the Sorbonne in Paris, when he stated, "Every man holds his property subject to the general right of the community to use to whatever degree the public welfare may require it." That statement, of course, also refers to government's role in regulating business, as he made clear in another speech, this one at the Progressive Party Convention in Chicago on June 17, 1912. "We wish to control big business so as to secure among other things good wages for the wage-workers and reasonable prices for the consumer", he said. By this time, his Republican Party had disagreed with him on the role of government, particularly as to how it related to business, so he had broken away from it to form a more progressive party, known back then as the Bull Moose Party.

Roosevelt's declarations stand in stark contrast to the beliefs of today's free-marketers and far-right conservative Republicans, who believe that government has no right at all to interfere with business and that the free market will fix whatever problems it encounters all, and best, by itself. We progressives believe this to be an errant, naive philosophy. Historical events prove OUR belief to be true, and theirs to be folly.

Wild, unregulated market speculation fueled by greed caused the crash of October, 1929, and led to the Great Depression. Similar wild unregulated speculation fueled by greed caused our summer of 2008 $4 per gallon gasoline problem, our mortgage banking problem, the failure of numerous banks, and contributed to our current Great Recession. In all these cases, had government been able to exercise a moderating influence on free market business initiatives, general prosperity would have been maintained rather than lost, and millions of people now unemployed would still have jobs. If the government had more power to regulate the health care industry, we would not have 1 of every 6.5 people in this country without health care insurance coverage, and the ever-rising costs of health care WOULDN'T be rising at a rate much higher than inflation or wages, and millions of citizens wouldn't be heading into bankruptcy due to medical costs. **In all of these cases the lack of government regulation and the totally free exercise taken by unrestrained concentrated capital hurt, rather than helped, the public welfare**. Each of these cases perfectly exposes the fallacy of private enterprise being able to take care of problems all on its own, without regulation.

**We progressives believe that government has the inherent power to protect its citizenry from powerful enemies from without as well as from powerful entities within.** You have every right to march and prance around as often and in any way you like, but should your marching and prancing be all over my toes and hurt my feet, we progressives say that your marching must be restricted, and that restriction should occur as a result of government regulation and supervision. That is only basic common sense, and so should it be with the marketplace. We do not believe that individuals or their businesses have the absolute right to do as they please without question; to force workers to work in unsafe conditions; to pay these workers, who actually produce the goods and services from which profit is made, very low wages while the company owner or CEO makes many hundreds of times that amount; or for an individual or business to be able to pollute the environment or endanger others in their pursuit of profit. In each case, we see the complete necessity of government to act as a regulator for the common good.

**We progressives do not at all agree with Ronald Reagan's assertion that government is the problem and not the solution. For government is the creator and enforcer of LAW, which is the underpinning of a stable and civilized nation. In the absence of law there is anarchy and constant civil disorder. Government is therefore an absolute necessity.**

It is interesting to note the difference between the progressive and conservative perceptions on government. The conservative believes government is necessary to enforce absolute property rights and to protect the wealthy’s holdings from being taken away by the lower classes. The progressive sees government as a necessary buffer to protect those in the middle and bottom from excesses and exploitation foisted on them by the wealthy. Conservatives therefore only see government's value in terms of its material protection, and see all other attributes as encumbrances. Yet, as Manifesto Joe of Manifesto Joe's Texas Blues (http:manifestojoestexasblues.blogspot.com/) so wisely pointed out in the comments section of the first installment of this series, "property rights exist BECAUSE OF GOVERNMENT, not in spite of it." He further explains, "Government and law define what property is, how much of it one rightfully owns...a typical difference between progressive/modern liberal view and that of conservatives and libertarians is that the former consider property rights CONDITIONAL . The public interest comes first, and **ownership of assets carries with it the condition of being accountable to that public interest.**" With these statements, Manifesto Joe has brilliantly reinforced that which Republican Teddy Roosevelt first laid out and practiced during his presidency from 1901-1909, and which subsequent progressive Presidents, among them FDR, Truman, JFK, and LBJ followed suit with.

**Progressives believe government can and should be a good force working on behalf of the people and not just a vehicle for special interests to use and abuse for their own ends.**

***FOREIGN POLICY AND NATIONAL DEFENSE***

We progressives believe that when our nation comes under attack, a strong united effort is not only practical, but absolutely essential. That is why we all stood united the day Pearl Harbor was bombed, the day Hitler declared war on us, and when terrorists destroyed the World Trade Center and slammed into the Pentagon on 9/11. progressive, moderate, and conservative alike stood firmly behind President George W. Bush when he vowed to go after, capture, and punish Osama Bin Laden and all others involved in the 9/11 acts of terrorism, exactly as we should have. We similarly and correctly stood behind FDR to defeat the Imperial Japanese and Nazi Germany in World War II, and when it became clear that the Soviet Union was embarking on a drive to destroy our system and engulf the entire world in its brand of repressive communism, and that it was not really our ally, progressives and all other factions united in the fight against Josef Stalin and his Soviet successors. Different factions may have disagreed as to the exact measures our country should take in that endeavor, but we remained united in purpose.

Just like conservatives, we progressives want this country to succeed and do *NOT* want it harmed or destroyed. We want the United States to be loved and admired as well as respected. We believe nations get along best when there is mutual communication and cooperation between them. Because we hold so valuable the principle of everybody being able to responsibly exercise their own individual rights and freedoms, we firmly support the rights of individual nations to pursue their own individual paths to progress too.

In matters of trade between countries, we believe in equally fair, mutually-beneficial trade agreements, NOT the one-sided, pro-corporate and anti-labor types conservatives have initiated and supported over the past two decades, such as NAFTA or CAFTA. Proponents of this so-called "free trade" activity have long argued that the absence of any government regulation on it would lead to more and better paying jobs in all countries, but such has definitely not been the case. These agreements have instead led directly to the exportation of millions of good-paying American jobs to cheap labor markets overseas and have resultantly lowered our standard of living by freezing or pushing down wages and benefits here. They have provided jobs for many in poorer countries, but at slave labor wage rates. They have also brought about the exportation of entire American plants to countries with little or no pollution standards, enabling these companies to pollute without restriction and thereby adding to unhealthy worldwide pollution. For these reasons, progressives are opponents of free trade, and instead support FAIR trade.

We progressives believe in developmental, no-strings-attached foreign aid, not aid which props up corrupt dictators, or military regimes which favor us geopolitically, for this type of aid never finds its way to the people in these poorer countries who need it most. We oppose exploitative efforts of entities like the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, which often force poorer countries to take part in projects which profit US but do little for those needy people of those needy countries and usually leave them deeper in debt. We also strongly support non-profit, humanitarian medical and disaster relief efforts.

We progressives believe that direct military action against another country should be taken as a LAST, rather than first, resort in matters of dispute. We believe in meaningful and constructive dialogue and diplomacy as the first option in cases of disagreement. We do not think it is wise or desirable to act as the policeman of the world before all nations, but we DO endorse military action to prevent widespread famine or genocide. We oppose the political assassination of foreign leaders, the use of rendition, or torture in any circumstance, and we support adherence to major treaties and agreements such as the Geneva Conventions. *WE CATEGORICALLY REJECT THE NEOCONSERVATIVE REPUBLICAN COROLLARY THAT PRE-EMPTIVE MILITARY STRIKES ARE DESIRABLE AND JUSTIFIABLE.* More than six decades of bloody violence and unending reprisals in the Middle East have debunked this foolhardy neocon notion, and numerous examples have proven that it only leads to further conflict, not to mention that it is a violation of international law. Not only do we oppose pre-emptive strikes, but we also oppose long military occupations, which only breed resentment toward us and cause further unnecessary bloodshed. We have seen the disastrously costly effect our 2003 pre-emptive military invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq has been in terms of lives unnecessarily lost, as well as the damage it has done to our credibility, world standing, and our economy as well. WE MUST NEVER AGAIN UNDERTAKE SUCH AN ACTION!

*We progressives oppose wars of imperialism and believe that those who wage war for profit, or order and engage in torture or genocide, must be tried, convicted, and punished for war crimes and/or crimes against humanity.* Regarding the issue of war profiteering, we progressives also see absolutely no need to privatize the military or award billions of taxpayer dollars to private contractors for jobs that have historically been handled suitably well on a non-profit basis by our military itself. We view this "privatization" as simply a cleverly-disguised form of corporate welfare which should be done away with. It is ludicrous to give out non-bid contracts to private companies and then say these companies and their employees are immune from prosecution for any crimes or excesses they may commit while "on the job." The importance of a valid military campaign should never be diminished by those engaged in a money-grabbing free for all. We therefore take great stock in Republican President Dwight Eisenhower's farewell warning to avoid the creation and maintenance of a profit-driven military/industrial complex. While we definitely support the proper amount of investment, research, and development to ensure we always have the most advanced weaponry for our defense, we do NOT believe this should be an ongoing venture for large profit, or that we should continually be involved in military conflicts to ensure the profitability of a weapons industry.

We progressives also strongly support the right of others to voice dissent or protest against war. We strongly oppose attempts by those who initiate or support a war to question the patriotism or impugn those who do not agree with that war.

Regarding national security questions, we progressives take a very dim view of suspending the writ of habeas corpus, forced detention, government wiretapping, or other forms of surveillance against private citizens. We strongly believe our country can be successfully defended without jeopardizing or limiting individual liberties or by ceding these liberties to the state. We believe our very best defense is to ensure our borders and ports are fully and properly secured; that every vessel or container which lands within our borders is inspected and cleared. It makes little sense to deploy troops halfway around the world and spend trillions on military campaigns overseas if our borders and ports are left leaking like sieves here back home. We believe in equipping our military with the highest quality and most technologically advanced equipment in the world, and in making sure they are thoroughly trained. We do NOT support our country being the chief arms merchant for the rest of the world. We would much prefer to see our government and industry involved in the development of products which enhance and improve people's lives as opposed to manufacturing and selling those which take people's lives.

In essence, the progressive viewpoint on foreign relations lies in practicing the Golden Rule and concentrating on the relations aspect rather than the adversarial or dominant position, while simultaneously keeping an alert eye on possible adverse developments. It involves acting toward and appealing to humankind's shared and higher aspirations rather than simply pursuing our own desired agenda. We believe it to be far better to diplomatically engage other nations than to withhold dialogue with them or isolate ourselves from them, or, even worse, engage in unilateral actions against them. We believe the best and most lasting peace results from our outstretched hand, not merely from the big loaded and cocked gun at our side...