

The World Economy Depression & Recovery

STUDENT ACTIVITY: CONSERVATISM & LIBERALISM, PART 2

Directions: After reviewing the definition of conservatism below, read the excerpt from Herbert Hoover's *Challenge to Liberty* speech that was given during the 1936 presidential election and highlight examples of conservatism.

Conservatism

Tracing its roots back to 19th century Europe, conservatism is a political ideology that favors maintaining the social order. To achieve this goal, conservatives look to the past for knowledge of how to address social and economic problems. To oppose change, they often argue that current economic and social conditions are about as good as can reasonably be expected. The specific goals of conservative philosophy can vary over time and among countries depending on circumstances. Conservative positions are often based on religious and moral grounds rather than on social theories such as distributive justice. American conservatism differs from the European variety in that American conservatives place greater emphasis on free markets, individual rights, and democracy. They argue for limited government interference in private business affairs and deregulation in the economic sphere. Conservatives believe in lower taxes and that the private sector should take on a greater role in helping those in need.

Herbert Hoover
Excerpt from *Challenge to Liberty*
October 30, 1936
Denver, Colorado



I am proud to have carried the banner of free men to the last hour of the term my countrymen entrusted it to me. It matters nothing in the history of a race what happens to those who in their time have carried the banner of free men. What matters is that the battle shall go on.

The people know now the aims of this New Deal philosophy of government. We propose instead leadership and authority in government within the moral and economic framework of the American System.

We propose to hold to the Constitutional safeguards of free men.

We propose to relieve men from fear, coercion and spite that are inevitable in personal government.

We propose to demobilize and decentralize all this spending upon which vast personal power is being built. We propose to amend the tax laws so as not to defeat free men and free enterprise.

We propose to turn the whole direction of this country toward liberty, not away from it.

The New Dealers say that all this that we propose is a worn-out System; that this machine age requires new measures for which we must sacrifice some part of the freedom of men. Men have lost their way with a confused idea that governments should run machines. Man-made machines cannot be of more worth than men themselves. Free men made these machines. Only free spirits can master them to their proper use.

The relation of our government with all these questions is complicated and difficult. They rise into the very highest ranges of economics, statesmanship, and morals.

And do not mistake. Free government is the most difficult of all government. But it is everlastingly true that the plain people will make fewer mistakes than any other group of men no matter how powerful. But free government implies vigilant thinking and courageous living and self-reliance in a people.

Let me say to you that any measure which breaks our dykes of freedom will flood the land with misery.

The Social Field

In the field which is more largely social our first American objective should be the protection of the health, the assurance of the education and training of every child in our land. We want children kept out of our factories. We want them kept in school. We want every character-building agency to surround them, including good homes. Freedom can march only upon the feet of educated, healthy and happy children.

We want a land of health, and greater recreation for everybody. We want more opportunity for the creation and care of beauty and those things which satisfy the spirit.

The Economic Field

In the field which is more largely economic our first objective must be to provide security from poverty and want. We want security in living for every home. We want to see a nation built of home-owners and farm-owners.

We want to see their savings protected. We want to see them in steady jobs.

These are the first economic securities of human beings.

We want to see more and more of them insured against death and accident, unemployment and old age. We want them all secure.

The American system of liberty has driven toward these ideals for a century and a half. We realize that one-quarter of our people are not able today to have the standards we desire. But we are proud of a system that has given security and comfort to three-quarters of our families and in which even the under quarter ranks higher than that of any nation in the world.

National wisdom and national ideals require that we constantly develop the economic forces which will lift this one-quarter of our people. It requires that we at the same time attain greater stability to employment and to agriculture in the other three-quarters.

This is no occasion to elaborate the details of a program. But surely we must dump the whole New Deal theory of restriction of production, of code monopolies, of constantly higher prices for manufactured goods. We must reject their currency and credit policies, which will repeat our calamities of booms and depressions with greater heights and depths. We must reduce spending and amend the forms of taxation which now destroy enterprise and employment. We hold over-swollen fortunes must be distributed through pressure of taxes.

We hold the first essential is to improve constantly our machines and methods. That will create plenty and make it cheaper. That will enable the under quarter of our people to obtain more goods. Thereby we give increasing employment to everybody. We hold that this can be done only by private industry and not by government. We hold it can be done only by rewarding men for skill and merit. We hold it can be done only through the energizing force of competition.

We hold that we must direct the mind of the nation to the elimination of wastes. There is waste in this government. There is waste in natural resources. There is waste in production and distribution. There is waste in labor conflicts. There is the worst of all waste in human beings. If we turn national effort to this instead of listening to ways to get something for nothing, we will attain not only security, but we will also raise comfort to levels never before envisioned. And above all we can do it and be free.

It may be that some super mind can tell us what to do each day for our own good or can even force us to do it. But we haven't seen any indication of such mind among the New Dealers. This country moves forward because each individual of all these millions, each thinking for himself, using his own best judgment, using his own skill and experience, becomes expert in bettering his family and his community, To do that they must captain their own souls. No man will be the captain of his own soul if a Tugwell manages it for him.

Doubtless some one will at once arise and shout wicked capitalism, laissez- faire, special privilege, or wolfish individualism. These are the illuminated pumpkins of tomorrow night's New Deal Hallowe'en.

We hold a rule of free men which overrides all such nonsense. That is, free men must have equal rights and equal opportunities. For that the government must be the vigorous umpire. But we want a Judge Landis, we do not want a Simon Legree.

You might think that reform and change to meet new conditions of life are discoveries of the New Deal. Free men have always applied reform. We have been reforming and changing ever since George Washington. Democracy is not static. It is a living force. Every new idea, every new invention offers opportunity for both good and evil.

We are in need of reform every day in the week as long as men are greedy for money or power. We need a whole list of reforms right now, including the reform of these people who have created a gigantic spoils system as a method of seizing political power.

Part V

Many of the problems discussed in this campaign concern our material welfare. That is right. But there are things far more important to a nation than material welfare. It is possible to have a prosperous country under a dictatorship. It is not possible to have a free country. No great question will ever be settled in dollars and cents. Great questions must be settled on moral grounds and the tests of what makes free men. What is the nation profited if it shall gain the whole world and lose its own soul?

We want recovery. Not alone economic recovery. We must have moral recovery. And there are many elements in this.

We must re-establish truth and morals in public life. No people will long remain a moral people under a government that repudiates its obligations, that uses public funds to corrupt the people, that conceals its actions by double bookkeeping.

We must have government that builds stamina into communities and men. That makes men instead of mendicants. We must stop this softening of thrift, self-reliance and self-respect through dependence on government. We must stop telling youth that the country is going to the devil and they haven't a chance. We must stop this dissipating the initiative and aspirations of our people. We must revive the courage of men and women and their faith in American liberty. We must recover these spiritual heritages of America.

All this clatter of class and class hate should end. Thieves will get into high places as well as low places and they should both be given economic security in jail. But they are not a class. This is a classless country. If we hold to our unique American ideal of equal opportunity there can never be classes or masses in our country. To preach these class ideas from the White House is new in American life. There is no employing class, no working class, no farming class. You may pigeonhole a man or woman as a farmer or a worker or a professional man or an employer or even a banker. But the son of the farmer will be a doctor or a worker or even a banker, and his daughter a teacher. The son of a worker will be an employer or maybe President. And certainly the sons of even economic royalists have a bad time holding the title of nobility.

The glory of our country has been that every mother could look at the babe in her arms with confidence that the highest position in the world was open to it.

The transcendent issue before us today is free men and women. How do we test freedom? It is not a catalogue of political rights. It is a thing of the spirit. Men must be free to worship, to think, to hold opinions, to speak without fear. They must be free to challenge wrong and oppression with surety of justice. Freedom conceives that the mind and spirit of man can be free only if he be free to pattern his own life, to develop his own talents, free to earn, to spend, to save, to acquire property as the security of his old age and his family.

Freedom demands that these rights and ideals shall be protected from infringement by others, whether men or groups, corporations or governments.

The conviction of our fathers was that all these freedoms come from the Creator and that they can be denied by no man or no government or no New Deal. They were spiritual rights of men. The prime purpose of liberal government is to enlarge and not to destroy these freedoms. It was for that purpose that the Constitution of the United States was enacted. For that reason we demand that the safeguards of freedom shall be upheld. It is for this reason that we demand that this country should turn its direction from a system of personal centralized government to the ideals of liberty.

And again I repeat that statement of four years ago-"This campaign is more than a contest between two men. It is a contest between two philosophies of government."

Whatever the outcome of this election that issue is set. We shall battle it out until the soul of America is saved.