

Thank You, Donald Trump

We advocates of liberty owe Donald Trump a great debt of gratitude. Thanks to Trump it is clearer than ever that most people who call themselves conservatives, and not just those who have lined up with Trump, are no cousins of ours. (There are honorable exceptions, but alas far too few.) Freedom is not on their list of priorities. Neither (of course) is free enterprise. Nor civil liberties. And I need not mention war, peace, and empire. (Trump is no dove or anti-imperialist.)

What apparently matters most is National Greatness, that is, rank nationalism — even among many conservatives who don't like Trump and who opposed his candidacy. (They merely doubt that Trump is really one of them.) But National Greatness is simply shorthand for conservative violations of liberty. As the Jeffersonian Abraham Bishop said in 1800, after witnessing a decade of Federalist (i.e., Hamiltonian) rule: "A nation that makes greatness its polestar can never be free; beneath national greatness sink individual greatness, honor, wealth and freedom."

Before going further, I will acknowledge I am swimming in perilous waters. *Conservatism* subsumes a diverse group of people. Neoconservatives differ significantly from paleoconservatives (such as those at *The American Conservative*, which has published my work). The former are empire lovers who thrill at the flexing of American power abroad; the latter are skeptical about projections of American power. To make things even more complicated, neoconservatives come in both Wilsonian (democracy-promoting) and non-Wilsonian flavors. But the various factions overlap enough to permit me to proceed, even if gingerly.

Coverage of the Trump campaign/transition has featured a long parade of pro-Trump conservative, or right-wing, former political operatives, activists, pundits, and talk-show hosts who in the past denounced Democratic presidential candidates as diabolical figures plotting to crush cherished free enterprise and impose broad social engineering, if not outright state socialism, in its place. (I'm thinking of Jeffrey Lord, Ben Ferguson, Scottie Nell Hughes, Katrina Pierson, Amy Kremer, and their ilk.)

But we've heard little or none of that sort of criticism this year. Why? Because their candidate, Trump, embraces social engineering and shows little if any interest in free enterprise — I mean *really* free enterprise — enterprise that is free to hire non-Americans with or without government papers; that can move abroad without penalty; that can buy and sell anywhere in the world without checking the terms of the "trade deal" struck by the U.S. government and some foreign counterpart. Proponents of immigration and trade restrictions favor social engineering, full stop. So Trump's conservative cheer-leading squad openly touts the benefits of social engineering. (One at least expresses discomfort

with some of the Trump program.) Many of them have long favored government restrictions on enterprise for the sake of National Greatness, but they were more circumspect in their pronouncements when their candidates paid lip service to free markets and free trade.

We're also witnessing the spectacle of a more prominent conservative Keynesianism, another form of social engineering. Right-wingers, former pro-Say, anti-Keynes supply-siders who once bashed big-spending debt-indifferent Democrats, now whoop it up for Trump, the man proposing to cut taxes *and* spend additional trillions on roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, and the allegedly depleted military. Remember the conservative outrage over President Obama's 2009 stimulus/infrastructure bill? (Regarding the myth that big infrastructure spending yields economic growth, see [this](#).) Trumpite conservatives no longer seem to care about the mounting national debt and budget deficit, which future generations will pay for in higher taxes and/or a Fed-inflated cost of living. (But see [this](#).) These conservatives used to see Social Security and Medicare the way progressives see climate change: as a coming manmade catastrophe. The conservatives, however, had a better case. The entitlement programs have many trillions of dollars in unfunded liabilities, which will one day require high taxes on younger workers. (Alas, repudiation may not be politically feasible.) Trump promised not to touch Social Security or Medicare, so his conservative backers have become fiscal-climate-change deniers. These are indeed men and women of principle.

Many of Trump's conservative fans were founding members of the Tea Party movement. It's been largely forgotten that the Tea Party emerged to oppose not Obamacare but George W. Bush's Wall Street bailouts in 2008. Guess who supported the bailouts: Trump. Moreover, on the campaign trail he complained that home ownership has declined under Obama. But it was government promotion of home ownership that gave us the Great Recession.

The Tea Party also opposed the use of eminent domain for corporate profit, which was upheld in the hated Supreme Court *Kelo* ruling. But Trump applauded *Kelo* and had tried to take advantage of the power of eminent domain for his own business ventures.

I never heard Trump criticized for things by his swooning legion of supporters. Are we to infer that conservatives now favor bank bailouts and corporate eminent domain?

Trump promises to stop firms from leaving the United States and brags about his efforts to keep Ford and Carrier facilities in the United States. Do conservatives now favor that sort of thing? The answer seems to be yes: conservative pundits favorably received the latest news that Carrier and Trump have struck a deal to keep 1,000 jobs (out of the 2,000 that were to be transferred to Mexico) in Indiana. Carrier, by the way, is owned by United Technologies, a big military contractor. As the *New York Times* observed, "If Barack Obama

had tried the same maneuver, he'd probably have drawn criticism for intervening in the free market.... While Carrier will forfeit some \$65 million a year in savings the move was supposed to generate, that's a small price to pay to avoid the public relations damage from moving the jobs as well as a possible threat to United Technologies' far-larger military contracting business.... The Pentagon is its single largest customer."

With Trump we're liable to see even more military-industrial-complex "socialism" than we already have. (See "Federal Access Likely Biggest Factor in Carrier Deal.")

Once upon a time, conservatives criticized President Kennedy for jawboning U.S. Steel and other steel companies into rolling back price increases. Back then Kennedy said: "Some time ago I asked each American to consider what he would do for his country. And I asked the steel companies. In the last 24 hours we have their answer." Conservatives have come a long way.

Finally, Trumpite conservatives, probably without exception, would say that the most influential figure in their political and even personal lives (until Trump came along?) was Ronald Reagan. He is their idol. Reagan once said that government isn't the solution; it's the problem. Unfortunately, that principle did not inform most of his policy making — but he said it, and his backers said they loved it. He even praised free-traders Bastiat, Cobden, and Bright — even if he bowed to political pressured and embraced protection. Trump expresses no such sentiments. He, like one of his closet confidants, Steve Bannon, is an "economic nationalist," that is, a mercantilist. Even the traditional conservative homage to the Constitution (flawed at that is) and limited government is lacking from the Trump songbook. He thinks the problem is weak national leadership and the solution is strong leadership, i.e., him. I don't hear Trumpite conservatives complaining about this, though they sometimes pretend to read this limited-government meaning into things Trump says.

So thank you, Mr. President-elect, for helping to clarify (if we didn't know already) who — like you — are not to be included among the friends of liberty.