

# CARLETON OBSERVER

"TRUTH IS THE MOST SACRED VIRTUE OF THE HUMAN HEART" - SENECA THE YOUNGER

## OUTGROWING THE FEELINGS TREE

BY ELIZABETH MCEACHRON

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EDITOR JOSH IS WOEFULLY CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

From kindergarten until fourth grade I shared my feelings and hung ornaments on the Feelings Tree--a bunch of dead branches stuck into a cement block--before I was allowed to play at daycare. I mention this because the days are past when people cared more about my feelings and intentions than about my actions. The increased demand for responsibility and accountability is a necessary evil of growing up. In reading the Observer, one sometimes finds it difficult to escape the indignation of conservative authors who feel unjustly characterized by their political affiliations; these authors are appalled at the assumptions of liberals that they hold beliefs typical of conservatives. Their unique political philosophies are clearly too complex for such a classification. To these authors I suggest that it is time to leave the Feelings Tree behind.

One cannot fully support a political party and then complain that he is associated with the views of that party. I am a registered Democrat. I vote for candidates affiliated with the Democratic Party--a party with certain tenets, among which are: that government's role is to fulfill each person's most basic needs; that the jobs of American workers should be protected against loss to foreign competitors; that individuals most capable of carrying economic burdens should do so, and so ensure government's ability to provide for all citizens; and that the environment should be protected, at least to an extent that does not inconvenience individuals. When I vote for a Democrat, I agree to and support these tenets.

Because I do not cast a vote in Congress, the nuances of my beliefs are irrelevant. Important instead are the beliefs of my representative and his understanding of my mine. If elected on a party ticket, it is reasonable to assume that party views represent the feelings of the electorate, and should therefore be pursued to win re-election. At the very least, it makes clear that voting along party lines is unlikely to affect a politician adversely, and if I do not explicitly state to my objection to a particular Democratic policy, I have rendered it my full support, whether I actually agree with it or not.

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### RALLY ROUND THE QUOTE:

"I LOVE AMERICA MORE THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY IN THIS WORLD, AND, EXACTLY FOR THIS REASON, I INSIST ON THE RIGHT TO CRITICIZE HER PERPETUALLY."

--JAMES BALDWIN



## A NOTE ON IDENTITY AND SPEAKING UP

BY JOSH MARKOWITZ

Those of you who read the Oct. 1st Observer may have noticed that much of it dealt with the issue of what it means to be conservative, both here at Carleton and in the world beyond. Some writers, myself included, voiced frustration over not being fully understood or appreciated by those who disagree with us. Sometimes, this leads us to weakly defend ourselves by explaining which parts of conservatism we accept and how those aspects of it that we dislike don't really represent us. While it is important to discuss ideas and question our respective leaders, this "yes, but" approach to self-definition gives the impression of saying "I may be conservative, but I'm really only half bad."

Peter Fritz gave us a good example in his article, "Living an Alternative Lifestyle at Carleton," of how to explain one's beliefs simply without feeling the need to dispel "guilt-by-association." Although, as Elizabeth McEachron writes in this issue, we may, indeed, be held accountable to some extent for the positions of those whom we elect, we should not feel the need to explain away any portions of which we disapprove in order to repair our dignity.

Such behavior actually encourages the belief among some liberals that conservatives really are evil and that they are morally acceptable only to the extent that they forsake certain conservative beliefs. Thus we hear descriptions of the conservative who's "okay because he's at least pro-choice and thinks Bush is a horrible president." Just think of the implications! If we are proud of our beliefs and are not afraid to accept some guilt for bad individual policies of those we elect, we do not run the risk of hingeing our own moral goodness upon renouncing what may be believed of us. If attacked we should defend the principles that guide our actions, even if those principles lead others within our own camp to different conclusions.

*The Observer is a non-partisan newspaper of social and political commentary. The opinions expressed herein are the sole creations of their authors. The Observer welcomes articles and letters from all viewpoints, and seeks to promote a diversity of keen and insightful thought at Carleton. Thanks for reading!*

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FEELINGS TREE, FROM PAGE 1

For instance, The 2004 Democratic National Platform has several paragraphs about protecting American jobs. The point of some of these paragraphs seems to be that the party intends to be a pain in the ass, thereby forcing American companies to hire American workers. The pain-in-the-ass strategy, however, does not strike me as appropriate; I think we should educate American workers, but that we should not interfere with a company's decision to hire elsewhere.

**Every voter implicitly supports the views espoused by the candidate for whom he votes and by the candidate's party unless he makes an effort to clarify his position to them. Not to passers-by or to Observer readers.**

The first person to read this article, though, is the first to know of my opinion; I have not written letters to Senator Boxer to object. She can therefore only assume that, as a Democrat, I approve of the party's stance. If the issue comes before the Senate and I continue on my path of laziness, I will support the pain-in-the-ass tactic by default, and I have no right to go crying to the Feelings Tree if some conservative calls me on it.

Every voter implicitly supports the views espoused by the candidate for whom he votes and by the candidate's party unless he makes an effort to clarify his position to them. Not to passers-by or to Observer readers. If a person finds himself complaining that he associates with a group he does not want to be associated with, he should rethink his political strategy.

Elizabeth McEachron is a Senior

# SOCIALISM AT CARLETON: MISGUIDED, OR JUST STUPID?

BY AARON WEINER

How many of you reading this consider yourself to be Marxist-Socialist-Communists of one form or another? I know there are quite a few of you – I hear you in Sayles or outside discussing things like the injustice of capitalism or the exact shade of red to use as the background for your awesome new Che Guevara shirt. Invariably, your discussions have an air of self-righteousness because you, with your 20 or so years on the planet, know so much more than anyone else. Now this is the point where you will express the idea that my authorship of this article puts me in the same boat of self-righteous idiocy I accuse you, hippie, of being in. But I'm not claiming to be better than most people; I'm just better than you.

**You, sipping coffee and waxing philosophical about the proletariat, are an unforgivable hypocrite.**

Let's look at why. First, the most common claim you espouse about social-marxist-communism (hereafter referred to as just socialism to keep it simpler) is that it is a more just system than our current corrupt capitalist pig-state. Probably because you claim everyone has some "right" to the same benefits as everyone else in society. Here is where you are very wrong. No one has any "right" to anything of mine. The fact that I am an individual means I ought to have control over my own destiny and the fruits of my labor. I have a right to keep the things I have worked for and you do not have a right to take them away just because it makes you feel better about yourself. Neal Boortz said it best, "We have witnessed an obscene explosion of so-called 'rights' in the last few decades, usually emanating from college campuses... Forget it. Forget those rights! I'll tell you what your rights are! You have a right to live free, and to whatever wealth you are able to produce with your labor. I'll also tell you, you have no right to any portion of the life or labor of another."

The other reason I have very little respect for you is because you are a hypocrite. You, sipping coffee and waxing philosophical about the proletariat, are an unforgivable hypocrite. You are enrolled at a very expensive, very exclusive, private college. Do you know what the tuition you're paying here could do for the "disadvantaged classes" you're so keen on protecting? Even just in terms of getting a college education. You're paying, or someone else is paying for you, close to \$40,000 a year for the privilege of being at Carleton College. You could pay for 4 other MN residents to attend the U of M for that. But you want to lecture me on redistribution of wealth across socio-economic classes?!

When I debated, there was a phrase I was fond of, "performative contradiction." It means that, while what you're actually saying may be one thing, your actions prove that you don't believe a word of it. The simple fact that you are here means that, at some level, you realize that all your socialist ideologies are full of shit. So let's summarize:

- 1) You think that some group of people have an enforceable right to the good things that I am able to produce; and
- 2) You are a hypocrite or a liar. Take your pick.

And then you wonder why I have no respect for socialists here?

Aaron Weiner is a Junior

The greatest vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings; the greatest virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries.

- WINSTON CHURCHILL

Socialism in general has a record of failure so blatant that only an intellectual could ignore or evade it.

- THOMAS SOWELL

## DON'T VOTE

BY PETER FRITZ

I look at my ballot. I know who I'm choosing for President, Congress, the state House, and school district. But what about county commissioner? What about Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor? I at least know what the county commissioner does. Then I turn the ballot over. Associate Justice 6 for the Minnesota Supreme Court? Judges of the Court of Appeals? I don't know any of these people and I don't have an opinion on who among them should be elected. What's wrong with me?

It's not that I'm a political slouch by any stretch of the imagination. I'm fairly engaged in the political process, reading a national newspaper every day, learning more about issues, and working on two political campaigns just this summer. Maybe some people look at me and think hey he knows who he's going to vote for in every race. Well, my guilty secret is that I still don't have an opinion on every office on the ballot. Heck, I haven't even heard of some of these people.

Well, my guilty secret is that I still don't have an opinion on every office on the ballot. Heck, I haven't even heard of some of these people.

Hopefully my guilty secret makes a useful point. There's no shame in not voting. Let me say that again: there's no shame in not voting. One should only vote when one feels confident that they are making an informed decision. When a person votes without knowledge of the issue, that vote is worse than useless. Voting without knowledge of and engagement in politics is making an important right meaningless. So far the concept of not voting is probably fairly easy to accept. If you haven't formed an opinion on a couple candidates on the ballot, it's better not to vote for them. Let us continue down that path.

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## DEMOCRACY FAILS US AGAIN

BY JAMES MAGNUSON

I just wanted to take this space to make a quick plea. You know all those signs around the Cities that stirred up a lot of controversy? The ones saying "Don't Vote" (they turned out to be ads for a crappy morning radio guy.) I'd like to urge everyone in my audience to not vote, and if you have to, to not vote for one of these hapless shlubs currently running. I mean, come on. Kerry is a stuck up sticky beak who makes Al Gore look like a good 'ol boy. Bush is a man who couldn't debate his way out of a paper bag. Een if the paper was wet. And he had scissors. (This is a metaphor. Kerry's all wet, and Bush has the scissors of better arguments. But he still is horrid at communication. The point: I love extended metaphors. I should be a writer.)

**Sure Johnny, you want a health plan for everyone, with the same coverage Congresspersons have. And I want a date with Shakira. But neither will ever happen. (But just in case, sugar, my number's on stalker net. Call me.)**

And by the way, the buzz is that Bush had some sort of feed for the answers and Kerry had a cheat sheet. Are you with me on this one? I took the LSAT not long ago. I could maybe have used a cheat sheet there. But a presidential debate shouldn't be about the right answer, it should be about what you really think is right, your values, beliefs, plans, witty quips, pithy quotes, and biffy jokes (toilet humor would be an excellent addition to either candidates repertoire.)

So, what I'm saying is, vote for whomever you think would do the best job. I probably will be doing that, except the Libertarians and Constitution party aren't cooperating by being particularly sound, rational, and all that sort of semi-necessary stuff on foreign policy, or trade. What it gets down to is this. Don't believe the hype. Bush and Kerry aren't that different. "Kerry will get us out of Iraq quicker." Yeah, and I've got some fine real estate for you. On whatever planet fiscal responsibility equals expanded taxes on everyone plus massively increased spending. And the joke is here: I'm not sure, and neither should you be, who I'm talking about.

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## DON'T VOTE, FROM PAGE 4

It seems to be incredibly important for every single college student to go out and vote. At least, that's what MTV and all manner of other organizations tell us. If we don't vote we are threatened with insignificance and dismissal; what could be worse than that? Well, the only thing worse than that is making voting itself insignificant. Those who are encouraging people to vote without sufficient previous engagement give these first time voters the wrong impression of their duties.

It is generally assumed in America today that well informed citizens are crucial for democracy to function. Being a well informed citizen is something that takes a great deal of time and energy. However, when people are encouraged to vote, regardless of how informed they are, they are encouraged to not be informed. Voting should not be a person's first engagement with the political process. Voting should be an end of political engagement, not a means by which to engage people.

There is a better way to encourage people to be engaged citizens besides shaming them into voting. When a person is truly interested and engaged in politics, they will need no prodding to vote. They will have found issues provoking enough passion and will have opinions that excite them enough, if not compel them, to vote. If making college students more civically involved is the goal, engaging and educating college students on issues and provoking their thoughts better achieves that goal.

So take this to heart. You aren't a bad person if you don't vote; you aren't even a bad citizen. If you truly don't feel like you will make educated decisions at the ballot box, don't pick up the ballot. Instead, resolve in the next two years to become a more well informed and engaged citizen. After all, being a good citizen isn't about voting per se, but about voting intelligently.

Peter Fritz is a Freshman

*"Ours is a government of laws, but no law is worth anything unless there is the right kind of man behind it."*

Theodore Roosevelt

## FAULTY JUDICIAL ELECTIONS

BY ANDREW NAVRATIL

When you go to the polls on November 2, you will have the opportunity to select candidates for United States President, Senator and Representative, state legislature, and local offices. In addition, a number of judicial candidates will be on the ballot. No matter the level of your political sophistication, chances are you will not even recognize the names of the judicial candidates. Yet, you are asked to choose who will sit behind the bench. Judicial elections in this country are faulty and pose a unique challenge to democracy. One solution to this problem is to appoint rather than to elect judges directly. While not a perfect solution, it eliminates many of the flaws in the current system.

Minnesota's constitution and laws specify that judicial vacancies be filled by gubernatorial appointment. However, no more than one year after appointment, judges are placed on the ballot and must be reelected every six years. Judicial elections differ from other elections in that their candidates cannot take a party affiliation or announce their views on disputed political or legal issues. These restrictions ensure an impartial judiciary and limit the influence of legislative politics.

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## DEMOCRACY FAILS, FROM PAGE 4

Bush and Kerry aren't that different, and they won't wield that much power. I have yet to hear Kerry come out with a plan that is that much different from what Bush is trying to do. Sure Johnny, you want a health plan for everyone, with the same coverage Congresspersons have. And I want a date with Shakira. But neither will ever happen. (But just in case, sugar, my number's on stalker net. Call me.) So, I'm unwinding like a Twins hitter three minutes after swinging at a Rivera cutter.

To sew this thing up, don't vote for either candidate. Too long have we had to accept that we have only two choices. Vote for who you think is best, not because you're scared Bush will draft you into his rebirth of the Brown-shirts, or because you think Kerry will soon have a flashback, and start warning the country that they're entering a world of pain. Both of those contingencies are as remote as the aforementioned Shakira dating Mike Moore. So, yeah, vote Libertarian. Or not. Whatever.

James Magnuson is a Senior  
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## JUDICIAL ELECTIONS, FROM PAGE 5

There are two fundamental problems with judicial elections. First, voters are not given enough information on the candidates to cast informed, responsible votes. Surveying a lack of party affiliation and a dearth of available personal information about the candidates, voters are asked to somehow make a decision in the name of democracy and an impartial judiciary.

Secondly, electing the judicial branch of government undermines the balance of power and weakens the system of checks and balances. Currently, the state judicial branch can strike down actions of the state legislative and executive branches, which, in turn, possess no counter-checks on the judiciary. Though all three branches are accountable to the citizens through elections, only the judiciary is not directly checked by another branch of government.

For these reasons, judges should be appointed rather than elected. The Governor should nominate them for a limited term of office—at least six years, the current term—and the state legislature should confirm the appointments. A process similar to this is used at the national level. Entrusting the selection of judges to a popularly elected Governor and state legislature places the burden of choosing them in the hands of those best equipped to decide: the very makers and enforcers of law. By doing so, citizens may still affect judicial appointments indirectly, and with adequate information, as well.

Several objections can be raised: appointment is fundamentally undemocratic, it brings politics into judicial selection, and it removes accountability to the people. But what value is democracy if voters are not informed? Randomly selecting a name on a ballot does nothing to ensure accountability. Although appointment could bring politics into the selection process, if structured properly, the influence of the political climate can be minimized. After all, such influence would be even greater under an electoral system in which judges took party affiliation and spoke about controversial issues. Furthermore, appointment may remove direct accountability to the people, but a judiciary directly accountable to the people sails on the whims of public opinion and cannot long remain independent. The lack of an independent judiciary is the first step on the road to tyranny.

Andrew Navratil is a Sophomore

## THAT OTHER GREAT AMERICAN GAME (OR PASTIME?)

BY RAWDON BERGQUIST



Three strikes and yer out! Or so we all thought until those boys from Boston came roaring back in the last four games. Among the hoopla and drama of the past few games a historic precedent has been set. Who else has come from three games behind to triumph over the evil empire, or turned an almost certain sweep into a rout? Let's see...the Carthaginians dropped three and lost to history, the fourth Rome never materialized, and I doubt the French are worried about another Reich. Then again there's that other little game being played that also grabbed some headlines...

Who else has come from three down of late? There were those three weeks of summer that the Massachusetts paper pusher sat on his hands and watched some swift boats speed by, or those three meetings where the Texas cowboy tied his tongue in a knot over some physics terminology and saw his nemesis come bouncing back. Has the curse of the bambino finally been lifted? Too bad Houston fell to the Cards--no more Massachusetts vs. Texas. Now that would truly be a series with the world title on the line.

Two teams locked in a rivalry so bitter that the major players hardly talk to one another anymore. No more man-to-man competition or charging the mound, the strategists exchange thrusts and parries through sound bites and big newsprint. They selected their lineups, careful to cover all the bases, and came out swinging for left, right, and center.

This year we've had all sorts of stories, from the scandals and infighting to the new condiments at the ballpark. There was a bit of swearing and cursing, some errors and wild pitches, and a whole lot of shouting going on in the dugout. Not to mention the front office changes, new rotations, fiery press releases, and a lot of batting practice. This is shaping up to be quite the race.

Now, just who am I rooting for? I suppose I'll go for the radical underdog...wait, who is that again?

Rawdon Bergquist is a Sophomore

# QUIETLY LOSING THE WAR

BY ALEX VON HAGEN-JAMAR

Policies for effectively fighting terrorism, particularly a terrorist group with the adaptability, sophistication, international reach, and wide appeal of al Qaeda, are difficult to make. Americans, both citizens and policy-makers, have greatly aggravated this by neglecting honest assessment of the threats we face, and the potential consequences of our current policies. There are a few examples of scholarship with genuine and useful analysis written by policy-makers, former government officials, current intelligence specialists, and academic experts. All of my thoughts within this article have been heavily influenced by such books as *Through Our Enemies Eyes* and *Imperial Hubris*, both by an anonymous senior intelligence official with years of expertise on Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda; *The Great Terror War*, by Richard Falk; *Against All Enemies*, by former counter-terrorism official Richard Clarke; and articles such as Richard K. Betts' 2002 article, "The Soft Underbelly of American Primacy: Tactical Advantages of Terror," and Martha Crenshaw's 1998 article, "The Logic of Terrorism: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice." Of all of these, I find the Anonymous books to be the most compelling, both for their exceptional analysis and for their powerful and unnerving policy recommendations. I firmly believe that anyone with a serious interest in foreign policy and terrorism should read these materials.

There are several concepts necessary for the establishment of a successful counter-terrorism policy. Any approach must be appropriate for the problem, as distractions can lead to enormous setbacks, or worse, play right into bin Laden's hands. The United States must realize that there will be no quick success, and no single policy that will defeat organizations such as al Qaeda – rather, it will be the combination of ruthlessly employed, moderately successful tactics. America must not overreach. Finally, America must understand the nature of our enemies and of the war we are fighting; American policymakers must cease attempting to apply old models of terrorism to al Qaeda, and employing purposefully degrading and flagrantly inaccurate characterizations of America's opponents. Only by understanding bin Laden, al Qaeda, and the international Islamist insurgency can we enact policy changes that effectively protect our way of life.

It is Osama bin Laden's ideas and his manner of expressing them that make him dangerous. Anonymous' books refute any claim that bin Laden lacks admirable personal traits, such as courage, intelligence, and loyalty. Bin Laden is eminently respected in much of the Muslim world. "The Islamic media focus on three factors to account for bin Laden's growing influence in the Muslim world: his personal reputation for bravery, piety, and support for the oppressed; his spoken condemnation of U.S. policies and attacks on U.S. targets; and the dictates of Islam." Rather than simply a "psychotic madman," it is bin Laden's rationality and convictions that make him and his global network so formidable.

This administration's inability to understand the terrorist perspective has already led to a major blunder, which Americans must be prepared to pay for. Bin Laden wanted the United States to engage in policies that will place it firmly in al Qaeda's line of fire (as in the recent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq), and to lead to actions on the part of the U.S. that will further radicalize the Muslim world, and reduce support within the United States and international community for current U.S. foreign policy. By entering Iraq, the United States began a campaign that runs counter to its goal of defeating terrorism – the U.S. put troops on the ground where militant Islamists can reach them, and subsequently stretches U.S. resources and radicalizes more Muslims. The insistence on focusing on states as sponsors of terrorism and the over simplification of the nature of the terrorists themselves misunderstands the nature of a global network such as al Qaeda and its associates. This misunderstanding ultimately strengthens the very enemy we are trying to defeat.

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***"It is of importance that the nation depend as little as possible upon its neighbors for the manufactures necessary for its defense."***

***Adam Smith***

## LOSING THE WAR, FROM PAGE 7

The Bush Administration is right about one thing – this is a war, and like so many others it must be fought with conviction and strength. There is no single solution, no easy way to end the violence and come out on top. Improved conventional defenses, cutting off money supplies, military force, intelligence and counterintelligence, and covert ops, all individually provide inadequate defense against terrorism but, when used together, they can gradually stem the tide. Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda are not invulnerable. But to truly end the war, we must first achieve a much greater understanding of our enemy and why they fight us. It is not, as President Bush says, because they are evil and hate freedom. Bin Laden has been very clear about his grievances, and much of the Muslim world – even the moderates – essentially agree with him. It is not who we are or what we are that makes them hate us – it is their perception of specific American policies.

Does the United States need low oil prices so badly that it is worth propping up corrupt dictatorships in the Middle East? Is it necessary to saturate the most holy Muslim lands – the Arab Peninsula and Iraq – with American soldiers for security reasons? Is it in our interest to unequivocally support Israel, no matter the price? Is it even good for Israel? Is it the responsibility of the United States to invade foreign countries in order to install our own secular, democratic version of government? How difficult is energy independence, and why have we not yet achieved it? All of these questions address the U.S. policies towards or related to the Middle East used by bin Laden as grounds for war.

WE MUST EITHER ACCEPT WHAT IS NECESSARY TO WIN, KNOWING THAT ALL WARS — EVEN JUST WARS — ARE EVIL, OR WE MUST SOMEHOW END THE FIGHTING. THAT CANNOT BE ACHIEVED IF WE DO NOT SIGNIFICANTLY ALTER THE FAILED FOREIGN POLICIES OUR GOVERNMENT SO STUBBORNLY CLINGS TO. IT IS TIME FOR SOME HONEST DISCUSSION.

These questions are difficult to answer. None of those questions listed above have been seriously and openly debated within our government or our national media. There is no discussion of why we are at war.

The United States is the world's foremost military and economic super-power – but our policies toward much of the Muslim world have led us into a battle that, in the long run, cannot be won without violating the very moral standards we profess. Ultimately, the United States only has two options if our way of life is to survive. We can wage war, ruthlessly and fully, paying and extracting unthinkable costs until the world is too tired to allow it to continue. Or we can rethink many of our outdated and poorly made policies. Until we ask ourselves which of these we want to indulge, we will continue fighting bin Laden's global movement and will continue losing.

At the start of the first chapter of his last book, Anonymous quotes Kent Gramm. “The difference between Mr. Lincoln's moral conclusion and the moral arguments usually made during wartime is that he did not identify the enemy alone as evil.” We must either accept what is necessary to win, knowing that all wars – even just wars – are evil, or we must somehow end the fighting. That cannot be achieved if we do not significantly alter the failed foreign policies our government so stubbornly clings to. It is time for some honest discussion.

Alex Von Hagen-Jamar is a Senior

# REFLECTIONS OF A PEACENIK

BY ELIZABETH MCEACHRON

This article is inspired by Rawdon Bergquist's "Waging the Peacenik War" that appeared in the October 1st issue of the Observer. Bergquist's article, while an amusing extrapolation of pacifist logic, revealed a fundamental lack of understanding of the liberal viewpoint. The following is aimed at clarifying liberal priorities and at explaining the liberal "peacenik" reaction to threats of violence from domestic and foreign sources.

Liberals and conservatives share many values: both groups believe in freedom, in democracy and in civil rights. This is important if we're sitting around a campfire singing Kumbaya. In daily life, though, we have to make choices; we do not have the time, financial resources or abilities to live according to all our values. What become applicable are priorities.

First, let us consider a nonspecific threat of violence from our countrymen. While we all believe in peace and love, if a conservative's safety is threatened he tends to favor blowing up the troublemaking bastards, or at least keeping a close eye on them. His priority is protecting his wellbeing. When a liberal's safety is threatened, he tends to revel in the freedom that allows aspiring bomb makers to read books on the art of explosives. To the liberal, any loss of civil rights of the would-be bombers or of their comrades will inevitably lead to loss of his own rights. His priority is preserving his civil liberties. Both sides use value statements to justify their viewpoints, but in the end the debate comes down to priorities: if both are not possible, would you rather feel secure in your person or in your rights? Because liberal and conservative priorities are necessarily opposed under general threat of danger, there is no compromise between the two. Each group thinks the other unable to fully understand the stakes.

Of course, if his life is directly threatened, any sane person will shoot first and ask questions later. Ideology is useless to a dead man. The fundamental difference between liberals and conservatives, as it pertains to this article, is tolerance of danger. While conservatives believe any threat that makes them feel unsafe justifies such action, liberals consider only imminent and specific danger to be worthy of such a course. If a threat is nonspecific or not immediate I choose to live in fear and so ensure my rights as a citizen. This means that I fight for the rights of terrorist groups who may one day blow up my house.

The threat of violence from a foreign nation or terrorist is more complicated because one cannot argue that the rights of U.S. citizens and nationals apply to foreign persons or that the violation of their rights will lead to violation of one's own. In the face of a foreign threat, conservatives once again take the position of safety above all. Few liberals would argue with the need to defend our country when attacked, but we do place a rigid standard on the circumstances surrounding our defense. We do not believe that waging war to prevent another country from maybe possibly attacking us some time in the future—which we have reason to believe they will do because they hate us—is an act of self defense. It is a risk to allow rulers with anti-American sentiments to remain in power, but it is a risk I must take to respect the autonomy of independent nations.

Today, many countries have nuclear weapons. Those that don't can still find ways to kill U.S. citizens. Every person must live with this uncertainty unless he wishes to wage war against the entire world. Liberals and conservatives differ in how much uncertainty we find acceptable. Neither group believes in acts of aggression against other nations, nor in absolute pacifism, but we cannot agree on the definition of either.

Despite the tone of certain Observer authors, we liberals have reasons for our actions and we are willing to accept their consequences. We also ask conservatives to accept these consequences, which are for beliefs they do not hold, and conservatives, in turn, ask us to do the same. This is an inevitable part of sharing a democratic nation. Because I understand the importance of feeling secure in one's person, I do not ask that conservatives change their views, nor do I see much room for compromise, but I would request that Bergquist and others bear in mind that liberal values are not aimed at helping terrorists escape punishment by "[hiding] behind the Bill of Rights," but result from a deep reluctance to descend on the slippery slope of lost civil rights. Any conservative author who does not address this reluctance either fails to understand the liberal mindset or wishes merely to engage in liberal-bashing. If the editors of the Observer desire a journal of political inquiry and debate, they must produce articles that address liberal concerns and beliefs. They must prove that we are wrong. This cannot be accomplished by articles that fail to acknowledge liberals as rational beings or that misinterpret our motives. If the editors would rather produce a publication aimed at making fun of liberals to their conservative friends, they are doing an excellent job.

# PROGRESSIVE TAXATION: DON'T WEIN ABOUT IT

BY MIKE CHURCH

In his essay for the last issue of the Carleton Observer, “Progressive Income Tax = Bad”, Andrew Weiner asserts that the progressive income tax structure encourages “decadence and failure”, and that our society should instead implement a regressive system—that is, one in which high-income people face lower marginal tax rates than poorer people. I would like to discuss the faults of his proposal, which I honestly hope was offered in jest. First, though, let us examine two arguments in support of progressive taxation—one philosophical, the other pragmatic in nature.

The marginal value of money—in layman’s terms, the worth of the “next dollar”—declines as a person’s income and wealth grow, when “value” is defined both in comparison to observable benchmarks such as time and health, and when measured in subjective terms of “happiness”. Therefore, if we take a purely utilitarian view whereby it is best to maximize the “sum happiness” of all individuals within a society, we should favor equitable distribution over polarization. (Of course, I do not intend to espouse enforced equidistribution; that not only defies human nature but would also, most likely, diminish incentive and reduce the collective well-being. We avoid this discussion since the justness and utility of some inequality of results does not justify the outright offensive inequality within American society.) Yet we can compare the value of the “rich” and “poor” dollar in more tangible terms: Standard consumer goods such as toothpaste, broccoli, and soap—which represent a large share of a poor person’s budget—tend to be priced according to the costs of producing them, as they are sold in large, competitive markets. By contrast, the prices of goods and services consumed by the wealthy—such as rare art, fine wines, and high-end real estate—are largely responsive to the massive glut of wealth held by a small set of people. Raising taxes on the poor will require them to forgo necessities or consume goods of lower quality, while increasing taxes for the wealthy will simply turn a \$2,500 bottle of wine into a \$1,500 one, or a \$10,000-a-month New York flat into a \$6,000 apartment. Hence, even the wealthy themselves would not suffer inordinately from higher taxes, whereas the poor will suffer greatly.

I’LL TAKE THE LIBERTY OF GUESSING THAT I GREW UP CLOSER TO THE “MEAN STREETS” THAN MR. WEINER DID, SO LET ME SPELL IT OUT: THOSE IN POVERTY HAVE PLENTY INCENTIVE TO MAKE MORE MONEY. NEITHER LACK OF MOTIVATION NOR “DECADENCE AND FAILURE” EXPLAINS WHY THE IMPOVERISHED LINGER IN THEIR MISERABLE STATE.

In addition to these subjective grounds for progressive taxation, there is also a pragmatic, ethical case: Taxes are, in essence, repayment for public goods. Everyone uses public goods, but the wealthy have demonstrably more stake in them, and therefore larger ethical debts to society. Let’s say that, every day, I drive across The Big Bridge to work at MegaCorp. Am I a beneficiary of The Big Bridge? Certainly I am; without it, I would have to seek a lower-paying job on my side of the river. Likewise, I benefit from other public goods—my education gives me the benefits of literacy and improved problem-solving skills. I have debts to society, and must repay them in taxes. Yet consider the CEO of MegaCorp: The Big Bridge enables not just him, but thousands of workers and millions of dollars of freight to get to MegaCorp daily. Regardless of his educational background, he benefits immensely from public education—undoubtedly the bulk of his literate, creative work force was educated in the public school system, some of his top-ranking executives, attorneys, and actuaries may have paid for college with Pell Grants, and so on. Not only would this CEO suffer, were The Big Bridge to tumble into the water or were public education discontinued, but he would fall the hardest. Therefore, it’s completely fair that he should pay a larger portion of his income to the public than should I, his underling.

## PROGRESSIVE TAXATION, FROM PAGE 10

So we have both a philosophical and a pragmatic argument in favor of progressive taxation. Let us turn now to Andrew Weiner's argument against it. The central argument of Mr. Weiner's essay seems to be that, under our current system, "the harder you work, the smaller the fraction of that work you are allowed to keep." This knee-jerk equation of wealth with "hard work" is not unique to Mr. Weiner, but it is fallacious, insufferably self-serving, and a punch in the gut to millions of Americans. It's true that personal wealth is sometimes a result of earnest labor, especially in the case of small or upstart businesses—one simply doesn't go from zero to prominence without considerable effort. Yet it's equally true that personal wealth can result from well-connectedness, luck, or inheritance—anyone who claims Paris Hilton to be harder-working than I am will be quickly dismissed as an idiot. Furthermore, "hard work" doesn't always guarantee wealth, else the "working poor", who often must work two or three jobs to stay afloat, would emerge as the next privileged class. Despite the belief that hard work enables the unfortunate to "move up the ladder", sometimes even the reverse can happen. Many American workers fail to get promoted because they work too hard, making them irreplaceable in their current position.

Mr. Weiner further claimed that a regressive income tax "would actually give poor people some incentive to make more money." I'll take the liberty of guessing that I grew up closer to the "mean streets" than Mr. Weiner did, so let me spell it out: Those in poverty have plenty incentive to make more money. Neither lack of motivation nor "decadence and failure" explains why the impoverished linger in their miserable state. The reasons are more complicated and subtle than that. Probably foremost among these reasons is that life at a subsistence level precludes the long-term orientation that we, as middle- and upper-class Americans, take for granted. I would guess that most cashiers in grocery stores don't think much about résumés or careers, but rather about how to juggle multiple low-paying jobs while meeting deadlines on next month's bills.

Mr. Weiner concludes by claiming that the nation's poorest should be assessed a flat nominal tax of \$3,500 per year, and that those unable to pay "will be arrested and forced to work off their taxes by performing low wage government jobs." It's funny that he should mention that, because a trip into the history books shows that this has already been done. In Proto-capitalist England those who were unable to repay public or private debts were thrown into "debtor's prisons" until they could "work off" their debt—the process was later abolished. Germany, in the 1930s, began running "re-education camps" to train the "lazy" homeless (along with other populations) in those Aryan values of hard work and love of country—we all know how that turned out. Finally, for a most profitable scheme, we examine the practices of American capitalists during the Industrial Revolution: even from ages as young as eight, children were responsible for the costs of their own (company-provided) food and lodging, and had to work in the mines (or factories, railroads, etc.) to pay off these debts. As in so many forced-labor situations, the company-set living costs were always higher than wages, leaving the worker unable to escape an effectively hereditary debt that began mounting at a young age. If an individual defaulted on this debt, there were company "police" hired to extract it, and not in the most civilized of ways. In fact, these examples are not confined to history. In the international underworld, slavery enforced by debt and the threat of deportation (most of its victims are in their host countries illegally) exists today, and not exclusively outside of the United States. So while Mr. Weiner may be proud of his "indebt-then-put-to-forced-work" innovation, it's not at all novel.

Despite my numerous objections to Mr. Weiner's poorly-thought-out rant on the merits of regressive taxation, there's one sentence of his essay that I must draw out, because I cannot bring myself to disagree with it: "I know what you're thinking: 'Andrew, that is the worst idea ever.'" Yes, Mr. Weiner, you're right; I rarely stopped thinking that throughout the reading of your essay.

Mike Church is a Senior

***"Cowardice asks the question, Is it safe? Expediency asks the question, Is it politic? Vanity asks the question, Is it popular? But conscience asks the question, Is it right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because his conscience tells him that it is right."***  
***--Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.***

# REPS AND DEMS GANG UP ON REALITY

BY JOSH MARKOWITZ

Although this election cycle may not reveal much truth about either major candidate's true personality, it certainly is telling a lot about the current state of this country's political climate. It is one of flat-out gang warfare, and many unaccustomed to it in the past are being swept up in the turmoil and asked to choose a side as the two parties wage a turf war over what is considered moderation. We often hear about this election being the most "polarized" the country's ever seen; how Democrats and Republicans have raised such a feverish shrill of hate and disagreement towards one another that they cannot even hold a civil conversation. This surprises me, however, not in the least. Quite simply, there is much more at stake in this election than there has been in any other of recent memory, and both parties promise to bring home the bacon.

In the past, Democrats marketed themselves as the paragons of compassion and control over the excesses of the free society. Even today, this is the essence of their policy proposals. However, since the Clinton era they have added a degree of economic rationality to their appeals for support. Not only should we elect them because they protect the interests of women, the poor, minorities, and the environment, but also because they will make us rich, unless we already are, in which case nothing can hurt us and they don't need our votes anyway because we are so few in number.

Republicans, on the other hand, used to argue over Democrats' heads, promising different results from different premises. They advocated less government interference in all aspects of life, upholding the virtue of personal responsibility and touting the long-term rationality of free markets. Under these premises the two sides could agree that each was right, but also fundamentally corrupt and, thus, wrong, on its own terms. Elections revolved around petty character assassination and moral questioning. Most Americans didn't really care one way or another.

But now the Republicans have assimilated the Democratic model and philosophy of government and the Democrats have grabbed the torch of fiscal responsibility and bureaucratic efficiency from the Republicans (at least in rhetoric). Both claim to be explicitly courting the "moderate" vote. Apparently, Americans today demand unrestrained government management of their personal lives, and they want it cheap and they want it now! They just differ on which parts of their lives are negotiable. The result we see is a ridiculous contest of two parties debating whose policies of "divide-and-conquer" better meet the demands of pragmatic conservative restraint. The reason they hate each other so much right now is, quite simply, because they both want to do the same thing, just in different proportions.

While the Democrats temper their liberalism with a healthy dose of realism, the Republicans douse their conservatism in the schmaltzy glow of compassionism. And so we will end up with a President who believes he can have his cake and eat it too. His favored gang will dine on the carcass of its less popular rival, as private benefits step in to repay the bonds of political support. The real question has thus become, to those who have examined the implications of their candidate's intended policies, not what you believe but whose side you are on. Neither has given up on your vote because they both think it's up for sale if the price is right. Sure, the conservatives don't like Bush and the liberals don't like Kerry, but who else will they vote for? Besides, why preach to the choir if you can build a nation of faithful by drawing water from rock? Thus, it increasingly seems that nothing short of a miracle will ever bring us a President whom we can both love and believe--whoever we are.

Josh Markowitz is a Senior

**A GOVERNMENT THAT IS BIG  
ENOUGH TO GIVE YOU ALL  
YOU WANT IS BIG ENOUGH  
TO TAKE IT ALL AWAY.  
--BARRY GOLDWATER**

**Have an opinion? Submit it to the Observer!**

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