

PRINCIPLES OF LIBERALISM

Government of the People, by the People, for the People

A man's political faith like his religious faith lacks the vitalizing germ unless he can "give a reason for the faith that is in him." It is true that in politics as in religion one is "born to the faith." As it is put in Pinafore:—

Every boy and every girl
That's born into this world alive
Is either a little Liberal
Or else a little Conservative.

But the Liberalism or the Conservatism that continues to be founded on the accident and the prejudice of birth, that believes in "my party and my father's party right or wrong" is the real cause of the discouraging inertia of public opinion that often allows the self-interested few to practically control elections and governments, that prevents or retards reform and makes of a free democracy a bureaucratic tyranny. Liberalism is a positive reasoned belief and every Liberal should be able, apart from opinions as to the Government or the issues of the day, to justify his faith according to cardinal principles of good government.

What are the fundamental distinctions between Liberalism and Conservatism? The words themselves embody the respective historical attitudes of the two parties toward the main function of government.

Liberalism is in essence the problem of realising liberty. It seeks the setting free of the mass of the people in regard to self-government, trade, religion, education, industry, in all the manifold ramifications of society. Conservatism, on the other hand, means at bottom restriction. It means the conserving of vested rights, the centralization of government in the "governing classes", setting the brakes on social progress.

The function of government is to define the rights of the individual in terms of the common good and to think of the common good in terms of the welfare of the individual. In the case of Liberalism the emphasis has usually been on the "common good." In the case of Conservatism the emphasis is usually on the "individual." Historically the particular "individuals" have belonged to the authoritative or vested interest classes. Their motto has been "what we have we hold." Liberalism has found its main support in the masses. The natural result has been that legislation with each party, has been mainly for the classes their leaders represent.

Liberalism recognises that the teaching of history shows that progress is more continuous and secure when men are content to deal with great reforms piecemeal than when they seek to destroy root and

branch in order to erect a complete new system which has captured the idealistic imagination. But its grappling with reforms is continuous. Conservatism, while believing in "the god of things as they are," has usually grappled with reforms under the stimulus of an increasingly feared and potent democracy. Liberalism has had to wrench from Conservatism responsible government by the people, manhood suffrage, equal taxation, the right of like opportunity for all classes of the community. Conservatism has clung to precedent, the established order, the old authoritarian basis of government and has yielded but slowly and as a rule only on compulsion.

Liberalism is ordained of the common people and sprang from a common resistance to the oppression of arbitrary and self-centred rule. Conservatism had its birth in the doctrine of the divine right of kings. The "governing classes" were ordained of God because they themselves arranged the ordination. Liberalism has its principles embedded in the human heart. Conservatism finds its well-springs in its own pockets.

Toryism is ever invoking the forces of reaction, as was evidenced last session in the application of closure by arbitrary and unconstitutional methods, the attempt to centralize in the ministry control of expenditures and in the effort to revert to Downing Street rule in regard to Naval defence.

The main battlements of privilege and vested authority have been won by Liberalism through centuries of struggle. The fight

of democracy for freedom, for equality of opportunity and for substantial justice to all individuals of the commonwealth still goes on. There are still inequalities of taxation to be righted, the oppression of vested interests in trade and industry to be overcome, monopolies and trusts to be regulated, the rights of society as a whole to be asserted to the wealth that depends on its own collective enterprise. The increase of the well-being of the masses does not appear to be by any means proportionate to the general growth of wealth. In the sphere of economic legislation, Liberalism still has perhaps its greatest work to do. The welfare of the common man at the common task is its first consideration.

Government of the people, for the people, and by the people is the essence of Liberalism.

First principles must first be grasped before a man can be either a good citizen or an intelligent adherent of the Liberal party. The application of these principles to the problems of Canadian politics in relation to national, imperial and world-wide interests is the work of the Liberal party in Canada.

THE PRINCIPLE OF LIBERALISM is TRUST in the People Qualified by Prudence;

THE PRINCIPLE OF CONSERVATISM is MISTRUST of the People Qualified by Fear.

W. E. GLADSTONE.