

Entertainment Outlook

An indepth look at at Liberal woollyism

Granted, there's not much point in yearning for a bygone era of smaller problems and simpler values.

Still, as you look round at the political landscape on both sides of the border, the question does present itself: whatever happened to the good old days, when it was still respectable to be a woolly-headed liberal?

The decline of woolly-headed liberalism is hardly a new trend, of course. It's been several years since a new breed of liberals started publicly spurning woollyism by proclaiming themselves "neoliberals."

(Neoliberals, as far as I can figure, seem to be upwardly-mobile young professional types who believe that social conscience must be balanced by fiscal conservatism. Or to put it in simpler terms, a neoliberal is someone who sees nothing wrong with social programs so long as they don't necessitate higher taxes on BMW parts.)

But the anti-woolly trend took a shocking new turn just the other week, when Ronald Reagan unveiled the Republicans' master plan — to sink the Democrats by convincing voters that Michael Dukakis is any sort of liberal at all.

"It's time," the president proclaimed, "to say the dreaded L-word. Time to label Dukakis what he is: liberal, liberal, liberal."

This proclamation, of course, raises a couple of questions. To begin with, did Reagan really intend to hurl the ultimate insult by calling Dukakis not merely a "liberal," but a "liberal, liberal, liberal?" Or was it just that his teleprompter got stuck?

But more significantly, is it really true that "liberal" has become such a filthy term it can no longer be tolerated in decent American families?

"Mommy — Jimmy said the L-word!" "Oh, wretched boy — just wait till your father gets home."

Now, granted, the liberal label has not yet become the kiss of death in Canadian politics. Quite the contrary, as a matter of fact.

John Turner won his party's leadership by proclaiming loudly and repeatedly that he was a liberal — over the objections of his opponents, who kept shouting back, "Oh, no you're not; you're a Bay Street Tory."

Similarly, Ed Broadbent's whole strategy is to convince voters the NDP is really a liberal party. (Again, his opponents remain unconvinced. While conceding his image may be liberal, lib-



Weir's View

By Ian Weir
Thomson News Service

eral, liberal, they insist his undies, undies, undies are still red, red, red.)

But even in Canada, woolly-headed liberalism has fallen into disgrace. Several years ago, Pierre Trudeau acknowledged this when he proclaimed the Liberals were the party of "the radical centre, the extreme middle."

This was, you'll admit, a startling concept. The old, fuzzy, bleeding-heart liberals were gone forever — to be replaced, apparently, by a new, sharp-eyed and hard-headed squad of fanatical fence-sitters.

Which brings us back to my original question. And as someone who has been a woolly-headed liberal ever since I was old enough to get tangled up in my own logic, I ask it plaintively: what's wrong with the woollies?

Admittedly, woollyism has its drawbacks. As a philosophy, it often involves a certain evasion of difficult decisions and initiatives.

Generally speaking, a woolly tends to be someone who believes cans of worms are best left unopened, industrial efficiency is best left to the Japanese, and

deficit reduction is best left to God, who alone understands how the economy works anyway.

As to the dilemma of how to balance economic expansion with environmental protection, the woolly ideal is a two-step solution. Step one: save the whales. Step two: ask them to figure it out.

Still, woollyism has its merits. Just consider the fact that history does not record a single woolly-headed Spanish Inquisitor, Iranian mullah or Southern football coach.

And when people object that Canada's current problems are the legacy of woolly-headed optimists, it's only fair to ask the question: who but a woolly-headed optimist could have conceived of this country in the first place?

Ah, well. It's just a small suggestion, as we sit shivering in these cold and blustery political times.

Hard-headed realists serve a necessary function. But woollies have their purpose, too.

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