



The Left and the Masses: Part III

Claiming the role of champions of the masses is something the political left has been doing ever since there has been a political left — which is to say, ever since the late 18th century, when people with such views sat on the left side of the French National Assembly.

Like so much that is claimed by the left, their compassion for the masses has seldom been subjected to any factual test. Both their words and their deeds reveal their low opinion of the people they claim to be championing.



When Barack Obama referred to ordinary working people as people who are “bitter,” and who “cling to guns or religion,” that was not just a peculiarity of Obama. He was part of a centuries-long tradition on the left.

No one so epitomized the 18th century left as Jean Jacques Rousseau, who likened the masses to “a stupid, pusillanimous invalid.” In the 19th century, Karl Marx said, “The working class is revolutionary or it is nothing” — in other words, millions of human beings mattered only if they carried out his vision.

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Fabian socialist George Bernard Shaw included the working class among the “detestable” people who “have no right to live.” He added: “I should despair if I did not know that they will all die presently, and that there is no need on earth why they should be replaced by people like themselves.”

It sounds very much like Hillary Clinton’s view of the “deplorables” who support her opponent, or Bill Clinton’s characterization of the same people as “standard rednecks.”

What role is there for the masses in the vision of the left?

One role is to provide a moral basis for the left to claim power, as defenders of the downtrodden. No secular doctrine has so swept across the world so swiftly, and with such widespread political impact as Marxism in the 20th century. Its central premise is that the workers are poor because their employers have exploited them.

That was not a hypothesis to be tested but an axiom to be accepted as sacred dogma. Nowhere in the three volumes of Marx’s classic *Capital* was there the slightest attempt to test that belief empirically.

It would not be difficult to put the Marxian exploitation thesis to a test. If capitalists’ exploitation of the workers is what makes them poor, then in countries run by Marxists, the workers should have a higher standard of living than in countries with a capitalist economic system.

But among the many Communist countries that emerged around the world in the 20th century, there has not been a single one where the workers’ standard of living has been as high as that of working people in the United States.

The political left in general has been able to claim that they have more compassion for the less



Written by [Thomas Sowell](#) on October 21, 2016

fortunate, and to depict their opponents as lacking in compassion for others. For none of these assertions have they felt a need to offer hard evidence.

Such evidence as exists contradicts those assertions. An empirical study titled *Who Really Cares* by Arthur C. Brooks found that conservatives donate a higher percentage of their incomes to philanthropic causes, as well as more hours of their time as volunteers, and they donate far more blood.

Another study showed that President Ronald Reagan donated a higher percentage of his income to philanthropic causes than such liberal icons as President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Senator Ted Kennedy.

What may be more remarkable than these findings is that the left was able to get away with asserting the opposite for years, without evidence being asked for or given.

What is also remarkable is the extent to which the left's preservation of their own self-flattering vision is defended at virtually all costs — with both facts and thoughts to the contrary being dismissed, rather than answered, using such words and phrases as “stereotypes,” “blaming the victim” or “racism.”

People with a different vision of the world are not answered but characterized — as people needing to have their consciousness raised or as people who “just don't get it.”

The near-monopoly of the left in academia allows such evasions to pass muster. But it cheats students out of practice in confronting opposing views on innumerable subjects, which they will have to do after they leave the insulated confines of academia.

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