

vote, you deserve the office." But of course they didn't. I must be totally nuts to even conceive of such an idea. They're about gaining, holding, and exploiting power. Period.

Larry, this scenario of pre-emptive war without end as a response to terrorism, the rich getting richer while the poor work harder to keep up, the purposeful trashing of the environment, a Big Brother government intolerant of dissent, when all put together in a package, make me weep for the death of the promise of America. We have been turned into a me-first nation, and we will pay the cost of this arrogance. Our wealth, power, and geo-political advantage put us in a privileged position to work for the betterment of all mankind. We've been squandering an opportunity, which, if intelligently exploited, would ultimately work in our favor.

I do a lot of reading, so I feel I have a better background in discussing these matters than the average person, but when I attempt to express my opinions verbally, all of the thoughts and feelings running through my mind cause me to just sit there and sputter. Also, I don't like to interrupt, and I don't like to be interrupted, nor do I enjoy listening to people who are having an interruptive conversation. But when the subject is politics, you just have to get used to it, so that's another reason I avoid talking politics.

I don't expect any of this to change any of your opinions (my liberal bias, again), but I can't help wishing that those who get most of their information from the corporate-financed default-Conservative mass-media broaden their horizons to include alternate viewpoints based on hard facts uncontaminated by Conservative ideology and that show a concern for overall human welfare. Like most Americans, you have an aversion to hippies, the drug culture, street criminals, elitist academic know-it-all-types, draft-dodgers, lawyers, politicians on the take, queers, "feminazis", and soft-headed idealists. The people who run the media know this about you. They tailor their content to stress stories where you're drawn into a good-guy/bad-guy scenario. Look for this and you will see that their purpose is not to give you the content that you need as an informed citizen, but to manipulate your emotions so you will stay tuned through the commercial. Although this strategy is profit-driven, it dovetails nicely with the Conservative's desire to have us so disgusted with politics (and so poorly informed) that we tune out and don't bother to vote.

One final point: I've been speaking of Conservatism as a political ideology rather than of cultural Conservatism. In my view, cultural Conservatism in America is generally religion-based, and as such has no valid place in the politics of the secular arena. Seeking to legislate how everyone ought to behave on the basis of one's religious beliefs is puritanical bigotry. Furthermore, the tenets of Christianity are in direct contradiction to the American Conservative political ideology. Where the two come together is in their mutual desire to coercively enforce obedience to values comfortable and profitable to themselves, and their mutual abhorrence of Liberal tolerance for varied life-styles and value systems.

serious attention to any of them seldom occurs in the media unless they can be characterized as "loony".

Let me give you my take on the Progressive bias: "We seek a world without war, led by democratic governments regulating a truly free market economy that puts a floor under poverty, with all people guaranteed full human and civil rights, so that people can lead meaningful, purposeful lives that avoid causing further environmental degradation."

Instead, we are getting a growing military seeking victorious wars to justify the need for ever greater armaments in concert with huge out-of-control corporations indifferent to the worldwide poverty and environmental degradation they cause which leave governments the task of coercively policing a cynical population forced to compete with each other for ever-scarcer money.

What makes the present situation different for people who share the Progressive viewpoint, is that we are shut out of the debate to the point where the issues and ideas we passionately believe in are not even acknowledged to exist. Take Iraq. The focus is kept entirely on what a bad guy Saddam is, how he *might* have WMD and he *might* use them, we can't risk giving him that opportunity, and if we just go in there and kick the shit out of them, the people will love us so much they'll set up a democracy just like Texas that will be such a wonderful example that all those neighboring Islamist extremists will fall all over themselves in a rush to emulate it. End of argument. In other words, a direct appeal to—actually, creation of—American's emotions of hatred, anger, and fear with no realistic concern for future consequences. Usurpation of Congressional authority through manipulating a fuzzy resolution during an election, the potential cost in human life, the world-wide outcry for peace, the damage to the United Nations, the roll of oil in their calculations, the erosion of civil rights in an artificial wartime environment, the probability of stimulating more terrorism, the complexity, cost, and duration of rebuilding Iraq, are all considerations they brush aside.

Many ruthless dictators are out there who don't receive this kind of threat from our government, many of whom were, in fact, installed with the complicity of our government, as was Saddam Hussein, originally. The fact that Bush doesn't go after *them* tells us that there must be some hidden motive behind such a hysterical propaganda buildup. And that, obviously, is oil. The US is dependent on mid-east oil. Worldwide, oil production has reached a peak that requires bringing new sources on line just to keep up. Sanctions have kept Iraqi oil production, potentially second in the world, at half-capacity. Seven billion in investment will be necessary to bring that up to full, and the Bush team wants that opportunity to go to American corporations who will then stabilize our supply, increase our control over the worldwide price and supply, and rebuild Iraq while enriching American investors with the profits. They are actually planning on using Saddam's government (minus Saddam and a few of his cronies) for this purpose. Freedom and democracy, my ass.

If the Bush gang actually believed in democracy, after the 2000 election they would have said, "Well, Albert, this one was too close to call in Florida, so since you won the popular

receive the votes from the swing-voter electorate. It's safe to predict that during the second half of 2004 we will either still be at war, or poised on the brink of a new one.

But to return to my main focus—media biases—a crucial difference separates the conservative and liberal agendas. If you think it's just a Liberal bias that the Conservative agenda *always* seeks money and power, as you follow the news, follow the money. You will see that the end result of every Conservative initiative, no matter what the stated goal, is the enrichment of business and/or reward to a contributor, and/or getting an iron grip on the levers of power. The Conservative's exclusive devotion to the acquisition and retention of wealth and power makes his agendas—when Conservatives are in positions of political power—relatively straight-forward and un-complicated, however much adorned with euphemistic bells-and-whistles.

Liberals, on the other hand, seeking to use government power to confer upon our least advantaged citizens the bounty gained through their redistributive strategies, argue endlessly amongst themselves over what those strategies ought to be. This environment attracts highly educated do-gooders who do the heavy lifting of dealing with the "facts" rather than media-savvy sound-bite rhetoric. They bore the ordinary citizen to death while managing to strike an offensive elitist tone. If successful, they reason, they will receive the gratitude of the formerly-disadvantaged (the majority of the population) at the polls, and thus secure their grip on power. But their lack of internal consensus coupled with the universal tendency of politicians to cater to wealthy constituents produces minimal results, so a disillusioned electorate is easy to persuade that Liberals are phonies. That's because they mostly are.

On the other hand, the Conservative agenda benefits the top 20% to some degree, the top 10% to a considerable degree, but the major benefits go to the top 1%, with real control exercised by the top tenth of one percent. This leaves them with a real bad problem: anybody earning less than \$100,000/yr. (or who makes less than half of his or her income from investments) is shooting themselves in the foot to vote Conservative. The people behind Reagan had the genius to exploit the "wedge issues" (racism, anti-feminism, patriarchalism, religious piety, puritanism, patriotic militarism, "family values", homophobia), turn "liberal" into a dirty word, and—for the first time since Roosevelt—to take the control of the political rhetoric for the Conservatives. In other words, since his time, the media has presented the Conservative wedge-issue agenda as the mainstream subject of discussion. This makes great media because it's mostly heated arguments about who the good guys and bad guys are, couched in rhetoric that communicates at the gut level without necessarily meaning anything. The point is, only those issues that Conservatives choose get debated, and then the course of the debate is channeled into those "hot-button" areas that engage the attention of the mostly-passive media audience. The Bush administration has taken this media domination strategy to the level of a high art.

Meanwhile, the Progressive bias has virtually no mainstream media visibility except for demonstrations so large (or bizarre) they can't be ignored. Ideas of any depth or complexity are poorly suited to advertising-dominated mass media. That's why paying

The essential irreducible Conservative position favors the use of government to further concentration of wealth and power into the hands of the already wealthy and powerful. The essential irreducible Liberal position favors the use of government to further the distribution of wealth and power more widely. The Centrist seeks to find a balance between the two in a shifting landscape. The media would have us believe that these three positions are the only ones "mainstream" enough to have any "relevance". Further, the Centrist politician is characterized by the media as either right or left because someone mediating makes for a poor story compared with someone taking a "controversial" position.

The ideas and agendas of the Progressives and the Fascists tend to be considered un-newsworthy for two very different reasons. This country has never come close to having a truly Progressive government, therefore, Progressives need not be taken seriously. Meanwhile, the Conservative political apparatus has been co-opted by its Fascist wing so that radical right policies are sold as Conservative. If you think I'm indulging in name-calling, my dictionary defines Fascism as "a system of government characterized by one-party dictatorship (there is now a barely perceptible difference between most Democrats and the Republicans: both are beholden to "big money"), forcible suppression of the opposition (unions, leftists, minorities), with-holding of civil rights, private ownership in cooperation with centralized government power, belligerent nationalism, glorification of war..." A little over the top? Okay, but the Bush administration is charging full speed ahead in this direction. Showing utter disdain for democracy in his manner of coming to power, his usurping of Congressional prerogatives ordained by the Constitution, mass jailing of innocents, close corporate ties, flouting of civil rights, canceling of treaties, proposing preventive war, display Bush's headlong rush in the Fascist direction. If "radical right" would be more "politically correct", so be it.

The point I'm making is that the cynical view that it's all to some degree bullshit fails to take into regard the fact that the real issues of our time are being swept under the rug by the corporate media, whether liberal, conservative, or attempting to be balanced between the two. The fact is, our highly-technologized, wasteful, oil-dependent, cheap-labor-dependent global-transport-dependent way of life is un-sustainable *now*. The wealthy and powerful are aware of this as much as any left-wing academic. They are amassing their huge fortunes to assure their own survival through their control of the levers of finance and the military and police capability of the government. We are now being trained to accept this. "Oh, so we're initiating a war without the benefit of either explicit Congressional declaration, or UN Security Council approval? What's the big deal? That's different enough to be newsworthy, but basically normal because it's our democratically elected government that's doing it, okay?" Not okay. And, with no apology, they brazenly initiated their drive for war on Iraq in the middle of the off-year election campaign. To object, or even open the discussion to alternate points of view, risked having one's patriotism impugned. The media went right along with this Fascist strategy. This administration is clearly set on staying in power through keeping the electorate in constant readiness for war. Since the present government is the one "dealing with the threat to national security", its members and supporters will be the ones to

DEAR LARRY, (Scala, guitarist)--3/9/03

I need to get something off my chest, so at the risk of offending you, I'm sending you this e-mail. I think it's probably necessary for my peace of mind that we don't discuss current events at the gig. I suggested this the last time we did, and I appreciate the fact that since then you've avoided bringing up political issues. My problem is that on the last discussion we had, you probably misunderstood the reasons why my response was so heated. I want to see if I can clarify those reasons now.

When it comes to biases, we all have them, if only in the form of personal preferences. But when it comes to understanding and interpreting more abstract ideas and large scale events, it becomes important to have the clearest possible picture of how to identify true and meaningful information, and then to have the clearest possible picture of which are the valid ways to process that information. Unfortunately, most of us don't get this training in school. Those of us who have, have learned to identify the logical fallacies employed as debating tricks such as: *the outright lie, the half-truth, the red herring, name-calling, quoting out of context, creating "straw men", false analogies, tautologies, mixing apples and oranges, over-simplification or the opposite--obfuscation, the irrelevant anecdote, switching premises in mid-argument, changing the subject, inventing and employing meaningless rhetoric, appeals to latent fear, appeals to latent anger, building arguments on un-provable assumptions*, and probably others (although I think I've covered most of them). Coming to reasonable conclusions about current affairs—an absolute necessity for citizens of a democracy—is difficult enough without the purposeful intrusion of fallacious thought processing.

Let's look at the liberal bias vs. conservative bias question. This is what's been nagging at me since our last conversation. If I get your viewpoint correctly, you see all political views available on the media as biased; all information designed to persuade or entertain; and, therefore, all information and opinion about current events unavoidably biased in favor of the interests of the speaker or writer. This is a posture of universal cynicism which is, in my view, not a bad place to begin. It's where you take it from there that I question. As I get it, your view is we all decide which bias has most gut-appeal and then collect and interpret our information and opinions on the basis of what most supports that bias. My view is that the gut is the thing we should all be willing to question at any time. The gut divides the universe into the cool and the uncool. The uncool is then ignored, shunned, and feared. We hear only what we want to hear. Learning has come to an end. If I'm wrong about your cynical posture, I'll have set you up as a "straw man", and will have to alter my views accordingly (thereby displaying my liberal bias).

The first things lacking in the liberal bias vs. conservative bias debate are the three positions surrounding them: the centrist, the radical left, and the radical right. The leading Democrats in Congress are mostly Centrists most of the time (except a few guys like Ted Kennedy, who is a definitional Liberal). Liberals, conservatives, and centrists generally agree on not changing the basic rules of the game. The radical left (which I will refer to as the Progressives) and the radical right (which I will refer to as the Fascist's) seek to change the rules of the game.