Patriotism Is More Closely Linked to Dissent than to Conformity

Ron Paul

Ron Paul is a US congressman from Texas. He has run for president twice—in 1988 as the Libertarian nominee and in 2008 as a candidate for the Republican nomination.

For some, patriotism is [as eighteenth-century British author Samuel Johnson famously said] “the last refuge of a scoundrel.” For others, it means dissent against a government’s abuse of the people’s rights.

I have never met a politician in Washington, or any American for that matter, who chose to be called “unpatriotic.” Nor have I met anyone who did not believe he wholeheartedly supported our troops wherever they may be.

What I have heard all too frequently from various individuals is sharp accusations that because their political opponents disagree with them on the need for foreign military entanglements, they were “unpatriotic, un-American, evildoers deserving contempt.”

The original American patriots were those individuals brave enough to resist with force the oppressive power of King George. I accept the definition of patriotism as that effort to resist oppressive state power. The true patriot is motivated by a sense of responsibility, and out of self-interest—for himself, his family, and the future of his country—to resist government abuse of power. He rejects the notion that patriotism means obedience to the state.

Resistance need not be violent, but the civil disobedience that might be required involves confrontation with the state and invites possible imprisonment.

What Does It Mean to Be Patriotic?

Peaceful nonviolent revolutions against tyranny have been every bit as successful as those involving military confrontation. Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. achieved great political successes by practicing nonviolence, yet they themselves suffered physically at the hands of the state.

But whether the resistance against government tyrants is nonviolent or physically violent, the effort to overthrow state oppression qualifies as true patriotism.

True patriotism today has gotten a bad name—at least from the government and the press. Those who now challenge the unconstitutional methods of imposing an income tax on us, or force us to use a monetary system designed to serve the rich at the expense of the poor, are routinely condemned. These American patriots are sadly looked down upon by many. They are never praised as champions of liberty as Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. have been.

Liberals, who withhold their taxes as a protest against war, are vilified as well—especially by conservative statists.

Unquestioned loyalty to the state is especially demanded in times of war. Lack of support for a war policy is said to be unpatriotic. Arguments against a particular policy that endorses a war once started are always said to be endangering the troops in the field. This, they blatantly claim, is unpatriotic and all dissent must stop. Yet it is dissent from government policies that defines the true patriot and champion of liberty....

Citizens Accept Loss of Liberty for Fear of Being Called Unpatriotic

Those who mistrust the people and the market for solving problems have no trouble promoting a “war psychology” to justify the expansive role of the state.

This includes the role the federal government plays in our personal lives as well as in all our economic transactions. And