

ened to do so at a certain point was the American nuclear deterrent. Nothing could have more vividly demonstrated the inextricable connection between the survival of Israel and the military adequacy of the United States. Nevertheless, even after the Yom Kippur war, many members of the American Jewish community and many self-proclaimed friends of Israel in the general liberal community continued to act as though the one had nothing to do with the other. They were loud in calling for a continued American commitment to the security of Israel, but they simultaneously favored cuts in the defense budget which, if implemented, would make such a commitment impossible to carry out.

It was in this contradiction that one could see the most dramatic evidence of the reluctance of the American Jewish community to face up to the unpleasant truth that the hostility to anti-Communist interventionism was as dangerous to Israel as the anti-Zionism of the Movement.

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The inextricable connection between the survival of Israel and American military strength was an idea I would soon also have the opportunity to lend strong support to during Pat Moynihan's race against Bella Abzug and Ramsey Clark for the Democratic nomination for the United States Senate in New York in 1976.

Although by 1976 Moynihan had held high appointive positions under the last four presidents, he had only run for elective office once before—as the Democratic candidate for president of the New York city council in 1965—and he had done badly enough to discourage the idea that he might have a future in electoral politics. But almost overnight, after only a few months

of putting the ideas he had expressed in his *Commentary* article into practice at the UN, he had to his own and everyone else's amazement become one of the most popular public figures in the United States. Walking the streets of New York, he would be stopped by passersby and slapped on the back; in restaurants, his table would be surrounded by people congratulating and thanking him; in a theater or concert hall, the mere sight of him was likely to set off a standing ovation. According to the public-opinion polls, it was the same everywhere in America: his approval ratings ran to an astonishing seventy percent in every region of the country and among every group in the population.

Americans loved him because he was the first public figure in a long time to assert, in language that was simultaneously blunt, eloquent, and credible, that the United States, as leader of the "liberty party," stood for something precious in the world. They loved him too because not only did he refuse to be put on the defensive by the lies and the slanders regularly hurled against the United States by the Communists and by representatives of the Third World; he also managed, just as he had prescribed in "The United States in Opposition," to put them on the defensive by the truths he had the undiplomatic clarity to speak (as, for example, when with literal accuracy he called Idi Amin of Uganda a "racist murderer").

Most Jews shared in this general American enthusiasm for Moynihan's stance, but they also had a special reason for looking up to him as their champion, and that was the way he behaved when the Arabs and the Soviet bloc introduced a resolution at the UN condemning Zionism as a form of racism and thereby in effect branding Israel a criminal state. Together with his UN colleague Leonard Garment—who was perhaps the only close associate of Richard Nixon to have emerged from the Watergate investigations with his reputation enhanced—Moynihan responded with a denunciation of the resolution the like of which had not been heard either in the UN or anywhere else for a very long time indeed. The United States was not the only country that voted

against the resolution, but most of the others did so—as their representatives all hastened to the rostrum to explain—because they thought the resolution politically unwise. Moynihan, by contrast, declared that the United States opposed it because it was wrong in principle, and because it represented a perversion of language as well as a distortion of the historical record. He used words like “obscenity” and “lies” and he did not hesitate to warn that by approving this egregiously anti-Semitic resolution (which it eventually did) the UN would disgrace itself and make a mockery of everything for which it pretended to stand.

What very few people understood about Moynihan’s response to the Zionism/racism resolution was that it arose not out of any special feeling for Israel or the Jews as such, but out of the conviction that the resolution represented an attack by the totalitarian world and its satellites and allies against the democratic world of which Israel happened for the moment to be the most vulnerable member. It was, in other words, on behalf of the liberty party rather than for the sake of the Jewish people that he sprang to the defense of Israel and because he believed that the campaign to delegitimize the state of Israel was aimed ultimately at the democratic world in general and the United States in particular. The ideological defense of Zionism was therefore dictated not only by moral considerations but by the American national interest.

I understood this because I knew Moynihan well and because he and I and Garment had discussed all these matters for many long hours while drafting the speeches they were to make in explanation of the American vote. But to most Jews this was, or would have been, had they been conscious of it, a distinction without a difference: what they heard was an official American spokesman standing up for a besieged and increasingly isolated Jewish state and doing so in a way that lifted the spirits and gladdened the heart.

For their part, what the Arabs and the Russians—and those Americans sunk in the “patterns of appeasement” Moynihan was

trying to reverse—heard was an appeal for Jewish support in the upcoming senatorial campaign. So worried was Moynihan that this explanation of his motives might discredit his entire position that he disclaimed any intention of running for the Senate, and in the strongest possible terms. He could afford to do this because he really had no intention of running, and it was only after being forced out of his job at the UN and then being worked on relentlessly by people like Bayard Rustin, Lane Kirkland of the AFL-CIO, and me that he agreed to enter the Democratic primary.

In sixteen years of personal friendship and professional collaboration, Pat Moynihan and I had had our differences and disagreements, but both of us had emerged from the experience of the sixties with the same general perspective. It was often said that we had moved to the Right, but neither of us was satisfied with that description. In one sense, of course, it was true: anyone moving away from the Left had to move to the Right. But the Right, as we understood the term, stood for a position that was in its own way no less radical than the position of the Left against which we had so decisively turned (I from a starting point much closer to it than he had ever been even in the early sixties). What was radical about the Left was that it regarded the liberal welfare state established by Roosevelt and his successors as a sham and a fraud and an obstacle to the social goals it pretended to serve; and what was radical about the Right was that it regarded that same liberal welfare state as an intolerable infringement on individual liberty. These were both radical positions in the sense that they both stood outside the majority consensus in favor of the liberal welfare state—the Left opposing it because it did not (and could not without being fundamentally altered) go far enough, the Right opposing it because it had already gone too far and threatened to go further still. Moynihan and I, however, believed in the liberal welfare state, we supported it, and we wanted to preserve and defend it—increasing its social benefits to the poor

and the handicapped without violating its *liberal* character as a system in which government control over the individual was kept within jealously guarded limits and in which initiative and enterprise were still encouraged and rewarded.

This individualist emphasis had once been taken for granted as the essence of liberalism, but in recent years the word “liberal” had come to be used so insistently as a euphemism for “socialist” that even people who called themselves socialists were referred to in the media as liberals. Nevertheless, neither Moynihan nor I was willing to acquiesce in this theft of an epithet that we thought belonged by right of historical title and philosophical pedigree to the position we held rather than to the position held by the New Politics or the Old Left.

By the same token we were both reluctant to accept the label “neoconservative” even though almost everyone else was beginning to use it of us and of our political friends, some of whom were also using it of themselves. As I have said, what in the authoritative view of Irving Kristol distinguished the “neo” or “new” conservatives from the older variety was precisely their acceptance of the welfare state; instead of working to dismantle it, as the “old” conservatives (or the Right) wanted to do, the neoconservatives wanted to make sure that it remained consistent with traditional American principles. If this was what defined a neoconservative, then Moynihan and I could legitimately be included. And yet, and yet. In a *Commentary* symposium on the question “What Is a Liberal—Who Is a Conservative?,” Midge Decter said she had come to recognize that she owed “her very existence” to the idea historically associated with liberalism “that no person may be forcibly imprisoned within the class or clan or even family into which he was born,” and that “had conservatism been dominant among my precursors, they would have ruled *me* out.” Consequently, even though there were nowadays many more things she wished to conserve than to improve upon, and even though life would be simpler and more peaceful if she submitted to the title “conservative” now so commonly used of peo-

ple with her political views, she could not yield without betraying her obligation to contend with those enemies of the liberalism to which she owed her life who were now seeking to “abscond with its good name.”

I felt very much the same way, and I think Moynihan did too: as the child of an Irish slum in New York he also owed his existence to the traditional liberal idea. Others might call us conservatives or neoconservatives, and we certainly had no desire to be identified with the views of many of the people usually known as liberals today. In looking for convenient alternatives to use in public, we would say that we were “centrists.” But privately, when we wondered what to call ourselves *to* ourselves, the invariable answer was: a liberal.

But all this was bound to remain relatively abstract until it could be translated into the concrete terms of actual candidacies for political office. Like everyone else in the CDM circle, I believed that popular support for our point of view was there, waiting to be appealed to and mobilized, and I also believed that the race for the United States Senate in New York in 1976 presented a perfect opportunity to do just that. The leading candidates in the Democratic primary, Bella Abzug and Ramsey Clark, were both “liberals,” she by way of the Old Left and he by way of the New. As for the Republican incumbent, James Buckley (brother of William F. Buckley of *The National Review* and as such a member of the first family of American conservatism), he was exactly the kind of conservative who might more properly have been called a radical of the Right. After all, he and his fellow organizers of the Conservative party had originally broken with the Republican party in protest against the latter’s decision, when it finally came to power in 1953 under Eisenhower, to ratify the welfare-state reforms of the New Deal instead of trying to repeal them; now he had brought a sanitized version of this position into the Republican party itself, much as the New Politics people had done on their side in carrying the ideas and attitudes of the radical Left into the Democratic party.

Running against Abzug and Clark in the Democratic party, and then against Buckley in the general election, was therefore an opportunity to define a liberal alternative first to the Left and then to the Right and to prove that this alternative commanded more popular support than either. Something else Midge Decter said around that time—“Between the Left and the Right there’s nowhere to go but down”—may well have provided the ultimate stimulus in persuading Moynihan to run. Now that his great popularity had turned him into a promising candidate, we all had another chance to go forward instead of down.

Moynihan’s campaign against Abzug and Clark accordingly focused on the theme of “a society worth defending.” In contrast to the New Politics “liberalism” of his opponents, he asserted his conviction that the old liberal tradition running from Roosevelt through Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson (and closely identified with the political culture of New York State itself) remained vital and viable. In contrast to the hostility shown by the New Politics to “middle-class” values, he affirmed the enduring importance of social institutions like the family (often accused in those days of being the source of all evil) and equally abused cultural values like the “work ethic” and the idea of individual responsibility. And in the sharpest contrast of all, he countered the calls of Abzug and Clark for deep cuts in military spending with the argument that a society worth defending also needed to be defended by an adequate military budget. It was in the course of raising this issue that Moynihan was able to demonstrate more vividly than anyone had done before that there was a direct contradiction between caring about the survival of Israel—as both Abzug and Clark professed to do—and opposing, as they both did, the defense appropriations out of which aid to Israel had to come.

Though this campaign against the Left resulted in a less decisive victory than I had expected, Moynihan did nevertheless win. He then went on to win—and much more decisively—against Buckley on an issue that gave sharp definition to the difference between the old liberal tradition he represented and the rightist

tradition out of which Buckley came: the issue of federal intervention to help the economically deprived or disadvantaged. In this case, the victim was not a class or an ethnic or racial group but an entire city—New York—and just as Buckley's political forebears had opposed federal intervention in the past where earlier victims were concerned, so he now opposed similar action to rescue New York City from bankruptcy and financial ruin. In making the case for federal help, Moynihan was thus simultaneously able to mount a general defense of the liberal welfare state against its enemies on the Right.

The alternative to going down between the Left and the Right had now been marked out: having already shown that it could win in the world of ideas, it now showed that it could win in the world of electoral politics as well. With this—and at least for me—one phase in the long and ongoing contention with radicalism had come to a happy end.