

HUMANISTIC POLITICS

by

John Vasconcellos and Mitch Saunders

Our world today cries out for vision, and for liberation, and for hope. We who have found so much of these in our own personal growth and development are the persons best prepared and equipped to now come forward and lead a humanistic revolution. It is time we move humanistic psychology into the mainstream of our culture and society.

The most profound and radical revolution of our times is our personal shift in the way we define ourselves and what it means to be a human being. We are changing our sense of ourselves - from inherently evil to good, away from being dangerous and guilty, toward becoming trustworthy and responsible.

It is likely that those of us familiar with the Association for Humanistic Psychology already know the personal ramifications of this internal revolution, based on our experience in exploring our own human nature and potential. We have been living this revolution for some time. Now, it is crucial that we recognize that this phenomenon is far broader than our individual experience. It is becoming a widespread social movement. In

New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down, Daniel Yankelovich suggests that four out of five Americans are switching their personal ethic, from self-denial to self-assertion - a sign they have begun their own personal revolution. He goes on to suggest that it is this shift in our fundamental understandings, our operational assumptions, that is precipitating the chaos rocking our contemporary culture and institutions.

It is time for those of us engaged in our own self-search and liberation to recognize that our endeavour extends beyond the individual. This revolution has profound social and political ramifications. And it is time for us to become intimately involved in the political struggles of our times.

By definition, we humans share the same nature. And the same rules operate in all our human relationships: from our most intimate and loving to all our institutional and international relations. What we believe about ourselves will influence (even determine) what we believe about and expect from everybody else. Our basic assumptions will also

determine the way we structure and operate all our personal, cultural and institutional practices.

If we believe we are inherently evil, untrustworthy, guilty and dangerous, it makes good sense that we be locked away, hidden and repressed - either within ourselves and/or behind walls, even bars. On the other hand, if we believe ourselves to be inherently good, trustworthy, responsible and safe, then it makes just as good sense that we become open, transparent, liberated and whole. The issue is **always** whether or not we believe that we humans are inherently good, trustworthy and responsible.

This issue is becoming **the** central social and political challenge of our times: to transform all our relationships and institutions (personal and political) to fit our new-found faithful sense of ourselves. It is time that each of us bring our individual revolutionary selves into that public, social revolution.

Let us not fool ourselves. It will not come easily or quickly - unlike the "Greening of America/. Just as we have learned in our personal struggle for liberation - it takes years of efforts, loneliness, confusion, and anguish. Yet it is worthwhile, it is the only hopeful way to live, it is the only way to life!

How can we more effectively involve ourselves in this social and political transformation/liberation? We must examine the ways we involve ourselves - to see if we are being true to our good nature. We must discover appropriate/consis-

tent methods for making our vision effective, to fit and speak to and awaken others. These include ways of being, relating, talking and acting.

First, we must remain dedicated to redefining and expanding our sense of ourselves, as individuals, for the politics we do is who we are. Each of us must, of course, develop our own way. We seek means to effect the following goals in our daily lives:

- a) to move from being cynical toward becoming faithful;
- b) to open ourselves to our innate potential for goodness;
- c) to reclaim our individual self-esteem;
- d) to erode our internal defences against our immediacy and freedom;
- e) to pay attention to our instinctual movements toward wholeness and health;
- f) to live always with clarity, integrity and daring.

In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire suggest that we explore those areas of our lives where we encounter our own obstacles to personal and social transformation. This means examining those places where we continue to deprecate ourselves and others through our unwitting compliance with an introjected "oppressor within". This "oppressor" subtly persuades us to try to fit our new understandings into old structures.

Second, we must extend our new sense of ourselves into our interpersonal relationships. Let us risk opening and disclosing ourselves to each other - more authentically

and intimately meeting each other. We will find ourselves becoming more secure, without walls and defences. We will inspire and enable each other to carry ourselves into politics and peacemaking with ever more vision, boldness, energy, durability and integrity. And we will recognize and strive for new levels of inter-dependence and community.

Third, we must redefine "politics" - as the selection of the public policies to guide our social entity. Recognize that most humans (across all cultures) desire the same goals in life and society: a peaceful world, safe communities, healthy families, quality education, etc. Where some of us differ is regarding the means for getting there - the strategies and methodologies for achieving our goals.

The means we choose depend on our underlying vision of our own human nature and potential. If we are evil, we attain our goals by repressing our evil selves. A stark display of how this dichotomy is already operating in our politics is found in the contrary visions and practices promulgated for humankind by the "Moral Majority" and by the "Human Potential Movement". Politics is the struggle and choice between competing psychologies and methodologies. Let us not abandon our lives and hopes and future to a psychology contrary to our newfound faithful sense of ourselves.

Fourth, we must redefine "politicians". Politics is more than going to the polls every two years and electing someone else to attend

to our public policy-making and problem-solving. Gandhi noted that "politics begins with each of us and how we treat the person next to us". We add, "... whether next to us in bed, in the next room, next door, cross town or across our world". Each of us is a politician, all day, every day.

As politicians, we can begin to envision and live and promulgate a new political agenda befitting our new sense of ourselves. We can name it, "A New Human Agenda - Toward Individual Self-Sufficiency" (Vasconcellos, 1982). It begins with gentle birthing and concludes with natural, dignified dying. In between, it involves re-structuring most of our human traditions, towards positive parenting; holistic health; humanizing education, economics and the workplace; and peace-making throughout the world. And we can begin to create a new "politics for growing humans" - beyond left and right, beyond conservative and liberal.

Our ultimate challenge is to choose what we believe about ourselves and how we shall live. Not to decide is to decide - to let others decide for us. And that does not fit our newfound sense of our own inherent capacity, right and responsibility for self-determination.

So let each of us take the initiative, and recognize that we affirm our sense of ourselves in every moment of every day, by how we decide: Will I be cynical or faithful? Suspicious, or trusting? Closed, or open? Armed, or embracing? How will you choose to be? Personally and politically?

We invite you to join us in examining the ways we live and carry ourselves, to discover other ways of being/operating"behaving that more authentically reflect and express our nature - positive, responsible and trusting. And we hope you find strength in knowing that you are not alone in this profound adventure - becoming real persons and honest politicians.

In summary - Politics is the process of our choosing (public policy) means to get us to the goals we humans all share. We choose means depending upon our understanding of our human nature and potential, motivation and development. Humanistic psychology offers a new more faithful, hopeful vision upon which to do our politics. It's t'me we carry ourselves and our vision into the real world of politics. Let us mobilize and do this now!

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**ASSOCIATION FOR SELF HELP AND COMMUNITY GROUPS CENTRE
FOR GROUP WORK AND SENSITIVITY TRAINING,
17 Marine Parade, Brighton BN2 1TL. Tel: 685 166 or 673 450**

The above organisations have come together to set up a fund to finance the employment of two part time counsellors to help your clients who may benefit from this service.

The areas covered to begin with are Brighton and Hastings, and a qualified counsellor, suitable for this work has been found in each area.

If you are interested in offering this service to your clients, we shall be glad to receive referrals. At present we can offer five hours per week in each area, but this may expand if the demand justifies it.

Self-referrals are also welcome. It is not envisaged to make a charge at this stage though later it may become necessary to make a small nominal charge if the service is to expand.

Hans Lobstein, Honorary Secretary to the joint support group.
