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The lumpen grumpy Left meets to talk with Sen. Susan Collins

By Hugo Gurdon

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As Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) disembarked from her flight home to Maine last Thursday after her midweek work in Washington, a fellow passenger berated her while the two women walked up the gangway.

They were dragging their carry-on luggage to the terminal when Collins's antagonist, a grumpy lumpen lefty, turned back from a few paces ahead and gave the Republican a piece of what, for want of a better word, I'll call her mind.

Her invective was partly muffled by a COVID mask. And because I was a few paces further behind Collins, I did not catch it all. But I heard the woman snipe, "You don't represent the voters of Maine."

The senator had said nothing except to confirm that she was who the other woman thought she was. Whereupon the assailant barked abuse at her. There was no conversation. The encounter lasted until the non-fan broke off and stalked triumphantly away.

It was mild stuff, but it highlighted points common to encounters with left-liberals. First, in a strictly numerical way, the critic had her facts wrong. It is untrue to say that Collins does not represent the voters of Maine. She has won reelection again and again and again, with 51% of the vote in 2020, 68% in 2014, and 61% in 2008.

Collins recalls that the woman who berated her also said she "did not represent women" and had "betrayed women," which were doubtless references to her decisive and widely admired 2018 speech that helped confirm Justice Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. The court, with Kavanaugh concurring, recently threw out the trumped-up constitutional abortion right, and Collins is hated on the Left for her role in elevating the justice who *Bloomberg* said is the most hated member of the bench.

But the suggestion that Collins does not speak for the people of her state, or indeed reflect their views on abortion, is belied by the fact that they keep returning her to Washington to represent them. The allegations thrown at her by the stranger from the plane fall into that capacious category of criticism that is dressed up in principle but amounts to nothing more than, "I disagree with you."

This points to a second common feature of much political discussion with people on the Left, which is that their default is to assume all right-thinking people agree with them. Readers will doubtless recall that whenever they're in gatherings at which talk turns to politics, it is usually the

left-winger who speaks as though everyone already concurs or should do so. No wonder a [2020 Cato Institute survey](#) found that 58% of staunch liberals disagreed with the suggestion that they could not speak their minds for fear of being found offensive, but only 23% of staunch conservatives felt likewise.

People often want to opine but not to hear contrary views. Collins's random left-liberal critic assumed, and declared, that the senator was out of line with the accepted opinion. It either did not occur to her, or she did not care to hear, that her own views are those in the minority no matter how strongly she holds them.

“It was a sadly typical offensive diatribe from someone who had no interest in a real conversation,” Collins told me. The senator recalled that she would gladly have had a civilized discussion once passengers had emerged from the gangway. But her antagonist kept walking to keep her distance while turning around repeatedly to hurl criticisms. It was the petulant but not rare argumentative style of someone who wants to throw invective then slam the door shut so there is no possibility of a reply.

“Unfortunately, there has been a degradation of dialogue,” the senator added, with people increasingly wanting only “the satisfaction that they apparently get from being abusive to people in public office.”

The Maine critic followed the injunction of Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA), who in 2018 told people on the Left to challenge political opponents in “a restaurant, in a department store, at a gasoline station” — in other words, to hound them and harass them wherever they could be cornered. And boy, have they done so ever since!

The location of the Collins encounter was telling. It took place in an enclosed space with one-way foot traffic. There was only one way out. The target of the criticism thus had no means of escape. And the critic, intent only on gaining the shallow satisfaction of being rude, took advantage of convenient circumstances from which she could get away, but her target could not.

Only one side's views were expressed — one cannot say they were explained — they were expressed aggressively, and there was a determined effort to make sure no answer could be given and no persuasion was possible.

It was a pristine example of what much political debate has become.