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“Human Rights,” According to the Obama Administration

David Bernstein • December 28, 2009 12:55 am

Washington Post editorial:

[Secretary of State Clinton] offered an innovation: The Obama administration, she said, would “see human rights in a broad context,” in which “oppression of want — want of food, want of health, want of education, *and* want of equality in law and in fact” — would be addressed alongside the oppression of tyranny and torture. “That is why,” Ms. Clinton said, “the cornerstones of our 21st-century human rights agenda” would be “supporting democracy” and “fostering development.”

This is indeed an important change in U.S. human rights policy — but the idea behind it is pure 20th century. Ms. Clinton’s lumping of economic and social “rights” with political and personal freedom was a standard doctrine of the Soviet Bloc, which used to argue at every East-West conference that human rights in Czechoslovakia were superior to those in the United States, because one provided government health care that the other lacked. In fact, as U.S. diplomats used to tirelessly respond, rights of liberty — for free expression and religion, for example — are unique in that they are both natural and universal; they will exist so long as governments do not suppress them. Health care, shelter and education are desirable social services, but they depend on resources that governments may or may not possess. These are fundamentally different goods, and one cannot substitute for another.

(H/T: David Boaz)

Biographers tell us that Clinton was once an Ayn Rand fan. Perhaps she should read this essay [for its explication of the principle of so-called “negative” rights]—not that one has to be an Ayn Rand admirer [as I’m sure the *Post* editorialists are not] to be appalled at Clinton’s (and therefore the Obama administration’s) abandonment of longstanding American liberal (in the philosophic sense) tradition in favor of the sort of thing you

might see put more succinctly on a graduate student's bumper sticker in Madison, Wisconsin.

Categories: International Human Rights Law

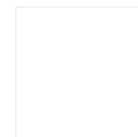
83 Comments

1. **David Bernstein says:**

I was thinking, bumper-sticker wise, of "Human Rights, Not Property Rights," but I'm sure there are other possibilities.

Quote

December 28, 2009, 12:58 am



2. **JHTRazor says:**

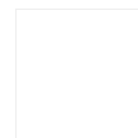
This is consistent with the rhetoric we here from the left. What we heard from Obama during the campaign. I don't have the exact quote, but didn't he refer to increased taxes (I believe when talking about increasing the capital gains tax) as both neighborly and patriotic, when describing redistribution of wealth.

The left has been making the argument that health care is a right that everyone is entitled to.

These thought processes seem to fall right in line with Hillary Clinton's comments about human rights.

Quote

December 28, 2009, 1:03 am



3. **Simple logic says:**

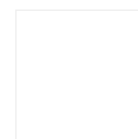
A human right can't contradict or cancel out some other one. You can't have a right at the expense of another right.

So human rights, like the Post says, "are both natural and universal; they will exist so long as governments do not suppress them."

This shouldn't be controversial. When someone talks about some other thing and calls it a human right, they're just not making sense.

Quote

December 28, 2009, 1:25 am



4. **ArthurKirkland says:**

