Fdr Vs. Hoover Essay, Research Paper

President Franklin D. Roosevelt is commonly thought of as a liberal and President Herbert C. Hoover as a conservative. The validity of these accusations, however, is uncertain.

Before classifying each president in the categories of “liberal” and “conservative,” it must first be understood what is meant by each term. During the time of the Great Depression, a liberal was usually associated with “political equality, free speech, free assembly, free press, and equality of opportunity.” It was directly derived from the word “liberty” which meant freedom. Today, the definition changes drastically. A liberal is someone who thinks government can solve problems, and someone who trusts government. They believe in more government spending (such as in social plans) and are not turned off because of raised taxes, knowing full well the money taken away will do the country good. Frankly, liberals believe in more government in the daily lives of people. Conservatives believe in directly the opposite of what liberals do. They believe heavily in the free enterprise system (private ownership). Their economics rely on the theory of supply and demand and profit motive. Their lassiez-faire policy was introduced in a book The Wealth of Nations by Adam Smith. This economic policy can be seen directly in the rest of what conservatives believe in. They are resistant to change, being strong believers of traditional values. They thought money should be spent on defense, not social programs. In a nutshell, they want government to stay out of people’s lives. The modern definitions of each term will be used in categorizing Roosevelt and Hoover.

President Hoover, a strong believer in traditional values, can definitely be described as a conservative. His initial “hands-off” policy in dealing with the Great Depression show this well. He believed in the business cycle and that the country would pull its self out of the depression. He did not want to use government power in dealing with this catastrophe, mainly because of his predecessor’s tradition of lassiez-faire. Hoover stated in an election speech, “Every step of bureaucratizing of the business of our country poisons the very roots of liberalism (old definition).” As government gets bigger, there are needed more offices, agencies and bureau’s to handle affairs. This bureaucracy, he said, would take the American people’s freedom right from them. He felt a great need to take government out of peoples lives more then ever. Even after the depression hit, Hoover was convinced that government could do nothing to help the country out this cataclysm. He said in 1930, “Economic depression cannot be cured by legislative action or executive pronouncement.” He felt that no matter what happens, government actions can do no good for the economy, and that only the people can pull themselves out.

As the depression worsened, Hoover began to think he should not sit back and watch the depression thorough, but help out as much as he can to quicken the arrival of prosperity in the business cycle. While this government action was one of liberal proportions, Hoover is still classifies as a conservative because of his long terms goals having conservatism written all over them. Drastic times call for drastic measures, and he felt the only way to preserve tradition was help out the people. He first started helping out by merely encouraging voluntary groups in the community to help out the less fortunate. He felt that “government -national, state and local- can join with the community in such programs and do its part.” He put people to work in construction and doubled the government expenditure. He favored “temporary expansion of these activities in aid unemployment during this winter.” While no other president had ever participated in the people’s lives as much as Hoover, he was still considered a conservative because of his goals for the end of the depression.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt could also be termed a conservative. In an election speech in 1932, Roosevelt attacked the Hoover administration for their increased government spending and involvement in people’s lives. He said, “It (the Hoover administration) is committed to the idea that we ought to center control of everything in Washington as rapidly as possible.” This highly liberal actions would appall any true conservative, just as it did Roosevelt. He proposed a twenty-five percent cut of federal spending, abolish the “innumerable boards and those commissions” and balance the budget. In his second election campaign, he spoke of himself as a true conservative. He said, “the true conservative is the man who has a real concern for injustice and takes thought against the day of reckoning.” Even in the heart of the depression, he still felt himself to be a great conservative. He perhaps defended his title as a conservative best when he stated “worthy institutions can be conserved only by adjusting them to the changing time.” When Roosevelt formed a rebuttal against his New Deal as being liberal, he perhaps best described his political career by saying “I am that kind of conservative because I am that kind of liberal.”

Roosevelt’s New Deal was perhaps the most liberal set of government actions this country will ever see. While the goals of this New Deal were liberal, it was all put into effect to preserve conservatism. The country was so down and out, something had to be done to pull itself out so the economy and the people could return to their normal, post-depression lives. Government seemed to have the only answer. Much of the New Deal contradicted itself with what Roosevelt said he would do in his campaign speeches. He said he would balance the budget, yet his devotion of John Maynard Keynes idea of deficit spending led this country to almost triple its indebtedness between 1929 and 1941. Perhaps Roosevelt did realize at the time what the true, horrendous condition of the country was during the time. He knew he had to act fast, in order to keep the country “alive”, and capable of living without government support. He established agencies and boards like the CCC, CWA, and PWA to provide jobs. He also provided loans to farmers and established the AAA to help them with their farming difficulties. He hoped that if he could give the people a boost, they might just get out of this depression and be able to support themselves, without government help. If he could end the depression with these “liberal actions” and make it so lassiez-faire could reign supreme again, Roosevelt would be happy.

To say that President Franklin D. Roosevelt is a liberal and that President Herbert Hoover was a conservative is only half-true. Both men lead their country through the perils of the depression with conservative goals in mind, and both men had to resort to liberals actions to preserve conservatism. Roosevelt best described himself and Hoover as being “that kind of conservative because (of being) that kind of liberal.”

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