



With apologies to Ambrose Bierce

The Devil's Political and Economic Dictionary

With November 8 on the horizon and some of us still not able to tell the players – and their pandering – without a scorecard, here are some cue cards to help sift through the patter and screw up your courage. Though over 100 years old, Bierce's definitions in *The Devil's Dictionary* may still apply: A **conservative** is “a statesman who is enamored of existing evils,” whereas a **liberal** “wishes to replace them with others.” **Radicalism?** “the conservatism of tomorrow injected into the affairs of today.”

Now, to interpret contemporary political rhetoric:

The American people: my supporters.

Special interests: my opponent's supporters.

Waste, fraud and corruption. What all candidates vow to eliminate. However, with a \$4 trillion federal budget, that is both an easy task but also one likely to have a trivial impact.

Closing loopholes. A pledge that lasts until an inconvenient truth surfaces: behind every loophole lies a constituency. Credit for mortgage interest and charitable donations are the largest by far – and also the least likely to be touched.

Wasteful spending – on roads, bridges, education, green things – must be reduced.

Investments – on roads, bridges, education, green things – must be increased.

Reform. All are in favor of “reform” – e.g., campaign finance reform (there's too much money in politics; see Bush, Jeb), tax reform, comprehensive immigration reform – so long as they can fund their own campaigns, their supporters pay less in taxes, and they can block those who might vote against them.

BY ALLEN R. SANDERSON

Status quo. Either (a) shorthand for blaming the injustices and exploitation produced and perpetuated by those in power, or (b) a shout-out for the current state of societal structure and values.

Fair and Free. Candidates' favorite F-words. By “fair” most politicians mean policies that raise taxes on, or restrict the behavior of, people and entities they disdain. “Free” means an economy run by Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny. Candidates can't resist promising “free” stuff – day care, education, health care, senior-citizen benefits. If it's against the law to yell another F-word – “Fire!” – in a crowded theater,

should it not also be illegal to yell “free tuition” in a public university auditorium or “free prescription drugs” in a rest home cafeteria?

Government. Various seen as: (a) a wise, benevolent, modern-day Robin Hood, assisted by sacrificing public servants, taking from the undeserving rich and redistributing it to the rest of us. Or (b) the body that takes from some taxpayers and gives to others, while proving itself incapable of conducting business, all of which should be privatized so that incompetents employed in public service can no longer feather their own nests and those of cronies and kin.

The government will pay for it. See “fair” and “free”.

Big. On the campaign trail, big is bad and small is beautiful. All the low-hanging villains – big banks, pharma, corporations, insurance companies, and Wall Street – are there for Democrats to pluck. For Republicans, there's just one: big government.

Transparency. What I will practice except in certain matters I want left unseen.

I'm sorry. For a politician who just got caught in a lie or scandal, the standard expression of remorse (for doing it or getting caught?). See also: “I have done nothing wrong.”

The Middle Class. The salt of the earth. A warm, fuzzy concept without any objective definition; and for politicians, a potential swing group that may, depending on context, encompass anywhere from 50 percent to 80 percent of the voting population.

Children. Those under 18 for whom we strive to offer hope of a better life. Teachers and their unions work tirelessly “for the children” – or is it to preserve their own jobs?

Europe: (a) an enlightened beacon that does everything better, full of selfless people who gladly surrender half of their taxable income in exchange for valuable social services and safety nets, or (b) a stagnant economic swamp with sclerotic labor markets and high unemployment, and disappearing like a Cheshire cat's grin as its share of world output and population shrinks from 17 percent and 12 percent, respectively, today to about 7 percent of each by midcentury?

Activist. A leader of grassroots movements who gives voice for social change, or a bored gadfly with a lot of discretionary free time and a penchant for making protest signs, taunting authorities, and getting arrested (see also “student”).

If you fail to keep all these people and positions straight, an observation from Ronald Reagan might help: “Politics is supposed to be the second oldest profession. I have come to realize that it bears a very close resemblance to the first.” □