

LBJ — After Four Years

Well, this month marks our fourth full year of the presidential rule of Lyndon Baines Johnson, and it is high time to sum up his reign. These four years have been years of enormous frustration and resentment on the part of America's liberal intellectual community. Here was a man who looked and still looks upon FDR as his political mentor — a man who ran with the support of the ADA [Americans for Democratic Action], of old and new New Dealers, of all authentic liberals — and here is a man who is now universally reviled by those former supporters.

The whole saga is very reminiscent of the way Trotsky and his followers felt betrayed by Stalin. The horror and brutality of the Stalin era were felt to be some sort of monstrous perversion, some inexplicable intrusion into the original Lenin-Trotsky ideal. And now the horrors and war-mongering of Johnson are felt to be another inexplicable betrayal of Roosevelt-Truman-Kennedy liberalism.

But the situation is not that simple, as uncomfortable as this truth will be for our liberal friends. Stalin was the logical outgrowth of the “ideals” of Lenin and Trotsky. In the same way, Lyndon Baines Johnson was and still is a liberal through and through. By launching imperial war against foreign countries, by expanding the power of the state over the economy and the society, by bringing ever greater military control of society, Lyndon

Baines Johnson is only following in the footsteps of his — and the intellectuals' — beloved mentors, Roosevelt and Truman. No wonder Lyndon feels puzzled and betrayed by the rancor of the liberal intellectuals! He is only doing what they and their mentors taught him: he is expanding unchecked presidential power in foreign and domestic affairs and launching imperial global crusades in the name of “world freedom” and “collective security.” So why the fuss and feathers?

The liberals have got to wake up to the great truth that Lyndon Baines Johnson is liberalism in action-liberalism personified. This instructive lesson will be lost upon them if they grow increasingly horrified at his despotic and dangerous rule; if they do not realize that what they are seeing is not a personal aberration of the Devil, but the ultimate triumph of their own liberal principles. If they don't like what they see, they must abandon liberalism, and rapidly.

Meanwhile, the conservatives could use a lot of soul-searching, too. Whatever they had in anti-statist principles has long been swept away, sacrificed on the altar of the latter-day crusade against the Communist wing of statism. Conservative enthusiasm for Johnson and his cohorts can be gauged by the enormous conservative support for Senator Thomas Dodd (D., Conn.), a man with a virtually 100 percent ADA-liberal record. The old categories are dissolving fast.