

AN ALTERNATIVE OUTLOOK

By Everett W. Gross

I once read a science fiction book written by the eminent astronomer, Fred Hoyle. In one part, a brilliant young scientist volunteers to be placed where he is to learn from a strange being which has entered our system. The experience proves fatal to our young scientist because the teachings of the stranger require our young scientist to unlearn most of what he thought he knew. His death was caused by an inflammation of the brain -- not from learning the new but from unlearning the old.

A friend of mine once asked me whether I am a liberal or a conservative. I had to answer that I am both and neither. This puzzled him and it took me quite a while to introduce him to the totally shocking idea that there could be a third alternative. His reaction was one of intensely challenging questioning on the basis of the theories which had always guided him, and not on the basis of the new idea which I was trying to get him to examine.

When I saw the veins in his temples swell up as I challenged his old beliefs, I thought of Fred Hoyle's fatally brain-damaged hero and so I didn't hurry too fast. I also remembered my own reaction of great anger four decades ago, while I was reading Progress and Poverty by Henry George. My prior beliefs which I was unlearning were many of those held by the liberals and conservatives today.

We can pursue my friend's puzzlement about how I can be both liberal and conservative, and at the same time neither one. Actually, I agree with both as to the descriptions of the problems which they address. Also, every other school of thought that I know of agrees with both. In that sense, I am both a liberal and a conservative.

But I disagree with both when it comes to explaining the reasons for the problems. In that respect I have to say I am neither a liberal nor a conservative. Keep in mind that if one does not know the reason for a problem, one may not come up with a workable remedy.

Much of this element of conflict is always brought home in any meeting such as the one I attended a few days ago. It was a panel discussion about the ancient hope of Peace on Earth. The same old threadbare arguments were tossed around.

A perennial favorite is that batch about a World Government empowered to enforce peace. It was a favorite that day. But none of the panelists were exposed to the danger of inflammation of the brain from unlearning, since none of them changed their beliefs about anything. The topic of natural rights really did not enjoy much of a hearing that day.

All of the above can only reinforce the suspicion that the entire liberal-conservative controversy is engineered and planted into the mass of public opinion to divert attention from topics which might be useful in abolishing poverty and therefore war. This is not to say that these panelists are guilty of being counted among the conspirators doing that planting.

The stimulating discussion provided by the panelists must not be written off as a failure. More of such is needed rather than less. More can hold out hope for human survival. Less does not.