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WHY LIBERALS WANT TO ABOLISH PACs

What do former liberal presidential candidate Eugene McCarthy, conservative activist Terry Dolan, millionaire liberal Stewart Mott, and conservative Senator Steven Symms have in common? They oppose a bill sponsored by 101 liberal Congressmen which would require the taxpayers to finance Congressional elections and would limit the money which candidates can receive from PACs (Political Action Committees).

Limiting PAC donations to candidates would operate as an effective restriction on the right of individuals to contribute to the candidates of their choice, because PAC money is nothing more or less than a pooling of contributions from individuals who want to put their money where their mouth is and donate to candidates they support. The four men named above think this bill is an unconstitutional restriction of our First Amendment rights.

It takes quite an exercise in sleight-of-hand semantics to promote a bill that will, at one and the same time, restrict free-speech rights and cost the taxpayers a lot of money. The liberals have met that challenge by calling their bill the "Clean Campaign Act" and labeling it a "reform."

As Eugene McCarthy says, "When liberals become reformers, you're in deep trouble -- like the second stage of the French Revolution." He compares liberal reformers to the Robespierre liberals who supported the guillotine because it was more humane than the older method of executions by axe; the guillotine also diffused responsibility since gravity rather than a human hand delivered the fatal blow.

Now the liberal reformers are trying to get the taxpayers to assume the responsibility for electing candidates to Congress so you will never know whom to blame when you don't like the way the money is spent. This "reform" bill would force you to finance the campaign of candidates you don't want elected.

The liberals profess shock and indignation that PACs donated $83 million to Congressional candidates last year. So what? Nobody forced anybody to contribute to a PAC or to accept money from a PAC. Every dime of that $83 million was given or received

voluntarily.

In the peculiar inverted ideology of the liberals, it is bad for American citizens to spend $83 million of their own money on the candidates of their choice, but it would be good for the Federal Government to tax you and spend a similar amount of your money to support candidates most of whom are not of your choice.

It bothers the liberals that PACs are concerned with specific issues. So what's wrong with that? Voters and donors have every right to base their support of candidates on a single issue, or on a cluster of issues, or on a single party, or on any other reason of their choice.

The real explanation for liberal antagonism to PACs was inadvertently revealed by Irvin Ross in the July Reader's Digest in the course of an impassioned plea for taxpayer financing of Congressional elections. The liberals outsmarted themselves in their election "reform" legislation passed in 1974.

What Ross called a "surprising development" was that conservatives began to use a provision in the 1974 law and set up dozens of PACs. From the 1940s to 1974, PACs were operated almost exclusively by labor unions. Today there are 3,371 PACs of which only 380 are operated by labor unions.

Ross concludes: "Clearly, we need to reform campaign financing" and control "the PAC problem" by substituting taxpayer financing. The only thing "clear" from Ross' argument is that he wants to substitute a liberal/federal control mechanism in elections instead of allowing the American people voluntarily to spend their own money as they choose.

It might sound like a bit of flamboyant rhetoric to say that voluntary PACs versus taxpayer financing of Congressional candidates is an issue of freedom versus socialism, but that is substantially what former liberal Senator Eugene McCarthy says. He admits that there is "a kind of socialist ideology that runs through a lot of the liberal movement."

He says that many liberals think, "Why don't we have government control the political process?" He explains that, "if you do that, you can control the government."

The best way to keep Congressional elections "clean" is to keep them as far away as possible from government control and taxpayer financing.