
HOW THE LEFT CORRUPTED HUMAN RIGHTS



Simon Breheny explains how human rights have been hijacked by the left.

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In May 2011, a United Nations Special Rapporteur declared that people had a human right to internet access. It seems absurd to argue that such a right exists but it is the logical progression of the corrupting influence of leftist ideology on the traditional conception of human rights.

It's worth pointing out that this is not just an obscure debate within the confines of an irrelevant international body. Finland had implemented legislation a year before—in July 2010—that granted every one of its citizens the right to speeds of one megabit per second.

The right to internet access is just one of the many 'human rights' manufactured by the left throughout the course of the last century. The right to welfare is another example. Earlier this year, another UN official said that an Australian government decision to reduce welfare payments was a violation of the unemployed's fundamental right to receive Centrelink benefits.

'Rights' to other social privileges have also become popular over the last hundred years. During his State of the Union Address on 11 January 1944, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed a 'Second Bill of Rights'. This new Bill of Rights included rights to employment, a living wage, freedom from unfair competition and monopolies,

SECOND BILL OF RIGHTS
EVERY AMERICAN HAS THE RIGHT TO:

1. A JOB
2. AN ADEQUATE WAGE AND DECENT LIVING
3. A DECENT HOME
4. MEDICAL CARE
5. ECONOMIC PROTECTION DURING SICKNESS, ACCIDENT, OLD AGE OR UNEMPLOYMENT
6. A GOOD EDUCATION

■ Franklin Roosevelt's 'Second Bill of Rights'

housing, medical care, education and social security. FDR believed that the US' original Bill of Rights had 'proved inadequate to assure us equality in the pursuit of happiness.'

A similar set of 'human rights' was later included in the 1952 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Universal Declaration included rights to employment (article 23), housing, healthcare and welfare (article 25) and education (article 26). If the internet had been around in the 1950s the right to bandwidth probably would have been included too.

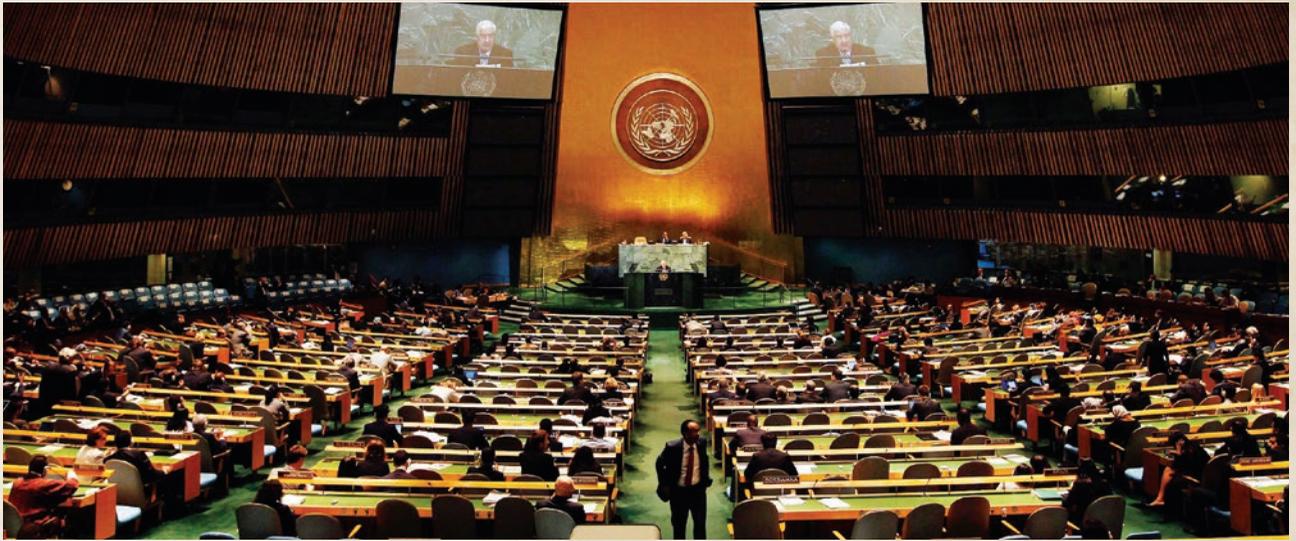
Of course, none of these things are actually human rights. At best they're vague policy aspirations. By definition, human rights exist without the need for policies and programs of government. Universal human rights are not privileges granted by the state but restrictions on what the state can do. The concept of human rights is based on the idea that people acquire them by virtue of being human. So if coercion is required to give

➤ **UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS ARE NOT PRIVILEGES GRANTED BY THE STATE BUT RESTRICTIONS ON WHAT THE STATE CAN DO**

effect to a potential human right, it's not a human right. Compulsory redistribution of resources of the kind that is required for government programs such as subsidised education and healthcare are therefore not human rights.

The fundamental issue with this group of so called rights is not just that they don't meet the definition of human rights. That would be a pretty abstract concern. The deeper concern is that their implementation unavoidably entails their violation.

Rights to free schooling, housing, jobs, and healthcare require the government to take money from one section of the community and give it to another.



■ The United Nations: contrary to the left, not the source of all human rights



RIGHTS BASED ON HUMAN FREEDOMS ARE THE ONLY HUMAN RIGHTS. ANY OTHER CHARACTERISATION MISSES THE FACT THAT HUMAN RIGHTS ARE THOSE THAT MUST BE ABLE TO EXIST IN ABSENCE OF THE STATE

▶ CONTINUED

This is just old-fashioned redistribution and it clearly violates your human right to do with your property what you will. But it's sold under the guise of human rights.

And a strikingly large number of people accept that these are in fact rights to which we as human beings are entitled. It is remarkable that so many have come to accept these vague policy goals as immutable rights. And it's important to understand why.

The key reason these 'rights' were developed was to achieve particular ideological ends. While conservatives and liberals see human rights as an end in themselves, the left-wing view human rights as another tool to achieve outcomes. And it's for this reason that leftists have co-opted the language of human rights. It's not hard to see why. What's more powerful: 'I think the government should subsidise education', or 'people have a right to free education.'

The language of human rights has been used very successfully by the left to fight for particular interest groups they have decided are important. It allows the left to elevate left-wing principles of equality to the same level as human liberty.

The left's co-optation of the language of traditional human rights to their own agenda has corrupted human rights. Original ideas about civil liberties place a distant second in the minds of many human rights lawyers and academics if they even figure at all.

More particularly, the left has corrupted legitimate human rights that broadly fall into the category of 'positive liberties'. In his 1958 essay 'Two Concepts of Liberty', Isaiah Berlin argued that there are two categories of freedom—positive and negative liberties. Negative liberties are those that exist when an individual is free from coercion. Freedom of thought and association, for example, are respected simply



■ Isaiah Berlin, responsible for the ‘two concepts of liberty’

by the state doing nothing to restrict these rights. Rights to participate in the political system are distinct—they require some level of government action. The right to vote is a positive liberty.

The success of the left was in twisting Berlinian positive liberties into what they now call positive rights. This co-optation by progressives was successfully used to include what became known as economic, social and cultural rights. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is the best example of this. The UN treaty is filled with the kind of vague ‘rights’ loved by those on the left. Of course, due to their ambiguity it is impossible to objectively enforce these rights because they require qualitative measurements.

In stark contrast, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights defends true human rights. Civil rights are negative freedoms, while political

rights are positive freedoms in the classical sense.

True human rights are rooted in the idea that individuals should be free to pursue their own goals. They go to the heart of classical liberal philosophy—human rights act as specific limits on state power and create the blueprint for legitimate government built on the protection of human rights, not their abrogation.

Rights based on human freedoms are the only human rights. Any other characterisation misses the fact that human rights are those that must be able to exist in absence of the state. The left has clearly failed to grasp this important idea. But conservatives and liberals have also failed to address this corruption. It’s time for us to take on the left and return to a truly liberal conception of human rights. **R**

SOME OF THE SO CALLED
‘RIGHTS’ LISTED IN THE
INTERNATIONAL COVENANT
OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND
CULTURAL RIGHTS

**ARTICLE 9:
‘THE RIGHT OF EVERYONE TO SOCIAL
SECURITY, INCLUDING SOCIAL
INSURANCE’**

**ARTICLE 13:
‘HIGHER EDUCATION SHALL BE
MADE EQUALLY ACCESSIBLE TO
ALL...AND IN PARTICULAR BY THE
PROGRESSIVE INTRODUCTION OF
FREE EDUCATION’**