

The Power of Progress

Cornell Progressives are Leading the Movement to Get Liberals Organized

By Andrew Garib

According to the prevailing wisdom, progressives are notoriously poorly organized. Liberals, so goes this mantra, are idealists out of touch with reality, crippled by the desire to attain ideological purity; for Leftists, organization means power, and power is the devil's currency.

Despite this popular smear, both the perception of liberals' inexorable disorganization and some progressives' backwards and ironic views towards centralized effective power are woefully under-tempered by the nation's true state of affairs. Effective organization, finance and messaging are essential to any political victory, Left or Right; and American progressives are quickly shedding the faded image of head-in-the-clouds dreamers for a visage reflecting a new optimism bolstered by a confident stride. Right here on campus — with the Progressive Students Union and the Cornell Institute for Progressive Policy — and in colleges and universities all across America, the Left has become the new resounding force of political organization.

Liberals have learned to match the Rightist machine. For the Heritage Foundation, there is the Center for American Progress; for the Collegiate Network, there's Campus Progress; and for Young America's Foundation there's the People For the American Way's Young People For organization. Liberal media outlets have begun to arm themselves on the airwaves, countering years of domination on the radio and the ongoing Rightist threat on television.

As with the national scene, we see progress right here on campus. Over the past three years, I've had the pleasure of being a part of the resurgence of this newspaper, *Turn Left*, now a respected and formidable counter to the campus Rightist press. And now, Cornell's progressive community is taking two major steps towards a brighter, more progressive future for Cornellians and all Americans.

The Progressive Students Union (PSU), established in January, is Cornell's first serious attempt at forming a permanent student organization to provide services to the progressive community, giving liberal causes and groups the organizational edge they'll need to win their battles. In the coming weeks, the PSU will work to create a more cohesive sense of community among progressives, organizing meetings among progressive leaders to plan joint campaigns, and launching the PSU's new website to offer a streamlined version of its existing communication services, news bulletins, information about campus political groups, as well as a new campus progressive blog. The PSU will also offer media relations services and activist skills training.

While the establishment of the PSU is a great success for our campus, an even more monumental task lies ahead. The creation of the new Cornell Institute for Progressive Policy (CIPP) will shore up the PSU's organizational effort with the establishment of a progressive student-run think tank. CIPP and its student experts will be a key source for progressive ideas and policy recommendations, as well as for organized, effective talking points on the most important issues to bolster campus political dialogue. An online web forum will provide CIPP with a dynamic edge, offering an effective round-table for the

exchange of important ideas that will ultimately foster a stronger progressive scholarly voice at Cornell.

While the PSU organizes, CIPP provides Cornell progressives with the best researched and articulated ideas to make liberal campaigns as effective as possible. Cornell progressives will have the tools to win the war of ideas and shed the image of liberal mindless idealism so many held before.

Ironically it's today's conservatives who are the idealists out of touch with reality. We need only think of ultra-hawkish neoconservative foreign policy, social conservative's bigoted rejection of homosexual marriage, and pie-in-the-sky free-marketers ignorant of the implications of their out-of-date ideology.

The recent success of these zany conservative ideas is due not to compelling logic or moral integrity. On the contrary, contemporary conservative ideas have rebuffed saner ideologies through the workings of a well-oiled machine — it's how these ideas are formed, marketed, presented and sold that really matters. Over the past thirty-odd years, conservatives have done a much better job at forming, marketing, presenting and selling ideas, which is why we are now in the midst of one of the most politically conservative times in modern American history.

Herein lies the lesson: The organization, unity of message and effective delivery that has made the conservative movement such a success since 1966 is not tainted with the ideologies it has helped promote. The politics of power is not a game where the means to win are necessarily monopolized by the unscrupulous. The rules of the game, and the instruments of victory, need not dictate the ideologies being promoted.

It is up to all players whether or not they play to win. Thankfully, American progressives have decided that they would like to win, too — with progressive students in college campuses across this nation and right here at Cornell leading the cause.

Certainly, what we do with our newfound power must be directly principled upon the sanctity of rights, the justice of equality, and the well-being of all humanity. This power *is* itself a responsibility — especially if we set out to fight those who will invariably use power with impunity to progress selfish aims or demented ideologies.

Simply put, there is no excuse for disorganization and disunity. Cornell progressives have recognized that organizing for victory against ruthless opponents is not an option, but a moral imperative.

When we have committed to progressive ideals, the ultimate test of our movement is what we do with power when we have it. Our mission now is to make it come about that we take that test — our goal is to give us the chance to pass it.