Editorial

America versus Britain: On Human Rights

There are few Americans alive today, who could not use a refresher course on the fundamental, principled differences between the American versus British political philosophy and system. Yet, it is no exaggeration to say that the future of the human race depends upon understanding this distinction.

Let's start with what everyone thinks he or she knows something about: human rights.

It was the American Declaration of Independence which made famous and real the case for intrinsic, inalienable rights for all human beings, starting with the rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Since 1776, that fundamental belief has been a rallying cry for nations and peoples all around the world, demanding freedom from the oligarchical systems which have oppressed them. In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt built upon that principle when he delivered his call for creating a world based on what he called the "four freedoms": freedom of speech, freedom to worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.

Who could oppose these basic principles? The British Empire!

A copy of the Declaration of Independence had hardly made its way across the Atlantic when young English barrister Jeremy Bentham penned an article excoriating the Americans in October 1776. "They see not … that nothing that was ever called government ever was or ever could be created but at the expense of one or another of those rights, that … some one or other of those pretended unalienable rights is alienated.… In these tenets they have outdone the extravagance of all former fanatics."

The "liberal" Jeremy Bentham, author of the well-known dictum of pursuing the "greatest good for the greatest number," opposing inalienable human rights? Absolutely. For in so doing, he was following the same bestial tradition as that of the Venetian Liberal philosopher Paolo Sarpi: Man is simply a clever animal controlled by pleasure and pain, rather than morality and reason. In this, there is no barrier to oligarchical dictatorship, only pragmatic manuevering.

Clearly, the United States' principled approach prevailed over that of the British during many crucial periods since its founding—especially under the Presidencies of Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt. At that point the Benthamite view was profoundly challenged. But with the death of FDR in 1945, we saw the British Liberal (Benthamite) tradition once again triumphant—making the world safe for the same cynical liberal sophistry which he represented.

Thus, for example, we today see the much-touted British campaign for "democracy" and "human rights," *minus* any commitment to providing for the economic well-being of populations—FDR's principle of "freedom from want." This economic "right" was, in fact, included in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, but somehow has disappeared from the agenda of the British-sponsored human rights groupings today. Instead, they insisted on battering governments that seek to protect the welfare of their populations, making an absolute mockery of the idea of providing human conditions for those they claim to be fighting for.

It's long past time we went back to FDR's idea of the Four Freedoms, based as it was on the simultaneous commitment to national sovereignty, and the rights of the individual. Only the American System can reconcile those two conceptions, and, as we leave the Bush era, in particular, it's long past time that the United States returned to it—both for its own sake, and the world's.