

Roberts' decision shouldn't surprise

The November 1990 election introduced the state of Oregon to two things, which have since made their mark on the state. The first of these was Ballot Measure 5, a revenue-slashing tax limitation measure. The second was Barbara Roberts, a new governor.

Four years later, the state is bidding farewell to the governor. Roberts, who has presided over four of the most nightmarish years in Oregon governmental history, has decided not to run for re-election in the fall, citing family problems — including the recent death of her husband — as the reason. Surely, no one can argue that such family "challenges," as she called them, played a role in her decision. However, there are other realities in force in Oregon that make the governor's job a less-than-enviable one — realities that make Roberts' decision seem quite reasonable indeed.

Foremost of these realities is Measure 5, which accompanied Roberts into Oregon politics, and is now helping to push her out.

Since it was passed, the measure has preoccupied the state legislature and confounded the governor. The limitations it placed on property taxes have gotten more severe with each passing year and have therefore forced the government to do more and more with less and less tax revenue.

The results have not been pretty.

It was inevitable that Roberts would be eventually blamed for the financial troubles that resulted from Measure 5. The governor is the symbolic, if sometimes powerless, figurehead of the state government. If that government can't successfully deal with an issue such as Measure 5, then the governor gets a lot of the heat.

Roberts thought she had a solution with the sales tax, proposing a 3.5 percent measure in 1992 that never made it out of the legislature. It was followed last year by a 5 percent tax, which did make it on the state ballot as Measure 1 but failed at the hands of voters.

The tax didn't recognize the basic truth about the majority of Oregon voters: They want to pay less in taxes. It doesn't matter what form the tax takes. Passing Measure 5 and rejecting Measure 1 prove this to be the case.

Roberts' agenda probably didn't agree with this truth. Governors, and particularly Democratic ones, want to do something when they are in office — not merely preside over the state's decline. As University School of Law Dean Dave Frohnmayer said, Measure 5 is the real governor of Oregon. Roberts' administration was in trouble before it began.

One has to admire the courage of those individuals who have entered the race to be Roberts' replacement. Measure 5 won't be fully in effect until 1996; any winner this November is likely to be a big loser four Novembers later — assuming, of course, that they can even muster up the strength to run again. After all, Roberts couldn't.



COMMENTARY

The immorality of philosophy?

On Jan. 19, I attended a talk by the University club Students of Objectivism. The flier read, "Bridging the Is-Ought Gap: How to Derive Morality from Facts," delivered by Dr. Binswanger, the professional philosopher and teacher of graduate students.

The student organization is based on the philosophy of ultraconservative (although she refused to even call herself a conservative) Ayn Rand, a known advocate for regression to laissez-faire, Adam Smith capitalism.

She believes having pure, free trade prevail in society would allow for the free mind of every individual, and that self-interest, rather than collective responsibility, is the key in a world where the market would ideally rule.

In other words, interest groups liberalism projected at the macro level. Every man for himself, as Rand herself would put it.

For an hour, Binswanger explained why he opposes the "is-ought" dichotomy made by so many philosophers, and then he went into a question-and-answer period. A man got up and said he was not a believer in most things, and he did not buy into many concepts — well, right there with that statement, Binswanger, obviously suffering from a double dose of egotism and self-superiority, immediately scowled and belittled the man.

The philosopher proceeded to cut him down and cut him off, saying he could not talk to him, and that there was nothing to talk about because the man was not worthy of the scholar. And with that, he moved on to the next raised hand. But his rude and obnoxious behavior was thankfully countered and, confidence to his credit, he insisted that the speaker hear him and let him finish. The belligerent

(not) and magnanimous (not even) and unprejudiced (hell, no) philosopher finally relinquished his throne to basically save face and to look as though he was being all of these things. The rather patient man, then, finally got his chance to ask Binswanger what he thought of the LA riots.

The distinguished philosopher first responded by saying that the riots, though he believed that the police officers who beat Rodney King were guilty, (what in the hell else could he say) were immoral. There needs to be social control, to be sure, but he went on to say that the acts of vandalism that went on for several days were completely unjustified. He said that radical liberals would have you believe otherwise. He said what would everyone say if white, top-executive lawyers ran through the streets of LA, and looted and vandalized? Would that be justified as well?

I'll tell you what I would say — let's get real, shall we? White top-executive lawyers would have no reason to do those things because they are the oppressors, not the oppressed. All African-Americans are the descendants of human beings who were enslaved by the white man for four centuries. Can you understand that, Binswanger? Let's not forget that. I'd say that it would be indeed an absolutely unjustified act. He went on to say that the "bloodless savages" (spoken from the side of his mouth), his reference to African-Americans in the LA area, were fully responsible for the looting and damage.

I am unequivocally, irrevocably and unreservedly disconcerted on three levels. I am thwarted that the University would invite this person to our campus (and no doubt pay with student funds) and support such a racist. I am perplexed that a person with a doctorate could be

so utterly misinformed and misguided over the course of his 50-some years of life. Most of all, I am upset that when the philosopher spoke those two outlandishly pejorative words, quoted above, I was the only one who got up and left the room (for good). Why? I wanted to scream at the zombies still planted in their seats, "What the fuck are all you zombies still sitting here for, didn't you hear what the man just said?"

If, after having read all of the above you think this is a stinging indictment of Binswanger and the philosophy Ayn Rand purports and promulgates — beautiful! The so-called peace maker doesn't smell ... it stinks.

What results is a lack of access to career opportunities and an enormous lack of social services for those minorities who are disproportionately represented below the poverty line. What results is social unrest like what happened in LA. Why? Because these people are human beings with feelings, not animals, though they are often treated as such. They have wants and desires and dreams just like anybody else regardless of their background.

I thought we went over all this and cleared it all up during the 1960s, some 30 years ago, but maybe at that time Binswanger had not received his Ph.D. yet. Such a philosophy is sadly (I would say unbelievably, but that would be too naive. Besides, millions grunt to the tune of Rush Limbaugh) eaten up by more than a million Americans.

If you're reading this, Binswanger, or even the one and only Ayn Rand herself, for that matter, I have a question for you both: Is she, or her, or woman, or humankind in your vocabulary or capacity of speech? I was just wondering.

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