

Interpreting Jon Stewart's Politics

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Any criticism of Jon Stewart must begin with enthusiastic praise: his Daily Show is where millions of people go for important news that is purposely ignored by the mainstream media. Consequently, both Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert have become icons of the political Left.

During the Bush administration, their shows highlighted the lies and hypocrisies used to engage in foreign wars while destroying the civil liberties in the United States; Colbert's speech at the White House Correspondence dinner — with Bush present — will go down in history as a moment of great courage and confrontation between a satiric comedian and a war criminal.

This incident, combined with the consistent exposing of lying politicians and the biased mainstream media, have earned Stewart and Colbert deep political respect.

It's in this context that their rally in Washington, D.C. — the Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear — must be viewed. Millions of people were eager to see how Stewart's and Colbert's politics would manifest themselves in a political rally. To them, the rally was not a joke. The mainstream The New York Times is correct in saying:

"...it is perhaps a measure of the volatility of American politics that a television comedy show was able to tap something deep among American voters, who turned out in the tens of thousands on Saturday to add their voices to a national political debate that some said had left them behind."

and:

"Though it was billed as a gathering for civility — a party on a sunny Saturday for people to enjoy thoughtful conversation — for participants it was a serious political affair." (October 30, 2010).

http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/31/us/politics/31rally.html?_r=1&hp

Stewart's message was not a joke either. The rally was thus far the clearest expression of his political thought. The essence his political message was conveyed by a song performed by Kid Rock and Sheryl Crow (Stewart introduced the pair's song as being in sync with the purpose of the event). The chorus of the song includes the following lyrics:

"Yelling on the left/Screaming on the right/ I'm sitting in the middle trying to live my life."

This "middle" is where Jon Stewart's politics lie, between what he sees as an unreasonable

left and right-wing of the political spectrum; a theme repeated throughout the event.

Later in the rally Stewart played a video compilation of left-wing and right-wing pundits, screaming insults at their political opposites. Stewart portrays his politics as an alternative — a rational-thinking middle-ground.

To prove his moderate politics and to fend off right-wing criticism,

Stewart draped American flags around the stage and had musicians perform patriotic songs, including America the Beautiful and the National Anthem.

Sadly, Stewart went overboard to prove he wasn't overly progressive, when he specifically denounced Marxists as "attempting to subvert our constitution [?] " — an example of McCarthy Red-baiting at its worse.

Stewart's rally strongly implied that instead of political conflict, everyone should join him in the reasonable political center. One of his concluding remarks was: "It's a shame we can't work together to get things done."

If only politics were that simple.

In reality, society is torn apart by economic and social inequality, dominated by giant corporations that benefit from low wages and foreign wars. These same corporations — owned by super-rich individuals — also benefit from the lies, anger, and insanity broadcast by the mainstream media. The phenomenon of scare tactics directly benefits giant corporations who want a subdued populace so they can pursue their business-friendly agenda.

Stewart does his audience a great disservice by not recognizing the profit-motive behind the right-wing fear-mongers, who are paid large salaries by corporations to divide and confuse working people.

We are instead led to believe that simple "insanity" is why our mainstream media allows figures such as Bill O'Reilly, Glenn Beck, and Sarah Palin to preach hate and nonsense to millions of people.

In fact, these right-wingers are given such large venues because their politics are in line with the foreign and domestic policy interests of a number of very rich people who own TV channels and other corporations.

Stewart's rally signaled — whether consciously or not — a degree of political backpedaling on his part. During the Bush Administration, Stewart and Colbert's shows were incredibly radical, given the political circumstances; they exposed lies that cut deep into the Administration's heart. It was at this time that Stewart became globally famous, as millions around the world looked to his show to challenge the false narrative broadcast by the Bush government.

The Daily Show changed considerably when Obama became President. The criticisms became more mild mannered, even as Obama continued essentially the same policies as Bush. When Obama recently appeared on Stewart's Daily Show, not one question was asked about Obama's wars, while Obama was allowed to speak endlessly about all the great things he was doing for the country, in effect papering over his complete lack of action to create jobs.

Whether he acknowledges it or not, Jon Stewart is a political figure adored by millions on the left and ruthlessly hated by those on the right. The middle-ground that Stewart would like to base his politics on survives only in his head, and in the heads of others who would like to ignore the very real conflict between giant corporations versus tens of millions of working people.

Sides must be taken in this battle. But instead, Stewart preaches from the sidelines with a message that says, "No such battle is taking place." Unfortunately for Stewart, the politicians and mainstream media that he regularly thrashes fully embrace this perspective, for their own benefit.

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