Conservative William F. Buckley, Jr. Discusses Views on Liberalism and Conservatism

This interview with William F. Buckley, Jr. takes place on the 25th anniversary of his book, "Up From Liberalism." Buckley was a renowned conservative commentator and the founder of the National Review.

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**Description**

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Transcript
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JOHN PALMER, anchor:
With us today is William Buckley, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary edition of his book "Up From Liberalism" in which he wrote “We must bring down the thing called liberalism which is powerful but decadent and salvage a thing called conservatism which is weak but viable.” Bill, you wrote that back in 1959 and I’ll bet you’ve changed a little bit, have you?

Mr. WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY Jr.: Well, John, first of all let me ask you please to sympathize with me because here we are commemorating an important historical event and I don’t really know what the formula for doing that is. Suppose you had Einstein here and said, ‘Mr. Einstein, 25 years ago you discovered the fourth dimension, what do you think of that?’

PALMER: Well, Einstein couldn’t be with us here today though…

Mr. BUCKLEY: Well suppose, assuming he lived as long as I had, or suppose you had Alexander the Great and said to him, ‘What about the fact that you changed history 25 years ago?’ Would he have said, ‘Oh John, don’t call me Great, just call me Alexander.’ But my book on top of everything else had the virtue of having been denounced, as most prophecies are, or for instance in the St. Louis Post they said, ‘Mr. Buckley’s book will be welcomed for its commendable brevity. He is considerably handicapped by the fact that having nothing to say…’ Having said that 25 years ago, nothing published in the St. Louis Post this past 25 years ago would still be recalled. My very favorite…

PALMER: So all this means, if I can interpret this, all this means is that conservatism has changed in your view.

Mr. BUCKLEY: No wait, you’re interrupting me, I just want to finish this thought, the New Republic was my absolute favorite and said that the civilized community has moved on to other things. That is correct five years later it nominated Barry Goldwater, who said that this was his favorite modern book. A few years later it nominated Ronald Reagan, who said, quoted from the book to me when I first met him, so
we really have therefore the problem of congratulating for tracking the course of this great historical event. And say that unlike other historical books this one is fun to read and you are right that liberalism has evolutionized and it's beginning to shrug off some of its old accretions.

PALMER: You are not the loner that you once were. You considered yourself, did you not, somewhat in the wilderness as a pretty lonely voice, now you have a lot of company on conservatism.

Mr. BUCKLEY: Well the majority of the American people voted for charter subscriber to National Review, which had a hard time getting a circulation of 10,000 back when Ronald Reagan was reading it. So I think it is true that certain insights were had at the time of the publication of this book which are more generally recognized now than they were then. But one has to enjoy politics, even the frailties of people who are rather stuffy in their defense of highly obsolete formulas and I try to do that and I think you would to, wouldn’t you?

PALMER: I think so; I think so. Let’s go to something that’s happening right now. What about the Supreme Court decision yesterday?

Mr. BUCKLEY: Well that’s complicated for this reason: the liberalism 25 years ago would have decided completely with the Supreme Court. Hubert Humphrey said that if anybody ever interprets a civil rights bill as giving preference to somebody on account of race, I’ll eat the bill. Now he died of other things but he certainly would have had to eat the bill, given the way the Civil Rights bill has been treated during the last 10 years. But this is a step back in the direction of a color-blind constitution of the kind that I absolutely admit liberals definitely were out in favor of 25 years ago.