In 1975 I gave a series of lectures in Chile under the auspices of a private foundation. During the six days I was in Chile, I also conferred with people of all shades of opinion, ranging from General Pinochet to internal critics of the junta.

Six months later Anthony Lewis, in his column in *The New York Times*, criticized me for having given economic advice to an authoritarian government. That launched a campaign of abuse that has continued sporadically ever since. The campaign peaked after the news broke that I was to receive the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1976. Four Nobel laureates in the natural sciences wrote indignant letters to *The New York Times* asserting that my visit to Chile disqualified me from joining their select company. In Stockholm the authorities were sufficiently concerned about organized protests that they assigned my wife and me a 24-hour police guard. In this country I have been subjected to hostile demonstrations at lectures ranging from New York to San Diego.

I recently returned from a three-week visit to the People’s Republic of China, where I lectured under the auspices of the Institute of World Economics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a governmental body, as part of a cultural-exchange program between the United States and China. (Note that no private group is permitted to exist in China that could have sponsored my lectures.)

Despite the ideological difference between China and Chile, I was invited to both for precisely the same reasons. Both have experienced inflation and were interested in learning the latest findings about its cause and cure. Both have experienced the deficiencies of central planning and want to give a greater role to market forces, so both were interested in hearing the views of a strong proponent of free markets. In both countries, we enjoyed a warm and friendly reception. In both, also, my lectures generated much interest and stimulated a spirited discussion.

By any standard, the Communist government of China is far more authoritarian and repressive than the military junta in Chile, and the chance that it will be succeeded by a democratic government in the foreseeable future is far less. Yet I predict with great confidence that Anthony Lewis will not use his column to berate me for giving economic advice to a Communist government (as earlier, no one ever berated me for lecturing in Yugoslavia). No Nobel laureates will write *The New York Times* to denounce me for conduct unbecoming a recipient of a Nobel Prize. Doubtless, I shall continue to be picketed for having gone to Chile, but unless I organize the demonstrations myself, I shall not be picketed for having gone to China.

Why the difference in reaction?

The easy explanation for the double standard is the bias among intellectuals that is encapsulated in the saying, “There are no enemies on the left.” Despite increasing recognition that Communism has everywhere produced tyranny and misery, many people subconsciously judge Communist governments in terms of the noble objectives that they proclaim instead of the
deplorable results that they produce. No Communist government has ever been replaced by, or developed into, a democracy; at least some “right-wing” governments have been (Greece, Portugal, Spain). Yet this striking contrast is dismissed as “accidental” or simply ignored.

The left-wing bias does not explain one important feature of the different reactions to Communist and right-wing governments. The continual protests against right-wing governments (e.g., earlier, Franco’s Spain; more recently, Chile and Somoza’s Nicaragua) are organized and coordinated. The occasional protests against acts of repression, torture or murder in Communist countries display nothing like the same coordination.

The coordinated left-wing protests reinforce the bias of the intellectuals. And the protests in turn derive legitimacy from the position and respectability of the intellectuals who endorse them. In this way, the double standard feeds on itself.

The situation is similar to that portrayed by Arnaud de Borchgrave and Robert Moss in “The Spike,” their exposé, thinly disguised as a novel, of the disinformation activities of the Soviet Union.

Here is a fertile field for investigative journalism. Yet, so far, there seem to have been few if any takers. Another example of the double standard?

Compiled by Robert Leeson and Charles Palm as part of their “Collected Works of Milton Friedman” project.

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