A Little about Molly Ivins - On Being a Democrat

If you spent some of your time perusing the essays on this Sprague Democratic Town Committee website, you get high marks for civic industry. By this time, we hope that those of you who were uncertain of your political leanings have returned from the ideological wilderness and have moved closer to an understanding of what the Democratic Party is—or should be—all about. For those of you whom it all amounts to hogwash or perhaps gibberish, you are invited to either look for hope in the current Republican Party (best of luck to you), or do a little more reading. If you are a Stressed Sideliner (see a previous essay) there may still be hope for you.

It seems proper and worthwhile to those of you who have hung on this long, to share with you some of the wisdom imparted by one of the most exuberant of progressive Democrats, whose declaration on the importance of civic participation graces the front of the commentary page of this website: Molly Ivins. You may not agree with all of what Molly Ivins says, but if you find yourself nodding in agreement as you read what she has written (and she has reported and written on a great deal), you may very well be a hard core progressive, or at least a solid "D" democrat. In which case, you are in for a lot of hard work and heartache if you choose to man the political ramparts with the rest of us who are having a good time repelling the assault. (Some of Molly Ivins published books, made up of reprinted essays she wrote for newspapers and progressive publications, include: *Molly Ivins Can't Say That, Can She?; You Got to Dance with Them What Brung You;* and, *Nothin' But Good Times Ahead).*

You do not have to read all of the Ivins' essays in order to appreciate her ideology, but you will learn a lot. On several occasions in her writing, you will find her citing a couple of the most unimpeachable sources on the subject that offers a guide as to what she believed in:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among those are, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundations on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

and,

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

That first quotation, for those of you who were not offered either Social Studies or Civics classes in school, was from the Declaration of Independence. The second quote, as is stated in the body, was from the U.S. Constitution. One might argue that such citations favor almost any political stripe. But then, ask yourself honestly which political party, at least in modern times, has made the best continued effort to achieve these goals. If you are struggling to decide, keep reading; you'll get there.

Remember this: The government is us, you and me. We choose from amongst us to represent our interests (see quotes above). Molly wrote, "Personally, I think government is a tool, like a hammer. You can use a hammer to build or you can use a hammer to destroy; there is nothing intrinsically good or evil about the hammer itself. It is the purposes to which it is put and the skill with which it is used that determines whether the hammer's work is good or bad. If hammers were cussed as often and as vigorously as government, no doubt some Tim McVeigh would have parked a loaded Ryder truck outside a hammer factory by now. Cussing government in a democracy is a peculiar thing to do: it is, after all, us." Those we choose to represent us, work for us; we don't work for them.

So what are we to make of a President of the United States who runs on a slogan: “Government isn’t the solution to the problem, it is the problem”, or says, “The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I’m from the government and I’m here to help.” (Ronald Reagan, both). Then there is the legendary comment by Grover Norquist, one of Reagan’s acolytes, who in 2001 said, “My goal is to cut government in half in twenty-five years, to get it down to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub.”

There are many things that only government can do. The comments by the aforementioned Republicans may have been political puffery, or they may have been sincere personal belief. But Molly thought that the goals are laid out in what the Founding Fathers wrote. “Establish justice”. “Insure domestic tranquility”. “Provide for the common defense.” “Promote the General Welfare.” “Secure the blessings of Liberty”. We should not lose sight of those goals. And democracy, so far as Molly is concerned, is the best form of government to help us reach them.

Richard Waterman