



ESL Podcast 643 – Liberal and Conservative News

GLOSSARY

rag – a poor-quality, unimportant newspaper

* Henna writes for the local rag, but she dreams of becoming a reporter for a national newspaper.

news coverage – the stories and events that are discussed in a newspaper, magazine, or radio or television news program

* We watch local news coverage at 7:00, and state and national news coverage at 8:30.

incisive – understanding something very well; demonstrating one's intelligence and ability to understand something

* Brent wrote a very incisive essay about the causes of World War I.

commentary – something that is written or spoken about an event or idea, sometimes while it is happening

* Do you want to listen to the reporter's commentary, or would you prefer to just hear the facts?

liberal – a political philosophy that favors helping people and organizations and having a relatively large government that promotes social assistance for people

* Social Security is taken for granted, but in the past it was a very liberal idea.

propaganda – information that is only partially true, used to persuade people to believe a particular thing or take a particular action, especially in politics

* How can you believe all the election's propaganda?

to print – to publish something in written form, especially in a newspaper, magazine, or book

* I can't believe they printed that quote! I swear I never said any of that.

objective – without considering one's personal opinion; based on the facts

* Be objective when you choose which universities to apply to. Don't just apply to schools with nice looking brochures.

unbiased – objective; without feeling the need to agree with one side or another in an argument

* My mother says this dress makes me look beautiful, but I need an unbiased opinion.



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ultraconservative – extremely resistant to change and favoring a relatively small government that makes people rely on themselves more than on government services

* Fisher is an ultraconservative who votes against all social welfare programs.

reactionary – someone who doesn't like change and fights against it, often without gathering all the necessary information to truly understand something

* Jim is a reactionary and believes that this country should return to the way it was in the 1950s.

diatribe – a long written or spoken attack on someone or something

* Before you launch into a diatribe against my idea, please listen to my reasons for proposing it.

press – media; all newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and news websites

* That author rarely agrees to meet with the press for interviews.

staunch – loyal; strongly supporting something or someone

* The Presidential First Lady is a staunch advocate for nutritional school lunches.

enlightened – with a good understanding of something based on new ideas, opinions, and information

* It's wonderful to work for such an enlightened supervisor.

dyed-in-the-wool – extreme; completely involved in or characterized by something

* Christophe is a dyed-in-the-wool football fan who never misses a single game.

to tear down – to destroy; to ruin

* Did you read this journal article in which one researcher tears down his colleague's work?

tradition – a way of doing something; the way something has always been done in a particular culture or by a particular group of people

* In the United States, there is a tradition where the bride and groom feed each other the first piece of wedding cake.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What is Rachel reading?
 - a) A brochure.
 - b) A newspaper.
 - c) A magazine.
 2. What would you expect to find in diatribes?
 - a) Traditions.
 - b) Criticisms.
 - c) Compliments.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

rag

The word “rag,” in this podcast, means a poor-quality, unimportant newspaper: “Why do you waste your time reading that rag when you can find much better information online?” A “rag” is also a small piece of cloth that has been used many times, normally used for cleaning: “Freddie uses his old t-shirts as rags for dusting and polishing.” If someone’s clothes are “in rags,” they are in very poor condition with many tears and holes: “Chirico’s favorite shirt is in rags, but he keeps wearing it because he likes the color.” Finally, the phrase “from rags to riches” describes someone who is born into a very poor family but becomes very successful and rich: “She was born in a poor village but became a millionaire by the time she was 40 – an amazing rags-to-riches story!”

press

In this podcast, the word “press” means the media, or all newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and news websites: “Why does the press focus on negative news stories?” The “printing press” is a machine that produces printed materials: “Before the printing press was invented, books had to be copied by hand.” The phrase “to go to press” means for a newspaper to be printed: “When we went to press, officials were still counting the votes.” The phrase “to stop the presses” means to stop printing a newspaper, usually because there is new information that needs to be included in the stories: “Wow, what a surprise! Stop the presses!” Finally, the phrase “to get good/bad press” means to receive positive or negative news coverage in the media: “The company got a lot of bad press after its latest product recall.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Having an unbiased media is “critical” (very important) to the success of a participatory “democracy” (a government where all people can vote equally), because people need access to “accurate” (correct; precise) information. However, in the United States, many “cable news channels” (TV channels that cover the news all the time) are accused of being unfairly liberal or conservative. These channels present only one “side” (way of viewing or thinking about things) of the story.

In particular, the Fox News Channel is regularly “accused” (said to be doing something wrong or bad) of having a conservative, “right-wing” (favoring conservative views) bias. And MSNBC is regularly accused of having a liberal, left-wing bias. In a 2009 “poll” (a survey that asks about people’s opinions) by Pew Research, 47% of “respondents” (people who respond to a survey) said the Fox News Channel is “mostly conservative” and 36% of respondents said MSNBC is “mostly liberal.”

People cite many examples of these news channels’ bias. In late 2009, “tensions” (uncomfortable, negative feelings) between the White House and the Fox News Channel increased so much that the Obama “administration” (government) said it was “not a news network.” And around that same time, MSNBC showed “photoshopped pictures” (photos that have been changed with a computer program) of former vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin carrying a gun while wearing a “bikini” (a small, two-piece swimsuit).

Many people say that the problem is that these news channels describe themselves as “fair” (treating others equally) and unbiased. If people watch a “right- or left-leaning” (favoring conservative or liberal opinions) news program, but believe it is unbiased, they are unable to watch the program with an appropriate level of “skepticism” (questioning what one sees or hears) and do not receive the accurate, unbiased information they need.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – b



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 643: Liberal and Conservative News.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 643. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. Go there to download a Learning Guide for this episode to help you improve your English even faster than if you just stayed home and drank beer!

This episode is called "Liberal and Conservative News." It will use a lot of vocabulary that is used in American politics and media to describe two different philosophical views of the way the government should work. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Bill: Why are you reading that rag?

Rachel: I enjoy reading it. I like its news coverage and its incisive commentaries.

Bill: That's nothing but a liberal propaganda rag. You can't believe a thing they print in there.

Rachel: That's not true. The news stories are objective and unbiased. This magazine isn't like the newspapers and news websites you read. Those are run by ultraconservative reactionaries, who only know how to write diatribes. If I only read the news sources you read, I would think that this world was being ruled by liberals.

Bill: The world is being ruled by liberals, at least by the liberal press.

Rachel: You've got to be kidding! Our politics and our financial system are run by staunch conservatives, who ignore any point of view other than their own. Those of us who are enlightened...

Bill: You call yourselves enlightened? All you and your dyed-in-the-wool liberals want to do is to tear down old traditions.



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Rachel: Yes, we do want to tear down old traditions, old traditions that keep us from making progress toward...

Sophia: Mom, Dad, what's going on in here? Why are you yelling?

Rachel: Oh, it's nothing, honey. Go back to sleep. Your Dad and I are just having a friendly little talk.

[end of dialogue]

I'm not going to try to explain to you the differences between liberals and conservatives politically here in the United States, that would require several English Cafés. Generally speaking, if you know something about American politics, you can understand the difference by understanding the difference between Democrats, who are typically liberal, and Republicans who are typically conservative.

Well, this is a dialogue between Bill and Rachel. Bill says to Rachel, "Why are you reading that rag (rag)?" A "rag," in this sense, is a poor quality newspaper, a newspaper that is not reliable, often because it is very politically biased. That is, it only reports the news from one political view. "Rag" has a couple of different other meanings in English, and those are found in, of course, the Learning Guide.

Rachel says, "I enjoy reading it. I like its news coverage and its incisive commentaries." "News coverage" are the stories that appear in the newspaper or that are talked about in a magazine or on radio or television. "Coverage" is a general term to describe how much of something is included, so this is how much news and what kind of news is included in the newspaper. Rachel also likes the newspaper's incisive commentaries. A "commentary" is something that is written or spoken about an idea, sometimes while it is happening, sometimes after the fact. Most newspapers, at least in the United States, have commentary by different writers that represent different political views. When something is "incisive" (incisive) we mean that the person who wrote it understands something very well; it demonstrates the intelligence of the person and their ability to understand something. She means that newspaper.

Liberal, as I said before, is a political philosophy that in modern American terms tends to want to have larger government programs, whereas conservatives tend to want to have a smaller government presence. Again, I don't want to talk too much about that because it's impossible to summarize it in a short amount of time.



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Bill calls the newspaper a liberal propaganda rag. “Propaganda” is information that is often false that is used to try to persuade people to believe in a particular idea or action, especially in politics. Bill is saying that this newspaper is not objective – it’s not giving you the news without any sort of bias. Instead, it is a liberal propaganda rag; it is trying to promote a certain political philosophy. He says, “You can’t believe a thing (meaning you can’t believe anything) they print in there.” “To print” here means to publish something usually in a newspaper, magazine, or book.

Rachel says, “That’s not true. The news stories are objective and unbiased.” Rachel is defending her newspaper, saying that it is “objective,” meaning it’s based on the facts, it’s not just opinion. She also says it’s “unbiased,” which is the opposite of biased – not biased. If something is “biased,” it has one point of view and it only reflects one point of view – one philosophy, in this case. “Unbiased” would be something that is objective, it doesn’t take one side of the argument over another. Rachel says that this magazine – and I guess I thought she was reading a newspaper – “This magazine isn’t like the newspapers and news websites you read. Those are run by (those are operated by) ultraconservative reactionaries, who only know how to write diatribes.” There are lots of terms, some of them insulting terms, that are used in American politics to describe each side of the political spectrum – each side of the political range of views. When you say someone is an “ultraconservative,” you mean they are very, very conservative – extremely conservative, too conservative really. A “reactionary” is someone who doesn’t like change and wants to go, often, back in time, without even understanding completely what’s going on today. Again, this is a term that liberals in the U.S. would use to describe conservatives and make them seem extreme.

Conservatives have their own words to describe liberals; many times they’ll talk about the “far left”; you can also talk about the “far right.” The far left would be people who are very extreme in their liberal views. Conservatives would also use terms like the “loony left.” “Loony” (loony) means sort of crazy, in this case. So, each side has its own insulting terms that it likes to use. Those people who are in the middle, who are not liberal or conservative, we call “moderates” or “middle of the road,” they’re not too far on either side.

Rachel says that the magazines and newspapers that Bill reads only write diatribes. A “diatribe” (diatribe) is a long written or spoken attack on someone. When you are criticizing someone, you take a long time and you really attack or criticize everything about that person or that view. Rachel says, “If I only read



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the news sources you read, I would think that this world was being ruled by liberals.”

Bill says, “The world is being ruled by liberals, at least by the liberal press.” “Press” here means the same as media: newspapers, magazines, radio, television, websites that are related to the news or that report the news. “Press” however has several other meanings, and those can be found in our Learning Guide.

Rachel says, “You’ve got to be kidding (meaning you’re joking, right)! Our politics and our financial system are run by staunch conservatives, who ignore any point of view other than their own.” “Staunch” (staunch) means very loyal, someone who is strongly supporting a certain political position. Rachel says that our politics and our financial system are run by staunch conservatives, who ignore any point of view – any opinion – other than their own. “Those of us who are enlightened...” “To be enlightened” means to have a good understanding of something, sometimes associated with perhaps more modern ways of thinking.

Bill says, “You call yourselves enlightened? All you and your dyed-in-the-wool liberals want is to tear down old traditions.” The phrase “dyed (dyed)-in-the-wool (wool)” means completely involved in, extreme. So if you are a dyed-in-the-wool liberal, you are completely liberal, you are 100 percent liberal. “Wool,” you may know, is what you get from sheep that you can make clothing from. “Dyed” means that it is colored; you change the color of the wool by putting the wool into a dye, some sort of typically liquid substance. Bill says that the dyed-in-the-wool liberals want to tear down old traditions. “To tear (tear) down” is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to destroy, to ruin, to take apart. “Tradition” is the way that something has always been done by a particular culture or a particular group of people.

Rachel says, “Yes, we do want to tear down old traditions, old traditions that keep us (or prevent us) from making progress toward...” Suddenly we hear from Sophia, who is Bill and Rachel’s daughter; she says, “Mom, Dad, what’s going on here? Why are you yelling?” Sophia sounds a lot like Rachel because, of course, they’re related, right? Rachel says, “Oh, it’s nothing, honey. Go back to sleep. Your Dad and I are just having a friendly little talk.” So, the daughter wants to know why her parents are arguing, and the mother tells her just to go back to sleep.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]



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[end of dialogue]

Our objective and unbiased scriptwriter is Dr. Lucy Tse. Thank you, Lucy.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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