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## THEY SAID IT

“Margot understood that no bridge existed across which she could pass to commune as an equal with this communist “lady” . . . Nor did she wish to very much, because –for Victor’s sake – she dreaded and disliked all these false politics, of the sham underdogs (as she felt them to be), politics which made such a lavish use of the poor and the unfortunate, of the “proletariat” – as they call her class—to advertise injustice to the profit of a predatory Party, of sham-underdogs athirst for power; whose doctrine was a universal Sicilian Vespers, and which yet treated the real poor, when they were encountered, with such overweening contempt, and even derision.”

--*The Revenge for Love*, Wyndham Lewis.

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## LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL.

Steve and I have written several articles over the past year or so about the ongoing meltdown of the Democratic Party. I hope we haven’t over worked the subject, but the fact is that for two people who have spent much of their adult lives immersed in the study of politics, this is an extraordinary event. It is to us what Mount St. Helens was to vulcanologists, a once in a lifetime opportunity to witness something that few people have ever seen.

Not since the Whigs disappeared in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and the Republicans almost did in the 1930s has any American watched the disintegration of a major political party. And here it is happening right before our eyes to what was once the most powerful political party that the world’s most powerful nation had ever produced.

Like a Giant Sloth (*Glossotherium barlani*) slowly sinking into the La Brea Tar Pits, the Democrats are vanishing. Whoaaaa! And like the sloth, the struggle to stay alive is accelerating the process. It’s the political equivalent of watching the Nature Channel. And what makes it even more exciting is that the outcome is not certain. Democrats could still escape the fate of the Giant Sloth. Or they could prolong the death struggle for some time. Stay tuned.

In any case, my topic this week is not the struggle itself, but the tar pit in which it is all happening. And it is here that the metaphor falls apart, because the sloth expired in a putrid, dank pool of viscous rot, while the Democrats are meeting that “grim ferryman which poets write of” in what is arguably the safest and most comfortable place that Mother Earth has ever provided for mankind, at least since the Garden of Eden became off limits following the ouster of the original First Family. And therein lies the story.

You see, much like grifters, hucksters, loan sharks, pitchmen, trial lawyers, and other denizens of America’s subculture, Democrats are more viable and competitive when times are tough, when people are hurting and in search of a magic potion. That’s because a big part of the Democrats’ hustle is their claim that they “feel the pain” of others. So the expression, “no pain, no gain,” has a special meaning for them.

Modern day leftist politics was birthed in the slums of post revolutionary France, sired by the demented genius of Rousseau and the self-righteous lunacy of Robespierre. But the original prototype of today’s American liberal was the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. A sensitive young man, he was troubled by the hard times he witnessed among the peasants during the early days of England’s industrial revolution and by the destruction and death that accompanied the Napoleonic wars.

In response, he adopted a posture of moral superiority based on his assertion that he “cared” more than ordinary mortals about the human suffering he witnessed. He could be a spiteful and petty creature to the people close to him, but oh how he loved humanity in general. He “felt the pain” of the masses.

This in turn led him to embrace a vast inventory of misguided and downright harmful social and economic theories, as well as a debased moral code. He attacked everything from the accumulation of capital to the economic benefits of specialization to the stability of the family to the concept of free will, all in the name of his own overweening “compassion” and moral

certainty. The following quotes from his “Notes to Queen Mab” could be mistaken today, 192 years after they were written, for an excerpt from a keynote address at a Democratic national convention.

There is no real wealth but the labour of man. Were the mountains of gold and the valleys of silver, the world would not be one grain of corn the richer; no one comfort would be added to the human race . . . wealth is a power usurped by the few, to compel the many to labour for their benefit. The laws which support this system derive their force from the ignorance and credulity of its victims: they are the result of a conspiracy of the few against the many, who are themselves obliged to purchase this pre-eminence by the loss of all real comfort . . . Love is free: to promise for ever to love the same woman is not less absurd than to promise to believe the same creed . . . It is a calculation of this admirable author [Godwin], that all the conveniences of civilized life might be produced, if society would divide the labour equally among its members, by each individual being employed in labour two hours during the day . . . A husband and wife ought to continue so long united as they love each other: any law which should bind them to cohabitation for one moment after the decay of their affection would be a most intolerable tyranny. . . Every human being is irresistibly impelled to act as he does act: in the eternity which preceded his birth a chain of causes was generated, which, operating under the name of motives, make it impossible that any thought of his mind, or any action of his life, should be otherwise than it is . . .

Finally, of course, as with today’s liberals, Shelley blamed both society’s ills and his own shortcomings on religion. “I brought my daughter RELIGION, on earth, She smother’d Reason’s babes in their birth.”

This archetype has served the American liberal community well for the past 75 years or so, with one important appendage. Max Eastman described

this distinctive addition, which crept slowly into the ideology of Marxists around the world and has become a staple of American liberalism, as follows: “Yearning to do good and obsessed by the power of the state to do it.”

But a funny thing happened in the United States during the past few decades. The times became too good for too many people and the crowds around the snake oil salesman began to thin. “Let’s go see the elephant, Daddy.” I first noted this phenomenon just over six years ago in an article entitled “The Dawn of a New Political Era, Part II.”

Like Shelly, most of today’s American liberals have little use for traditional Christian morality. But unlike Shelly, they are unable to find much about which to be really angry. Bill is upset about kids smoking cigarettes, of course. Al Gore is currently troubled by traffic logjams in suburbia. Jane Fonda was outraged recently about the “starving children” in Georgia, until someone explained to her that there were no starving children in Georgia, which seemed to surprise her. First Lady Mrs. Hillary Rodham Clinton says she worries a great deal about “the children,” but it has never been clear exactly what concerns her most.

Were the sensitive Shelly alive today, I think he would be astonished to learn that these solid citizens of the left wing establishment are his successors as champions of the world’s downtrodden . . . One wonders what would stoke Shelley’s humanitarian anger today. Would it be teenage smoking? Traffic problems. Threats to the abortion rights of middle class moms? Hunger in America?

I suggested that Shelley might focus his ire on the human destruction that is caused by the nation’s tens of thousands of drug dealers, who sell their poison to young people in every city, town, and village in

the nation, destroying lives and families and leaving poverty and death in their wake. But I knew better than to think that this would serve as the foundation for a new crusade for liberal Democrats, many of whom were among the proud founders of the drug culture and continue to support it today.

So Al Gore fretted about “the environment” and launched a bold attack on the automobile, which he described as “a mortal threat to the security of every nation that is more deadly than that of any military enemy we are ever again likely to confront.” Needless to say, this didn’t have the same broad appeal as JFK’s civil rights initiative or Johnson’s “War on Poverty.” And he lost.

Four years later, John Kerry had an even harder time finding something about which to be angry; some collective “pain” he could feel on behalf of some large segment of the America public; some terrible problem that could be solved via the power of the state. So he portrayed himself as the right kind of man to handle such a problem should one come along. And he lost too.

Faced with this tar pit of good times, Howard Dean, the party’s new official leader, has decided that the new mortal threat to the nation is none other than the Republican Party itself, and he rants and raves at it like a rabid dog barking at his shadow. The good doctor says things like, “I hate the Republicans and everything they stand for,” and “No member of the Republican Party has ever done an honest day’s work.” But there is no there there. No great wrong to right, no victim group of any size. It’s small beer when compared to the bread lines of the late 1930s (caused by Herbert Hoover), the dust bowl foreclosures (perpetrated by the evil Republican bankers), and the labor strife in California (cultivated by the selfish fruit growers).

Indeed, on a quiet day in Washington, one can hear the collective voice of the Democrats paraphrasing the desperate Richard III, “My kingdom for a bloody shirt to wave.” Where are the poor when we need them? Where are the wrongs that need righting? Where are the nation’s oppressed and exploited laborers? The

man with a hoe, bowed by the weight of centuries, the emptiness of ages in his face? The depression? Appalachian poverty? The evils of Jim Crow? The cities burning in rage? Those were the days, my friend.

Democrats are, of course, desperately trying to rebuild the party on the foundation of opposition to the war in Iraq. And while anything can happen in war and politics, it seems unlikely that this movement will grow large and popular enough with the American people to give birth to a broadly-based revitalization, especially given the reluctance on the part of some of the Party's leading presidential hopefuls, such as Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton, to make a commitment to a peace cause that boasts the likes of Cindy Sheehan and Al Sharpton as spokespersons.

Over the next few weeks, Democrats can also be expected to blame Bush for much of the damage from Hurricane Katrina, arguing that the war in Iraq prompted cutbacks in the money for emergency preparedness and weakened the National Guard. But once again, this seems unlikely to serve as an issue upon which to rebuild the Democratic Party.

Of course, as I said earlier, the Democratic Party can still escape the tar pit of good times. It certainly can't do this under its current leadership. But there is a chance that a young, smart, charismatic, and upbeat Democratic politician will ride onto the scene in time for the 2008 primaries, not with a new list of complaints against a lame duck president, but with some reasonable proposals to address the real problems of today, problems related to the march of technology, the aging of the population, the shrinking of the world, and the dangers presented by the turmoil that is going on within the Islamic world.

This person would not have to ignore the old troubles that served for so long as the party's menu of issues, but could instead discuss with pride the extraordinary progress that has been made in the United States toward solving or at least mitigating these problems. In fact, he or she might claim that the Democratic Party had a major role in these victories and promise to forge ahead with the same kind of can-do optimism and imagination that led to these improvements.

Would I like this to happen? You bet. The political scene and the nation itself would be healthier if the Democratic Party were healthier. Do I think it will happen? No, I don't. The real power within the Party, the big money and the organizing capacity, still resides among the old school Democrats, the race hustlers, the labor goons, the ambulance chasers, the poverty entrepreneurs, the skills for social license, most of whom would rather see the party go the way of the Giant Sloth than to see it revitalized around a new set of issues that are less explosive, very much more important to the long term health of the nation, and eminently solvable, but only in an atmosphere of cooperation and good will. For what would they do then, poor things?

Chances are, of course, that they will wind up with neither. The party will not completely sink into the unique and bountiful tar pit, nor will it shed the debilitating and anachronistic burdens that keep it from emerging from the pit. The party will, I suppose, continue to atrophy over time unable to move in either direction, until something comes along and changes the political dynamic, making it possible for the more rational partisans to try again to reach the solid ground.

In the meantime, Steve and I will continue to watch the party try to avoid sinking into total political irrelevance and semi-permanent minority status, fascinated by the process, and marveling at the influence that the irrepressible, irremediably romantic, mentally addled, amoral little atheist, Percy Bysshe Shelley, still holds over his ideological progeny.

## THE COLLAPSE OF THE PARTIES?

Given the apparent state of the two major political parties in this country, one could be forgiven for thinking that the American political system is on the verge of disintegration and, moreover, that the war in Iraq is the obvious proximate cause of this breakdown. Day-in and day-out, the major papers, newswires, and 24-hour cable news networks trumpet the looming collapse of the Republican coalition that has served as the nation's *de facto* majority party for roughly a quarter-century. At the same time, a handful of dailies and influential political web sites have suggested that the Democratic Party too is in the midst of an internecine battle that may well end up wreaking more havoc than even the GOP's purportedly monumental struggle.

While there is no question that both parties are currently showing some strain, the foundations and causes of this strain are rather poorly understood. Certainly the war is not entirely irrelevant in these intra-party scuffles, but truth be told, it is hardly their principal cause either. The battles between various factions within the parties are, in some ways, the continuation of similar skirmishes that have plagued both parties since the end of the Cold War and, in other ways, are the manifestation of social and political impulses that date back decades, if not centuries, and which constitute one of the defining characteristics of modern Western Civilization.

The most recent spate of party-collapse speculation began in earnest last Sunday, when perennial Republican "maverick" and publicity-hound Senator Chuck Hagel told his interviewers on the Sunday morning political talk shows that the conflict in Iraq is beginning to remind him more and more of Vietnam. Though Hagel's actual comments were rambling, contradictory, virtually incomprehensible, and, most notably, mere reiterations of statements he's made many times before, the mainstream press greeted them as the sage musings of a foreign policy guru who had bravely broken with his party's leaders to speak truth to power.

Lost in their reporting is the fact that Hagel is, for the time being at least, the only prominent Republican who has publicly advocated pulling out of Iraq (but without leaving a "power vacuum," mind you), reengaging the mad Mullahs of Iran, and playing nicely with the Marxist dictators of Latin America. Yet his comments have been taken by the talking heads and other assorted pundits to be evidence of growing disenchantment with the war on the political right.

On the left, the immediate cause of the party-collapse speculation is the circus currently being performed under the direction of ringmaster Cindy Sheehan in Crawford, Texas. Though Mrs. Sheehan's increasingly bizarre and hate-filled "protest" has attracted the support of a host of fringe-left Democratic figures (including, naturally, Al Sharpton) who apparently have no compunction whatsoever about being associated with the anti-Semitic and anti-American rantings of a handful of truly unhinged anti-warriors, mainstream Democrats have done their very best to avoid even addressing the subject, hoping that if they ignore Mrs. Sheehan, her radical supporters, and her even more radical sponsors they will all simply go away.

But they will not go away, at least not without taking a few mainstreamers down with them. As became clear last week, the far-left, anti-war agitators at Moveon.org and similar behind-the-scenes groups are itching for a fight with members of their own party. Last week, Markos Moulitsas, operator of the DailyKos, the most influential of the hard-left blog sites, gave the game away when he issued what amounted to a declaration of war against the the Democratic Leadership Council, the centrist Democratic organization formerly headed by Bill Clinton which has been the party's sole successful policy operation over the last couple of decades.

"Kos" and other like-minded anti-warriors are unhappy with the prominent mainstream members of their party ostensibly because those Senators and Congressmen have supported the war and still refuse to call for unilateral surrender. The "Kos-sacks" have therefore declared their intentions to attack their fellow Democrats as too pro-war and too much

like Republicans. Kos has written that he and his supporters will take the DLC “head on” and will make moderate Democrats politically “radioactive.” Late last week, Liberal blogger Mickey Kaus described the Democrats’ burgeoning intra-party rebellion thusly:

Hillary Clinton is currently heading for a much bigger train wreck in her party than anticipated – a wreck all her cautious planning failed to anticipate, and probably exacerbated.

The same press drumbeat of defeatism about Iraq that has helped bring down Bush’s numbers has also emboldened the party’s mainstream left base (i.e., not just MoveOn or the DailyKos crowd). They hardly care whether Hillary is a member of the DLC. But they do not want to support someone who voted for the war, as Hillary did. Worse, they want a Democrat who is willing to break from the respectable Beltway Tough-It-Out Consensus now, publicly, in a way Hillary has been unable to do.

Clearly, there are some struggles going on within both parties, although I’m of the opinion that the Democrats’ battle is much more fundamental and therefore likely to be a bigger deal than the Republicans’, both in terms of ideology and net effect at the polls. The pertinent question here is whether all, or even most, of this dissent is, in fact, due principally to Iraq, as both the mainstream press and the partisan dissidents claim, or if there are other forces at work here, opportunistically using the war as cover for other ambitions.

For my part, I’m inclined to believe it’s the latter, whether the “anti-war” dissidents know it or not. Iraq and the greater war on terror have no doubt been a boon for those who are unhappy with some of the tenets espoused by the respective parties. But their unhappiness did not begin on September 11, 2001 or even after the March 2003 invasion of Iraq. By and

large, the war dissidents today were dissidents within their parties long before 9/11. The war has provided an issue around which to coalesce and use for rhetorical purposes, but the seeds of their discontent are planted much deeper, at least in most cases.

Part of what is going on here is an old story that Mark and I began telling several years ago and have revived occasionally as circumstances have warranted; namely that since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the onset of the global economy, the old political paradigms have collapsed as well, rendering the Depression/Cold War-era political labels rather inadequately descriptive. The old dichotomies pitting conservative against liberal, labor against capital, big government against small government, and, most importantly, hawk against dove disappeared over night, leaving many in both parties searching for direction and for ideas with which to identify their political proclivities.

Naturally, the decade immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union was a confusing one for many people on both sides of the political aisle, but particularly for those on the left. To this day, liberals love and revere Bill Clinton despite the fact he was the very embodiment of the ideological confusion that followed the collapse of the Cold War paradigms. As President, Clinton signed a comprehensive overhaul of the welfare system that the usual suspects railed against and insisted would greatly increase childhood poverty; he signed a bill slashing taxes on capital gains (*capital gains*, of all things); he ordered American troops into combat against the remnants of Communist Yugoslavia, not once, but twice; and he declared the “era of Big Government” over. All of these things are and always have been anathema to the far-left denizens who now populate the “anti-war” wing of the Democratic Party.

So when, for example, MoveOn, Kos, and the rest of the anti-war crowd rail against the DLC, they are railing not just against Hillary Clinton, Joe Lieberman, and the war, but against all the things the former leader of the DLC did when he was President. When

they claim the DLC Democrats are indistinguishable from Republicans, their animosity and ideological resentment go way beyond the war on terror or the war in Iraq.

For the ideologically confused, the attacks of September 11 and the President's response to those attacks were, in many ways, a godsend. Rather than have to define themselves anew, given shifting political realities, the war posture struck in the aftermath of the attacks allowed them comfortably and lazily to slip into old habits, old thought patterns, and old paradigms.

The problem with all of this is that the old paradigms to which these folks continue to cling no longer mean what they once did. So their fixations appear more than just a little bizarre. On the left, it has meant that self-described "progressive" "peace" advocates have allied themselves in principle with a medieval cult of anti-Semitic, anti-gay, misogynistic religious zealots who have dedicated their lives to violence and "holy war." And on the right this has meant retreating into the pretenses of foreign policy "realism," despite the fact that the dictators to be coddled today are not potential allies in a war against a vicious and determined enemy, as they were during the Cold War, but are, in fact, the enemy themselves, meaning that today's "realists" propose taking the disastrous policy of détente several steps further.

This brings us to the second, related reason to suspect that the Iraq war is a mere pretense for the apparent intra-party dissent, namely that this type of dissent is hardly unique to this period in American history and is, in fact, a fairly constant Western political phenomenon, virtually omnipresent in some form, generally, though not exclusively, on the left. If, for example, one were to look more closely at some of the principal participants in the Sheehan protest, many of the faces would look strikingly familiar, and for good reason. As it turns out, nearly all of the anti-warriors in Crawford, with the exception of Mrs. Sheehan herself, are veterans of various and sundry protest movements dating back nearly four decades. Some, of course, are Vietnam-era retreats. Others are

veterans of the anti-nuclear campaigns of the '70s and '80s. And still others have been players in nearly every frivolous, uber-fashionable, left-wing cause imaginable. As *National Review's* Byron York notes this morning, scheduling of events at the Crawford protest is now being coordinated by "organizer Lisa Fithian." York continues:

To anyone familiar with the world of professional protesting — protests against globalism, capitalism, war, police tactics, and dozens of other causes — the presence of Fithian is a sign of how far Cindy Sheehan has strayed from the roots of her "one mom" crusade against George W. Bush. Or, perhaps more accurately, it is a sign that the "one mom" crusade was never just one mom. Fithian is a legendary organizer who operates in the world of anti-globalism anarchists, antiwar protesters, and union activists; an advocate of aggressive "direct action" demonstrations, she protested the first Gulf war, played an important role in the violent shutdown of Seattle during the 1999 World Trade Organization meeting, was a key planner in protests at the Republican and Democratic national conventions in 2000 and 2004, and organized demonstrations at trade meetings in Washington, D.C., Prague, and Genoa.

Although she has received virtually no attention from reporters covering Sheehan, Fithian has been part of the Crawford protest from the very beginning. In a telephone interview with *National Review Online* on Sunday, she explained that she was with Sheehan in Dallas at a meeting of the antiwar group Veterans for Peace during the first days of August when the decision was made for Sheehan to go to the president's ranch. On August 6, when Sheehan went to Crawford — in a bus with the words "Impeachment Tour" emblazoned on the side — Fithian went along. "I came the first day and helped her

[Sheehan] set up the initial encampment,” Fithian said. With the exception of one brief absence, she has been there ever since.

The point here is that the Iraq dissent is nothing particularly new or special. It is merely another opportunity for a handful of radicals to explain to the world how they have things figured out, and if we’d all just have the good sense listen to them, everything would be great. How do today’s partisan dissidents reconcile the incongruities necessary to maintain the Cold War-paradigm fictions detailed above? They simply ignore them, believing that their personal contribution to the political discourse is so vital, so absolutely indispensable that those inconsistencies must be overlooked.

Such a position requires a special type of blinding arrogance that surpasses that of normal political advocates and which is characteristic of utopian elements that have plagued Western Civilization for several centuries and the Democratic Party for several decades.

That the Democratic Party has a tendency to foster such contradictory and potentially dangerous utopian/Gnostic factions is hardly a novel observation on my part. Among others, Eric Voegelin, Willaim F. Buckley, Buckley acolyte Jonah Goldberg, and Mark Melcher have all noted this predisposition before. As Voegelin maintained, and as Buckley et al. have reinforced, liberalism lends itself to the fomentation of Gnostic notions whereby the “imminentization of the Christian eschaton” becomes the inevitable goal of human progress. These notions do more than simply create an alternative vision of mankind’s destiny, they actually defy reality, or as Voegelin put it: “the Gnostic fallacy destroys the oldest wisdom of mankind concerning the rhythm of growth and decay which is the fate of all things under the sun.”

Generally speaking, conservatives have applied the Gnostic label to liberals with regard to their beliefs and expectations about economics and the government’s role in society. But there can be little question that

any group of fringe radicals that actually believes that it can negotiate a peace with the radical Islamists or that it can “end war” altogether (or as the anti-war group’s name suggests, “Stop War and End Racism”) subscribes to the same fallacy. Voegelin noted that “in the Gnostic dream world . . . nonrecognition of reality is the first principle.” And one would be hard-pressed not to concede that denial of or “nonrecognition” of reality is, indeed, the fundamental characteristic of those anti-warriors who have adopted Cindy Sheehan’s protest as their own, much as it was of those who protested the war in Vietnam and every other exercise of American military power since. Voegelin continued:

Gnostic societies and their leaders will recognize dangers to their existence when they develop, but such dangers will not be met by appropriate actions in the world of reality. They will rather be met by magic operations in the dream world, such as disapproval, moral condemnation, declarations of intention, resolutions, appeals to the opinion of mankind, branding of enemies as aggressors, outlawing of war, propaganda for world peace and world government, etc.

If that’s not a perfect description of what is going on down in Crawford and at the other Sheehan-inspired mini-protests around the country, I don’t know what is. Voegelin, of course, wrote those words in the wake of the Second World War. Thus it is fairly obvious not only that the anti-war dissidents currently causing heartburn for mainstream Democrats have hopelessly and unrealistically inflated opinions of themselves and their ability to affect the human condition, but that they are hardly the first such protestors to have been thusly delusional.

While it may seem that I am picking on the Democratic dissidents exclusively here, that’s not entirely true. The far-left malcontents make the point more clearly, since they have an obvious and documented history of this type of arrogant

presumption of super secret knowledge that will lead humanity to utopia. That said, the same fallacy appears to be at work in motivating some of the Republican dissidents as well.

As I noted above, chief among the GOP's armchair quarterbacks is Senator Chuck Hagel, a man I am embarrassed to admit shares my home state. Hagel is a foreign policy "realist," of course, and as best I can decipher, his "realist" critique of the war in Iraq is that it was unnecessary, too radical, too idealistic, and has upset the "stability" of the region to no good end.

Note that the scare quotes around the word "stability" are compulsory, in my opinion, since it is not exactly clear how "stable" the Middle East has ever been or, for that matter, how such a "stable" region could produce and foster the murderous ideology that toppled the Twin Towers and took out a large section of the Pentagon. Moreover, since 40-plus years of "realism" in Middle East policy actually tolerated the rise of that ideology in the name of some greater stability, it is fairly universally acknowledged that pursuit of "stability" has been a monumental failure. But those are mere details, and details, like logical consistency, appear not to matter much to the senior Senator from Nebraska. He, like the leftists noted above, can't be bothered with reality.

What appears actually to be important to Hagel is that the American public comes to understand that he has special gifts and knowledge that make him indispensable in the fashioning of a foreign policy that will, at long last, achieve this ever elusive stability. It doesn't matter that "realist" foreign policy proved a disaster under the guidance of Nobel Prize winner Henry Kissinger or such foreign policy superstars as James Baker and Brent Scowcroft. What will make the realist experiment different this time around – what will make it workable – is that *he* will be involved, and *he* is somehow special.

What is supremely ironic in all of this is that Hagel criticizes President Bush and his foreign policy as overly and unrealistically idealistic, all the while suggesting that previously disastrous foreign policy

strategies can be made successful, if only done properly and with the proper leadership (his, of course). This is, in my opinion, nonrecognition of reality taken to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  degree.

It may be argued that Hagel is not a true Gnostic in the sense that Voegelin used the term, since he is not exactly a pacifist or "one-worlder." And while that may, in a strict sense, be true, there is no denying the fact that Hagel appears to believe that he holds some sort of secret knowledge that has been denied the rest of the ruling elites and which would allow him to succeed where others have failed. Certainly his perception of himself and his place in the world qualifies him as "Gnostic-like" or, at the very least, supremely arrogant and delusional.

In closing, then, while I think an argument can be made that both the Republican and Democratic coalitions are under some stress specifically related to the war, I don't believe the war is a necessary condition for the dissent so many analysts and pundits have noted. Yes, Iraq has given the malcontents an excuse to voice their unhappiness, but it is hardly the cause of the underlying dissenting sentiment. Given this, I think all of the breathless reports about coalitions collapsing and parties falling apart are wildly sensationalistic. The type of arrogance and delusion that undergirds this dissent has been seen before and will be seen again. And the parties will survive, though perhaps somewhat worse for the wear.

Note that the threat to the parties on this count is, in my opinion, uneven. The Democrats' dissent is not only more widespread within the party than is the Republicans', but it is also considerably less in synch with the sentiments of the electorate. The threat to the Democrats is not that their party will collapse, but as Mark suggests above, that it will continue to atrophy and remain bogged down in the proverbial tar pit. Such a threat faces Republicans as well, but that threat appears much less realistic given that Senator Hagel stands virtually alone in his Quixotic campaign to bring back the coddling of dictators, whereas the Democrats' dissenters are both numerous and well funded.

## END NOTES.

### The Oracle Misreads the Entrails.

Regular readers know that we have not been particularly big fans of Warren Buffett, who may be an exceptionally successful investor and entrepreneur but who has proven to be a rather poor political prognosticator. As we have noted at least a couple of times this year, Buffett's decision, conscious or otherwise, to allow his subjective political predilections to guide his investment decisions has been a disaster for him and for his shareholders. Given this, we thought we'd alert you to the following, which appeared in the July/August edition of *The American Spectator*:

Warren Buffett is bearish on the United States, and he's bullish on Europe. For the first time in his life, starting in 2002, Mr. Buffett entered the foreign exchange markets and shorted the dollar. This rare macro-economic bet was based on a belief that U.S. consumers and the U.S. government were spending beyond their means, and that the trade deficit was a sign of economic weakness.

While his short position was profitable in 2004, he has lost more than half a billion dollars so far in 2005. Some Wall Street sources suggest that his breakeven exchange rate is \$1.22/euro, so with the euro trading near \$1.21 in mid-June, his short position was seriously in the red.

Buffett's anti-American investment sentiment has cost Berkshire Hathaway shareholders dearly. During the 12 months ending in mid-June, his stock price was down roughly 7 percent, while the S&P 500 was up 5 percent. The stock market voted "non" on this Berkshire investment strategy, just like the French and Dutch voted against the European constitution....

Our advice: You pick the investments, Warren, and leave the politics to the professionals.

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