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THEY SAID IT

It is indeed a vital question, "May not Islam rise again? . . . Will not perhaps the temporal power of Islam return and with it the menace of an armed Mohammedan world which will shake off the domination of Europeans – still nominally Christian – and reappear again as the prime enemy of our civilization?" . . . Cultures spring from religions; ultimately the vital force which maintains any culture is its philosophy, its attitude towards the universe; the decay of a religion involves the decay of the culture corresponding to it – we see that most clearly in the breakdown of Christendom today . . . In Islam there has been no such dissolution of ancestral doctrine -- or, at any rate, nothing corresponding to the universal break-up of religion in Europe.

The whole spiritual strength of Islam is still present in the masses of Syria and Anatolia, of the East Asian mountains, of Arabia, Egypt and North Africa. The final fruit of this tenacity, the second period of Islamic power, may be delayed: -- but I doubt whether it can be permanently postponed.

The Great Heresies, Hilaire Belloc, 1938.

DEMOCRATS ARE KEY TO AMERICA'S FUTURE.

On Tuesday, November 7, every member of the staff here at The Political Forum will go to the polls and vote a straight Republican ticket. This includes all of the individuals who fill the various major and menial rolls that are essential to an organization of this nature and size, i.e., the publishers, writers, research assistants, public relations specialists, secretaries, receptionists, proofreaders, tech support, security, accounts payable, accounts receivable, record keeping, and maintenance. That evening, the entire staff, or to be more specific, Mark and Steve, will close their respective small but messy basement offices, wearily climb the stairs to the real world, have dinner, and watch the returns with their respective wives, cheering when Republicans win one and groaning when the Democrats do.

Now, with that tribute to the Republican cause out of the way, we would like to offer a reason this week for folks like us not to feel too badly if Republicans do poorly on that fateful Tuesday. Indeed, we are going to posit the view here that the only hope for the long-term future of the United States is for the Democrats to resume a position of some strength within the governing authority in Washington; not political dominance again, but leadership of one or both houses, or alternatively, the presidency without control over either legislative body.

Before beginning this thankless task, we will acknowledge upfront that there is a great deal of naval gazing involved in this exercise. Indeed, we will further state that the purpose of this piece is not to build an iron clad case for the Democratic Party's partial ascendancy, but to use the premise that this would be a good thing as an editorial device for the purpose of exploring some issues that we think are relevant to the long-term security of the United States. So here goes.

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We will begin by recalling a point that we made just over a year ago in an article entitled, “Curmudgeonly Thoughts About Katrina.” To wit:

When Republicans are in the majority they become big spending liberals. They become worthless. They can’t help it. The forces at work on them are too great to resist. Making things worse, liberals are absolutely useless when they are in the minority. They are incapable of acting as a meaningful opposition force. They roll around on the floor and chew the carpet . . .

An ultra liberal Democratic president could not possibly spend more money than George Bush and his fellow Republicans, nor could he or she spend it more enthusiastically and with less concern about the consequences. It is possible, however, that if an ultra-liberal Democrat were in the White House the Republicans would return naturally to the role of a conservative opposition party, fighting on behalf of fiscal responsibility and a slow down in the growth of government.

Of course, Republicans could not stop either the fiscal hemorrhaging or the growth of the Leviathan. But they might be able to slow it down a little by bringing back that sublime condition that I used to describe as “blessed gridlock,” which is all anyone can realistically expect.

The impetus for this particular piece was our disappointment over the failure of the GOP to exercise even a modicum of fiscal responsibility. But the underlying message throughout was that when Republicans have full power and the Democrats have none, they are like Tolstoy’s unhappy families, each becomes irresponsible in its own way.

Over the past few years, it has become evident that this irresponsibility is not confined to fiscal and domestic matters, but is arguably even more damaging when it comes to foreign policy. Simply stated, the immediate problem is this. When modern day Republicans are in the majority, not only do they

spend money like drunken sailors, they also become as enchanted as liberals with the prospect of using the enormous power and influence of the U.S. government to “make the world a better place.” They can’t help it. The forces at work on them are too great to resist. This leaves absolutely no one around in the entire political spectrum to make the traditional, conservative argument in favor of prudence and restraint.

And yes, Virginia, there is such an argument. In fact, it was once a centerpiece of the conservative movement. We won’t elaborate on it here, but will simply offer the following observations by the late, great Russell Kirk, who was once an icon of American conservatism. These are taken from his 1993 book, *The Politics of Prudence*.

Most of the world never was satisfactorily democratic in the past, is distinctly undemocratic today, and has no prospect of decent democracy in the future . . . The United States cannot be forever unsettling the governments of client states, or small countries, or of allies, on the ground that they are not sufficiently democratic in obedience to the doctrines of Rousseau, or that they “discriminate” against somebody or other, or that they prefer traditional economies to a full-blown abstract capitalism. One thinks of the aphorism of the late Madame Nu: “If you have the United States for a friend, you don’t need any enemies.” Successful foreign policy, like political success generally, is produced through the art of the possible—not through ideological rigidity. It will not do for the Department of State to repeat, like an incantation, “Democracy good, all other government bad.” In short, I am saying that a quasi-religion of Democratic Capitalism cannot do duty for imagination and right reason and prescriptive wisdom, in domestic politics or in foreign relations. . . .

To expect that all the world should, and must, adopt the peculiar political institutions of the United States – which often do not work

very well even at home – is to indulge the most unrealistic of visions; yet just that seems to be the hope and expectation of many Neoconservatives . . . Such naïve doctrine led us into the wars in Indo-China – the notion that we could establish or prop up in Viet Nam a “democracy” that never had existed anywhere in south-east Asia. Such foreign policies are such stuff as dreams are made of; yet they lead to the heaps of corpses of men who died in vain. . . .

It must be emphasized that the ends of a tolerable human community are order, and justice, and freedom. Democracy, per se, is not the end or object of human existence; it is a possible means rather, toward those three real ends of the civil social order. . . . So let us set our faces against those American neoterists who would have us establish a civil religion worshipping the great god Demos. The prevalence of Christian mores among the American people was the cause of the success of the American democracy, as Tocqueville discerned nearly a century ago.

Now our purpose here is not to debate President Bush’s efforts to introduce democracy into the Middle East. For what it’s worth, we have been highly skeptical of this enterprise from the very beginning. In fact, in April 2003 we declared that we would “quickly become pessimistic” about the war if President Bush went “overboard with the idea of building a ‘democratic’ Iraq.” In our opinion, we said back then, “he may as well try to raise caribou over there.”

We have softened our stance in the intervening three and half years, largely in recognition of the fact that President Bush had no other choice after overthrowing the existing government of Iraq but to propose the establishment of a “democracy,” given the public relations problem that would have accompanied a call for either of the more appropriate alternatives, a dictatorship or a kleptocracy. We seem to recall that at one point someone did suggest a return of the Hashemite monarchy in the person of Sharif Ali Bin al-Huessein, a cousin of King Faisal II, who was

killed in a 1958 coup. But even President Bush knew this was a non-starter. The question now is whether the United States would settle for what we suggested would be a realistic alternative to democracy in Iraq, namely the installation of “our tyrant instead of theirs.” And, of course, the answer is yes.

Our purpose for raising this issue is to note that the position outlined above by Russell Kirk, which not too long ago would have been considered mainline conservative, has few if any champions on the modern day battlefield of political ideas. In a sense, all of the wisdom contained in this intellectual opposition to nation building has gone the way of the once similarly conventional, conservative belief that big government is a dire threat to what Kirk described above as the three goals of a tolerable community, namely order, justice, and freedom.

Needless to say, Democrats cannot be expected to promote conservative principles. So when Republicans start sounding like Lyndon Johnson and Woodrow Wilson, Democrats don’t stand in opposition, but move to the left of the Republicans and spout beliefs that are right out of Eric Voegelin’s “dream world,” like promoting the Canadian health care system as a substitute for the American one, or the idea that Islamic anger at the United States is “our fault.”

In any case, the bottom line on all of this is that when the Democrats are out of power, Republicans inevitably abandon conservative principles and pitch their tents on the ideological territory of liberals. The Democrats don’t respond by embracing them, but by moving further leftward into some sort of weird, uncharted, radical, never-never land. And the United States finds itself moving ever deeper into that “Serbonian bog . . . where armies whole have sunk,” to borrow an allusion from Milton.

Now we are not foolish enough to think that all will be well if the Democrats regain a degree of political power. We do believe, however, that things will never be well if they don’t. That is, their return to some sort of normality is absolutely necessary, but not sufficient to assure the long-term health and security of the United States.

In defense of this position, we would argue that the United States is facing some exceedingly difficult and dangerous times. Islam is on the march worldwide, challenging liberal democracies across the globe with a variety of strategies and weapons, ranging from massive waves of immigration to cultural intimidation and to acts of terrorism and mass murder.

In addition, there is a very real threat of another terrorist strike on American soil similar in magnitude or possibly even more deadly than the attacks of September 11. Indeed, we know of no expert on the subject of terrorism who does not believe that the pertinent question concerning such an attack is not whether but when.

Furthermore, it seems highly likely now that Islamic terrorists will eventually have access to nuclear weapons and will attempt to use them to wreak massive casualties on Americans, to severely cripple the U.S. economy, to intimidate the United States into abandoning areas of the globe that are necessary to its continued economic and social well being, or to do all of these things at once and more.

It also seems likely, if not absolutely certain, that the nations of Europe will become Islamic societies within the lifetimes of most Americans living today. The result, other than the loss of Western style freedoms in these nations, is that the United States will not only lose its historically most important friends and allies in the world but also gain a gaggle of new antagonists and enemies.

We could go on, of course, cataloguing the threat that militant Islam presents to the United States and to liberal societies worldwide. But this task is being pursued by many others who are better suited to it than we are, including the inimitable Mark Steyn in his newly released book *America Alone: The End Of The World As We Know It*.

The dust jacket of Steyn's book maintains that the United States can "survive, prosper, and defend its freedom only if it continues to believe in itself, in the sturdier virtues of self-reliance (not government), in

the centrality of family, and in the conviction that our country really is the world's last best hope."

Needless to say, we fully agree with Steyn. Indeed, we have been making this point ourselves in these pages for a very long time. What we would add, in support of the premise of this article, is that one of the ingredients in this prescription for survival must be a Democratic Party that is not aggressively antagonistic to the sturdier virtues of self-reliance (not government), the centrality of family, and the conviction that the United States really is the world's last best hope.

Gaining some degree of power, responsibility, and accountability for the government may not be enough to transform Democrats into a responsible opposition party. But, as we said earlier, the United States is doomed if the Democratic Party's sole function continues to be nothing more than to oppose everything that the Republicans do and in some cases to openly sabotage GOP initiatives designed to protect the nation from its enemies. In the world today, this is a prescription for disaster.

Besides denying the nation the benefit of a reasoned and reasonable debate involving a variety of policy choices, a Democratic Party that takes up permanent residence in the far left, nether regions of the political spectrum is unhealthy for the conservative movement within the Republican Party, which is going to be absolutely crucial to the battle that lies ahead. As we mentioned earlier, when Democrats move sharply leftward, Republicans follow and the political discussion becomes unserious, focused on issues that have little or nothing to do with the nation's social and economic health or of its national securities needs.

The wisdom of the old conservatives is overwhelmed by the loud outpourings of the Hollywood and sports celebrities, television news personalities, radio talk show hosts, political columnists, and addled billionaires, all of whom are more interested in winning the immediate, superficial political battles than in the greater, ideological war over how best to protect the nation and insure a just and peaceful society.

So we'll vote for the Republicans on Tuesday, but not despair if the Democrats make a comeback of sorts, hoping against hope that this will mark a necessary first step in the long march by Democrats back to the kind of patriotism and love of country that Jack Kennedy demonstrated when he risked nuclear war to keep Soviet missiles out of Cuba and solemnly pledged to the world that the United States would do all that it takes to assure the survival and the success of liberty worldwide. It may be a long shot, but we firmly believe that an American victory in the long and difficult battle with militant Islam that lies ahead depends upon it.

BROKEN INSTITUTIONS.

If there is one serious and incontrovertible complaint about President Bush's democratization effort in Iraq, one inescapable problem with the noble and understandable effort to foster democratic governance in that benighted and bloody place, it is that the Iraqis lack the requisite institutions to foster self government.

"Democracy" does not take place in a vacuum. It requires both a citizenry that understands the requirements and responsibilities of self government and the institutions to cultivate thusly informed citizens. Nowhere in the Middle East, save Israel, do such institutions exist, which means that the task in the Middle East, as President Bush has defined it, is not simply to hold a few elections, but to foster the type of conventions and public organizations that will ensure the kind of long-term dedication to the democratic process that so many Americans have died to bring to Iraq.

The value of such institutions cannot be underestimated. The underpinnings of a democratic society are a free and honest press, a stable and largely egalitarian education system that imparts the history and the function of the culture, and a civic society that fosters understanding of and respect for both the process and the results. And this applies to *all* democratic societies, east or west, young or mature. It is no coincidence that the most successful and long-lived democracies in the world are not just English in origin but also have a long pre-democratic history of English institutions. Likewise, it is no coincidence

that those ostensible Western democracies that have rejected the importance of history, education, and culture in favor of post-modern, multi-culti platitudes appear, at times, to be "democracies" in name only.

Certainly, the American founders understood well the value of these civic institutions. Thomas Jefferson noted that "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free . . . it expects what never was and never will be." And Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of Jefferson's vaunted Declaration of Independence, concurred, similarly declaring, "The business of education has acquired a new complexion by the independence of our country. The form of government we have assumed, has created a new class of duties to every American."

We have addressed these concerns ourselves dozens of times in these pages over the years, endlessly lamenting the collapse of the education system and the concomitant threat to the civic life of the nation. The system is broken. Quite simply, students are not taught what they need to know to participate fully in a democratic society and are instead subjected to political indoctrination masquerading as instruction. Last February, we put it thusly:

The education establishment's failure to prepare its wards to be lucid participants in American civic life – which, by the way, is the fundamental rationale for a public education system in the first place – is neither surprising nor necessarily unintentional. It stems from an active effort to politicize education and has affected the quality of instruction both in what it teaches and what it fails to teach.

Recently, our fears about the education system and its long-term effect on the nation have been confirmed and, more to the point, quantified. Last month, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute released the report of a study on civic literacy in America's universities conducted in conjunction with the University of Connecticut's Department of Public Policy. The results of the study are dispiriting, to say the least.

According the ISI report, entitled "The Coming Crisis in Citizenship: Higher Education's Failure to Teach America's History and Institutions," (from which

the two above quotes by Jefferson and Rush were drawn) American college students not only receive failing grades in civics (American history, American government, “America and the world,” and free market economics), but benefit very little in this regard from a four-year education. On average, college seniors scored only 1.5% higher than freshmen, meaning that “college students on average leave campus . . . no better off than when they arrived in terms of acquiring the knowledge necessary for informed engagement in a democratic republic and global economy.”

ISI’s report includes the following sad and deeply troubling commentaries on the state of American education:

- Seniors lack basic knowledge of America’s history. More than half, 53.4 percent, could not identify the correct century when the first American colony was established at Jamestown. And 55.4 percent could not recognize Yorktown as the battle that brought the American Revolution to an end (28 percent even thought the Civil War battle at Gettysburg the correct answer).
- College seniors are also ignorant of America’s founding documents. Fewer than half, 47.9 percent, recognized that the line “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,” is from the Declaration of Independence. And an overwhelming majority, 72.8 percent, could not correctly identify the source of the idea of “a wall of separation” between church and state.
- More than half of college seniors did not know that the Bill of Rights explicitly prohibits the establishment of an official religion for the United States.
- Nearly half of all college seniors, 49.4 percent, did not know that The Federalist Papers—foundational texts of America’s constitutional order—were written in support of the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. Seniors actually scored lower than freshmen on this question by 5.7 percentage points, illustrating negative learning while at college.

- More than 75 percent of college seniors could not identify that the purpose of the Monroe Doctrine was to prevent foreign expansion in the Western Hemisphere.
- Even with their country at war in Iraq, fewer than half of seniors, 45.2 percent, could identify the Baath party as the main source of Saddam Hussein’s political support. In fact, 12.2 percent believed that Saddam Hussein found his most reliable supporters in the Communist Party. Almost 5.7 percent chose Israel.

That’s just great. Better than one in twenty American college seniors thinks that Saddam was a tool of the Jews. Perfect. All we can do, we suppose, is be grateful that the ISI study also shows that students with lower levels of civic knowledge also have lower levels of participation in civic life, for example voting. That’s small consolation, of course, but it’s something.

Sadly, the education system is not the only civic institution that’s broken in this nation. Indeed, it may not even be the most egregiously broken. That honor likely belongs to the nation’s press, its “mainstream media.”

As adamant as the Founders may have been about an educated citizenry, they were likely more adamant about a free press, which only makes sense, given that the press is one of the instruments by which a populace remains educated. “The basis of our government being the opinion of the people,” Jefferson wrote, “the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”

What the Founders, who valued the press enough to make it the subject of the First Amendment to the Constitution, could not have foreseen, of course, is the nature of the modern press: its enormous influence and ability to shape rather than merely report and opine upon the operation of government; its consolidation in the hands of a tiny few citizens (and non-citizens), the overwhelming majority of whom share a similar ideology and temperament; and the

deception played upon the population at large through the denial of this ideology and the press's pretense of munificent objectivity.

We won't bore you here with anecdotes about the media's prejudices. Only fools and self-serving ideologues can any longer deny the existence of widespread liberal bias in the modern press. The only remaining surprise with regard to this bias is, perhaps, how forcefully and unabashedly the media denizens have embraced it, even as the nation is at war and preparing for an election that will almost certainly play a role in the ultimate disposition of that war.

In August, we argued that the "mainstream media is openly and aggressively opposed to this president, to his war, and, frankly, to anything even akin to victory." And in the two months since, the coverage of the war has only grown progressively worse, with every new day bringing another handful of thumb-sucking laments about how the war is clearly lost and how everyone on the planet, save the President and Vice President, understands this.

A week ago yesterday, Brian Calame, the public editor of *The New York Times*, used his column to apologize for defending his paper's decision "to publish its June 23 article on a once-secret banking-data surveillance program," conceding that the article should not have been published. Clearly, as with a handful of other stories the *Times* has "broken" during the five years of the war on terror, the banking surveillance program scoop has objectively damaged the overall war effort and done so needlessly. And thus Calame's apology is a welcome one. But as blogger Tom Maguire noted, Calame's *mea culpa* is largely irrelevant now. The damage is done and cannot be undone, or as Maguire put it, "toothpaste, meet tube."

Last Thursday, Lynn Cheney, the wife of Vice President Dick Cheney, finally had enough and lit into CNN's Wolf Blitzer about his network's egregious and histrionic coverage of the war. "What," Mrs. Cheney demanded of Blitzer "is CNN doing running tapes of terrorists shooting Americans?" referring to a propaganda/recruiting video distributed by terrorists in Iraq and shown by CNN in its pursuit of shocking headlines. "Do you want us to win?" she pressed further.

And while Blitzer declared emphatically that "of course" he and his network "want the United States to win," viewers could be forgiven for wondering otherwise. For a combination of reasons – Watergate Syndrome, Vietnam Syndrome, Bush Derangement Syndrome – a great many of those in the mainstream media want not just for the war in Iraq and the broader war on terror to fail, but to be there when it does in order to be able to pat themselves on the back and declare that it was they who brought down the dastardly George Bush. As political observer extraordinaire Michael Barone noted this summer, "We have a press that is at war with an administration, while our country is at war against merciless enemies."

This war against the administration has, of course, been carried out on the domestic front as well, with the media doing its very best to convince Americans that next week's midterm elections are going to produce a Democratic tidal wave, apparently hoping that it can turn its dreams into reality simply by repeating them often enough. While serious forecasters and pollsters have suggested that many races are still too close to call and that control of Congress remains up for grabs, the mainstream press has insisted that a Democratic victory is all but guaranteed and that the only question remaining is how big the landslide will be.

Through a combination of manifestly skewed polls over-weighted with Democratic respondents and selective interpretation of survey data, the media have painted a picture of a Republican collapse that is premature at best. As blogger, columnist, PhD candidate, and polling authority Jay Cost wrote recently, these "media polls are designed to maximize news value, not truth value," and therefore "offer lots of heat and very little light." The same, incidentally, can also be said of the rest of the media's election coverage.

This is hardly a new phenomenon, of course. Indeed, the media tried to defeat President Bush and the GOP in the 2004 election, only to fail. Republicans consoled themselves then as they do now with the knowledge that the mainstream media, powerful though it may be, is no longer as powerful as it once was, since it no longer has a monopoly on information. And certainly the conservative-leaning "alternative" media (e.g.

talk radio, Fox News, conservative internet sites and blogs) made a significant difference in the President's ability to overcome the synchronized campaigns of the Democrats and the mainstream media two years ago.

But conservatives should not presume that the advantages provided them by alternative and "new" media will continue indefinitely or without considerable vigilance and expenditure of effort. As the new media becomes less new, by definition it also becomes more established and thus takes on many of the characteristics *and faults* of the establishment media. Three weeks ago, Robert Cox, a member of the editorial board of *The Washington Examiner*, noted that liberal entities are slowly but surely seizing control of "the major 'nodes' in the online world" and that the left's dream of owning "the Internet the way the right owns talk radio" appears well within its grasp.

Among other things, Cox noted that conservative blogger Michelle Malkin had her video commentaries removed from the video-sharing site YouTube and her account with the service terminated because her videos – conservative "rants" – were deemed offensive by the service and a handful of its users. Though Cox didn't mention it, Malkin was hardly alone, and dozens of conservative videos from dozens of different sources were removed and labeled offensive, all for the crime of expressing conservative political views.

Why does this matter? Well, as Cox describes it, "YouTube is poised to become the eBay of video file sharing. If you want the biggest audience for your video, you want access to the most potential viewers – and that means YouTube." More to the point, YouTube has just been purchased (for \$1.65 billion) by the internet giant Google, which understands both the power of the service and of internet communication in general. Oh, and by the way, Google itself is an aggressively liberal company, with, as Cox notes, "98 percent of the money donated to political parties by Google employees" going to Democrats.

Google is not alone in its leftist political leanings. All of the major stakeholders in new media technology – from Google to Microsoft to Yahoo – are on the "progressive" side of politics and are unashamed

either to express their predilections or to work to achieve their political goals. Cox continues:

It's not just Google's media and financial muscle that benefits the left. Liberals run the leading blog search engine – Technorati. They run the leading blog software manufacturer – Six Apart. They invented two of the most important blogging technologies – Podcasting and RSS. The list goes on and on.

Conservatives protest that companies like Google and Yahoo may control aspects of the internet, but they can't control the entire amorphous creature, meaning that conservative news sites and bloggers will continue to reach their audiences. As "A-List blogger and talk radio show host Hugh Hewitt" told Cox, "It doesn't matter who creates the tools used by bloggers, but what bloggers do with those tools." That's true, of course, but it also misses the point, which is that most people who use the internet to gather news and information about political topics and candidates do so using search engines – like Google.

Ironically, just two weeks after Cox's column ran, *The New York Times* intimated that this brave new world of institutional ideological bias in the new media may already be upon us. Last Thursday, the *Times* reported the following:

"Fifty or so . . . Republican candidates have also been made targets in a sophisticated "Google Bombing" campaign intended to game the search engine's ranking algorithms. By flooding the Web with references to the candidates and repeatedly cross-linking to specific articles and sites on the Web, it is possible to take advantage of Google's formula and force those articles to the top of the list of search results."

And while Google was hardly complicit in this effort, neither was it particularly eager to stop it. According to the *Times*, the company has a "hands off" policy with regard to Google Bombing. The paper also quoted Marissa Mayer, Google's director of consumer

Web products, as writing that such “bombs” are mere pranks that are “distracting to some, but . . . don’t affect the overall quality of our search service . . .”

We think it should also be noted that companies like Google, Yahoo, and Microsoft, all of which have clear progressive leanings in this country, are not above playing footsie with totalitarians in other countries when it suits their purposes. All of these companies and others have made common cause with the communist government of China to censor “inappropriate” use of the internet and, by extension, to aid in crackdowns against cyber-dissidents. Journalist Jonathan Mirsky summed up the new media’s campaign against the people of China thusly last January:

Beijing has the very best help. Some of the world’s most famous Internet companies have lined up to show China how to cripple the Web.

A partial list includes Google, Microsoft, Yahoo, Cisco, Sun Microsystems and Skype. Each has its expertise. Google removes from its Chinese site whatever the Chinese deem politically sensitive. According to Reporters without Frontiers, “Cisco Systems has sold several thousand routers to enable the regime to build an online spying system and the firm’s engineers have helped set it to spot ‘subversive’ key-words in messages.”

In 2002, Yahoo signed a document called a “Public Pledge on Self-discipline for the Chinese Internet Industry.” That agreement led to disaster for Shi Tao. Shi, 37, worked for a business daily. On April 30, last year, he was sentenced to 10 years behind bars for revealing a top state secret, to foreign Web sites. The secret was an official warning to the news media on the threat to China posed by dissidents returning to mark the

15th anniversary of the Tiananmen killings. Yahoo and Cisco furnished the technology that permitted the security services to identify Shi.

We don’t want to wade too deeply into the fever swamps of conspiracy mongering, but all of this in combination should give conservatives serious pause. What we have here are the largest and most powerful internet companies in the world, all of which oppose conservative politics, some of which have allowed their services to be used to silence those who espouse conservatism, and a great many of which have shown a propensity for collaborating with dictators to stifle dissent – or worse. The conservative mavens of the new media may not be too terribly concerned about all of this, but they should be.

As things stand today, the internet, talk radio, and Fox News stand as a sort of conservative bulwark against a handful of other civic institutions that have been co-opted by ideological forces and thus no longer serve their intended purpose in the cultivation of a responsible citizenry. But given the propensity of these ideologues to heed Antonio Gramsci’s exhortation to make the “long march through the institutions” there is no guarantee that this bulwark will hold.

Several years ago, *The Washington Post* famously referred to evangelical Christians as “uneducated and easily led.” It seems to us given the damage done over the years to the nation’s civic institutions and the effect that has had on civic literacy, that “uneducated and easily led” is a description that might better fit the majority of Americans. How all of this will affect the long-term execution of American democracy remains to be seen, of course, though we strongly suspect that the results will not be particularly pleasing.

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