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THEY SAID IT

Some ingenious writers have suspected that Europe was much colder formerly than it is at present; and the most ancient descriptions of the climate of Germany tend exceedingly to confirm their theory. The general complaints of intense frost, and eternal winter, are perhaps little to be regarded, since we have no method of reducing to the accurate standard of the thermometer the feelings or the expressions of an orator, born in the happier regions of Greece or Asia. But I shall select two remarkable circumstances of a less equivocal nature. 1/. The great rivers which covered the Roman provinces, the Rhine and the Danube, were frequently frozen over, and capable of supporting the most enormous weights. The barbarians, who often chose that severe season for their inroads, transported, without apprehension or danger, their numerous armies, their cavalry, and their heavy wagons, over a vast and solid bridge of ice. Modern ages have not presented an instance of a like phenomenon. 2/. The reindeer, that useful animal, from whom the savage of the North derives the best comforts of his dreary life, is of a constitution that supports, and even requires, the most intense cold. He is found on the rock of Spitzberg, within ten degrees of the Pole; he seems to delight in the snows of Lapland and Siberia; but at present he cannot subsist, much less multiply, in any country to the south of the Baltic. In the time of Caesar, the reindeer, as well as the elk and the wild bull, was a native of the Hercynian forest, which then overshadowed a great part of Germany and Poland.

Edward Gibbon on global warming, from *The History of the Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire*, Vol. I, 1776.

AL GORE AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL REFORMATION.

Sure, he lost an election six-and-a-half years ago, and a big election at that, yet Al Gore appears today to be sitting on top of the world. He's a hero to the hard left. He just won an Academy Award. He has been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize and appears to be the frontrunner. Serious political strategists within the Democratic Party actually believe that he could be the most attractive candidate in next year's presidential contest, and many are strongly encouraging him to return to politics. More importantly, he has made powerful and popular new friends and become an icon to the Hollywood types who once reviled him for wanting to slap parental advisory labels on their CDs. Why, he's even pals with heartthrob Leonardo DiCaprio.

Unfortunately for Al, it is doubtful that this Golden Age is going last very long. Indeed, there is a very good chance that the association for which he will be most remembered will not be the one with Leo DiCaprio, but one with Leo X. Let us explain.

In this Issue

Al Gore and the Environmental Reformation.

La Traison des 'Experts'

As we all know, Gore has become the global spokesman for what is now called “climate change.” It used to be called “global warming,” but that term proved inadequate, since advocates wanted to be able to condemn every perceived fluctuation in global weather patterns – higher temperatures, lower temperatures, increased rains, droughts, whatever – as the result of man’s gluttony, the negative consequence of the internal combustion engine and rampant American-style materialism. Gore’s Academy-Award-winning movie on the subject, “An Inconvenient Truth,” is not so much a documentary as a horror flick. With lots of charts and “facts,” the former Vice President predicts a climate apocalypse and warns that man, and American man in particular, will have blood on his hands if he doesn’t shape up and fly right.

And while Gore may be the most visible “Climate Change” scold, he speaks for a large and growing contingent. Almost every politician in the rest of the developed world, from Europe to Canada to Japan, has taken a position on the subject that in some way reflects a belief in the existence of climate change, in man’s culpability for this change, and in the need to alter human behavior to combat it. The issue tends to transcend ideology. In fact, the majority of so-called “conservatives” in most of the West have by and large made Gore’s crusade their own. Even here in the United States, it is increasingly difficult to find many aggressive and diehard skeptics. Most of the Republican candidates for president have signaled a willingness to capitulate on the issue, as has the Bush administration, accusations of “global warming holocaust denial” notwithstanding.

Given all of this, it seemed, until very recently, that Gore and the rest of the climate change activist crowd were about to succeed in imposing their vision on the United States. As with most such issues these days, conservatives had neither the intellectual vigor nor the confidence necessary to counter the climate changers and their charts, models, and sad pictures of drowning polar bears. Gore and the left had declared the issue settled, claiming that the science is incontrovertible and labeling skeptics “tools of special interests.” And the right, such as it is, appeared ready to concede defeat.

But then a funny thing happened.

As it turns out, Al’s over-the-top performance in touting climate change, in promoting his movie, and in generally patting himself and the rest of the environmental movement on the back didn’t sit well with all concerned parties. For a handful of reasons, the preening moralism of the climate change crowd and their blatant demonstration of absolute righteousness appear to have caused some uneasiness, even among erstwhile supporters.

The first and most obvious reason for this is because the claims made by Gore and his compatriots simply don’t fit the evidence. For nearly twenty years now, Al Gore has been telling anyone who will listen that the science is settled on the issue of global warming/ climate change and that anyone who says otherwise is a liar and a shill. And apparently, that claim has finally made some of the people who actually perform the science a touch uncomfortable.

Last week, for example, *The New York Times* reported that “part of his [Gore’s] scientific audience is uneasy” with his spiel. To wit:

In talks, articles and blog entries that have appeared since his film and accompanying book came out last year, these scientists argue that some of Mr. Gore’s central points are exaggerated and erroneous. They are alarmed, some say, at what they call his alarmism. “I don’t want to pick on Al Gore,” Don J. Easterbrook, an emeritus professor of geology at Western Washington University, told hundreds of experts at the annual meeting of the Geological Society of America. “But there are a lot of inaccuracies in the statements we are seeing, and we have to temper that with real data.”...

Criticisms of Mr. Gore have come not only from conservative groups and prominent skeptics of catastrophic warming, but also from rank-and-file scientists like Dr. Easterbrook, who told his peers that he had no political ax to grind. A few see natural

variation as more central to global warming than heat-trapping gases. Many appear to occupy a middle ground in the climate debate, seeing human activity as a serious threat but challenging what they call the extremism of both skeptics and zealots.

Kevin Vranes, a climatologist at the Center for Science and Technology Policy Research at the University of Colorado, said he sensed a growing backlash against exaggeration. While praising Mr. Gore for “getting the message out,” Dr. Vranes questioned whether his presentations were “overselling our certainty about knowing the future.”

These guys are hardly alone. A British documentary called “The Great Global Warming Swindle” has been making the rounds of late and like *The New York Times* piece, it features a number of prominent and respected climatologists and meteorologists who are leery of the claims made by the climate change crowd. The bottom line in the film is the same as in the *NYTimes* article above, namely that the science on the issue is far from settled, no matter what Al Gore says. Moreover, the insistence that it is, in fact, settled, has prompted many who know better to question openly the honesty of those like Gore who claim scientific and moral certainty.

Now, as shoddy as the science of the climate change movement is, the social science tied up in its claims is equally unsound. Both from an economic and sociological perspective, the assertions made by Gore and his comrades make little sense and are increasingly viewed as overwrought and hysterical and geared toward ends other than simply preventing environmental destruction.

For starters, the pretense that anything can be done about global warming without including the world’s developing nations is absurd and increasingly acknowledged as such. As blogger Don Surber has pointed out, “only 2% of India is air-conditioned. 71% of the U.S. is. India is to our south,” which is to say that as India continues to develop and to modernize, it will begin to consume energy on a monumental

scale and to burn fossil fuels for the overwhelming preponderance of that energy. The same goes for China.

Any purported “solution” to the problem of global warming that ignores this fact can hardly be called serious. And the expectation that anyone – any individual or any nation as a collective – is going to make an exhaustive effort to limit carbon emissions in an attempt to halt warming, knowing full well that that effort is in vain because those in the developing world aren’t playing along, is equally unserious. Indeed, the evidence shows that Canada and the nations of Europe, who preen and posture most on the issue, nonetheless refuse to be constrained by emissions curbs despite their insistence that such curbs are the key to preventing global calamity.

Regarding the economic impact of global warming and its purported cures, the debate is usually cast in terms of economic growth vs. human lives. One side says that reducing carbon emissions will likewise reduce economic expansion, while the other argues that such reductions are a small price to pay to save millions of lives. But as the debate has evolved and taken on a higher profile and a more absolutist tone, it has become fairly obvious that this is, in fact, a false choice.

Economic growth is and always has been a universal lifesaver, extending lives and improving health. Yet Gore and the climate change fanatics are unable or unwilling to see this, and thus stubbornly refuse to factor real economic consequences into their cost-benefit models. The resulting bias was perhaps best described by the inimitable Mark Steyn, whose analysis may be a little crude but at least exposes the flaw in the Gore-ite argument:

Had America and Australia ratified Kyoto, and had Canada and Europe complied with it instead of just pretending to, by 2050 the treaty would have reduced global warming by 0.07C – a figure that would be statistically undetectable within annual climate variation. But, in return for this meaningless gesture, American GDP in 2010 would be lower by

US\$97 billion to \$397 billion – and those are the U.S. Energy Information Administration’s somewhat optimistic models. That seems a lot of bucks for a damp squib of a bang.

So we could do everything [Canadian Liberal Party leader Stephane] Dion wants and whatever global warming and/or cooling trend the planet’s undergoing right now would be entirely unchanged. Insofar as it’s economic growth that enables wider prosperity, better health, longer life and a greater range of individual opportunities, environmentalism is a conspiracy to keep the developing world from developing.

I was interested to see, in one of the daily scare stories, that unless we go the Dion route “one million people” will die by 2100 – from droughts, hurricanes, wildfires and the like. That’s according to Kevin Trenberth, one of the many authors of the new report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

One million dead? Big deal. Right now 10 million children die each year from preventable diseases. If you leave them in Third World economies, they’ll continue to die – 10 million per year, or 930 million by the year 2100. Versus one million projected to get whacked in various unspecified meteorological catastrophes. Which will probably happen anyway. You can make arguments for action on “climate change” based on your concern for polar bears and krill and all the rest but not for human beings. Humans are pretty much the one species you can guarantee will die in greater numbers if the warm-mongers get their way.

Of course, of all the things that have upset the proverbial apple cart for Al and his fellow global warming enthusiasts, their rank hypocrisy is unquestionably the most damaging. This morning Gore is on Capitol Hill trying, in part, to explain how it is that he and his Hollywood pals can claim to working so ardently to “raise consciousness” about

climate change while at the same time expending energy and burning fossil fuels at a clip that would embarrass anyone with any sense of shame. In the several weeks since Big Al won his Academy Award, he and his fellow activists have been hammered for their hypocrisy on the question of personal behavior, and this, as much as anything, is key to understanding the plummeting credibility of the global warming/ environmental movement.

Numerous analysts and pundits, including *The Wall Street Journal’s* John Fund this morning, have noted that Gore in particular has been exposed as a voracious energy hog and polluter over the last few weeks. Between the stories about his mansion, which uses approximately 20 times the energy of the average American household, to the weekend reports about his Zinc mine, which the Gores acquired from Stalin devotee Armand Hammer and which even the Gore family acknowledges is one of the dirtiest in the world, it has become quite clear that Gore’s personal “carbon footprint” is Sasquatch-esque.

But the energy-use hypocrisy is hardly the worst part of the story. Where Gore and his fellow pampered polluters have truly damaged the credibility of their cause is in their detached and decadent attempts to buy absolution for their appetites.

That the environmental movement is quasi-religious in nature is no secret. Its religious undertones are widely recognized and largely indisputable. As Tony Blankley, the editorial page editor of *The Washington Times* recently noted, environmentalism is, in many ways, a post-modern search for transcendence that can most accurately be called “pagan neo-animism.” Blankley offers the following quote from Dr. Graham Harvey, “professor of religious studies at King Alfred’s College, England, [who] has written two approving books on the topic: *Contemporary Paganism: Listening People, Speaking Earth*, (New York University Press) and *Animism: Respecting the Living World*. (Columbia University Press)”:

This new use of the term animism applies to the religious worldviews and lifeways of communities and cultures for which

it is important to inculcate and enhance appropriate ways to live respectfully within the wider community of [non-human animate and inanimate] persons.

An appearance by Al Gore in Toronto last month tends to bear out Blankley's/Harvey's contention. Gore's appearance sold out in three minutes (1,000 seats), so quickly that the online ticket-sales system crashed. Anthony Reinhart, a columnist for the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, described those in attendance as religious "believers" who came to hear the "prophet from Tennessee." Even the attendees seemed to acknowledge the religious nature of their crusade with Bruce Crofts from the East Toronto Climate Action Group openly admitting to Reinhart "from my perspective, it is a form of religion." Likewise, Glenn MacIntosh, the founder of the ecoSanity group, declared that the climate change movement, of which Gore is the undisputed leader, creates a "kind of spiritual connection in their gut."

As it turns out, though, this spiritual movement is corrupt to its core, starting at the top. Al Gore and his Hollywood disciples, who fly in private jets and are ferried in stretch limos, advocate environmental purity but practice debauchery. To make amends for their wickedness, these adepts purchase "carbon offsets," whereby a company is paid to find ways to reduce greenhouse emissions to "offset" those created by the burning of fossil fuels. The concept of offsets has a place in serious pollution reduction efforts (cap and trade) but at an individual level they are a joke, to put it mildly. They are grace on the cheap, a way to feel good about one's "carbon footprint" without actually having to make any lifestyle changes or alter behavior in any way.

And this is where Al's connection to the other Leo comes into play. If the environmental movement is religious in nature (and is there any doubt that it is?), then these individual carbon offsets are the equivalent of pre-Reformation papal indulgences. As Tony Blankley noted in the column cited above, an indulgence (*indulgentia a culpa et a poena*) is defined as a sinner paying for "remission of the temporal punishment due," granted "for some just and

reasonable motive." But in the years preceding the Reformation, indulgences were abused and corrupted, granted not for "just and reasonable motives" but largely out of greed and comfort. And the man who administered the Church during this corruption was Giovanni di Lorenzo de Medici, a.k.a. Pope Leo X.

Leo X is the pope who issued the papal bull against Martin Luther (whose schism with the Church was over the "Power and Efficacy of Indulgences") but who failed to do much of anything to stop the Reformation and Christianity's attendant dissolution. Though history is divided on the personal responsibility of Leo X for the Church's corruption, it is by and large acknowledged that he did little to stem abuses and thus bears considerable responsibility for the collapse of the Church's credibility throughout much of Christendom.

Similarly, while Al Gore may not be personally responsible for the collapse of credibility of the Church of Climate Change, certainly he has contributed significantly to the damage.

It's hard to say where things go from here in the battle over global warming. And certainly the religious zealots who populate the political left throughout the West will be hard to convert. Nonetheless, it appears to us that the climate change alarmists have overplayed their hand. By insisting on certainty where none exists, by promoting their spiritual beliefs as indisputable "science," and by wantonly and grossly ignoring their own calls to environmental purity, Al Gore and his Hollywood posse have damaged the movement. Just how gravely they have done so remains to be seen.

LA TRAHISON DES 'EXPERTS.'

Last week, prompted in part by a *Wall Street Journal* article by Daniel Heninger, we discussed the "unseriousness" of America's politicians today, or to be more specific, their tendency to ignore the real problems that are facing the nation and to engage instead in an endless stream of clichéd sound bites on issues of little immediate importance.

In part, we blamed this phenomenon on the narcissism that seems to be so common among the baby boom generation of politicians. This week, we thought we'd revisit this "unseriousness" theme, not to offer an alternative explanation but a complimentary one. It is a complex issue, more suitable for an entire book. So, as with last week, our observations are going to be broad brushed, designed to stimulate thought, and even argument, rather than to be the final word on the subject. So here goes.

We'll begin with a notion put forth in 1927 by the French intellectual Julien Benda in a book entitled *La Trahison Des Clercs*, which is generally translated as "the treason of the intellectuals" whom Benda described as those individuals "whose activity essentially is not the pursuit of practical aims, all those who seek their joy in the practice of an art or a science or metaphysical speculation."

Benda maintained that men such as these impose values on humanity, whether humanity chooses to honor these values or not. Moreover, he said that civilization cannot exist without them, and that Europe was, therefore, in very deep trouble because its intellectuals had succumbed to the call of the masses, the lure of politics, or more specifically to nationalism. He put it this way.

Civilization, I repeat, seems to me possible only if humanity consents to a division of functions, if side by side with those who carry out the lay passions and extol the virtues serviceable to them there exists a class of men who depreciate these passions and glorify the advantages that are beyond the material. Today the game is over. Humanity is national. The layman has won. But his triumph has gone beyond anything he could have expected. The "clerc" is not only conquered, he is assimilated. The man of science, the artist, the philosopher are attached to their nations as much as the day-laborer and the merchant.

It is important to understand that at the time Benda wrote this small book, fascism was on the ascendancy across Europe. Mussolini had just created

a totalitarian dictatorship over Italy by abolishing all parties except his own. Hitler had just assumed full leadership of the Nazi party in Germany and had given his first well-attended public speech to an audience of 5,000 in Berlin. And in France, Action Française, was enjoying widespread popularity, based largely on the writings of Charles Maurras, an intellectual whose infamous and entirely groundless attack on the Dreyfusards in 1898 could arguably be described as the seed from which European fascism had sprouted.

Needless to say, Europe's communists and socialists were fighting back, and the result was that the entire continent was engaged in a monumental battle between intellectuals on the left and the right. Few if any of the intellectuals, whom Benda regarded as necessary to civilization itself, were on the sidelines counseling prudence and citing humanitarian considerations. And Benda, needless to say, was worried. He put it this way.

Indeed, if we ask ourselves what will happen to a humanity where every group is striving more eagerly than ever to feel conscious of its own particular interests, and makes its moralists tell it that it is sublime to the extent that it knows no law but this interest – a child can give the answer. This humanity is heading for the greatest and most perfect war ever seen in the world, whether it is a war of nations, or a war of classes.

A race of which one group exalts one of its masters [Maurice Barrès, a devotee of Action Française] to the skies because he teaches: "We must defend the essential part of ourselves as sectarians," while a neighboring group acclaim a leader [Kaiser Wilhelm II] because, when he attacks a defenseless small nation, he says, "Necessity knows no law" — such a race is ripe for the zoological wars Renan talks about, which, he said, would be like the life and death wars which occur among rodents and among the carnivora. As regards the nation, think of Italy; as regards class, think of Russia [by then

firmly in the grasp of Stalin]; and you will see the hitherto known point of perfection attained by the spirit of hatred against what is “different” among a group of men, consciously realist and at last liberated from all non-practical morality. And my predictions are not rendered less probable by the fact that these two nations are hailed as models throughout the world by those who desire either the grandeur of their nation or the triumph of their class.

Benda’s lament about this “treason of the intellectuals” is not easy for most Americans to understand. One reason is that Benda was not all that clear about what he expected the intellectuals of his day to do to stop the disaster that he saw coming. A second is that most Americans have never had a great deal of use for the type of intellectual described by Benda, i.e., someone of whom it can be said that “the grandeur of his teaching lies precisely in the absence of practical value.”

Thirdly, Americans have never looked to the intellectuals in their midst for the kind of spiritual guidance that Benda seems to think that the European intellectuals of his day should have been providing. To be more specific, it seems to us that few if any Americans would think to either congratulate or blame Noam Chomsky or William Buckley for either creating or failing to prevent the cultural chaos and political turmoil that is the hallmark of the opening days of 21st century America.

The United States has, over the years, produced its share of brilliant people who could rightfully be described as intellectuals. But the fact of the matter is that Americans have never really agreed among themselves as to which of the nation’s most notable thinkers actually qualify to be recognized as intellectuals. Certainly a great many individuals, both alive and dead, whom the American left would proudly describe as intellectuals, are regarded by those on the right of the political spectrum as “useful idiots” (to borrow a phrase Stalin used to describe communist sympathizers), shameless blowhards, or libertines masquerading as deep thinkers. And, of course, most

liberals would argue that the phrase “conservative intellectual” is a contradiction in terms.

But in the final analysis, Benda’s thesis has never been recognized, in the United States at least, as a great contribution to the intellectual history of mankind because he was simply wrong to expect humanitarian and spiritual leadership from the European intellectuals of his day, most of whom had been nurtured on the morally thin gruel of Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, Kant, and the like, and weaned on Nietzsche.

But the role of the intellectual in European and American society, while interesting, is of no consequence to this article. What interests us here is Benda’s observation that a healthy civilization requires a class of intelligent, thoughtful, honest individuals who are above the day-to-day skirmishes of politics and social discourse, and whose counsel is respected as wise and unbiased, and thus sought after and carefully considered by those involved in the day-to-day affairs of society and government.

Benda thought that intellectuals were the only ones who could fill that role. We would have looked to the religious leaders of Europe. But, given the times, we would almost certainly have been just as disappointed as Benda was. In any case, the fact of the matter is that today, in America, the role that Benda believed was crucial to the survival of civilization is, for all practical purposes, being filled by what we call “experts.”

Yes, Americans are interested in the insights provided by philosophers and other intellectuals. And many rely heavily on the views and advice of religious leaders. But, in the final analysis, the folks that Americans expect to carry the flag of truth into the thick of each battle are the “experts.” These are the people who are expected to know more about the subject than anyone else, to be both honest and impartial when asked to provide a view on a given topic. These are the ones whom Americans expect to speak truth to power, as the saying goes, to place checks on “those who carry out the lay passions and extol the virtues serviceable to them.”

This ascendancy of the “expert” did not happen by accident. In fact, Max Weber had predicted, well before Benda came onto the intellectual scene, that as the world became ever more complex, politicians would rely increasingly on “experts” to help them make important decisions. This, he said, would eventually result in the establishment of gigantic, omnipotent bureaucracies that would represent “a monolithic power structure as oppressive as that of ancient Egypt.”

As so it has come to pass in the opening days of the 21st century that the most powerful nation that the world has ever seen is, for the most part, run by “experts,” men and women who are learned in a specific field, who are recognized around the world as authorities, whose unique insights into issues related to their particular field of study are sought by leaders of both government and industry. Whether the topic is the war in Iraq, global warming, Social Security reform, energy use, monetary policy, health care, or the survival of the pig-footed bandicoot, Americans and their politicians rely on “experts” to inform them of the nature of the problem and present solutions.

And so it has also come to pass in the opening days of the 21st century that a large number of these “experts” are doing what Benda’s “clerks” did, they are selling out to the call of the masses. In this case the lure is not nationalism, but money and in some cases, celebrity status. Every special interest group in America, every corporation, every government agency has “experts” on the payroll, paid to promote the cause and the views of the person or organization writing the check. Some of these “experts” are honest. Some are not. Indeed, to borrow an accusation that the French physician-turned-novelist Louis-Ferdinand Destouches, aka Céline once assigned to the Soviet communists, some “have the nerve to dress up a turd and call it a caramel.”

Not all “experts” are selling out, of course. But it’s becoming increasingly difficult to tell those who are from those who aren’t. And more important, even

those “experts” who still offer unbiased and untainted information and opinions are immediately accused by those who don’t like their counsel as being allied with “the other side,” leaving the public and decision makers as befuddled as they would be if that particular “expert” were indeed a paid partisan.

A good example of this phenomenon in action can be observed in the on-going debate over “global warming.” Like a plot from a Kafka short story, some poor fellow who has spent his entire life studying weather discovers one day that his unique knowledge about this subject is in demand, that someone actually cares about the discipline to which he is devoted, that indeed a great many people care. So he accepts an invitation to appear on television to tell the American people what he has learned from his life of study, proudly telling his friends and family that his knowledge is being sought by the powerful, that he will help to settle an important national dispute. Then he finds to his surprise that he is described during his introduction to the audience as “representing one side in the argument,” and that the “other side” will be defended by a well-known pop singer who “cares a great deal about the terrible effects of global warming on the defenseless animals of the world.” He, in his dispassionate address, is made to look like a fool by the celebrity who is an “expert” in expressing opinions on any subject with great emotion.

We don’t claim that this problem is leading to “the greatest and most perfect war ever seen in the world.” But we would argue that it is in the process of preventing the American political system from finding solutions to some of the most pressing problems facing the nation. Moreover, it has created a climate of unseriousness in American politics at a time when the problems are arguably as serious as they have ever been. And this in turn has given rise to an entire generation of poorly informed, unserious politicians, “experts” in the field of prevarication, dissemblance, and yes, expressing opinions on any subject with great emotion.

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