

**Mark L. Melcher** Publisher  
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

**Stephen R. Soukup** Editor  
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

## THEY SAID IT

Now, how does the philosopher view the culture of our time?...When he thinks of the haste and hurry now universal, or the increasing velocity of life, of the cessation of all contemplativeness and simplicity, he almost thinks that what he is seeing are the symptoms of a total extermination and uprooting of culture. The waters of religion are ebbing, and they are leaving behind swamps or stagnant pools....The sciences, pursued without any restraint and in a spirit of the blindest laissez faire, are shattering and dissolving all firmly held belief; the educated classes and states are being swept along by a hugely contemptible money economy. The world has never been more worldly, never poorer in love and goodness. The educated classes are no longer lighthouses or refuges in the midst of this turmoil of secularization; they themselves grow daily more restless, thoughtless and loveless. Everything, contemporary art and science included, serves the coming barbarism. The cultured man has degenerated to the greatest enemy of culture.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, "Schopenhauer as Educator," 1874.

## THE NEW NIHILISTS.

In case you haven't noticed, the American political scene is in a state of flux right now. There is heated disagreement between and within both parties over a wide variety of highly important issues. Neither party can be said to faithfully represent a coherent, long-standing, political philosophy. Neither has a single member whose political views and character are highly respected within both parties and across the polis. In fact, neither can boast of a leader who is widely regarded even by a majority of his or her own party as an elder sage who can speak authoritatively for the party as a whole.

As we have said many times in these pages, the standard, old fashioned, economically oriented political paradigms that once defined politics in America, such as labor vs. capital, rich vs. poor, big government vs. small government, are fading into history. These have been largely replaced by a host of contentious cultural, life-style issues, ranging from abortion to gay rights to the role of religion in the public square, which, by their very nature, do not lend themselves to the kind of compromises that are the hallmark of successful representative government. No solid, political consensus exists even on subjects that deal with the most important elements of national security, which is an obvious sign of political and social decay.

This situation should come as no surprise. In fact, anyone who has even a cursory knowledge of world history understands that it is not unusual for a nation or an empire that has reached great heights of power and wealth to begin to show signs of social and political wear and tear. This manifests itself in different

### In this Issue

The New Nihilists.

Once Upon a Time in a Banana Republic, Redux.

Subscriptions are available by contacting:

The Political Forum LLC 8563 Senedo Road, Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842  
Phone 540.477.9762 Fax 540.477.3359 melcher@thepoliticalforum.com www.thepoliticalforum.com

ways depending upon the age and the culture, but it inevitably begins with boredom brought on by success. This eventually manifests itself in a widespread breakdown of respect for traditional customs and values, religious, moral, and secular, and then degenerates into nihilism. In a famous passage from *Will to Power*, Nietzsche asked, “What does nihilism mean?” And then he answered his own question thusly: “That the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking; ‘why?’ finds no answer.”

The well-known intellectual historian Richard Wolin, in an introduction to Karl Löwith’s *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, offered the following assessment of the decline and collapse of European culture during the *fin de siècle*, which led to a horrific World War, the rise of National Socialism, and another horrific World War. We believe it provides some insight into contemporary trends in American society and politics.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, argues Löwith, Europe lost touch with its traditional spiritual moorings, paving the way for a faithless political and intellectual radicalism. In this context, the notion of a subordination of human purposes to a series of superior, divinely ordained ends would become meaningless. Instead, as Löwith explains in *European Nihilism*, “The Europe of the nineteenth century no longer lived with faith in a genuine mission; it simply disseminated its wares and its scientific technological civilization in every direction....

Suddenly it dawned upon the European *Bildungsbürgertum* [the academic elites] that the values and beliefs they had taken to be the highest manifestations of the spirit of the West had lost their efficacy, their capacity to guide and inspire. Moreover, with the decline of these beliefs, a new radical and aggressive spirit of *kulterfeindlichkeit* – of hostility to culture – began rapidly to gain currency.

It is fair to say, we think, that the highest manifestations of the spirit of the American experiment in democracy are in danger of losing their

efficacy, their capacity to guide and inspire. As in the above description, the nation’s foundational traditions, customs, mores, and “widely held beliefs” are under attack by a radical and aggressive spirit of hostility to culture. In this case, this spirit has insinuated itself into the heart of the Democratic Party like Kipling’s wax moth that invaded and destroyed the weakened honeybee hive.

Yes, of course, American society is still strong, vibrant, and healthy. But there is trouble afoot in one of its oldest and greatest political parties, a once venerable repository of many of the nation’s best and most noble attributes: its charity toward the poor; concern for the working stiff, the disabled, and the minorities; its spirit of international brotherhood; its courage in the face of global tyranny; its determination to share its good fortune with the oppressed of the world; the party of Franklin Roosevelt, who courageously took the nation into war in order to defend its friends and allies against the evil of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan; of Harry Truman, whose patriotism and moral courage prompted him to make the decision to take tens of thousands of lives in order to save even more by bringing a quick end to a terrible war; of Lyndon Johnson, who insisted that black Americans should and damn well would have the rights guaranteed them by the Constitution; of Hubert Humphrey, the Happy Warrior, whose cheery compassion was a constant beacon for those Americans who wished to honor God’s command of charity towards all; of Jack Kennedy, who demanded that Americans should ask not what their country could do for them, but what they could do for their country.

This party, the Democratic Party, is slowly but ever so surely coming under the control of radical nihilists, whose stock in trade is spewing hatred for those who would dare to challenge their abhorrence for the traditions, mores, morals, values, and spiritual foundations that are the pillars of the American experiment.

Two weeks ago, the “Democratic Leadership Council” held its annual meeting in Chicago, and *not one Democratic Presidential hopeful showed up to speak*. Not one. Not even Mrs. Clinton, whose husband is a

founder of the organization and who is, herself, listed on its website as the Chair of its “American Dream Initiative.”

Lest you may have forgotten, the DLC was, in the not-too-distant past, hailed by its founders as the home of “New Democrats,” the young, energetic, “progressive” leaders of the party, who had rejected the old liberalism in favor of a “shift to the right,” to a “third way” approach to governance that would “move beyond the old left-right debate.”

The organization pledged that it would “define and galvanize popular support for a new public philosophy built on progressive ideals, mainstream values, and innovative, non- bureaucratic, market-based solutions.” Its most cherished goals included spurring private sector economic growth, fiscal discipline, community policing, work based welfare reform, expanded international trade, and national service.

It was formed in 1985, in the aftermath of Ronald Reagan’s re-election. Its founders and most prominent members included most of the party’s young up-and-comers, such as Bill and Hillary Clinton, John Breaux, Sam Nunn, Charles Robb, Joe Lieberman, Evan Bayh, John Kerry, Bob Kerry, Paul Welstone, Harold Ford, and Dick Gephardt. The following paragraph is taken from Wikipedia’s entry on the DLC.

The DLC gave strong support for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Prior to the war, Will Marshall [a founder of the DLC and president of its think-tank, the Progressive Policy Institute] co-signed a letter to President Bush from the Project for the New American Century endorsing military action against Saddam Hussein. During the 2004 Primary campaign the DLC attacked Presidential candidate Howard Dean as an out-of-touch liberal because of Dean’s position of only pursuing Osama Bin Laden instead of invading Iraq. The DLC dismissed other critics of the Iraq invasion such as filmmaker Michael Moore as “Anti-American” and members of the “loony left.” Even as domestic support for the Iraq War

plummeted in 2004 and 2005, Marshall called upon Democrats to balance their criticism of Bush’s handling of the Iraq War with praise for the President’s achievements and cautioned “Democrats need to be choosier about the political company they keep, distancing themselves from the pacifist and anti-American fringe.”

Choosier indeed. Last weekend every single one of the Democratic presidential candidates, including DLC all-star Hillary Clinton, spoke at the YearlyKos convention, except for Joe Biden, who wanted to be there but had a prior commitment. This convention was, of course, hosted by DailyKos, which is the web-based Mecca of what Will Marshall described above as “the anti-American fringe,” and the sworn enemy of the DLC, whose convention the aforementioned Democratic candidates all shunned.

DailyKos’ founder is a fellow named Markos Moulitsas Zuniga, who, several years ago, told Democratic politicians in the DLC mode that they could join his effort to “take this country forward to what it really needs to be, not what it has become,” get out of the way, or be rolled over by him and his movement. As we saw last weekend, the majority of Democrats appear to have joined his mob of screeching, hate-filled, ideologues.

The “New Democrats” have become the “New Nihilists,” casting aside all thoughts of guiding their party toward the center left of the American political spectrum; joining the rush to the outer, hate-filled fringes, rejecting all vestiges of moderation, prudence, temperance, respect for the views of others, old-fashioned patriotism, and love and respect for the men and women who wear the uniform of their country,

Exaggeration? Well if you are skeptical you can go to [www.dailykos.com](http://www.dailykos.com) and read until you feel the need for a long shower with a lot of soap. It’s nasty, paranoid, brown shirt stuff. To wit:

But do I still support the individual men and women who have given so much to serve their country? No. I think they’re a bunch of

idiots. I also think they're morally retarded. Because they sign a contract that says they will kill whoever [sic] you tell me to kill. And that is morally retarded." – A Whitney Brown

We need to lose this war and not start the next one so that we can remain a free people. Diminished on the world stage? Perhaps, like Great Britain was diminished when it surrendered its colonial empire. But free." – bluedogtxn

Even as I write these words I feel like a wild-eyed nutcase. If it were not for the OH SO REAL danger this country faces in the next 15 months or so as the people in power see their own doom and are determined to prevent their expulsion from power by suspending next year's elections and declaring martial law WHEN the next 9/11 comes or events that can be construed as a national emergency to "justify" such actions, I would be holding my tongue and crossing my fingers." – slw0606

If the Democrats fail (to end the war), the only option left is revolution and foreign intervention. Tyranny is but assured because Congress cannot and will not exercise it's Constitutional power to end this fascist Coup d'etat. – wolverine06

Markos Moulitsas Zuniga maintains that he doesn't believe in censorship, that the site simply runs that which its readers send in. But, of course, that's not true. He could choose not run the vile and the pornographic. But he doesn't. In fact, he has personally set the tone for the site, as can be seen from the following quote in which he gave his view of the death of four American security workers in Iraq.

I feel nothing over the death of mercenaries. They aren't in Iraq because of orders, or because they are there trying to help the people make Iraq a better place. They are there to wage war for profit. Screw them.

These men were veterans. One had been a SEAL, another a Ranger, and another a paratrooper. One had earned a Bronze Star. We cannot, of course, state why they chose to work in Iraq, but we would wager that each of them genuinely believed that his service there was in the best interests of his country. And we would argue that those Democrat presidential candidates who, last weekend, openly pandered to and by their presence promoted the interests of someone who would sully the efforts and mock the deaths of four such men, are guilty of a tragic betrayal of their once proud party.

It remains to be seen whether these "New Nihilist" will become the future political leaders of the United States or will be do their damage and fade away, as did so many of their ideological antecedents, such as the Anarchists or the Ku Klux Klan.

Our guess is that they are a temporary blot on the political scene. They are against much, and for little, which is not a good formula for political success, most especially in a nation that has not yet exhausted its optimism and ambition. In the meantime, however, they should not be taken lightly. Their movement is a global one. It is gaining power every day within this nation. It should be viewed not as the disease itself, but the fever and vomiting that reveal the presence of a sickness within the American body politic.

## **ONCE UPON A TIME IN A BANANA REPUBLIC, REDUX.**

For more than a decade now, we have argued that the single greatest threat to the world's free markets and free governments is corruption. In article after article, we have noted the nature and scope of the menace facing the Western world and reproved the political and business elites who either look the other way or, worse yet, actively engage in the theft and fraud that undermine the public trust and confidence in the American system.

In one particularly piquant article, which shares a title with this piece and was written just over eight-and-a-half years ago, we detailed the overwhelming

tide of dishonesty and lawlessness then on the rise in Washington and suggested that the political establishment's willingness to participate in or at least to abide this type and level of sleaze threatened to render this great nation little more than a "banana republic."

Given the events of the last few weeks, and the last week in particular, it would be hard to argue that we were wrong. From the majority party's blatant and unashamed theft of a Congressional vote that it was all but certain to lose, to the same majority party allowing a onetime "unindicted co-conspirator" to reward his and his family's benefactors with more than \$100 million in taxpayer "earmarks," to the tragic collapse of an interstate bridge and the swift manipulation of that tragedy to demand even greater federal largesse.

As opposition parties are wont to do, the Democratic Party campaigned in last year's midterm election on a platform of "change," promising to clean up Washington and to run a more ethical and honest Congress. Yet their first six months in power have been anything but a study in "clean" government.

Right from the start, the new Democratic leaders proved unwilling to deal with even the most blatant abuses of power and, moreover, actually supported some of the worst offenders, placing them in positions of authority.

Congressman William Jefferson, who was found with \$90,000 in purported bribe money literally "on ice" in the freezer of his New Orleans home and who was indicted in June on 16 counts of bribery and corruption, nevertheless was defended aggressively by many Democratic colleagues, most notably the Black Congressional Caucus, and today remains a member in good standing of both the CBC and the Democratic caucus.

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi initially tried to place Florida Congressman Alcee Hastings in charge of the House Intelligence Committee (and all the sensitive information that chairmanship would entitle

him to), despite the fact that was the first federal judge ever to be impeached, for bribery. Pelosi relented only after Republicans publicized Hastings' record.

Congressman Alan Mollohan of West Virginia, who is under federal investigation for steering funds to friends and associates, was allowed to become chairman of the Appropriations subcommittee responsible for funding the FBI, on the condition that he would recuse himself from FBI-related matters. Yet Mollohan continues to vote on relevant bills and last month voted against an amendment that would have increased the Bureau's budget by \$6 million. And the list goes on and on . . .

Last week, conditions in Congress took a decided turn for the worse. During a vote on a GOP amendment to the Agriculture appropriations bill (an amendment to prevent the expansion of welfare benefits to illegal immigrants) the Democrats changed the results in order to achieve a favorable outcome.

Democratic Congressman Mike McNulty, who was presiding over the House at the time, gaveled the vote closed with the Republican position ahead and the vote "scoreboard" reading "FINAL." Realizing that they had lost, Democratic leaders nevertheless allowed their members to continue to vote (or to change their votes) *on a closed motion* until their desired outcome was achieved. The electronic records of the vote were then mysteriously "lost." The House subsequently erupted in chaos, and GOP members walked off the floor.

Also last week, the tragic collapse of the Interstate 35 bridge in the Twin Cities prompted Democratic calls for greater federal funding for "infrastructure," even as the Congressional leadership was pushing ethics "reform" legislation that made only a handful of superficial changes and kept intact the process by which funds for infrastructure repairs are instead diverted to members' pet projects.

While Minnesota Congressman James Oberstar and Congresswoman Amy Klobuchar were busy criticizing the Bush administration for fighting wars

and neglecting bridges (or something to that effect), their party was leading the fight to preserve the earmark process that diverted some \$20 billion from the 2005 transportation bill away from infrastructure and to members' cronies. *The Wall Street Journal* noted over the weekend that the "main problem with these earmarks is that they often supersede the more urgent repair and replacement needs identified by state and local officials," like, for example, the repair of interstate bridges. Still, as the editors of the *DC Examiner* noted:

[Senate Majority Leader Harry] Reid and [House Speaker Nancy] Pelosi killed the reform bill's original provision prohibiting earmark trading for votes, and they all but gutted the prohibition on earmarks to family and staff members. As for transparency, Reid lowered the Senate earmark disclosure suspension threshold from 67 votes to 60 and made himself arbiter of certifying compliance, instead of the Senate parliamentarian. This is like an addict condemning drugs as he heads to the backroom to shoot up again.

And speaking of earmarks, when the House finally passed its Defense appropriations bill late last week, the noted anti-warrior and onetime ABSCAM unindicted co-conspirator Congressman John Murtha had secured more than \$150 million in defense earmarks, the most of any member. This is hardly a surprise, given Murtha's reputation for generosity with taxpayer money and his position as chairman of the Appropriations Committee's defense panel. Murtha, who has made a name for himself over the past couple of years by maligning American servicemen, still felt entitled to direct \$150 million of the money allotted to the armed services to his friends, including \$23 million to the National Drug Intelligence Center, located in his district (naturally), which the Bush administration had actually sought to shut down because it is duplicative of another intelligence center.

Of course, we should note that all of this comes at a time when the Democratic Party is in the midst of a presidential primary campaign, the end result of which will almost certainly be the nomination of a woman

who is herself a onetime "unindicted co-conspirator" in a bank fraud case and who was credibly accused of and nearly charged with several counts of obstruction of justice, perjury, and tampering with witnesses and evidence. Her husband, you may recall, was only the second president ever to be impeached by the House of Representatives and "voluntarily" gave up his license to practice law in his home state because of the ethics case against him for lying under oath. Banana republic indeed.

And would you like to know the worst part of this Democratic corruption? The worst part is that it is possible that the Democrats are only the second-most corrupt political party in the country.

Unlike a great many Washington analysts over the last few years, we have never fallen under the spell of the cult of Karl Rove; we have never believed that Rove is anything more than an average, though clearly gifted, political strategist. Yet even we would have to agree that his assessment of the GOP's collapse is far more prescient than those of most of his colleagues and adversaries.

Two weeks ago, Rove told a group of Republican insiders that corruption, not the war in Iraq, was the chief cause of the party's losses in last year's midterm. And he's right. Though Rove's assessment may seem somewhat counterintuitive, in light of the disproportionate attention the mainstream press gives the war, Rove has the numbers to back up his claim. Exit polls last November consistently showed that voters were more upset with "business as usual" in Washington than with the conduct of the war.

Unfortunately, this business appears to be continuing "as usual," even among the Republicans who one might have hoped had been taught a lesson. Last week, for example, we learned that the FBI had raided and searched the home of Alaska's senior senator, Republican Ted Stevens, presumably in connection with a longstanding and ongoing investigation into political favors granted to the oil-services company Veco. Veco's CEO and vice president have both pled guilty to charges involving the bribery of state lawmakers.

What the Stevens investigation means, then, is that now the entire Alaska Congressional delegation – Republicans all – is under investigation by officials on various corruption charges. Also last week, the state’s junior senator, Lisa Murkowski – who was appointed to fill out the remainder of her father’s term by her father (who had been elected governor) – announced that she would sell back to the previous owner a piece of property she bought at up to 20% below market value and which, according to the National Legal and Policy Center, constituted “an illegal gift worth between \$70,000 and \$170,000.” Alaska’s only House member, Don Young, is, like Stevens, under federal investigation for connections to and possible bribes from the Veco corporation.

Though the list of recently revealed Republican crooks may not be as long or as interesting as the comparable list of Democrats, that’s not exactly an acquittal of the party. For one thing, the ethical collapse of Republicans over the last couple of years has been so total and complete, that many of the worst offenders were rounded up long before now. Between the former Majority Leader Tom Delay’s manifold ethical lapses, the Abramoff scandal, Congressman Duke Cunningham’s dramatic fall from grace and trip to the penitentiary, and former Congressman Mark Foley’s solicitation of underage boys, the GOP has seen more than its fair share of corruption. If there are fewer Republican crooks in town today, that’s only because there are fewer Republicans in town.

As we have written numerous times over the years, this GOP corruption, though perhaps less than Democratic corruption in terms of volume, is likely far greater in terms of consequences. If the credibility of Congress is in question (and can there be any doubt that it is?), then those who purport to stand for decency, honesty, and “moral values” bear a significant portion of the blame. Congressional approval ratings have fallen well below even President Bush’s anemic numbers, and there is no question in our minds that the mistrust of the party of “family values” is one of the more notable reasons why.

More to the point, the damage done by GOP corruption today could have serious ramifications on ideology and policy for years to come. Back after the 2004 presidential election, an election in which “moral values” voters made the difference for the GOP, we noted that those “moral values” are vital to conservatism. Many of the movement’s core principles, including capitalism, free markets, and individual freedom, are highly dependent on individual responsibility and thus on individual morality. We put it this way:

Adam Smith first noted the important relationship between capitalism and religion when he argued that commercial society cannot thrive in a climate of moral decay; or to put it another way, that successful capitalism requires more than an effective legal system, but also must operate within a moral framework for, as Machiavelli put it years earlier, “the fear of the Prince” can only “temporarily supply the want of religion.”

If Republicans allow their party and partisans to be associated with corruption, then they also damage the fundamental beliefs that undergird the party. If Republican legislators themselves are incapable of behaving in conformity with standards necessary to keep the political and social systems functioning effectively and efficiently, then they can hardly expect the public at large to trust that their fellow citizens will do so.

In more immediate and practical terms, Republican corruption has been and will continue to be extremely damaging to the nation’s security. We argued several years ago that it was incumbent on GOP legislators to act with utmost integrity so as to preserve their political viability and thus to preserve the viability of the war on terror. Knowing full well what a Democratic Congress would do to the war effort, particularly in Iraq, Republicans had, we argued, a greater responsibility to behave decently, so as not to allow their own personal failings to affect the course of the war. They didn’t, of course. And the poisoned

political atmosphere and overwhelming political urge to surrender are, in this sense, direct consequences of the Republicans' ethical failings.

If the GOP hopes to salvage the war effort, then it has little choice but to purge its ranks of its wayward souls and to begin the process of rebuilding the trust of the American electorate. If Republicans cannot do so, then they will remain the minority party and will thus ensure that at some point in not-too-distant future, the Democrats will find a way to surrender to the nation's enemies, regardless of the conditions on the ground.

As far as we can tell, the only consolation in all of this is that the crooks in Congress are, mercifully, becoming less and less relevant. As we noted this spring, Congress is slowly but surely losing power to the executive branch, namely the bureaucracy, and the judicial branch. Congress is increasingly viewed by the electorate as inconsequential. And though we hate to see the vision of the Founders spoiled, given the quality of the men and women who inhabit the legislative branch today, we can't help but wonder if that isn't for the best.

Copyright 2007. The Political Forum. 8563 Senedo Road, Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842, tel. 540-477-9762, fax 540-477-3359. All rights reserved.

Information contained herein is based on data obtained from recognized services, issuer reports or communications, or other sources believed to be reliable. However, such information has not been verified by us, and we do not make any representations as to its accuracy or completeness, and we are not responsible for typographical errors. Any statements nonfactual in nature constitute only current opinions which are subject to change without notice.