

Mark L. Melcher Publisher
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

Stephen R. Soukup Editor
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

THEY SAID IT

I consider it utterly out of the question to suppose that this dialectical hocus-pocus [the labor theory of value] furnished the source and justification of his conviction, for Marx himself. I cannot believe that this represents the procedure by which he originally attained conviction. I consider Marx an intellect of the very first order. And I believe it would have been impossible for a thinker of his caliber to seek the truth by paths that are in their very nature so devious and unnatural. Nor could a mind of such stature have blundered through sheer mischance or adverse fortune into all the errors of logic and of method I have described. I believe the true situation was quite otherwise. I do not doubt that Marx was really and sincerely convinced of his thesis. But the reasons for his conviction are not the ones he wrote into his system. He believed in his thesis as a fanatic believes in his dogma.

Eugene Böhm-Bawerk. *Capital and Interest*, 1900.

GREEN PEACE.

It is not widely recognized, but nevertheless true that the entire canon of left wing political thought can be traced to one simple notion that sprang forth from the feverish mind of Jean-Jacque Rousseau, namely that the Christian concept of original sin is bogus; that man in his natural state is noble; that vice and error are not inherent to mankind but introduced from without, caused mostly by bad institutions. Rousseau stated it this way in the opening line from *Emile*.

Everything is good in leaving the hands of the Creator of Things; everything degenerates in the hands of man.

In his Lectures on the French Revolution, Lord Acton described this claim by Rousseau as “the strongest political theory that had appeared amongst men.” W. H. Auden elaborated on the political importance of this concept beautifully in his once well-known 1941 essay, “Criticism In A Mass Society.” He put it this way.

The statement, “Man is a fallen creature with a natural bias to do evil,” and the statement, “Men are good by nature and made bad by society,” are both presuppositions, but it is not an academic question to which one we give assent. If, as I do, you assent to the first, your art and politics will be very different from what they will be if you assent, like Rousseau or Whitman, to the second.”

How different? Well, as Auden said, very different, indeed. If one believes either in the poetic truth, to borrow a phrase from Auden, or subscribes to the historical accuracy of the story behind original sin, then one’s expectations of what man and government can do to eliminate evil and to create a nirvana on earth are going to be somewhat limited.

In this Issue

Green Peace.

What If We Win?

Burke spoke for all conservatives for all time on this important topic in his classic “Thoughts and Details on Scarcity,” written in 1795 to combat the various “projects” being proposed to manipulate the economy during the economic crisis that struck Britain in 1794 and 1795.

To provide for us in our necessities is not in the power of government. It would be vain presumption in statesmen to think they can do it. The people maintain them, and not they the people. It is in the power of government to prevent much evil; it can do very little positive good in this, or perhaps in anything else.

If, however, one attributes all extant evil to bad institutions, then one is much more likely to favor grand, governmental “projects” in social engineering. Max Eastman, an early fan of Lenin and the Russian revolution who saw the light in the late 1930s and began lecturing and writing about the evils of the system he had once admired, characterized the liberal bent toward improvement of man via government as “yearning to do good and obsessed by the power of the state to do it.”

Marx was, of course, the quintessential believer in the power of government to improve the plight of mankind. In fact, he believed that history was marching inevitably toward the time when “scientific socialism” would bring about a “worker’s paradise” in which a man would be free from the “human self-estrangement” brought on by the concept of private property and would return to “himself as a social being.” Marx described the idyllic life one would enjoy in this world as follows.

In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon,

rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.

Eric Voegelin coined the famous phrase “the immanentization of the Christian eschaton” to describe the assertion by Marx that one did not have to wait for the afterlife to enter paradise as Christians maintained, but could enjoy it on Earth in the here and now complements of “scientific socialism.”

Voegelin argued that the left’s faith in human progress toward perfectibility, in contrast to the Christian belief that each individual needs to concentrate first on his or her own goodness, leads a society’s members to believe that their particular society is an integral part of some great historical order, that they are somehow ordained to advance the cause of mankind. This, he said, leads to the belief, despite any experience to the contrary, that their values are unassailable.

Specifically, he said, this fallacy “destroys the oldest wisdom of mankind concerning the rhythm of growth and decay which is the fate of all things under the sun.” The inevitable consequence of this, he says, is the creation of a “civil theology,” accompanied by political fanaticism. This can take many forms but it always encompasses the belief that government action, rather than individual spiritual improvement, is the key to society’s salvation.

Now it should be said here that if Marx were alive today he would have no grounds to complain that his followers let him down. Or to put this another way, he could not credibly argue that he would have been proven right if his accolades had been more persistent in their efforts. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to find the views of any secular visionary in the entire history of mankind whose theories have been more aggressively pursued and trusted by more people over a longer period of time than those of Karl Marx.

From Russia to China to Europe to Africa to the Middle East and even to America, hordes of simpletons have ignored all evidence that Marx’s

blatherings were pure nonsense, both in theory and in practice. Indeed, for over 150 years, men and women from virtually all of the nations of the world participated in the shedding of millions upon millions of lives, the spilling of oceans of blood, and the waste of unfathomable resources in an attempt to fulfill communism's utopian promise.

But now Marx has a rival for the left's attention. A new, radical theory for greatly improving the lot of mankind has entered the competition for the enthusiasm and energy of Rousseau's spawn. This one is an original. It is devoid of Marxist roots. But, like Marxism, it boasts of a great, world-renowned, intellectual and spiritual leader, namely Al Gore. And it makes grand claims of being based purely on "science," although, as with Marxism, it actually depends on a plethora of bogus studies, theories, and suppositions, along with monumental misunderstandings of both economics and human nature.

Both movements have strong Luddite tendencies and direct their anger toward the economically productive segment of society. Both are characterized by the messianic fanaticism of their followers. And both have highly ambitious aims, Marxism being intent on changing the very nature of mankind, while Al's movement aims to change nothing less than the weather.

Al's book, *Earth in the Balance*, which declared that the internal combustion engine is a greater threat to the safety of mankind than nuclear weapons, is every bit as wacky as Karl's *Das Capital*. And Al has something Karl didn't. Al has an Oscar-winning movie, no less, and that's a big thing in this day and age.

Both movements promise bold and compelling benefits to mankind. Al started out a little slow in the utopia business. He focused his attention first on promising to save mankind from a host of environmental catastrophes ranging from hurricanes, floods, droughts, mud slides, drowning polar bears, and, one assumes, heat exhaustion. But this didn't really get it, as the saying goes. It was a static promise. It didn't suggest that life would be better than it is

now, only that it wouldn't be worse. "If you do these things, Florida won't disappear under water and you'll still be able to enjoy those cute pictures of polar bears straddling a log and looking contented."

What was needed to rival communism as an international movement for those who yearn to do good and are obsessed by the power of the state to do it was a promise that life would be better if you got on board with the "global warming" crowd. The movement needed something akin to Marx's promise of a "worker's paradise." And lo, last week it happened. The Nobel Committee declared that Al's movement was not simply about averting environmental disasters, but would – are you ready for this? – help to bring peace on earth. Talk about immanentizing the Christian eschaton. All that was needed was the hallelujah chorus.

Now if you, gentle reader, unlike virtually every news reporter and political pundit in the entire world, happen to wonder what possible link there could be between Al's "global warming" crusade and promoting world peace, don't feel like the Lone Ranger. We wondered too. So we went web searching.

Needless to say, the Nobel Committee didn't offer much in the form of an explanation. It noted simply that Mr. Gore focused "on the processes and decisions that appear to be necessary to protect the world's future climate, and thereby *reduce the future threat to the security of mankind.*" Apparently, the noble Nobels just assumed that everyone would see the connection.

Finally, we found the mystery explained by one Jeffrey Sachs. Sachs is a giant in the global community of left-wing intellectuals and gadflies. His bio on the website of Columbia University, where he is Director of something called "The Earth Institute," identifies him as the Quetelet Professor of Sustainable Development and Professor of Health Policy and Management. It notes that he also serves as Special Advisor to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and when not thus engaged hangs with his pal, the anti-American billionaire George Soros, and hobnobs with the likes of Bono, Brad, and Angelina. To wit:

[Sachs] is widely considered to be the leading international economic advisor of his generation. For more than 20 years Professor Sachs has been in the forefront of the challenges of economic development, poverty alleviation, and enlightened globalization, promoting policies to help all parts of the world to benefit from expanding economic opportunities and well being. He is also one of the leading voices for combining economic development with environmental sustainability, and as Director of the Earth Institute leads large-scale efforts to promote the mitigation of human-induced climate change. In 2004 and 2005 he was named among the 100 most influential leaders in the world by *Time* magazine.

Now, as you can imagine, Sach's great accomplishments are too numerous to list here. But basically speaking his greatest accomplishment – his unified field theory, so to speak – is his discovery of the root cause of poverty in what used to be called third-world nations. Largely rejecting all the conventional explanations, such as colonialism, cultural barriers to modern methods of creating wealth, rampant corruption, the ill effects of massive handouts to these regions from well meaning Westerners, and Islamic fanaticism, Sachs has come up with the novel theory that the poverty in these nations is related directly to the fact that these folks don't have enough money. Needless to say, he has a cure, which involves rich nations, most notably the United States, simply giving them sufficient funds to remedy this malady.

In case you are wondering, he says this could easily be done if Americans would stop being “hijacked by fear” and quit squandering their money on such foolishness as national security.

Anyway, for what its worth, Sachs has now provided the missing link between solving the global warming problem and promoting peace on earth as follows.

I believe there are many places that are in, or on the edge of, conflict because of climate change already, and this [Nobel] prize is a warning that on our current trajectory of climate change the risk will get a lot worse - these will be the conflicts of the 21st century.

In a post-award article in the European edition of the *International Herald Tribune*, entitled “Declaring that green equals peace,” reporter Elisabeth Rosenthal enlightens us further. To wit:

Sachs said that climate change had already helped ignite conflicts and wars in a swath of the world that extends from Sudan in Africa, through the Middle East and to Afghanistan. “All of these are in dry lands that have had significant environmental stress, which is probably related to climate change,” he said.

A recent UN report concluded that land degradation and desertification in the Darfur region of Sudan helped set the stage for the devastating tribal and ethnic conflicts of the past few years as poor people increasingly competed for depleted resources. “But for the environmental stress, I doubt this would have exploded,” Sachs said....

If China, India and the U.S. are going to have peaceful relations, they are going to have to negotiate a peaceful method for managing climate-related public goods - like natural resources, the atmosphere and biodiversity,”

So there you have it, green equals peace.

G.K. Chesterton once wryly noted that original sin is the one Christian teaching for which there has always been abundant empirical evidence. One wonders what he would say upon learning that man's fallen nature is not evidence of such nasty things as genocide in Darfur, that the culprit is instead “global warming.”

WHAT IF WE WIN?

For months now, the topic of discussion among Washington's political players has been the likely effect on the world should the United States lose the war in Iraq. Naturally, the discussion has varied among political factions, with some on the left framing the debate not terms of *if* the United States should lose, which they see as a foregone conclusion, but *when* Bush and company finally concede defeat and agree to start bringing troops home. Either way, the focus has always been on the inevitable American defeat and Vietnam-esque retreat.

President Bush himself contributed to and inflamed this debate this summer, stirring up images and memories of Vietnam by suggesting that withdrawal from Iraq would lead to political chaos and mass slaughter, just as the American retreat from Southeast Asia did some three decades ago. As you may recall, the President's invocation of Vietnam, one of the left's holy shibboleths, irked many of his political opponents, some of whom proceeded to embarrass themselves, insisting that the flight from Vietnam was a constructive geopolitical development and denying the Communist-perpetrated slaughter that followed in its wake.

In any case, while the nation's political elites and talking heads spent the summer debating the consequences of defeat, General Petraeus and the soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen and women under his command spent theirs trying to make that debate mute. And lo and behold, they've been surprisingly successful, so successful, in fact, that we believe that it's about time to change the discussion entirely and to begin contemplating the likely effects not of defeat, but of victory in Iraq.

Now, for the record, we will begin with the usual caveats and appeals to prudence. Victory in Iraq may well still be a long ways off. Moreover, it is hardly guaranteed. Truth be told, those running this war have yet to define victory, which is to say that the concept itself remains nebulous and thus impossible to achieve, at least for the time being.

For our purposes today, however, we would like to define victory in Iraq as the establishment of a stable, nearly self-sufficient, functional government that can meet the overwhelming majority of its own security needs, has the ability to carry out the basic domestic and international functions of a state, and is at least somewhat friendly toward the United States.

A crucial component of such a victory, of course, would be the ultimate defeat of the so-called insurgency and the isolation and/or expulsion of those foreign terrorists who carry on the struggle in the name of radical Islam. And while it is unlikely that you would know this, given the bulk of the coverage of the mainstream media, a victory of this sort is astonishingly close. The classicist and military historian (and onetime advisor to Vice President Cheney) Victor Davis Hanson put it this way last week upon his return from Iraq.

I don't think the [U.S.] is ready, either psychologically or politically, for the very real chance that the U.S. military is going to stabilize Iraq and end the insurgency – on the al Qaeda side with help from millions of formerly hostile Sunnis, and on the Shiite side, with Shiites fed up with the criminality of their own militias, and that relatively soon oil and electrical supplies will continue to improve even more radically, as well as the general economic climate of the country at large.

Yet, there is at least a 60/40 chance of that happening very soon . . .

Evidence of serious and undeniable progress is everywhere. Though most of the media and most of the political left would like to ignore the initial and ongoing success of the surge, such pretense is growing harder and harder to maintain. Even the editorial board of *The Washington Post*, not exactly a mouthpiece for the Bush administration, was compelled to admit over the weekend that "The evidence of a drop in violence in Iraq is becoming hard to dispute." This morning, *the Post* offered even more evidence that is

becoming hard to dispute, reporting that many U.S. military leaders believe that American forces have “dealt devastating and perhaps irreversible blows to al-Qaeda in Iraq [the main remaining faction in the insurgency] in recent months . . .”

Perhaps the most complete inventory of signs of progress and the potential for victory was published last week by *The Prospect*, a left-wing British periodical. And though we again issue the usual caveats about patience, prudence, and the possibility of renewed violence, we think it’s difficult to argue with the arguments made by *The Prospect’s* Bartle Bull. To wit:

The great question in deciding whether to keep fighting in Iraq is not about the morality and self-interest of supporting a struggling democracy that is also one of the most important countries in the world. The question is whether the war is winnable and whether we can help the winning of it. The answer is made much easier by the fact that three and a half years after the start of the insurgency, most of the big questions in Iraq have been resolved. Moreover, they have been resolved in ways that are mostly towards the positive end of the range of outcomes imagined at the start of the project. The country is whole. It has embraced the ballot box. It has created a fair and popular constitution. It has avoided all-out civil war. It has not been taken over by Iran. It has put an end to Kurdish and marsh Arab genocide, and anti-Shia apartheid. It has rejected mass revenge against the Sunnis. As shown in the great national votes of 2005 and the noisy celebrations of the Iraq football team’s success in July, Iraq survived the Saddam Hussein era with a sense of national unity; even the Kurds – whose reluctant commitment to autonomy rather than full independence is in no danger of changing – celebrated. Iraq’s condition has not caused a sectarian apocalypse across the region. The country has ceased to be a threat to the

world or its region. The only neighbours threatened by its status today are the leaders in Damascus, Riyadh and Tehran . . .

In terms of national politics, there is nothing left to fight for. The only Iraqis still fighting for more than local factional advantage and criminal dominance are the irrational actors: the Sunni fundamentalists, who number but a thousand or two men-at-arms, most of them not Iraqi. Like other Wahhabi attacks on Iraq in 1805 and 1925, the current one will end soon enough. As the maturing Iraqi state gets control of its borders, and as Iraq’s Sunni neighbours recognise that a Shia Iraq must be dealt with, the flow of foreign fighters and suicide bombers into Iraq from Syria will start to dry up. Even today, for all the bloodshed it causes, the violence hardly affects the bigger picture: suicide bombs go off, dozens of innocents die, the Shias mostly hold back and Iraq’s tough life goes on.

If Bull is correct; if *The Washington Post* is correct; if Victor Davis Hanson is correct; if we were correct this past July, when we challenged the conventional wisdom and predicted that conditions in Iraq would improve, then domestic and geopolitical conditions are all but certain to change dramatically. Just a few short months ago, the possibility of American victory was something that no more than a handful of people in Baghdad and Washington were even willing to contemplate. And this reversal of fortune is all but certain to cause significant political upheaval.

Here at home, victory in Iraq would certainly alter the balance of power, though not necessarily in the ways that most observers would presume. For starters, the upside for the Republican Party as a whole would be limited. Too many Republicans have been too weak-kneed in their support of the President and the war in Iraq, and it is likely that their newfound espousal of the cause will be seen for what it is, the feckless flip-flopping of timid and capricious professional politicians.

As for those who have supported the war consistently and wholeheartedly, they would likely see their fortunes rise, though perhaps only marginally and temporarily. For presidential hopefuls like John McCain and Rudy Giuliani, whose campaigns center on their defense of the war and their national security *bona fides*, the elimination of the war as a critical issue could also eliminate the principle rationale for their candidacies. War supporters will be vindicated, but the idea that that vindication will translate into a sizeable political gain is dubious at best.

Certainly, victory in Iraq would help to raise the esteem of President Bush and Vice President Cheney, but to what end? Neither will be running for office in 2008 and neither could stand to benefit politically from any surge in popularity. Additionally, the constant criticism of the conduct of the war over the past four years would likely temper any immediate reassessment of Bush and Cheney, regardless of the ultimate outcome. The history books, of course, will likely have a different take, but that will hardly bring any immediate consolation.

The most significant domestic impact of victory would almost certainly be seen among Democrats, where many of the party's leaders will find themselves in immediate and substantial political trouble. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, and any other prominent Democrat who kowtowed to the angry, anti-war left could wind up fighting for his or her political life. This is not to say that the Democratic Party as a whole will suffer a reversal of fortune, merely those who have become connected with the "netroots" left.

Chief among the Democrats likely to benefit from victory in Iraq is Hillary Clinton. Hillary has been shrewd in her discussion of Iraq and would be the only Democratic presidential candidate who would be able to claim unflinching support for the soldiers and their mission. Others who would likely benefit include House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and Chairman of the House Democratic Caucus Rahm Emanuel.

Both Hoyer and Emanuel would move up the House hierarchy when Pelosi is deposed, as she almost certainly would be.

The most ironic domestic post-victory development might well be the surge in the fortunes of the Democratic Party as a whole. As we noted at least three years ago, the positive conclusion of the war in Iraq would allow the Democrats to abandon their weakness, i.e. national security, and unreservedly embrace their historic political strength, which is "centrist" domestic policy. Clearly Hillary Clinton understands this, which is why she has begun to focus her campaign almost exclusively on her prospective domestic agenda. If the anti-warriors were disgraced and defanged (as if their fangs were terribly sharp to begin with), the domestic political agenda of the Clintonian centrism would likely resonate again with voters.

On the international front, American victory in Iraq would almost certainly solidify the trend toward conservative politics in continental Europe. The likes of Schroeder, de Villepin, and Chirac have already been thrown aside in favor of more American-friendly leaders like Merkel and Sarkozy. And positive developments in Iraq would serve to strengthen the hands of the more conservative Europeans and further disgrace their anti-American predecessors. Only in Great Britain, where the Labour party has been President Bush's unflinching ally, would the rightward trend be resisted. Tony Blair's successor, Gordon Brown, would likely benefit from Blair's steadiness, while the fickle and indecisive Tories would remain consigned to minority status.

In the Middle East, the effects of American victory would bring a mixed bag. On the positive side, it is difficult to see how the instigators of the war on terror would be able to survive the defeat of their allies in Iraq. If one listens to the demands made by Osama bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri, al Qaeda already sounds beaten and willing to sue for peace. No longer do they boast of the restoration of the

Caliphate or promise a global umma. They ask for little more than to be left alone. But even this they will not be granted.

Success in Iraq would also shatter the prevailing myth of American frailty. If nothing else, the Bush administration has shown the kind of perseverance that almost no one, not least the Islamists, expected from an American president. The United States would no longer be perceived to be the “weak horse” as bin Laden himself termed it, and the stain of capitulation and political weakness in Vietnam would, for the time being at least, be erased. And this would likely strengthen American allies in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, making al Qaeda’s fight all the more difficult.

On the downside, success in Iraq would prompt desperation on the part of the Mullahs in Iran and the Wahabbists in Saudi Arabia. The existence of a stable, pro-Western, semi-democratic Iraq is more than either would be able to tolerate. And the prospect would all but guarantee the escalation of violence elsewhere in the region.

The Iranians, for example, would escalate not only their direct attacks on sovereign Iraq, but would intensify their proxy campaigns in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories. It would be unsurprising to see a two-front hot war started against Israel, emanating both from Lebanon via Hezbollah and from Gaza via Hamas. The Mullahs would hope not only to draw the larger Muslim world into the war against the “Zionists” but to divert Western attention and resources from Iraq. Lebanon itself would face greater aggression from Syria. And Iran’s race against time to develop nuclear weapons would take on increased urgency.

The most fascinating and difficult to predict reactions to potential American success in Iraq are those of the two mini-superpowers, Russia and China. Both nations have been recalcitrant throughout the war in Iraq, but their obstinacy has been based on self-interest more than policy or ideological considerations. As long as the United States is distracted in Iraq, both nations are free

to pursue their own agendas without much meddling. But an American victory would likely change their calculations.

The Russians would likely embrace American victory. Comrade Putin is a pragmatist. And if the United States is successful, then he will support that success and use it to his own advantage, perhaps to further consolidate power in the Russian Federation, at the expense of “Islamists” in Chechnya and elsewhere in Central Asia. Certainly, Putin would let his pal George Bush see once again “into his soul” to find an ally, at least for the time being. As we have noted before, Putin continues to play “the great game,” and given that, he would do whatever he can to advance his country’s ambitions.

As for China, it is likely that it too would become friendlier and more helpful in the war on terror. Victory in Iraq would breathe new life into “The Bush Doctrine,” which could cause the Chinese to rethink their positions on various global hotspots. For example the perseverance of the Bush team in Iraq may well convince the Chinese that America might undertake similar efforts to save innocents in Darfur or to topple the Mullahs in Tehran. Either development would be bad for the Chinese, who have taken advantage of these nations’ pariah status to forge economic and energy-related ties to both. The threat of American intervention and the resultant destruction of these exclusive arrangements might compel the Chinese to act unilaterally, to lean on the governments in Tehran and Khartoum to solve their problems before the Americans do it for them.

In Iran, such “problem-solving” would be superficial at best, but might include the elimination of such high-profile problems as President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad himself. Ahmadinejad is largely powerless anyway, the Mullah’s puppet, and his masters could easily sacrifice him to placate their Western enemies, all the while maintaining the nuclear weapons and radical Shiite evangelization plans for which Ahmadinejad has become the public face. Nothing

would actually change within the regime, but it would buy itself some time by eliminating the lightning rod for criticism.

All of this highly speculative, of course, but it sure is nice to have the chance to indulge in such speculation. The war in Iraq has been presumed lost for so long, that it is quite fascinating and novel even to consider the possible ramifications of victory. And while that victory remains far from assured, conditions are improving. We can only hope that this will continue and that by next November, the Iraq war will not loom so heavily over the election.

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