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THEY SAID IT

Therefore, the authors of all enquiries into modern socialism are forced to acknowledge that the latter implies the division of society into two groups: the first of these is a select body, organized as a political party, which has adopted the mission of thinking for the thoughtless masses, and which imagines that, because it allows the latter to enjoy the results of its superior enlightenment, it has done something admirable. The second is . . . the whole body of the producers. The select body of politicians has no other profession than that of using its wits, and they find that it is strictly in accordance with the principles of immanent justice (of which they are sole owners) that the proletariat should work to feed them and furnish them with the means for an existence that only distantly resembles an ascetic's.

Georges Sorel, *Reflexions Sur La Violence*, 1908.

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THE STRUGGLE WITHIN THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY.

For the past year or so, a common topic of discussion among political pundits and foreign policy gurus, particularly those of the conservative persuasion, has been the fate of Iraq and of American interests in the Middle East if a Democratic should win the White House in November and engage in a precipitous withdrawal of American troops from the region. This has been an interesting debate, but not, in our opinion, all that consequential. As we said a few weeks ago in an article entitled "Things Are In The Saddle And Ride Mankind," America's enemies in the Middle East are much more likely to dictate the future of America's actions in Iraq than the next U.S. president, whomever that might be.

A much more interesting question, in our opinion, is what will happen to the Democratic Party if it is unable to arrive at some sort of consensus among its many constituency groups about anything at all, not just about when and whether to go to war and how to fight should one break out, but about racism, taxes, immigration, Social Security, Medicare, and yes, the role of God in the America's grand experiment in democracy. While this latter item may not seem of great importance to many readers, one should keep in mind that in a democratic nation that has as many "church-goers" as the United States has, a political party's perceived attitude toward religion can be decisive.

It is common for Democrats to claim, when someone notes that their Party seems to be in disarray, that Hillary's and Barack's positions on the issues are very much the same, implying by this that all will be rosy when one of them becomes the Party's candidate. We believe that the turmoil within the Democratic Party

runs much deeper than the debate over positions on the issues, which are virtually the same right now between Hillary and Barack because both are studying the same polls to decide how they feel about things.

We think that the real problem is that the Democratic Party has a very large and growing number of members who have an agenda of their own that is very different from that of either of the party's candidates; that is, in fact, very different from any agenda that any American political party has endorsed since the birth of the Republic.

We are talking, of course, about the moveon.org crowd, the "get out of Iraq immediately if not sooner no matter what the consequences" crowd, and the "dump Hillary because she is too conservative" crowd. These are the folks who are ultimately more responsible than Barack Obama for the problems that Hillary has encountered while trying to win her party's nomination, and who are likely to give Barack more trouble after he wins the nomination than John McCain does.

These are not liberal Democrats. Their agenda is not driven by conventional liberal dogma. They have neither respect nor love for the legacies of FDR, Truman, Stevenson, Kennedy, Johnson, Humphrey, and their like. Their "thing" is a genuine hatred for traditional American religious, moral, and secular customs and values. These are people who have lost touch with the moorings of the civilization in which they were raised. These are the people who have neither beliefs nor doubts. These are those whom we described as "the new nihilists" in an article by that name that we wrote last summer.

This breed is not new to Western civilization. Europe has suffered their presence for at least a century and a half. Moreover, their appearance in the United States in recent years was perfectly predictable, a natural reaction from the peripheral of the left wing to the growth of bureaucratic socialism in the United States in recent decades. Indeed, the fight for control of the Democratic Party that we are witnessing today can be viewed as a replay of battle that went on in Europe

in the mid 19th century between the Marxists and a similar group of nihilists, who viewed the advent of socialism as nothing more than a new form of control over their lives by an oppressive government.

This is not the first time we have discussed this battle. In fact, we first brought it up in an article entitled "Stirner Vs. Marx Redux," dated September 27, 1995. The word *redux* in that title referred not to a prior story on the same subject but to the intellectual battle between these two men that had occurred 150 years ago; Stirner being widely regarded as the "grandfather" of nihilism, existentialism, post-modernism, and anarchism, and Marx as the father of communism.

We would like to return to that historic dispute this week as a guide to those who are interested in the current battle for control of the Democratic Party. We have no dog in this fight. To mix metaphors here, our position is best described by the old saying, "a pox on both your houses."

Stirner was a contemporary of Marx. With Marx, he was one of a group of radical, intensely anti-religious, neo-Hegelians, referred to as the Hippel circle, named after the proprietor of the *Weinstube* in northern Friedrichstrasse in Berlin where the group met during the pre-revolutionary 1840s to rant and argue over what Hegel really meant.

Besides Stirner and Marx, the Hippel circle included such stormy insurgents as Ludwig Feuerbach, whose book *The Essence of Christianity* was said by Engels to have freed him from his religious beliefs; Moses Hess, who was said to have been one of the first men to appreciate Marx's genius and who converted Engels to Communism; and Bruno Bauer, who argued that the New Testament was a fraud, that Jesus never existed.

Stirner's book *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (*The Ego and His Own*), was described for decades after its publication in 1845 as the most dangerous book ever written. Its central theme was that "the only criterion of life is my Ego." *Der Einzige* is too complex to be detailed here. But the following quotes from James Huneker's description of Stirner's ideas in his delightful 1909 book, *Egoists* provides the gist of it.

Our first enemies are our parents, our educators. It follows, then, that the only criterion of life is my Ego. Without my Ego I could not apprehend existence. Altruism is a petty disguise for egotism. No one is or can be disinterested. He gives up one thing for another because the other seems better, nobler to him...the one sure thing of life is the Ego. Therefore, "I am not you, but I'll use you if you are agreeable to me." Not to God, not to man, must be given the glory. "I'll keep the glory myself." What is Humanity but an abstraction? I am Humanity. Therefore the State is a monster that devours its children. It must not dictate to me...Socialism is but a further screwing up of the State machine to limit the individual. Socialism is a new god, a new abstraction to tyrannize over the Ego... "crimes spring from fixed ideas." The Church, State, the Family, Morals, are fixed ideas. "Atheists are pious people." They reject one fiction only to cling to many old ones. Liberty for the people is not my liberty. Socrates was a fool in that he conceded to the Athenians the right to condemn him . . . Communism, Socialism abolish private property and push us back into Collectivism. The individual is enslaved by the machinery of the State or by socialism. Your Ego is not free if you allow your vices or virtues to enslave it...Nothing compulsory, all Voluntary. Do what you will.

In his later years, Marx derided virtually all of his old colleagues. But it was the ideas of Stirner that Marx hated and feared most. In fact, Marx and Engels devoted three hundred pages to an attack on Stirner in *The German Ideology*, their well-known polemic against all of their philosophical contemporaries, including Feurbach and Bauer. For both Marx and Engels knew that if the proletariat ever adopted Stirner's extreme egoism they would never be valuable members of a political movement, never rise up in unison to overthrow the bourgeoisie. They would share the enemies of the left, the ruling elite. They would make trouble for these enemies. They would be noisy. They would complain. They might even individually man

the barricades during an attack on these enemies. But they would just as readily and easily attack the leftist elite, for they recognized no group, no leader, and no "cause" as superior to their individual self-interest.

Roberto Calasso, in his fascinating and highly readable book, *The Ruin of Kasch*, stated it this way.

Even a small amount of Stirner's prussic acid would be enough to produce incurable spasms in the mighty torso of the Worker—that deplorable anthropological figment on whom Marx and Engels built their labor practices... .In the molten lead that flowed from Stirner's book, in its obsessive repetitions and unseemly arguments, Marx and Engels, who now claimed to speak for all workers, saw the emergence of a different and fearsome mass of proletarians. Not Pellizza da Volpedo's workers, striding proudly to be gunned down by mustachioed officers, but the infernal, shapeless mass of the Lumpen: incorrigible vagabonds, incapable of class loyalty, rootless from the womb, violent, inarticulate, disrespectful enemies of labor and learning . . .

For Marx, the petty bourgeois are...evil incarnate. There was nothing wrong with the Bolsheviks; the acid bath of the Cause would suffice to make them unrecognizable...But it was the countless other proliferating species that frightened Marx and seemed to him beyond control, like a sea of jellyfish. In Stirner he recognized the herald of that poisoned host. That single individual of Stirner's certainly did not offer an anthropological model for the petty bourgeois (as Marx and Engels, out of polemical shrewdness, claim it did). It represented something far more fearsome: the breakdown of the schema of classes, the chaotic irruption that spoiled the sacred drama of history in the penultimate act. This was the prime unforgivable sin – and this is enough to explain the fury of Marx's attacks on Stirner.

George Sorel was one of the first great political philosophers and radical leftist activists to recognize and comment extensively on the nature of this conflict. On one side, he saw the extremists whose only crime was to have taken the leftist ideology to its natural conclusion, i.e. resistance against any and all ruling classes. On the other side he saw the emergence of a leftist elite, no better than those whom they sought to replace. He called these self-described representatives of “the people” “parliamentary socialists” or “worthy progressives,” and defined them as “naive, philanthropically disposed people who believe that they have discovered the solution to the problem of social reform – whose attitude, however, is often complicated by a good deal of hypocrisy, they being frequently rapacious when their own personal interests are at stake.” He described further as follows:

Parliamentary Socialists can only obtain great influence if they can manage, by the use of a very confused language, to impose themselves on very diverse groups; for example, they must have working-men constituents simple enough to allow themselves to be duped by high-sounding phrases about future collectivism; they are compelled to represent themselves as profound philosophers to stupid middle-class people who wish to appear to be well informed about social questions; it is very necessary also for them to be able to exploit rich people who think that they are earning the gratitude of humanity by taking shares in the enterprises of Socialist politicians.

The last time we wrote about this fight, 13 years ago, we observed that “the question that begs an answer today is whether Marx’s ideological progeny in America’s Democratic Party will understand [as he did] the threat from the Stirner gang,” i.e., that the nihilism and egoism that exists among some of their ostensible fellow travelers has the potential to destroy both American liberalism and the Democratic Party as well.

We said back then that this situation “is fun to think about.” Today, we would say that it is even more fun to watch. Here we have Hillary, like Marx in his time,

defending the leftist establishment, which she and Bill wish to lead, against the ideological progeny of Stirner and Sorel who rightly view her and her kind as the social parasites that they are.

This fight is likely to get nasty before it is over. For, to paraphrase Ivan Karamazov, if God does not exist, everything is permitted.

NO WAY TO WIN AN ELECTION.

It wasn’t supposed to be like this, you know. It was supposed to be easy. It was supposed to be fun. It was supposed to be humiliating, for Republicans that is. It was supposed to be a landslide. As the classicist and military historian Victor Davis Hanson put it, it was “supposed to have been an ideal year for the Democratic Party.”

After all, voters have clearly tired of President Bush. After eight years, they are ready to move on. Indeed, Bush’s poll numbers remain ominously low, and the Republican’s presumptive successor, John McCain, is disliked rather intensely by a surprising number of people even within his own party. Not that it would mean a whole lot even if everyone in the party supported him, since support for the party itself has waned historically in the last four years. In 2004, the electorate was, for the first time since prior to the Great Depression, roughly equally divided between Democratic self-identifiers and Republican self-identifiers. Today, the disparity has grown to levels unseen since the 1970s, with self-identified Democrats outnumbering Republicans by some 12% percentage points.

Moreover, the nation quite probably is either in a recession or headed toward one. Last week, more than eight in 10 Americans told pollsters from the *New York Times* and CBS that they believe the country is on the “wrong path.” As the *Times* noted, “Americans are more dissatisfied with the country’s direction than at any time since the *New York Times*/CBS News poll began asking about the subject in the early 1990s . . .”

Americans have grown more supportive of the war in Iraq over the last several months, but a majority of them still believe that the entire thing was a mistake.

And perhaps most importantly, in the two years since the Democrats embarrassed the GOP and regained control of Congress, Republicans have done nothing whatsoever to improve their standing among voters. They have not purged the party of its lazy and corrupt factions, and they have done little to reassure anyone that they've learned anything at all from their striking electoral rebuke. All things considered then, the Democrats should have no problem whatsoever in taking complete control of the government and exercising a serious and substantive electoral mandate.

Of course, *should* and *will* are two drastically different words. Not to get too clichéd here, but a funny thing happened to Democrats on their way to a unified “progressive” government.

Over the past several weeks, those of us who were foolish enough in January to predict that a Republican would retain the White House have started to look prescient rather than deluded. The Democrats are raising and spending money at a record clip. And they're fighting hard for power. The only problem is that they're spending it on fights between themselves. Democrats have performed so poorly and handled themselves so unattractively that even some of the party's most diehard and blindly biased supporters are beginning to sense that things may be slipping away from them. Last week, for example, Glenn Greenwald, one of the country's most popular, angry-leftist bloggers and a columnist for the left-wing news magazine, Salon.com, offered the following observations from a book he has just published and thus inaugurated the quadrennial Democratic exercise in excuse-making:

They [the Republicans] have cultivated the ability to manipulate media behavior, largely as a result of a media eager to help. But what they do not have is popular support for virtually anything they are doing. And yet they continue to win elections.

How and why that happens
– the deceitful electoral tactics and
manipulative personality-based myths

the Right has perfected and continuously deploys to win elections, and the ways in which our slothful, vapid and complicit establishment press propagates those myths – is the principal subject of this book. And understanding and exposing that right-wing/media partnership is a necessary precondition for weakening it.

The central paradox of our political life is that the right-wing faction that continues to dominate our political institutions and win elections embraces fringe beliefs which have little popular support. That's why their overarching objective is to remove substantive considerations from our political debates -- the more consequential the issue, the less establishment media attention it receives, the less real public debate there is over it. Instead, our elections are determined by the barren, petty personality-based distractions and mindless chatter that define the lowly Drudgian Freak Show, where our political life now almost exclusively resides.

The Right has perfected the art of creating mythical cults of personality around their leaders.

What is perhaps most interesting – and most amusing – about this screed is that Greenwald is actually *serious*. It may seem hard to believe, but this guy and many others like him actually believe this garbage. They can see no reason other than Republican deceit and manipulation for Democrats to continue to lose elections. The idea that the “will of the people” could vary from their own is so inconceivable to them that they have no choice but to invent fantasies to explain it all and to soothe their bruised self-images. But they're as wrong as they are grating.

In our estimation, there are two principle reasons why the Democrats no longer appear to have a lock on this November's election results. Both are long-running

themes of ours. And both are ideas that we would all do well to keep in mind as this election season progresses.

The first, simple and straight-forward, is a topic we have discussed here recently, namely the payback that Democrats are, at long last, receiving for their unabashed embrace of the Clintons during the 1990s. Anyone with any sense knew then that the Clintons were interested in one thing and one thing only, that being the Clintons. And it is hard to feel sorry for the Democrats now that they have discovered that the Clintonian self-absorption, about which we warned them repeatedly throughout Bill's eight years in the White House, has come back to bite them in the . . . ummm . . . derrière.

Back during the Political Forum's initial two-month-long existence, between our stints at the brokerage house that no longer exists and the investment bank that is struggling mightily to avoid a similar fate, we warned that Bill's parting gift to his fellow Democrats – leaving Terry McAuliffe in charge of the official party mechanism – would prove to be an appalling development for any Democrat not named Clinton. And so it has.

Everything from Hillary's early "inevitability" to her ability to continue to raise gobs of cash to her lead in the divisive super-delegate race to the debacles that were the Florida and Michigan primaries can be traced directly to McAuliffe and to his stint at the DNC. Bill left him in charge for a reason. And that reason had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with facilitating the growth or the strength of the Democratic Party.

Nothing about this intra-party fight would surprise us. Nothing, that is, except Hillary's voluntary withdrawal. For weeks now, we've heard that Obama has the moral high ground here, since he will undoubtedly win the popular vote and the pledged-delegate count. But as the incomparable Michael Barone pointed out two weeks ago (and others have since concluded), that case is likely to fall apart, since there is very strong chance that Hillary will in fact wind up with more votes than Obama. In short then, what we will have, come

convention time, is a replay of Florida and Election 2000. One candidate will have more votes; the other will have more delegates. And chaos will ensue.

Bitterness will ensue as well. And as poll after poll have shown, the net result of this bitterness may well be a serious drag on the Democratic nominee. Nearly 25% of Hillary voters say they will vote for McCain if Obama wins; and nearly 20% of Obama voters say they will vote for McCain or not vote at all, if Hillary is the nominee.

All things considered, this should be a lot of fun, unless, of course, you're a Democratic big shot.

The second reason that we believe it is not unreasonable to expect a Democratic collapse is a reason we've been flogging now for nearly the entire history of this little operation, namely the Democrats' "descent into madness." Since early 2003, we have, on various occasions, discussed the Democrats' rage, confusion, and sheer lunacy in the face of the war on terror and George Bush's handling of it, a lunacy that has cost them much of their reputation and a great many votes.

We abandoned this theme temporarily in the run-up to and aftermath of the 2006 midterm election, for obvious reasons. But we still believe, notwithstanding those midterm results, that this is an important and potentially election-altering force in American politics.

If the Democrats continue along the path they are currently traveling, they will nominate Barack Obama. And in so doing, they will open themselves up to serious risks. It is possible, we suppose, that Obama could win. But it is more likely, in our estimation, that he will lose and will do so because he represents the Democratic Party at its very maddest. Indeed, there is a chance, maybe even a significant chance, that Obama will, as the aforementioned Victor Davis Hanson recently suggested, lead the Democrats to a McGovern-esque collapse.

It's not that we think the country is not ready for a black president. Or that we think that Obama is ineloquent. Or that we think that the GOP will mount

an effective and vigorous counter-campaign. It's just that we think that Obama represents all of those characteristics of the Democratic Party that tend to turn off voters.

Obama still doesn't understand what the fuss over his choice of preachers is all about. He still doesn't understand why anyone would care that he spent the last 20 years of his life taking religious instruction from a man who believes that America is a terrorist nation, that its government has waged covert war on its own people, and that said government, not radical Islam, was the cause of some 3,000 deaths on September 11, 2001.

Obama still doesn't understand why voters might be bothered by his wife's proclamation that she has never been proud of her country until now. He doesn't understand that his repeated pledge to hold unconditional discussions with this nation's enemies might make some people more than a little uncomfortable. He doesn't know why people care whether he wears a flag pin on his lapel or why they might take offense at his explanation that he quit wearing that pin because his patriotism is so much deeper and more sophisticated than that of the simple-minded pin-wearers and flag-wavers. Obama doesn't seem to be bothered by the fact that many of his foreign policy advisors are avowedly anti-Israel. And he doesn't understand why any Americans would care if they are. He thinks his Grandmother is the moral equivalent of a race-baiting, anti-American demagogue, simply because she once said she is uncomfortable around black men she doesn't know. And he doesn't understand why anyone would think that's strange.

In short, he doesn't get it. Any of it.

The unfortunate thing for the Democrats is that as the campaign wears on, it is likely that Obama, despite all his flaws and "misunderstandings" will look like one of the more rational Democrats around. Nancy Pelosi

warned General Petraeus last week that he'd better not put a positive spin on recent developments in Iraq. Is she serious? Does she really think she's going to score any points with the voting public by accusing the commander of forces in Iraq of being unduly optimistic? Again, is she serious?

The Democrats as a whole still appear not to understand what is at stake here. And more to the point, they don't seem to grasp that the public, by contrast, does understand the stakes. Glenn Greenwald and his ilk can whine all they like about the Republicans winning elections despite their partisan disadvantage, but until they begin to account for the real reasons for the Democrats' ineptitude, instead of creating outlandish bogeymen to explain the inconsistency, they will be able to do nothing whatsoever to remedy it.

John McCain is not John Kerry. His devotion to his country and his willingness to sacrifice for it will not be "swift-boated" away. And his resolve will not easily be questioned. McCain has many flaws, as a politician and as a candidate. But one of his greatest strengths is his bi-partisan appeal. Whether erstwhile self-identified Democratic voters bolt the part out of bitterness or out sheer amazement at their party's inability to grasp the importance of the war on terror, John McCain, of all possible Republican nominees, is best poised to capture their votes.

Back in January, we predicted that Senator McCain would be the 44th President of the United States. And as the campaign progresses, we feel more and more confident about that prediction.

Oh, and one more thing: Rock Chalk Jayhawk!

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