

Mark L. Melcher Publisher
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

Stephen R. Soukup Editor
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

THEY SAID IT

If we attach more significance to feeling than to thinking, we shall soon, by a simple extension, attach more to wanting than to deserving....It clarifies much to see that socialism is in origin a middle-class and not a proletarian concept. The middle class owes to its social location an especial fondness for security and complacency....Loving comfort, risking little, terrified by the thought of change, its aim is to establish a materialistic civilization which will banish threats to its complacency....Thus the final degradation of the Baconian philosophy is that knowledge becomes power in the service of appetite. The state, ceasing to express man's inner qualifications, turns into a vast bureaucracy designed to promote economic activity. It is little wonder that traditional values, however much they may be eulogized on commemorative occasions, today must dodge about and find themselves nooks and crannies if they are to survive at all....The dullest member of a conservative legislative committee, seeking the source of threats to institutions, does not fail to see that those doctrines which exalt material interests over spiritual, to the confounding of rational distinctions among men, are positively incompatible with the society he is elected to represent. For expressing such views, he is likely to be condemned as ignorant or selfish, because normally he does not express them very well.

Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 1948.

THE DAWN OF A NEW POLITICAL ERA, PART IV.

Roughly a decade ago, we wrote a series of articles on the changing nature of American politics in the face of new priorities and the disappearance of many age-old, defining partisan issues. That three part series, entitled "The Dawn of a New Political Era," detailed the effective end of both liberalism and conservatism as those terms had been understood for roughly half a century. In the post-Cold-War era the world was changing, and American politics was changing right along with it. We put our thoughts to paper thusly:

"Liberals" still purport to represent the interests of "the poor," but there aren't many "poor" around anymore, so they concentrate their efforts on boosting middle class entitlements and log rolling for labor unions, trial lawyers, public employees, and schoolteachers.

They support things that would have been anathema to liberals just a few years ago: big defense spending, bombing Third World nations, welfare cutbacks, the death penalty, curtailment of the rights of accused criminals, normal relations with nations that demonstrate no respect for human rights, and wink at sexual activities in the White House that once formed the centerpiece of the "feminist" agenda.

In this Issue

The Dawn of a New Political Era,
Part IV.

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

Conservatives still pay lip service to conservative themes, such as smaller government, sharply lower taxes and a reverence for traditional moral and ethical behavior. But it's all nonsense, as was amply demonstrated by the pathetic actions of the Senate Republicans during the impeachment proceedings, and the lack of any significant effort by the GOP majority in both houses during the budget negotiations of past four years to diminish the power and size of government.

The one problem we encountered in noting the end of the old-style partisan politics, as most Americans understood it at the time, was trying to explain in any detail what would come next. In the end, we basically promised to regularly revisit the question, as we put it, paraphrasing Yeats, "What rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches towards Washington to be born."

We touched on the issue several times over the next couple of years. And we hit it hard during the 2000 presidential campaign between Al Gore and George W. Bush, when we directly re-visited some of the questions first posed in the "New Era" series, trying to place the issues defining that campaign into a rough outline of a burgeoning new political paradigm. Our most important contribution to the discussion of this paradigm came in June of that year, in an article entitled "The New Progressives vs. the Reactionaries." As the title of the piece suggests, we argued that the Gore and Bush campaigns augured a future in which the Republican Party occupies the center, the *left*-center to be more precise, while the Democratic Party drifts into reaction and an entrenched defense of the New Deal/Great Society status quo.

We described George W. Bush's campaign as the triumph of style over substance, of labels over policies, noting that while he preferred the term "compassionate conservatism," his agenda and beliefs differed very little from the "new progressive" agenda embraced by Bill Clinton and the center-left Democratic Leadership Council (DLC). Bush was

then and remains still a "big government" guy, who sees no problem whatsoever with the growth of the Washington behemoth.

As for Gore, we thought that the evidence was overwhelming and largely unquestionable that he had fallen in among the forces of "reaction." We put it like this:

According to the *Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought*, reactionaries are people who "not merely resist change but seek to put the clock back and return to some earlier order of society which is seen as having possessed characteristics . . . which the present is felt to lack."

And Al, remember, is the guy who thinks that the internal combustion engine is one of mankind's greatest threats, not to mention outdoor barbecues.

Al is the guy who thinks that virtually every proposal "W" endorses, many of which, as noted above, were developed by his own Democrats, is "risky."

A scant fifteen months later, all talk of new eras and new paradigms was put on hold, when the defining political theme of the moment became the "war on terror" and how best to handle the mounting threat posed by radical Islam. Within a few months, it became clear that the hawks vs. doves portion of the old, Cold War paradigm was not dead, but had only been dormant, lying in wait for the emergence of a new enemy.

Both the elections of 2002 and 2004 were contested largely along the lines of the old hawk vs. dove tension, with the hawks clearly earning the support of the American people. And although this tension remains critical and will likely also play a big role in this fall's campaign, the intervening election -- i.e., the 2006 midterms-- demonstrated just as clearly that there is indeed a new paradigm taking shape and that many of the old tensions between the parties are for the most part irrelevant.

Again, it is nigh on impossible to state with any confidence how any of this will play out over the long run. But as of today, as the Republicans prepare to do political battle with a widely renowned “maverick” heading their ticket, and as the Democrats are on the verge of nominating the most obviously leftist candidate in at least a generation, the new paradigm appears once again to pit progressives against reactionaries.

This time around, there can be no mistake whatsoever about the nature and the state of the Republican Party. George W. Bush confused a great many people. He was and is a bleeding-heart conservative, a guy who believes in the power of government and the necessity of its intervention in nearly every aspect of the lives of Americans. Both spending and regulation have increased dramatically on his watch, as has the size and scope of the federal government, with two new cabinet-level departments and an entirely new layer of intelligence bureaucracy added during his tenure. At the same time, most uninformed observers – i.e. the mainstream media and most Democrats – persist in the belief that Bush is a “conservative,” simply because he cut taxes, has traditional leanings on many social issues, and at least pays lip service to the ideas of free markets and free men.

But let us dispel that confusion: George W. Bush is not a conservative. He’s just not. He is a likeable enough guy with a great many admirable traits who has done some remarkably brave and valuable things for his country. But he is no more a “conservative” than was Bill Clinton. He is, to borrow a phrase from Jonah Goldberg, a gig-government *pro*-servative.

John McCain, by contrast, should prove a great deal less confusing for most people. He claims to have seen the light on taxes and has always been a true believer on spending and pork. But even so, his vision for the GOP, will almost certainly be more recognizably centrist than was Bush’s, if for no other reason than that he prefers not to emphasize his “conservative” positions on the social issues that are the press’s current standard for defining conservatism.

Irrespective of McCain’s personal beliefs about spending and pork, though, there can be little question that should he win this November, the federal government will continue to grow at a significant clip. Part of this is simply the nature of the beast. As we have argued more times than we can count, 21st Century America is likely to continue its bureaucratization, eventually becoming the very definition of “the administrative state.” Expertise and purported “competence” will continue to grow in importance as the hallmarks of “good governance,” and certainly the values of individual choice and personal freedom will continue to give ground to “the common good.”

The other part of this is McCain’s own personal affinity for heavy-handed government. We all know about his disdain for the First Amendment protections as they apply to political speech, but many of us also recall his longstanding support for other intrusive government solutions to market-related problems, most notably his participation in the tobacco settlement debacle of the mid-1990s. It is also worth remembering, we believe, that McCain is among the Republicans’ most prominent global warmists, believing not only that the problem is real and man-made but that it must be addressed now through the power of the federal government. He also appears to be getting behind the idea of a federally funded housing bailout, hardly the stuff of free market capitalism.

If nothing else, it is fair, we think, to say that McCain, like most of the rest of the political class, has accepted and embraced the bureaucratization of the federal government and the quasi-totalitarian belief that competence and the “common good” trump liberty. James Pethoukis, the assistant managing editor of *U.S. News and World Report’s* Money & Business section, put it this way last week in a story entitled “The Return of Big Government.”

Reagan-style “get government off our back” rhetoric is nowhere to be found at McCain campaign headquarters. “There

is a role for government, and the primary thing is to identify that role and to make sure government does that well,” says Douglas Holtz-Eakin, McCain’s director of economic policy and former director of the Congressional Budget Office. “The striking thing that has come out of this campaign is the degree to which people have lost trust in government to pursue national priorities. They want it to work. They really do.”

Take the issue of trade and how globalization is affecting workers. On that, Holtz-Eakin sounds a lot like {liberal Democratic Congressman Rahm] Emanuel. “I don’t think Americans are afraid to compete,” he says. “They just don’t want to feel like the government has left them out there to do it on their own.” In addition to an update of America’s entire worker retraining system, McCain has mused about creating a wage insurance program in which, for instance, a 55-year-old worker who once earned \$50,000 and found a new job paying just \$30,000 might receive \$10,000 a year for a couple of years to partly make up the difference.

No one – we repeat, no one – should be even remotely surprised by any of this. The last eight years, at least, should have served as a very strong omen of things to come for the GOP. The spending, the regulation, the carelessness, and the condescension regarding the needs and wants of average Americans; in short, all of those things that one expects from “liberals” have been on full display by Republican leaders in the House, Senate, and the Executive branch for most of this decade. And frankly, the problem even pre-dates the Bush administration. Newt and the Republican Revolutionaries took Congress in 1994, and then proceeded quickly to morph from revolutionaries to power-obsessed defenders of government largesse.

But if the progression of the GOP is somewhat unsurprising, the evolution of the Democratic Party has, by contrast, been truly astounding, if not for the content of the evolution, then certainly for its pace. Back in 2000, we labeled the Gore-led Democrats “reactionaries” but had to use the rather limited lexical denotation of the term, rather than the broader common connotation of it, in order to make our point. Today, no such fudging is necessary. To any informed and rational observer, there can be little question that the Democratic Party has, in the span of eight short years, become a more obvious “reactionary” movement, as the term is commonly used, complete with all or most of the usual pathologies of such movements.

If one looks at the agenda of the Democratic Party as it is currently constituted, he can only conclude that it is anything but “progressive.” Hillary, Obama, and the rest may prefer that term to “liberal,” given the spectacular job the right has done in discrediting “liberalism.” But there is nothing whatsoever “progressive” about the modern Democratic Party.

On taxes, the Democrats yearn simply to *return* to the pre-Bush tax levels. On most matters of regulation, environmental regulation in particular, they want simply to “turn back the clock.” On nearly every issue imaginable, Bush is their foil, the last eight years are their complaint, and all they want is to go back to the way things were in good “old” days of the 1990s.

But it goes deeper than that, much deeper. Despite the fact that Barack Obama is currently in some political hot water for mocking rural Pennsylvanians for their backwardness, their religiosity, their anti-immigrant tendencies, and their anti-trade sentiment, a closer look at the Democratic rhetoric and actions over the last several months shows that it is Obama and his fellow Democrats who adhere most enthusiastically to the “clinging” behaviors he describes.

The Democratic Party today is adamantly opposed to the expansion of free trade, going so far as to render the word of the President of the United States

irrelevant if it happens to contradict the wishes of the various and sundry labor leaders.

The Democrats, not the Republicans, balked at allowing “brown skinned” foreigners to buy the company that manages the country’s ports. While George Bush, John McCain and the entire Republican establishment advocate an active and engaged foreign policy, the Democrats favor neo-isolationism. The Democrats may appear to be internationalist in their fondness for the United Nations and other multinational organizations. But truth be told, they favor those organizations not because they wish for the United States to be able to contribute to helping the rest of the world solve its problems, but because they wish for the rest of the world to absolve the United States from its responsibility as the world’s only superpower to defend liberty and promote justice.

The Democrats today are anti-global and borderline neo-Luddite, believing that science, technology, and commercial enterprise are the enemies, rather than the friends of the world’s poorest and most oppressed populations. They quite clearly are obsessed by race. And perhaps most ominously, the Democratic Party is the party that both harbors “anti-Zionists” and actively supports overt anti-Semites, from the Jew-baiting Reverend Jeremiah Wright to the terrorist-friendly former Democratic President Jimmy Carter.

We are loathe to say that the Democratic Party has become “fascist,” because that is a loaded term that in today’s political discourse has come to mean little more than “I don’t like that.” Nevertheless, as Jonah Goldberg has demonstrated in his wildly successful *New York Times* bestseller, *Liberal Fascism*, and as we ourselves have argued many times in the past, there are aspects of modern “liberalism” that are indeed derived from the same intellectual and cultural sources as were fascism and even National Socialism. At the very least, we think it fair to say that the Democrats of today far more closely resemble the paleo-populists of Pitchfork Pat Buchanan than actual “liberals.”

Most of the press coverage of Barack Obama’s politically obtuse gaffe last week has focused on his condescension and his charge that rural folks are

religious and favor guns simply because they are bitter. But we can’t help but think that there is a broader, more explicitly totalitarian message in his words. What Obama said was this:

You go into these small towns in Pennsylvania and, like a lot of small towns in the Midwest, the jobs have been gone now for 25 years and nothing’s replaced them . . . And they fell through the Clinton Administration, and the Bush Administration, and each successive administration has said that somehow these communities are gonna’ regenerate and they have not. And it’s not surprising then they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren’t like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations.

As but a handful of observers have noted, what is perhaps most telling and most troubling about this statement is the implication that what these poor, stupid shlubs in Pennsylvania (and Ohio, and Kansas, and Missouri, etc.) need is for the government to tell them what really *should* matter to them and to make their frustrations disappear. It would be hard to imagine a greater call for the expansion of the power and the intrusiveness of federal government. Like all totalitarians (or elitists, corporatists, fascists, or whatever other term you think suits the description best) Obama is declaring here that he knows what is best for people and will damn well use the power of the state to ensure that the people agree with him. And although Hillary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, Harry Reid and the rest are likely politically savvy enough never to say so publicly, you can bet that they too feel much the same way.

The ironic thing in all of this political evolution is that it dates unofficially to an election held 40 years ago that will likely be replayed this year. Recall that in 1968, Abbie Hoffman, Bobby Seale, Jerry Rubin, Tom Hayden and the rest of the Chicago Seven disrupted the Democratic National Convention with protests, riots, and other random violence. Though

the traditional liberal Hubert Humphrey was the Party's nominee that year, the convention and the related violence marked a shift in power from the New Deal Democrats to the New Left, with its disdain for religion, its overt hatred of tradition and politesse, its radical political correctness, and its equally radical agenda. Today's reactionary Democrats, those represented best by the left-wing bloggers and the Obama faithful, are in many ways the descendants of the Chicago Seven. The New Left has been struggling to take over the party for four decades, and it finally has, though its socialism has largely been replaced by good old-fashioned populist absolutism.

What's most interesting, though, is that the other side of the 1968 Democratic clash is also represented in this election. It is fair, we think, to say that Humphrey would almost certainly identify more closely with John McCain and his agenda than with Barack Obama and his. And that is hardly a coincidence. Today's Republican Party has, by and large, moved into the void vacated by the Democrats in their push away

from traditional American liberalism. McCain may not be quite as liberal as Humphrey or Humphrey's boss, Lyndon Johnson. But he is not significantly more conservative either. And neither are most other Republican politicians. Note that George Bush's Medicare drug benefit was the largest expansion of government since Johnson's Great Society. McCain is not the perfect Humphrey-ite, but he is, more or less, a Scoop Jackson Democrat.

And that appears, at least at this juncture, to be the emerging political dynamic in the post-Cold-War era: the Republicans representing the Old Left vs. the Democrats representing the New Left, though the Democrats are less leftist than they are merely statist. That dynamic could, of course, change, but not before November's election.

Conservatism is conspicuously absent from this emerging paradigm, but then again, no one who has been paying attention should be even remotely surprised by that. Such is life in the New Political Era.

Copyright 2008. 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.