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THEY SAID IT

Where the precise effects of government policy on particular people are known, where the government aims directly at such particular effects, it cannot help knowing these effects, and therefore it cannot be impartial. It must, of necessity, take sides, impose its valuations upon people and, instead of assisting them in the advancement of their own ends, choose the ends for them. As soon as the particular effects are foreseen at the time a law is made, it ceases to be a mere instrument to be used by the people and becomes instead an instrument used by the lawgiver upon the people and for his ends. The state ceases to be piece of utilitarian machinery intended to help individuals in the fullest development of their individual personality and becomes a "moral" institution--where "moral" is not used in contrast to immoral but describes an institution which imposes on its members its views on all moral questions, whether these views be moral or highly immoral. In this sense the Nazi or any other collectivist state is "moral", while the liberal state is not.

F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 1944.

THE ECONOMICS OF LIBERALISM.

Generally speaking, all of the utopian "isms" that grew out of the political turmoil of post-revolutionary France consist of two idealized components, a political one and an economic one. Communism, for example, is both a system of government and a system of commerce, as are Marxism, socialism, syndicalism, fascism, national socialism, falangism, anarchism, and anarcho-syndicalism. History demonstrates that the collapse of any "ism" is inevitably heralded by the failure of one of these two components.

The dissolution of the communist government in Russia, for example, was preceded not by the failure of the political system but by the meltdown of the collectivist economy. The fall of Italian fascism and German Nazism, on the other hand, was not precipitated by economic faults but by the failure of the political formulation, which required an unsustainable level of nationalism and imperialistic endeavors.

Now we know that this is an oversimplification, and are not inclined to get into a big argument over it with "experts." Furthermore, it doesn't matter whether this construction is flawed because it is, for our purposes, nothing more than a literary device to set up the story that we wish to address here this week.

Simply stated, that story is that American liberal "ism" is in trouble not because it is no longer politically viable but because the economic system that underlies it has "hit the wall," so to speak.

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There are two reasons why the experts and pundits haven't figured out that the economic side of liberalism has run its course, or is, at the very least, in very big trouble. The first is that they are too busy worrying about immediate economic problems such as \$4 gasoline and diminishing worldwide food supplies. The second, related reason is that while these experts and pundits know a great deal about liberal politics, they know almost nothing about the fundamental nature of the ancillary, liberal economic system that has slowly developed since the end of World War II in reaction to the spreading, liberal, political belief in the obligation of the federal government to "do good."

Their situation is similar to that of George Washington's doctor, who could describe the president's illness quite well, but knew so little about the actual functioning of the human body that his treatment was to drain five pints of blood out of poor George and fill him full of mercury chloride to make him vomit up his body's "impurities."

So we thought this week we would discuss the liberal economic system. And as is our wont, being just a couple of country boys, awash in a sea of "experts," we are going to begin with the thoughts of someone who knows more about it than we do, who, for reasons that are not all that clear, seems not to be widely known either to the American public or to those whose task it is to educate the American public.

We are speaking of Bertrand de Jouvenel, a French philosopher, political economist, futurist, author of numerous erudite books, by all accounts a connoisseur from a very young age of the fairer sex, and a man who has been described as the "least famous of the great political thinkers of the twentieth century." For our purposes this week, we will concentrate on a series of lectures he made in 1949, which were republished in 1989 by Liberty Press in a small book entitled *The Ethics of Redistribution*. If this book sounds familiar to some of our long-time readers, we would note that we have mentioned it before in these pages. The first time was 14 years ago in an article entitled "To Define Clinton, Try 'Utopian Redistributivist,' Rather Than Socialist."

As we noted in that article, the message from these lectures is that the economic system associated with liberalism is best described as redistributivism. De Jouvenel points out that socialism is the suppression of private property in an attempt at communal moral solidarity. It is incompatible with modern society, he says, and can be realized, if at all, only in monasteries, where material goods are spurned, or in communities that are small, simple, and even primitive. Redistributivism, he maintains, differs from socialism in that it is based on the relatively new twin beliefs that government should be centrally involved in the relief of poverty, and that economic inequality is itself unjust or evil.

These beliefs, he says, have led inexorably to the view that government is responsible for ensuring rising popular living standards and that government should provide a subsistence floor beneath which no one may fall. De Jouvenel claims that redistributivism is not a linear descendent from socialism, but finds its origins in Lloyd George's budget for 1909-10, which, by introducing progressive taxation, "abandoned the idea that for taxation purposes, equality implies proportionality."

It should be noted here that the social and economic troubles associated with progressive taxation were well known to America's founding fathers. Indeed, these brilliant men included a clause in the U.S. Constitution clearly stipulating that all duties, imposts, excises, and taxes must be uniform throughout the United States.

Congress made its first attempt to abolish this notion in 1894, during the administration of Grover Cleveland, the first Democrat elected to the White House after the Civil War. But the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional the very next year in the famous case *Pollock v. Farmers Loan & Trust Co.* The formal decision was made on technical grounds, but the true objection was that a graduated tax violated the "uniformity" requirement of the Constitution by exempting some citizens from the tax altogether and by taxing some at higher levels than others.

Reflecting the views and concerns of the founding fathers, Justice Field, writing for the majority, argued that “every citizen should contribute his proportion, however small the sum, to the support of the government, and it is no kindness to urge any of our citizens to escape this obligation.”

This, of course, did not put the matter to rest, but simply stirred the populist tax advocates to greater frenzy, and in 1913, in the final days of the Taft administration and just a few years after the aforementioned budget of Lloyd George, the 16th amendment to the Constitution was ratified, which formally put to rest the “uniformity” requirement in which the founding fathers had placed so much faith.

No longer did the government need to be “uniform” in its taxation, or even fair. Indeed, from that point on the majority ruled when it came to taxation. In case you haven’t read the 16th amendment lately, it goes as follows.

The Congress shall have power to lay and collect taxes on incomes, from whatever source derived, without apportionment among the several states, and without regard to any census of enumeration.

At heart, de Jouvenel says, redistributionalism is based on the notion that “The richer would feel their loss less than the poorer would appreciate their gain; or even more roughly: A certain loss of income would mean less to the richer than the consequent gain would mean to the poorer.”

Recalling one of Friedrich Hayek’s most important theses, de Jouvenel notes that redistributionalism is based on the mistaken belief that government bureaucrats know “how to achieve the maximum sum of individual satisfactions capable of being drawn from a given flow of production, which must always be assumed to be unaffected.” The end result of redistributionalism, he says, is an enormous strengthening of the state. Here we will let Baron de Jouvenel speak for himself.

The State sets up as trustee for the lower-income group and doles out services and benefits. In order to avoid the creation of a ‘protected class,’ a discrimination fatal to political equality, the tendency has been to extend the benefits and services upward to all members of society, to cheapen food and rents for the rich as well as the poor, to assist the well- to-do in illness equally with the needy.

The more one considers the matter, the clearer it becomes that redistribution is in effect far less a redistribution of free income from the richer to the poorer, as imagined, than a redistribution of power from the individual to the State.

Insofar as the State amputates higher incomes, it must assume their savings and investment functions, and we come to the centralization of investment. Insofar, as the amputated higher incomes fail to sustain certain social activities, the state must step in, subsidize these activities, and preside over them.

This results in a transfer of power from individuals to officials, who tend to constitute a new ruling class....This leads the observer to wonder how far the demand for equality is directed against inequality itself and is thus a fundamental demand, and how far it is directed against a certain set of “unequals” and is thus an unconscious move in a change of elites.

As we said in our first mention about this book, we cannot do justice in such a short article to de Jouvenel’s full thoughts on this subject. But Oxford scholar John Gray, did a wonderful job of compressing some of his more important points in his introduction to the Liberty Press volume, as follows.

Resources needed to support a subsistence minimum cannot be derived solely, or even primarily, from taxation of the rich. Such

resources must be extracted from the middle classes, who are also the beneficiaries of income-transfer schemes . . . [de Jouvenel] further notes that a policy of redistribution is bound to discriminate against minorities, since it will inevitably favor the preferences and interests of the majority – a fact remarked upon also by Hayek....

The regime of high taxation inseparable from the redistributionist state has the further undesirable consequence of diminishing the sphere of free services in which people engage in convivial relations without the expectation of payment –and thereby corroding the culture of civility that sustains liberal civilization....

The modern welfare state is not defensible by reference to any coherent set of principles or purposes. It has not significantly alleviated poverty but has instead substantially institutionalized it. This is the upshot of path breaking studies such as Charles Murray's *Losing Ground*. A generation of welfare policy has inflicted on its clients such disincentives and moral hazards as to leave their last state worse than their first....If any social group benefits it is likely to be the middle class majority rather than the poor....

Now it must be recognized that the political side of liberal“ism” has proven to be immensely successful in the United States. So much so, that virtually all of the nation's Republican and “conservative” politicians participate in the fun, along with the liberals, just as though they had helped invent it.

The problem is that the fun appears to be coming to an end. While the political side of liberalism is still extremely popular, the economic system developed to support this political scheme has come under severe strain of late, not because the number of people living in poverty has grown too large for “the rich” and the “middle class” to support, but because the demands

of the middle class on the system constantly exceed by very large sums the amount that all are collectively paying in.

The liberal economic system worked reasonably well when liberal politicians were pledged to see that every citizen had food and shelter. But today, liberal politicians are forced to promise that they will see to it that no citizens are denied cheap gasoline, homes “they can afford,” vacations “they can afford,” and “freedom from the fear of want.” Indeed, we now hear the “conservative” John McCain promising, as part of his presidential campaign, to suspend the federal gasoline tax each summer so the financially strapped, middle class consumer can still afford to “take the kids to Disney World.”

Now it is anyone's guess how long this can go on. But, when viewed from the perspective of Jouvenel, it becomes apparent that while the political side of liberalism may still be in reasonably good shape, the economic side has turned into a giant Ponzi scheme, which is beginning to look a little shaky, as all Ponzi schemes eventually do.

THE RECOLONIZATION OF AFRICA.

This may not have been the most important story in the news last week, but it was, we're afraid, one of the most telling and most disturbing. Last Tuesday, it seems, police in Kinshasa, the capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo, were forced to make several arrests to keep order in the city and to prevent widespread bloodshed.

Terrorists, you ask? Tribal warfare? Ethnic cleansing? No, sadly, none of these. The real problem in Kinshasa was...ummmm...well...errr....We guess you could call it...ummm....Maybe we should let *Reuters* reporter Joe Bavier tell the story:

Police in Congo have arrested 13 suspected sorcerers accused of using black magic to steal or shrink men's

penises after a wave of panic and attempted lynchings triggered by the alleged witchcraft.

Reports of so-called penis snatching are not uncommon in West Africa, where belief in traditional religions and witchcraft remains widespread, and where ritual killings to obtain blood or body parts still occur.

Rumours of penis theft began circulating last week in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo's sprawling capital of some eight million inhabitants. They quickly dominated radio call-in shows, with listeners advised to beware of fellow passengers in communal taxis wearing gold rings.

Purported victims, 14 of whom were also detained by police, claimed that sorcerers simply touched them to make their genitals shrink or disappear, in what some residents said was an attempt to extort cash with the promise of a cure . . .

Police arrested the accused sorcerers and their alleged victims in an effort to avoid the sort of bloodshed seen in Ghana a decade ago, when 12 suspected penis snatchers were beaten to death by angry mobs.

We're not sure which part of that story we find most amazing. Is it the fact that the police – i.e. the official representatives of the government – actually arrested 13 *sorcerers*? Not alleged sorcerers, mind you, but the real deal. Is it the fact that this is, apparently, not a one-off event; that these incidents are “not uncommon” and actually led to the beating deaths of a dozen people just a few short years ago? Or is it the fact that all of this just seems way too ordinary for Africa? Recall that just two short months ago, we brought you the story of Liberia's General Butt Naked, as told by Mark Steyn:

This week, my eye fell on a striking headline in Britain's *Daily Telegraph*: “General Butt Naked Confesses To Nude Killings.” General Butt Naked is a Liberian warlord so called because of his preference for charging into battle wearing only his boots at the head of a similarly *deshabille* contingent known as the Butt Naked Battalion. As I said, the story happened to catch my eye, and when anything from Liberia catches your eye you're best to grab it back before someone eats it. And so it was with this tale. As the *Telegraph's* West Africa editor, Mike Pflanz, wrote:

“The nude gunmen became known for terrorizing villagers and sacrificing children whose hearts they would eat before going into battle during Liberia's 14-year on-off civil war which ended in 2003.”

Did they do a lot of this? Child-sacrifice and heart-eating and so forth? Well, General Butt Naked confesses to killing some 20,000 people before finding himself standing nude in battle on a bridge outside Monrovia and hearing the voice of God tell him he was Satan's slave and should repent immediately. Since then he's been an evangelical preacher in Ghana.

And we shrug and move on. Hey, it's Liberia.

Likewise, this week, anyone who saw the Congo/Sorcerer story – and that was likely no more than a couple dozen people, including the reporter's undoubtedly proud parents – just shrugged and moved on. Hey, it's Africa.

And that's the way it goes. Africa is, to put it mildly, a basket case of a continent. Think about it for just a minute. Think about the fact that South Africa was, until just recently, a global pariah; a country that only last decade threw off the chains of state-

sanctioned, state-enforced racial separation and official disenfranchisement of the majority of the population. And yet it is by far the most developed, most progressive, and most stable nation on the continent. That is mind-boggling, to say the least. From rampant and population-altering AIDS epidemics, to vicious ethnic warfare, to mass slaughter, to state-sanctioned slavery, to penis-stealing sorcerers, to Islamic radicalism, to child-prostitution rings set up and operated by the United Nations' "peacekeeping" Blue Helmets, Africa can tell all, or nearly all, of the world's most deeply troubling and amazingly primitive stories. The place nearly defies words.

The African disaster *du jour*, of course, is the standoff in Zimbabwe. You see, President for Life Robert Mugabe held some sham elections, lost them, nonetheless refuses to give up power, and the whole mess now appears headed for civil war and/or a massive government extermination of the opposition. Truth be told, it's all kinda dull by African standards; honestly, there are no sorcerers, no child-sacrifice, no chopping off of and/or stealing of male genitalia.

Mugabe has been conducting a sort of slow-motion genocide for more than a decade now, but no one much cared. So what? Just another pogrom gone bad. Hey, after all, it's Zimbabwe. Members of the EU, led by Jacques Chirac's France, actually honored the guy for having the bravery to resist "genetically modified" food crops while starving his people to death. It took a stolen election to get anyone to notice, and even then the number of people who took note was so small that Side Show Bob will all but certainly be allowed to steal his election and hold on to power long enough to ensure that the majority of his population starves to death while rich farmlands go fallow and rich Westerners go to the Gap.

Why none of the "liberal" humanitarians in the West care much about Africa and the fate of its people is debatable. *That* none of them cares is not. For all their prattling about stopping the horrors of Darfur and preventing another Rwanda-esque genocide, most Western nations and organizations gave up the fight to help Africa after Apartheid was ended. The irony

is that for all of the libelous accusations directed at George Bush, he has done more to help Africa than just about any other Western leader one can name. The fact is that Africa is a living, breathing horror show, but no one seems to have the time or the energy to give much thought to ending the performance.

Well, almost no one. Over the past several years, we are aware of only three earnest suggestions/efforts to deal with the manifold evils that haunt Africa. And by coincidence, they are all essentially the same suggestion, from three different sources. And all deal directly with a politically taboo subject.

The first suggestion came from a onetime colleague of ours, who still reads this publication and with whom we are still friends, and who suggested many years ago, that the only way to save Africa and Africans from themselves would be to re-colonize the continent. If we recall correctly, this suggestion came in the wake of the Rwandan genocide, which left upwards of 500,000 men, women, and children dead.

The second suggestion came a few years later and was made in a far more public forum by then-editor of *National Review Online* (and current syndicated columnist and *New York Times* best-selling author) Jonah Goldberg, who made precisely the same pitch as our erstwhile colleague. To wit:

I think it's time we revisited the notion of a new kind of Colonialism – though we shouldn't call it that. I don't mean ripping off poor countries. I don't mean setting tribes against one another and paying off corrupt "leaders" to keep down unrest. I mean going in – guns blazing if necessary – for truth and justice. I am quite serious about this. The United States should mount a serious effort to bring civilization (yes, "Civilization") to those parts of Africa that are in Hobbesian despair. We should enlist any nation, institution or organization – especially multinational corporations and evangelical churches

as well as average African citizens – interested in permanently helping Africa join the 21st century. This might mean that Harvard would have to cut back on courses about transgender construction workers. And it might mean that some churches would have to spend more time feeding starving people than pronouncing on American presidential candidates.

We should spend billions upon billions doing it. We should put American troops in harm's way. We should not be surprised that Americans will die doing the right thing. We should not be squeamish, either, about the fact that (mostly white) Americans will kill some black Africans in the process. Yes, this would be a display of arrogance of historic proportions, even a crusade. But it wouldn't be a military one. On one hand, this cannot be merely an armed invasion, but on the other hand it must not be some UN initiative which just shuffles poverty around. This would be America and its allies doing right as we see it.

Yes, this would seem imperial, for there would certainly be wars declared against us. French writers would break their pencils in defiance of the American Empire. Kofi Annan would need a pacemaker. Pat Buchanan would move to Canada. But being imperial is not necessarily a bad thing. The British Empire decided unilaterally that the global practice of slavery was a crime against God and man, and they set out to stop it. They didn't care about the "sovereignty" of other nations when it came to an evil institution. They didn't care about the "rule of international law," they made law with the barrel of a cannon.

We should note that the "presidential candidates" Goldberg referenced in this piece were George W. Bush and Al Gore, which is to say that this column was written in 2000, *before 9/11* and *before Iraq*. The very idea of "colonizing" any country (much less an entire continent) in the post-Iraq era seems laughable at best. But even before Iraq, no serious policy maker would ever even have countenanced the thought. To suggest that Africans are incapable of self-rule and need Americans (and perhaps Britons) to save them would be to commit political suicide. No politician could survive the antipathy and the publicity such a suggestion would generate. Frankly, we're a little surprised that Goldberg wasn't at least marginalized by the suggestion, given its radically politically incorrect overtones.

The fact is that colonialism is just not an issue to be discussed in polite company, particularly since Iraq. No one would ever dare even to think about re-colonizing Africa.

Well, again, *almost* no one. And that brings us to the third suggestion about how to address Africa, which also promulgates colonization...of a sort.

There is no question that neither the United States nor any of its Western allies will ever entertain the idea of colonizing Africa, but that doesn't necessarily mean that no one will – or has. You might have to dig into the news a bit to find the signs, given the general Western disinterest in Africa, but if you do, you'll see that colonization of the continent is actually being carried out . . . by the Chinese.

Long-time readers know that China's interest in and "resource colonization" of Africa is an issue that we have followed for a long time now, dating back at least a decade to our discussions of the People's Republic's support for the genocidal Islamist regime in Sudan in return for access to that nation's plentiful oil supplies. Throughout the decade, China has maintained its support for the regime of Omar al-Bashir and even increased its arms sales tremendously, despite Bashir's

barely concealed efforts to wipe out Darfur's black Muslim population. But Sudan is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

Last spring, William Gumede, the Associate Editor at Africa Central, a research fellow at the School of Public and Development Management at Johannesburg's Witwatersrand University, and a columnist/blogger at the *Washington Post's* "PostGlobal" blog, penned the following about China's interest in Africa:

Is China becoming Africa's new colonizer? In what is reminiscent of a new scramble for Africa, China has rushed to plant its flag on the continent, offering soft credit, bricks and mortar investment and promising noninterference in local politics. But is this all too good to be true? In November, China hosted an Africa summit in Beijing attended by 50 African leaders, the biggest showcase of China's new foreign policy shift towards the developing world. China aims to expand its political reach on the continent and secure raw materials for its rapidly growing economy. At the conference, Beijing offered Africa US\$3bn in preferential loans and US\$2bn in export credits over the next three years. China envisaged annual trade with Africa to reach \$100bn by 2010....

China earlier this year granted Nigeria a \$2.5bn soft loan and the Angolan government \$9bn without strings. But China has also offered many African despots, such as Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe a lifeline. China has major investments in Sudan's oilfields and fiercely supports the Sudanese regime, which is responsible for an internal conflict that has seen millions killed or displaced. China worked tirelessly to water-down a United Nations resolution condemning Sudan for the bloodshed

in Darfur. China accounts for 65% of all Sudanese oil exports and 35% of Angolan oil sold abroad.

Just last week, a Chinese ship loaded with arms for Zimbabwe's embattled regime – presumably intended to help Mugabe fend off his opponents and continue the mass starvation of his own people – was prevented from unloading its cargo at the South African port of Durban. That's the good news. The bad news is that the ship was stopped not by the South African government, but by dockworkers standing in solidarity with their oppressed (and dying) brothers and sisters to the north. The South African government, for its part, was more than willing to allow the ship to unload its contents and has argued rather strenuously that it is not yet time for an arms embargo to be imposed on Mugabe. So much for solidarity, we guess. Somehow gobs of Chinese cash appear to speak louder than principle and "human rights."

So, while the Chinese are playing around in Africa, the United States is preoccupied in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the rest of the West is too disinterested or too lazy even to notice the horrors throughout the continent. And we are left wondering about the consequences.

In the short term, we'd imagine that the effects will be quite beneficial for the Chinese government and for the strongmen with whom it is dealing, and truly deadly and horrifying for everyone else. As we noted in an article published last February, the Chinese are contributing to and exacerbating the endemic corruption in Third World Africa. The fruits of the development, aid and trade packages are hardly evenly distributed. Political elites, i.e. local strongmen, get rich, while the Chinese get oil and the average Nigerian, Sudanese, or Angolan gets nothing (if they're lucky, that is). As William Gumede put it, "the more easy money China dangles in return for oil or other commodities, the more corruption rises."

In addition, China is arming some of the world's most dangerous regimes. And it is more than likely that at some point some of these armaments will be used to kill Americans.

Over the medium-to-long term, though, China's colonization of Africa will all but certainly take a toll back in Beijing. As the inimitable Paul Johnson writes in his classic history *Modern Times*, "It follows from this, as many British statesmen had insisted throughout the nineteenth century, that colonies were not a source of strength but of weakness...The concept of a colonial superpower was largely fraudulent. As a military and economic colossus, the British Empire was made of lath and plaster, paint and gilding."

China's efforts in Africa already come with a price tag. Two actually. The first, as we indicated above, is measured in what Johnson notes are "real resources." China may be gaining access to oil, copper, and the like. But it is costing them a lot of hard cash.

The second price tag will likely be measured in terms of prestige, trustworthiness, and even investment. As the United States has too often learned the hard way, tyrants eventually die and tyrannies eventually fall. And those who bring about their demise are rarely favorably disposed toward those who propped up the previous regime and thus extended and exacerbated their suffering. When Robert Mugabe is dead, for example (and if the opposition doesn't get him, God eventually will), does anyone believe that the successor regime will look kindly upon his arms supplier?

This is an eventuality that has serious and far-reaching investment implications. If it is true as so many big-shot investors (e.g. George Soros, Warren Buffett) have

suggested, that China is a better investment today than the United States, since the United States has incurred international enmity stemming from its arrogance and neo-imperialism, then how much worse an investment will China be once the proverbial worm turns? The United States, at least, is pursuing defensible humanitarian and national security ends. But China is not. One wonders whether such politically motivated investors will hold China to the same standard they hold their own country and, if they don't, whether their investors will pay dearly for it.

Finally, we can't help but believe that all of this Africa mess will somehow fall to the United States to clean up. Whether the blame-America-first crowd will figure out a way to shift responsibility for all of this to the United States (and the Republicans, presumably) is questionable. But there is no question that the United States, as the world's lone superpower and vigilant policeman, will feel compelled nonetheless to *take* responsibility and to ameliorate any potential crises.

In the end, it would probably be considerably less costly for the United States to be proactive in dealing with Africa. But it won't be. There's no political glory in that. Just ask George Bush, who despite his efforts to relieve the African AIDS crises gets no credit and is still plied with blame. Will another high-profile politician take that risk when the reward is miniscule? Not likely. After all, it is (just) Africa.

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