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THEY SAID IT

The story of this book is in many ways the story of a video. Last summer, I posted a portion of one of my speeches on the popular Web site YouTube. It was a short, three-minute video in which I explained the difference between the world that works and the world that fails, using the example of FedEx and UPS versus the bureaucracy.

The UPS and FedEx systems are so capable and so efficient that they can track, in real time, millions of packages as they move across the country. UPS locates fifteen million packages a day; FedEx eight million — while they are moving. In contrast, the federal bureaucracy can't locate between ten and twenty million people in this country illegally. Perhaps, I said in the video, the federal government should send each of these people a package by FedEx or UPS.

It's a tongue-in-cheek example, but it makes a serious point. Efficient, well-organized, functioning systems like FedEx and UPS are not a theory — they're a reality of the world that works. And they stand in glaring contrast to the world of bureaucracies and special interests — the world that fails.

--Newt Gingrich, *Real Change: From the World That Fails to the World That Works*, 2008.

LIFE IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE STATE.

This being the fortieth anniversary of the summer riots in Paris and the subsequent takeover of Columbia University by angry and bored American imitators, 1968 is on the minds of what seems sometimes to be the entire political community.

In case you haven't heard, according to the pundits, the presidential campaign of 2008 is, in many ways, a rerun of the '68 campaign, played this time as farce. After all, there's an unpopular foreign war raging half-a-world away. There's an establishment Democratic candidate running against the upstart outsider. There's an excellent chance that this fight between the candidates will go to the convention, that the convention will be rancorous, and that the losing Democratic faction will angrily turn on its own party. The campaign has been marked by overt racial divisiveness. And the list goes on. As the columnist Rod Dreher put it over the weekend, "the restless spirit of '68 haunts this year's presidential campaign." Already some of the more prominent lefty bloggers are promising to "march on" the Democratic convention in Denver, and there is even a fringe anti-war group called "The Re-Create 68 Alliance" that intends to disrupt the Denver events and to stage a "very serious" protest.

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We don't mean to be reflexively contrarian by any means, but we're not so sure we'd agree that 1968 is the correct prototype. In fact, it seems to us that the similarities between today's campaign and that of 1972 are much more striking and, more to the point, much more relevant to the long-term prospects of the current partisan breakdown.

Now, for the record, this does not necessarily mean that we expect Obama's campaign to collapse and for him to lose nearly every state, the way George McGovern's did in '72. That seems to us unlikely. But with the GOP still readying its attack on Obama and the party not yet fully engaged, we think that there is a chance that enough of Obama's past associations and current beliefs will emerge to alienate large swaths of voters, thus rendering him completely unelectable. It is very difficult to envision Obama winning in a landslide, but it's not too hard to imagine him beaten in one.

That notwithstanding, the real similarities between this campaign and that of 1972 can be found on the Republican side of the aisle. As in 1972, the GOP's presidential prospects today mask a serious and vital failure of the party and its prevailing ideology. Sure, Nixon won in an historic landslide in '72, but his party was collapsing beneath him. By 1974, the Republican Party as it was then constituted was a completely spent force, drained by a combination of corruption, fiscal profligacy, economic ignorance, and foreign policy irresolution. Those looking only at the top of the ticket in 1972 would have been fooled, lulled into a false sense of partisan security, never suspecting the proximity of the GOP's collapse.

Much the same is taking place today. John McCain stands poised to capture the White House and may even do so in stunningly easy fashion. But the Republican Party as a whole is in utter and complete collapse. Whatever the "lessons" of the 2006 midterm Democratic landslide might have been, the Republicans have not learned them. They have spent the 18 months since they lost their majority doing absolutely nothing – nothing, that is, save slipping further and further into the minority.

Last week, we began an article documenting the recent GOP defeats in special elections held in overwhelmingly Republican districts, the most recent being the loss last weekend of a Louisiana Congressional district that voted overwhelmingly for President Bush in 2004 and which had been represented by a Republican for more than three decades. We shelved the piece, and are grateful we did. Had we finished it and forwarded it, it would likely have gotten lost in the shuffle of many similar pieces, last week being the week that conservative columnists and pundits finally realized the problems that the GOP faces this November and set about discussing the party's failures and possible remedies.

Everyone from the former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich to the libertarians at *Reason* magazine to mainstream columnists and even onetime conservative theorist and current *New York Times* token conservative David Brooks noted the looming Republican electoral catastrophe and offered their suggestions on making the world a more hospitable place for GOP politicians. The suggestions ranged from the hackneyed, e.g. try focusing less on social issues and more on issues that *really* matter, to the bizarre, e.g. Newt's suggestion that we scrap the old air-traffic control system and "implement a space-based GPS-style air traffic system," which he somehow believes is one of the nine most vital steps to help "rebuild the American people's confidence that Republicans share their values, understand their worries, and are prepared to act instead of just talk."

Of all the suggestions, though, one was repeated over and over again, in piece after piece, running the gamut of conservative thought: imitate your conservative brethren across the Atlantic, take a page from David Cameron's revival of the British Tories and their recent stunning electoral success. This is an odd suggestion, in our estimation, since it is generally acknowledged that Cameron's particular take on conservatism is anything but "conservative." In fact, it is, rather, soft centrists, statist even.

But for at least a couple of commentators that's sort of the point. Take, for example, David Brooks, who

last Friday wrote the following about the Tories and about the lessons they might teach the Republicans:

The British conservative renovation begins with this insight: The central political debate of the 20th century was over the role of government. The right stood for individual freedom while the left stood for extending the role of the state. But the central debate of the 21st century is over quality of life. In this new debate, it is necessary but insufficient to talk about individual freedom. Political leaders have to also talk about, as one Tory politician put it, “the whole way we live our lives.”

That means, first, moving beyond the Thatcherite tendency to put economics first. As Oliver Letwin, one of the leading Tory strategists put it: “Politics, once econo-centric, must now become socio-centric.” David Cameron, the Conservative Party leader, makes it clear that his primary focus is sociological. Last year he declared: “The great challenge of the 1970s and 1980s was economic revival. The great challenge in this decade and the next is social revival.” In another speech, he argued: “We used to stand for the individual. We still do. But individual freedoms count for little if society is disintegrating. Now we stand for the family, for the neighborhood – in a word, for society.”

This has led to a lot of talk about community, relationships, civic engagement and social responsibility. Danny Kruger, a special adviser to Cameron, wrote a much-discussed pamphlet, “On Fraternity.” These conservatives are not trying to improve the souls of citizens. They’re trying to use government to foster dense social bonds . . .

The Conservative Party has spent a lot of time thinking about how government should connect with citizens. Basically, everything should be smaller, decentralized and interactive. They want a greater variety of schools, with local and parental control. They want to reverse the trend toward big central hospitals. Health care, Cameron says, is as much about regular long-term care as major surgery, and patients should have the power to construct relationships with caretakers, pharmacists and local facilities.

Cameron also believes government should help social entrepreneurs scale up their activities without burdening them with excessive oversight.

Now, before we get into our analysis of this passage and what it might suggest, we think it is important to note a couple of things about its author, David Brooks. Brooks, for those of you who don’t know, was formerly Bill Kristol’s writing partner at *The Weekly Standard*, where he was a senior editor.

In 1997, Kristol and Brooks together argued for a new conservatism, one that was more patriotic and more civic minded and less hung up on the ideas forwarded by the libertarian and small-government types. As they put it in a *Wall Street Journal* column, “Wishing to be left alone isn’t a governing doctrine.” The personification of this “National Greatness Conservatism,” was found in John McCain, who was conservative enough, but not necessarily enthusiastic about minimalist government, and who based his entire political persona on the ideas of love of country, honor, and duty. McCain was a perfect fit, and the Brooks-Kristol team extolled his virtues throughout his presidential primary campaign in 2000.

Brooks is also the originator of the sociological term “bobos,” which stands for “bourgeoisie-bohemians,” coined in his book *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There*. According to Brooks, the Bobos are the successors to the 1980s “yuppies.”

They are very affluent young, urban professionals, but rather than succumbing to greed and consumption as the ultimate ends, they tend to take a more placid, more globally conscious view of life. Bobos are, in short, the '80s yuppies infused with a heavy dose of '60s liberalism. They are Obama voters.

And here we see the importance of Brooks's social insight. Though he is rarely if ever cited as a great sociological observer, Brooks did nonetheless accurately forecast the current election cycle more than a decade ago. This election pits both of Brooks's principle social factions, the National Greatness McCainiacs and the Bobo Obamaniacs, against one another. Brooks has been derided by liberals and conservatives alike, but clearly he has a sense of the social trends driving American politics.

So what does all this mean in terms of the current GOP problems? Maybe nothing, though we doubt that. What David Cameron is fostering in Great Britain then, and what Brooks is suggesting that American conservatives emulate is, essentially, the surrender of classical liberalism, i.e. the libertarian, small government principles that have guided the conservative movement for better than half-a-century.

For all intents, Brooks is arguing that conservatives make their peace with the bureaucracy and with the administrative state and proceed from there. Bureaucracy can be made less centralized. It can be molded to fit market models better. It can be "reformed" to foster individual or localized autonomy. But it cannot be eradicated. It is here to stay, and we'd all just better get used to it.

This is part and parcel of piece that Brooks penned just a couple of weeks ago in which he offered his personal theories about globalization and the benefits it holds for Western and specifically American workers. Brooks argues that the "globalization paradigm" is inaccurate and, in fact, misidentified. The world is, he argues, undergoing "a skills revolution." "We're moving into a more demanding cognitive age," he continues, "In order to thrive, people are compelled to become better at absorbing, processing and combining

information. This is happening in localized and globalized sectors, and it would be happening even if you tore up every free trade deal ever inked."

Essentially Brooks is making another argument supporting the inevitability of the administrative state. In the post-globalized world, skills, knowledge, information processing, and the like are crucial. And though Brooks doesn't complete the thought, it also means that specialization and complexity are increasing and increasingly inevitable. And all of this points to the need for a comprehensive, specialized, knowledge-driven governing structure. Or in other words, the Weberian ideal-type bureaucracy.

The interesting thing about all of this is that it fits very neatly with the ideas offered by one of the other commentators who has argued prominently that the Republicans are in serious trouble and could learn a great deal from their British cousins. Though it is likely that he would rage against the comparison, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, has, by and large, adopted a position similar to that laid out by Brooks. In his new book, *Real Change: From the World That Fails to the World That Works*, Newt argues essentially that Americans should embrace the "coming explosion in scientific knowledge" and insist that the government abandon its current, rules-bloated ways and adopt the technological innovation embraced by the private sector to perform its tasks and deliver its goods more efficiently.

While we admire Newt's effort here, we can't help but notice that he is not proposing to reject the bloated government Leviathan, but to reform it; to surrender to it as long as it makes some changes and agrees to emulate the markets and private enterprise a little better. Newt can call this "real change" or anything else that he wants to, but the fact of the matter is that he is essentially advocating the same thing that David Cameron and David Brooks are, namely acquiescence to the administrative state.

None of this should, we'll note, come as a surprise. We have been writing for more than a decade now about the changing political paradigm, the prescience

of Max Weber, the inevitability of the bureaucratic/administrative state, in short, the fact that the battle between big government and small government is over, and that big government has won.

A common theme of ours for the last ten years has been that the political future belongs not to the party that can muster the best and most effective ideological arguments, but to the one that can figure out the most effective means by which to deliver the goods and services demanded by an enfeebled and indolent public.

When you read about or witness “conservative” change in Europe, what you are really seeing is not conservatism reborn, but mere market-friendly, private-enterprise-oriented tinkering with the administrative state; yet another reform of the bureaucracy intended to provide services more efficiently or to keep the economy “competitive.” Real conservatism is largely dead in Europe. And so shall it be in the United States.

And that, believe it or not, is the message being sent both by the collapse of the Republican Party and by those who have offered party and elected officials a roadmap to future electoral success. If you listen closely to the criticisms of President Bush – both from the left and the right – the bulk of the charges stem not from ideology but from alleged incompetence. He didn’t administer the war properly; he failed to take care of New Orleans efficiently; he “managed” the economy poorly. This is not the disapproval of a populace that wants less from its government, but one that wants more and wants it delivered more effectively. Thus is life in the administrative state.

GOING TO THE MATTRESSES.

She’s wounded, but she’s not dead. And a wounded beast can be more dangerous than a healthy one. Fear and anger mixes with pain and often produces aggressive behavior in even the meekest animal. It always does so in the naturally aggressive ones, and Hillary is nothing if she is not naturally aggressive. With this in mind, our advice to Mr. Obama is to carefully protect and defend the prize he is about to

win because Mrs. Clinton will do everything she can to see that it gains him nothing, that he loses the next battle, the one with John McCain.

Whether Barack knows it or not, Hillary’s response to losing this fight will be to go to the mattresses, as in this from “The Godfather.”

Sonny: No, no, no! No more! Not this time, consiglieri. No more meetings, no more discussions, no more Sollozzo tricks. You give ‘em one message: I want Sollozzo. If not, it’s all-out war: we go to the mattresses.

You see Mrs. Clinton and her husband could not tolerate an Obama presidency. Their political lives would be finished, and they have no other lives except their political ones. No beloved farms or ranches to return to, no grandkids to coddle, no inclination to “spend more time with their families,” or heaven forbid, to spend more time with “each other.” They would become the modern day equivalent of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, wandering the world as vapid “celebrities,” locked in a sterile marriage for the sake of their public image and pride, being the “attraction” at parties, and attending “openings,” the American answer to Eurotrash, without the appearance of class, of course.

President Obama would pretend to enlist their help, keeping them busy with important but hopeless projects, like rebuilding New Orleans or “feeding the hungry” in Africa. But he would purge the party of all Clinton loyalists and cover the ground behind them with salt as the Romans did Carthage. And the Clintons know it.

On the other hand, a McCain presidency would be a great consolation prize to the loss of the White House itself. The Clintons could engage immediately in a fight to take back control of the Democratic Party under the banner of “I told you so.” Mrs. Clinton would begin preparation for the race in ’12, raising money and doing favors for party big shots in return for future support. And Bill could continue to do what he has been doing for the past eight years,

“selling access” and making promises to crooked politicians and jackleg businessmen all around the world.

It is also worth remembering that despite their lifelong affiliation with left wing radicalism and their obvious disdain for traditional moral and ethical norms, the Clintons are, by today’s standards anyway, conventional Democrats, who entertain conventional liberal hopes and ideas about how to utilize the federal government “to make the world a better place.” It is logical to believe, then, that they are probably sincere in their public expressions of concern about Mr. Obama’s limited knowledge of global affairs, untested skills in dealing with difficult situations, and his marked capacity to entertain and endorse social and economic theories that are just plain nuts.

As we have often said in these pages, our guess is that McCain will beat Obama in the presidential race with or without Hillary’s help. Either way, as we said last week, we believe that the next president will have to deal with considerable animosity not just from the opposition party but also from within his own ranks.

With this in mind, we would note that we strongly disagree with the front-page piece in the most recent weekend edition of the *Wall Street Journal* by Gerald Seib and John Harwood entitled “America’s Race to the Middle,” in which the two argue that “Campaign 2008 may break Washington’s gridlock by reviving the long-dormant political center.” We stated our position this way:

The hard and happy truth is that whoever occupies the White House in 2009 is going to be faced with what we, many, many years ago in these pages, described “blessed gridlock.” Or to put this in another way, not much is going to happen at the instigation of the next president. Partisan politics will play a roll in keeping him or her from doing too much damage, as will the shaky state of the economy.

Most particularly, we disagree with the following from the *WSJ* article:

Ultimately, the need to solve some especially daunting problems in the next decade or so may force Washington’s rival power centers into united action, much as World War II and the Cold War did in decades past . . . ending the alarming rise in the cost of health care, searching for energy independence in an era of \$100-a-barrel oil, and, perhaps above all, resisting the rise of extreme Islam and terrorism all are problems with potential to compel national consensus at some point.

Yes indeed, Seib and Harwood are correct in noting that each of these issues has the “potential to compel national consensus.” But short of divine intervention, this potential is likely to die at the hands of a Congress and a White House that won’t be able to agree on any type of comprehensive solution to any of these problems, at least until they reach the crises stage. As we said last week, our bet is that Congress and the White House will stay true to form, reacting to events as they occur, rather than anticipating them, or as we put it, “more and more of the heavy lifting when it comes to solving problems will be done in response to circumstances, rather than the forward looking imaginations of our congressional leaders.”

And this, as we also said, is a good thing because if we are wrong and they reach some cockamamie agreements on “solving” these problems, as sure as God made little green apples they will make the situation worse. That’s the nature of the beast.

In the meantime, keep your eye on Hillary. Before this election is over, she’ll make Lady Macbeth look like a Sunday school teacher. And the whole time, she’ll be smiling, wishing Barack luck, and offering to do all she can to help him win.

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