

Mark L. Melcher Publisher
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

Stephen R. Soukup Editor
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

THEY SAID IT

They have given us into the hands of the new unhappy lords,
Lords without anger and honour, who dare not carry their swords.
They fight by shuffling papers; they have bright dead alien eyes;
They look at our labour and laughter as a tired man looks at flies.
And the load of their loveless pity is worse than the ancient
wrongs,
Their doors are shut in the evening; and they know no songs.

We hear men speaking for us of new laws strong and sweet,
Yet is there no man speaketh as we speak in the street.
It may be we shall rise the last as Frenchmen rose the first,
Our wrath come after Russia's wrath and our wrath be the worst.
It may be we are meant to mark with our riot and our rest
God's scorn for all men governing. It may be beer is best.
But we are the people of England; and we have not spoken yet.
Smile at us, pay us, pass us. But do not quite forget.

G. K. Chesterton, "The Secret People,"

SOWING THE WIND.

The first thing you have to understand when trying to make sense of what is going on in Washington and determining how best to react to it is that it is a waste of time to attempt to assign blame. If you fault the Democrats, the Republicans, George Bush, Barney Frank, or whomever, the next step will be to try to determine who is to blame for them, and then for them, and, after a great deal of thought, you will eventually come to the realization, to paraphrase the Bard, that the fault, dear Brutus, lies not in the stars but in ourselves, who elected these "stars" and let them do as they did. As we have said many times in these pages over the years, the mess in Washington is a symptom, not the disease itself. It is the fever, the pustules, the aches and pains that reveal the presence of a sickness within.

The disease itself is a chronic and probably irreversible cycle of decay that, as noted in Ecclesiastes, affects all things. A society that is morally and ethically healthy wouldn't have reelected Bill Clinton and wouldn't tolerate a tax cheat as the new head of the IRS, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

There are some very practical reasons why this point is so important, the most significant of which is that if you fall into the trap of believing that the nation's problems are the fault of its politicians, you are likely to entertain false hopes that everything would be all right if only Washington could be "cleaned up," "changed." This is simply not true. Hercules could reroute the Potomac River through Washington as he did the Alpheus and the Penues Rivers through the Augean stables, and the result would not be to clean Washington but

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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

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to pollute the river itself. Washington will change when and only if the nation changes. The late, great Russell Kirk, the founder of modern day American conservatism, made this point brilliantly, as follows.

A society in which men and women are governed by belief in an enduring moral order, by a strong sense of right and wrong, by personal convictions about justice and honor, will be a good society—whatever political machinery it may utilize; while a society in which men and women are morally adrift, ignorant of norms, and intent chiefly upon gratification of appetites, will be a bad society—no matter how many people vote and no matter how liberal its formal constitution may be.

Yes, of course, legislative initiatives could be taken that would help to ease the pain of the current economic situation and quicken the recovery to “normal,” whatever “normal” means in today’s topsy-turvy world. But the fact is that if “the system,” as it exists today, would allow any or all of these things to be done, the nation wouldn’t be in the mess it is in.

It is possible that the on-going and upcoming economic crisis will prompt cultural changes that will halt or delay the on-going decay. The Great Depression instilled the benefits of frugality, hard work, charity, honesty, and patriotism into those whom Tom Brokaw later honored in his best-selling book *The Greatest Generation*. But even if this were to occur, it would take a great deal of time. In the meantime, Americans are facing a long, difficult period that is likely to “try men’s souls,” as Thomas Paine put it.

Barring some sort of horrible terrorist attack or natural disaster that would unite Americans behind the need for coordinated action, our guess is that the population will atomize during the difficult times ahead. Individuals will seek out and form closer ties to smaller communities of common interest -- familial, occupational, religious, ethnic, geographical, class, and what not. It will be increasingly difficult for anyone

to feel a sense of unity with the federal government. Alasdair MacIntyre put it this way:

In any society where government does not express or represent the moral community of the citizens, but is instead a set of institutional arrangements for imposing a bureaucratized unity on a society which lacks genuine moral consensus, the nature of political obligation becomes systematically unclear. Patriotism is or was a virtue founded on attachment primarily to a political and moral community and only secondarily to the government of that community; but it is characteristically exercised in discharging responsibility to and in such government. When however the relationship of government to the moral community is put in question both by the changed nature of government and the lack of moral consensus in the society, it becomes difficult any longer to have any clear, simple and teachable conception of patriotism. Loyalty to my country, to my community--which remains unalterably a central virtue -- becomes detached from obedience to the government which happens to rule one.

It is worth noting in this context that the current President of the United States has no roots in any of America’s traditional, large political or societal bases. He is not a Southerner, a Texan, a Northeast aristocrat, a good old boy, a Catholic, a Jew, or a member of the working class. He is of African descent, but his ties to any particular segment of the American black community are weak at best.

This is fitting, in a way, because if he is successful in what he appears to be attempting to do, history will recognize him as one of the first in a new American mandarin class, a socially, culturally, and ethnically ambiguous, elite group of bureaucratic “experts,” who, unless they are stopped, will, like the pigs in *Animal Farm*, decide who among us is more equal than the others.

We say, “unless they are stopped” because it is not all that clear that Americans will go gently into the good night that Barack and his fellow liberals have planned for them. At least at this point, we would not go so far as to predict outright revolt. But some form of civil unrest and passive resistance are certainly not outside the realm of possibility.

A great many Americans feels very strongly about certain issues and depending upon how heavily the Obama boot comes down upon the faces of these folks, many are capable of reacting harshly. Abortion foes, for example, will once again be subsidizing this activity with their tax dollars and many will find that to be not just personally abhorrent but sinful. Anyone who has spent any time in rural America lately understands that gun owners widely expect the Obama administration to attempt to severely restrict their rights under the 2nd Amendment and are sullenly beginning to consider the federal government to be an outright enemy. Property rights is likely to become another very explosive issue as the statists in Washington push their “green” initiatives into the homes, back yards, farms, and personal lives of Americans who were heretofore virtually oblivious or indifferent to the pure power and malignancy of the gargantuan Leviathan in Washington.

It is worth considering, in this context, the practical difficulties of giving away one trillion dollars without sowing widespread anger and jealousy among those who receive less than others for what seems to be arbitrary or even deliberately unfair reasons. Why, some Americans are going to ask, is the fellow down the street, who spent himself and his family into financial ruin, receiving large federal help when they, who paid their bills on time, didn’t buy what they couldn’t afford, and saved their money, are receiving nothing other than the burden of being ruled by a government with huge debts and unending deficits.

One of the certain consequences of this exercise will be that each American will eventually be forced to decide what his or her moral and practical obligations are to the federal government as traditionally understood according to the social contract that underwrites the relationship. Is it morally acceptable

to cheat on one’s taxes if the government condones tax cheaters among its ranks? Do citizens have an obligation to pay taxes to a government that uses this money to subsidize and promote the killing of babies in the womb? Does one have a right or obligation to one’s family and heirs to hide all or a portion of one’s wealth from the government if this government is prone to confiscate it under arbitrary and clearly unfair guidelines? Does one have a right or an obligation to violate gun laws that people feel endanger the life of them or their families?

Socrates maintained that his obligation to obey the laws of Athens was absolute, even if these laws were unjust. According to Plato, he had the following dialogue with Crito over whether he should accept the death penalty or flee the city, which he was free to do.

Socrates: Do you imagine that a city can continue to exist and not be destroyed if the legal judgments pronounced in it have no force, but can be nullified and destroyed by individual persons? Suppose they said, Was there a provision in the agreement between you and us for you to disobey, or did you agree to abide by whatever judgments were pronounced? What are we to say, Crito? Are we not bound to admit that we must obey?

Crito: “Indeed we are bound, Socrates.”

Thomas Jefferson, on the other hand, maintained that the “tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.”

So which is it?

We report. You decide.

MEN WITHOUT CHESTS, REDUX.

Last week, the Brits, as is their wont, set an example for the world, and especially for Americans, their erstwhile subjects and social and political heirs. Unfortunately, the example they set was a *bad* one, an example of how *not* to act and a cautionary tale about our own prospective future.

As many of you already know, last Tuesday, the government of Great Britain barred Geert Wilders, the Dutch member of parliament and controversial anti-Islamist and film maker, from entering the country. Wilders was detained at Heathrow Airport and swiftly deported, despite having been invited to speak to the British parliament by Lord Malcolm Pearson, a member of the House of Lords. It was, as many commentators have noted, the first time a parliamentarian from an EU nation was denied entry to another EU nation.

The problem, you see, is that Wilders made a film, a 17-minute film called *Fitna*, which juxtaposes violence-inducing verses from the Koran and exhortations to murder by Muslim preachers with images and videos of terrorist attacks committed in the name of Islam. And that, apparently, is enough to make one an enemy of the state in Great Britain these days. According to British Home Secretary Jacqui Smith, Wilders' "presence in the UK would pose a genuine, present and sufficiently serious threat to one of the fundamental interests of society."

Now, most of the commentary we've read on Wilders, his film, and his rough treatment in Britain has contained all the usual caveats, most notably the remonstrance that Wilders film is, in fact, unfair to Islam, in that it paints with too broad a brush, attributing the failings and violence of the Islamist movement to the religion as a whole. Still, the commentators continue, he should enjoy free speech; he shouldn't be censored; he should be granted all the rights that are generally granted freeborn men while in Britain, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. We couldn't care less.

About any of it.

We don't care if Wilders' film is unfair. We don't care whether it is offensive. We don't care whether his rights to "free speech" are being denied. This is all beside the point, and, in fact, distracts from the real point. This isn't about Wilders or about free speech or censorship or religious tolerance. Those issues are tangential. This is about a society's willingness to defend itself, its ideals, and its culture.

The British government, it seems, will bend over backward (or forward, though perhaps only metaphorically) to preserve the tender egos of its nation's Muslims, to whom, apparently, no offense is too small and no incitement too mild. In order to understand the true perversity of the Brits' indulgence of their own "Islamic Street" a comparison is necessary.

Fortunately for us, such a comparison has already been made. Two weeks ago, *The Guardian's* Jonathan Freedland wondered aloud why Britain's other minority of Middle Eastern heritage, the Jews, are treated so differently from the country's Muslims. To wit:

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks on September 11 2001 and July 7 2005, a noble impulse seized the British liberal left. Politicians, commentators and activists united to say to their fellow citizens that, no matter how outraged they felt at the loss of civilian life they had just witnessed, they should under no circumstances take out that anger on the Muslim community. Progressive voices insisted that Muslims were not to be branded as guilty by association, just because the killers of 9/11 and 7/7 had been Muslims and had claimed to act in the name of all Muslims.

They urged Britons to be careful in their language, not to generalise from a few individuals to an entire community, to make clear to Britain's Muslims that they were a welcome part of the national life

...

Yet there's been a curious silence in the last few weeks. Once again many are outraged by the loss of civilian life they have witnessed – this time in Gaza. Yet there has been no chorus of liberal voices insisting that, no matter how intense their fury, people must not take out that anger on Britain's Jewish community . . . Those who in 2001 or 2005 rapidly spoke out against guilt by association have been mute this time. Yet this is no abstract concern. For British Jews have indeed come under attack.

According to the Community Security Trust, the body that monitors anti-Jewish racism, the four weeks after Cast Lead began saw an eightfold increase in antisemitic incidents in Britain compared with the same period a year earlier. It reports 250 incidents - nearly 10 a day - the highest number since it began its work 25 years ago. Among them are attacks on synagogues, including arson, and physical assaults on Jews. One man was set upon in Golders Green, north London, by two men who shouted, "This is for Gaza", as they punched and kicked him to the ground.

Blood-curdling graffiti has appeared in Jewish areas across the country, slogans ranging from "Slay the Jewish pigs", and "Kill the Jews", to "Jewish bastardz." Jewish schools have been advised to be on high alert against attack. Most now have security guards on the door; some have a police presence.

The threat is real, and yet barely a word has been heard from those who pride themselves on their vigilance against racism . . .

Riazat Butt, the Guardian's religious affairs correspondent, describes in a joint edition of the *Guardian's* Islamophonic and Sounds Jewish Podcast how at one demo she heard the cry not only of "Down with Israel" but "Kill Jews". An anti-war protest in Amsterdam witnessed chants of: "Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas."

Why, Freedland wonders, would official Britain be so willing to defend the nation's Muslims and to insist on their treatment with kid gloves and yet remain silent where the Jews are concerned?

Really? Does Freedland seriously not get it?

The first problem that the Jews face in getting a fair shake is that they're . . . well . . . Jews. After all, they don't call it "the oldest hatred" for nothing. Great Britain may not have the record of virulent anti-Semitism that some of its European brethren have, but it's hardly been immune. As British MP Denis McShane noted yesterday, "even in Britain the Duke of Wellington of the time [during the Great Depression] was leader of a secret anti-Jewish organisation which had the initials PJ – Perish Judah – on its letterhead."

Today, public sentiment throughout the EU, including Great Britain, blames the Jews for stirring up trouble in the Middle East and, more tellingly, for allegedly being a part of the international banking system that has collapsed under the weight of its own mistakes and corruption, leading to the current economic downturn. Old habits, as they say, die hard, and so do old prejudices.

For our purposes today, though, Europe's endemic anti-Semitism is a secondary cause of Britain's double standard. The real issue is the fact that when the Jewish community is offended, when Jews are singled out and made to feel scorned, when Jews get upset, no one gets blown up; no one gets his head chopped off; there are no riots and no public calls for the death

of various individuals; there are no *fatwas* issued. The same, sadly, cannot be said when the Muslim community is similarly unhappy.

Now, for the record, this does not mean that every Muslim is violent or that all Muslims support terrorism or that anything but a small minority of Muslims participate in aggression against Westerners. But so what? There is a large enough, vocal enough, and passionate enough minority to make the fear of Islamic reprisal a legitimate one. Moreover, up to this point, the purported “silent majority” of Muslims who supposedly do not support the violence has remained just that, *silent*. All of which is to say that irrespective of how many Muslims actually support or advocate terrorism, the loudest and most vocal factions within the community do, defaming the entire religion and setting the standard for expected response to offense, especially in Europe.

So why do Britain’s leaders speak out to ensure no reprisals against Muslims but do nothing to ensure calm for the nation’s Jews? Well, in large part because they’re scared to death of the Muslims, but not the Jews.

But it goes deeper than that. Much deeper. Four weeks ago, in a piece titled “Men Without Chests,” we quoted from Ze’ev Maghen, the senior lecturer in Islamic history and Persian language and chair of the department of Middle East Studies at Bar-Ilan University in Israel and research fellow at Bar-Ilan’s Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies, who noted the following:

Among theorists of international conflict resolution, the belief is widely held that the removal of one party’s “enclaves” or “outposts” from territory claimed by a rival party can not only help create mutually satisfactory borders but can inaugurate the kind of equilibrium that will eventually allow foes to become friends. In Europe, the great example is the post-World War II territorial

adjustments that, however painful, put an end at last to the centuries-old enmity of France and Germany. In the Middle East, on a purely local scale, the same logic underlay Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s policy of evacuating Israel’s Gaza settlements and handing over the territory to the Palestinians, as it did Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s projected “consolidation” of the Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria.

The specter that now haunts the state of Israel is that the West may some day adopt this logic, deeply problematic as it has proved to be locally, and apply it internationally vis-à-vis Iran and the “Little Satan” as a means of resolving the larger conflict between fundamentalist Islam and the “Great Satan.” For no agenda is being pushed more energetically by today’s Islamists worldwide than that, for the sake of Muslim-Christian rapprochement, and on pain of terrible consequences otherwise, America and Europe agree to offer up the Western imperialist enclave or outpost known as Israel on the altar of “accommodation.” . . .

The Iranians and their allies throughout the Muslim world are bent on making the abandonment of Israel the price of “peace in our time.” In a scenario that should ring frighteningly familiar, a charismatic leader of an ideological, totalitarian state is building upon an endemic anti-Semitism inculcated by centuries of religious indoctrination to create an atmosphere in which the massacre of large numbers of Jews and the destruction of their independent polity will be considered a tolerable if not indeed a legitimate eventuality.

Obviously, Maghen's comments are intended to apply at the global level, addressing Israel specifically. But a similar phenomenon is almost certainly at work at the micro or national level. Simply substitute "Islamists" for "Iranians" and "Jews" for "Israel" in the first sentence of the last paragraph of the quote, and you have a nice summary of what is taking place in places like Great Britain and throughout Europe. "The Islamists and their allies throughout the Muslim world are bent on making the abandonment of Jews the price of 'peace in our time.'"

You want your cities to stay calm? Blame the Jews. You want us not to blow you up or chop off your head? Look the other way when we kick the crap out of kids leaving synagogue. You want us not to pour into the streets by the tens of thousands, chanting death to Gordon Brown, death to Great Britain, and death to America? Then understand that Jews are our *common* enemy and that we demand your help in intimidating them.

Giving in to pressure; conceding out of fear; tacitly blaming the Jews; overtly blaming Israel for the Middle East's mess; barring inflammatory critics from entering the country – all of these and more are the acts of submission proffered by the leaders in Great Britain and Europe in return for the promise of peace and tranquility – a promise which remains unfulfilled, but which is offered over and over to the feckless and relentlessly simple leaders of the West.

And sadly, these acts of submission to the Islamists are not relegated exclusively to Europe. As we noted last week, when Barack Obama gave his first interview as President of the United States, his defenders declared it brilliant and inspiring, a bold attempt to demonstrate to the people of the Islamic world that the new leader of the most powerful nation on earth seeks their friendship rather than their enmity. And perhaps such a claim would be at least marginally believable (if only in the political context) had the President not used the occasion to disparage his own country, to dissemble about the nature of the recent history between the United States and Muslim

peoples, and preemptively to concede the issue of responsibility for the hostility between the West and Islam. As the columnist Charles Krauthammer put it:

Every president has the right to portray himself as ushering in a new era of this or that. Obama wants to pursue new ties with Muslim nations, drawing on his own identity and associations. Good. But when his self-inflation as redeemer of U.S.-Muslim relations leads him to suggest that pre-Obama America was disrespectful or insensitive or uncaring of Muslims, he is engaging not just in fiction but in gratuitous disparagement of the country he is now privileged to lead.

But this is hardly President Obama's fault alone, and he is hardly the only perpetrator. Just over three years ago, when the Muslim world erupted in violence and protest over the Danish publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in a less-than-flattering light, only two American dailies, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The New York Sun*, had the mettle to reprint the allegedly offensive drawings. To the rest of the editors and publishers around the country, the risk, apparently was not worth the reward.

On a similar note, just last week, in Western New York, a Muslim man – the very picture of moderate Islam – *beheaded* his wife, yet no one seems much to care, and certainly the mainstream press is less than interested. As the inimitable Mark Steyn noted:

Just asking, but are beheadings common in western New York? I used to spend a lot of time in that neck of the woods and I don't remember decapitation as a routine form of murder. Yet the killing of Aasiya Hassan seems to have elicited a very muted response.

When poor Mrs. Hassan's husband launched his TV network to counter negative stereotypes of Muslims, he had

no difficulty generating column inches, as far afield as *The Columbus Dispatch*, *The Detroit Free Press*, *The San Jose Mercury News*, *Variety*, NBC News, the Voice of America, and the Canadian Press. *The Rochester Democrat & Chronicle* put the couple on the front page under the headline “Infant TV Network Unveils The Face Of Muslim News”.

But, when Muzzammil Hassan kills his wife and “the face of Muslim news” is unveiled rather more literally, detached from her corpse at his TV studios, it’s all he can do to make the local press – page 26 of *Newsday*, plus *The Buffalo News*, and a very oddly angled piece in the usually gung-ho *New York Post* . . .

Does any of this mean that the United States is therefore destined to travel the same road as its European brethren into the virtual state of *dhimmitude* and perpetual censorship out of fear of Islamist reprisal? Of course not. For starters, America’s Muslim population is, in general, far more integrated into society and far less concerned with the finer points of “justice” and “respect” that preoccupy the disaffected Muslim youths in the Middle East and in much of Europe. Additionally, the tradition of anti-Semitism is less virulent in this country than in much of Europe, and no leader with any hope of maintaining a political future would dare to pick sides against Israel.

Moreover, the United States remains – at least to this point – dedicated to the foundational virtues of liberty and self determination. The aforementioned Mark Steyn suggests that this leaves “America Alone” in the battle against radical Islam. And the also aforementioned Geert Wilders calls the United States “the last bastion of Western civilization, facing an Islamic Europe.”

But the American future is anything but guaranteed. As we noted at the top of this piece, what is taking place in Europe today should serve as a cautionary tale about our own prospective future. Many in the political class – Democrats, Republicans, and others – appear tired of fighting over “foreign policy” and issues of national security and appear intent on doing whatever is necessary to muffle such matters and to return the political focus to domestic issues. Many in the electorate – Democrats, Republicans, and others – appear tired of fighting in general, tired of waging constant war, losing soldiers, and being perpetually targeted by the world’s disgruntled and discontented. Therefore the threat to this country – the threat that its guard will be let down – is very real. Whether those who currently hold the political power necessary to ensure that the guard is not let down have the courage and the focus to do so remains to be seen.

In this morning’s *Wall Street Journal*, Brett Stephens calls the Geert Wilders situation “a test for Western Civilization.” He’s right, of course. But this case and other future cases like it will, far more to the point, be a test for the United States’ political elites.

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