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THEY SAID IT

The Utopian socialists could explain in part how the state of affairs which they deplored came about. They could also explain why such a state of affairs did not appear deprecatory to others. But they could not explain in the slightest their own ideals of social reform. They appeared to themselves as if they were outside of the social process—as if they were historical mutants whose fertilizing ideas would revolutionize the existing order. The philosophy of other people was determined by circumstances and education but not their own philosophy. And, in fact, how could it be on their materialistic assumptions, since their circumstances and conditions were quite similar to those of “the others” who disagreed with them? That is why Marx properly points out that this mixture of socialism and materialism leads to a belief in a division of society into two parts -- one of common-run people whose ideas are simply determined by circumstances and education, the other of choice Utopian spirits who are elevated above society and social laws, the rare gifts of the gods to an errant humanity.

Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx*, 1950.

MUGGED BY REALITY.

One of the most dramatic moments in medicine is when a comatose patient responds to a request to “squeeze my hand if you can hear me.” Last week, we and many Americans of like mind were provided with a few, similar, highly welcome, small rays of hope that Barack Obama is cognitive, if not fully alert.

The first of these was when he told government lawyers to object to a court-ordered release of additional images showing alleged abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib because it could affect the safety of U.S. troops and “inflare anti-American opinion.” The second came when he announced plans to re-institute the military tribunals at Guantanamo Bay. A third took the form of an announcement that his administration is considering detaining some terrorist suspects on U.S. soil indefinitely and without trial. We were speechless, gobsmacked. Somewhere, somehow, reality had penetrated the opacity of the President’s mind.

And finally, *mirabile dictu*, a truly remarkable indication of the presence of cerebration occurred when Barack publicly acknowledged that the federal deficit is “unsustainable,” then added that he was aware of the simple fact that “we have to pay interest on the debt.” Perhaps, we thought, the world could now look forward to a time when the President of the United States would be able to comprehend such arcane concepts as compound interest and Bohm-Bawerk’s theory of the time value of money.

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Of course, like the above mentioned little squeeze of a hand from a formerly unresponsive loved one, these incidences told an anxious world nothing about the extent of the brain befuddlement from which Barack has obviously been suffering for many years. Nor did they offer any real insight into the possibility that someday his thought processes might function normally. But they did provide some indication that he is at least aware that there is a world outside of his own narcissistic existence, that this world is evaluating his performance using measurements that are not of his own making, and that somehow this process *may* be important to him. And that is a good thing.

But one need not be an expert to understand that a full recovery would require the young president to abandon the kind of behavior that got him into the perilous situation in which he finds himself. The first step in this multi-step process would be to identify the origins of his debilitating affliction and then publicly acknowledge that it is a problem. The next step would be to avoid his old neighborhood, his old friends, his old ways. If he fails to take this important step, he is unlikely to ever escape his addiction to the grotesque meliorism of the liberal dream world that produces the snowy white dreams that engulf him, for, to paraphrase Coleridge, he on liberal honey-dew hath fed.

In an effort to aid him in this process, we have done extensive research on the subject and have concluded that he is suffering from a psychological disorder called the Bellamy Syndrome. This disease has not been widely studied, but there is little question that it is an extreme threat to good mental hygiene. It appeared on the scene in the early 19th century via the establishment of a 165 or so “Bellamy Clubs” across the nation, which were devoted to the discussion and propagation of the ideas contained in Edward Bellamy’s classic, socialist tome, *Looking Backward*. The book was published in 1887 and had, by 1990, according to one report, sold more copies than any other book in America with the exception of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Ben-Hur*. It was listed in several surveys in 1935, as the “most influential work written by an American in the preceding fifty years.”

Looking Backward is a utopian fantasy about a young Bostonian, Julian West, who falls into a deep sleep in 1887 and awakens in 2000 to a world of peace and plenty, and to a nation where there is no squalor and injustice.

Bellamy’s utopia is regimented and hierarchical, ruled by a “competent elite.” Most significantly, private capitalism has disappeared. Everyone is employed by one big business corporation, a single capitalist, the state. The vision of the book is a perfectly organized industrial system that, by reason of the close interlocking of its wheels, works with a minimum of friction and a maximum of wealth and leisure to all. The following is a brief description of Bellamy’s fantasy world from the *Forward* written by Erich Fromm to the Signet Classic paperback edition dated 1960.

Everyone receives the same amount of money, regardless of the amount of work he does. Everyone has the right to a decent human life not because he excels in this or that, but because he is a man . . . All means of production are in the hands of the state, and there is no private owner of capital or business. Both the kind and the extent of work anyone does is determined by individual choice. Bellamy’s good society is one the aim of which is not luxury and consumption *per se*, but the good life; and work, while freely chosen, is not the aim of life either. After the age of forty-five, everyone is exempt from further economic service to the nation, with the exception of the very specialized professional and administrative jobs which give pleasure and require a great deal of experience. It is Bellamy’s basic principle that the system is “entirely voluntary, the logical outcome of the operation of human nature under rational conditions.”

One of the striking features of Bellamy's utopia is the fact that people not only live better materially, but that they are different psychologically. There is no individual antagonism, but a sense of solidarity and love. Their principle is that one accepts only those services one is willing to return. They are frank and they do not lie, and there is complete equality of the sexes, with no need for deceit and manipulation. In other words, it is a society in which the religion of brotherly love and solidarity has been realized.

By any measure, this treacle makes Alice In Wonderland look like a script for a television reality show. What is not so obvious, although Alice knew it instinctively, is that treacle can be deadly.

“They lived on treacle,” said the Dormouse, after thinking a minute or two.

“They couldn't have done that, you know,” Alice gently remarked; “they'd have been ill.”

“So they were,” said the Dormouse; *very* ill.”

Indeed, history demonstrates that this kind of honey-dew nonsense can cause liberal politicians to lose their grip on reality, to adopt the notion that they are pre-destined to fulfill some form of millenarian social role, to spend money they don't have, to build giant bureaucracies that do more harm than good, and to tear down centuries-old cultural and moral buttresses, leaving society exposed to evil and decay.

Examples abound, beginning with the French Jacobins. They slaughtered tens of thousands of innocent people who, in the words of the fanatic Danton, were not guilty, but “must die, because they are out of place, interfere with the movement of things, and will stand in the way of the future.” Hitler, Stalin, Mao Tse-Tung slaughtered tens of millions in their quests for a utopian world that could only exist in the fevered mind of someone suffering from an advanced case of Bellamy Syndrome.

So, can Barack recover his mental health before he does irreparable damage to the nation? As we said earlier, the fact that he apparently recognizes that his madcap spending spree is “unsustainable,” and that his attitude toward the terrorists in our midst is too blasé, indicates that he has not given himself entirely over to what Eric Voegelin described as the “dream conception of cause and effect.”

But a full recovery is a thin reed. A more reasonable hope is that reality, which is the only efficacious medication for Bellamy Syndrome, will provide occasional, temporary relief, especially during critical seizures. For example, one can hope that the realities of the bond market will penetrate the skein of illusion that is one of the defining characteristics of Bellamy Syndrome and prevent Barack's insane spending policies from totally bankrupting the nation; that the will of the American people to live will keep him from “perfecting” the health care system into a government directed death march; that the certainty of growing energy demand will overcome his utopian insistence that wind and sunshine can obviate the need for fossil fuel exploration; for Barack's sake, that he will someday learn to understand and cope with the real world; and for the sake of the nation, that it will survive until he does, or until he leaves office.

NANCY GOES TO WAR.

Late last month in these pages, we wrote that President Obama was playing with fire and that he should consider himself warned that any ongoing preoccupation with such subjects as “torture,” “enhanced interrogation,” and “war crimes” would all but certainly lead to a long, protracted, and destructive war of attrition among Washington's relevant players. Former Vice President Cheney had sent a warning, we wrote, that any attempt to criminalize disagreements over policy would be met with a firm and vigorous response, which would leave many of this town's big shots wishing desperately that the President had told his party's left wing to “shut up and move on” already.

We went on to predict that the torture debate would end with a whimper, not a bang, and that Obama, the undisputed leader of the American political left,

would lead his party and his administration away from the party's fringes and away from questions about the Bush administration's legal culpability. "Obama and his ever-loquacious Attorney General Eric Holder" we wrote, "will pat themselves on the back for being so magnanimous and for 'forgiving' guys like Dick Cheney for keeping the nation safe . . . [And then] they'll all move on . . ."

Looks like we were wrong.

What neither we nor President Obama could have foreseen then or at any point since is that this particular call would not be Obama's to make, that while he might have every intention of moving on and staying away from a domestic war of words, war would nonetheless be brought to him. What we could not have known, in other words, is that the Speaker of the House and Obama's fellow Democrat Nancy Pelosi would be so foolhardy, so reckless, so self-absorbed, and so clumsy as to launch the war herself, taking control of the issue away from the President – wittingly or unwittingly – and virtually ensuring that the next several months in Washington will revolve principally around the settling of scores and will devolve into petty back and forth squabbling, and little else.

The truly pathetic part of all of this is that Pelosi didn't start the war because she felt it was one that needed to be fought. She didn't start it because she was adhering to some treasured and heartfelt position or principle that had to be defended at all costs. She didn't even start it because she felt it would be in the best interests of her party. She started it because she was scared that her own lying and grandstanding had finally caught up to her and could, therefore, damage her political reputation and standing. She started it because she is – and you'll forgive us for our candor – really, really mind-numbingly stupid.

No? Well, we ask you, what kind of idiot thinks that it would be a good idea to get up in front of a bunch of reporters and declare that the CIA – the Central Flipping Intelligence Agency, for crying out loud – lied to her? What kind of idiot thinks it would be a better

idea, moreover, to continue digging, to compound her blunder, and to accuse the CIA not just of lying to her one time, but to accuse the Agency of "misleading the Congress" and of doing it "all the time."

Pardon us, but Ho. Ly. Crap. We've suffered through years of Democrats, media types, and even some disgruntled Republicans telling us how dumb guys like Ronald Reagan, Dan Quayle, and George W. Bush are. But nothing that any of them ever did, nothing they could have ever even imagined doing comes close to what Speaker Pelosi did last week when she blamed her woes and her own moral confusion on the lying SOB's at the CIA. Yikes. Yikes. And double Yikes.

So now the war is on. And unless Obama can act very quickly and very deftly to stop things from getting out of hand, this war, rather than the war in Iraq or the war in Afghanistan, will be the chief political story of the summer. And what a story – and what a summer – it will be.

Whatever the case, it seems to us that the first and perhaps the highest profile casualty in this war will be Mrs. Pelosi herself. A year ago this past January, we made the following prediction in our first-of-the-year forecast piece: "By year-end, Nancy Pelosi, the first woman Speaker of the House, will be the first woman former-Speaker of the House." We continued:

Four years ago, when Minority-Leader-for-Life Dick Gephardt finally gave up and retired from the House, Pelosi was elected to fill his leadership spot (and eventually to become Speaker). But she didn't make many friends along the way. And one of those whom she alienated was the man who serves now as the official second-in-command in the House, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer. Hoyer, a centrist from Maryland, has never been particularly close to Pelosi, a nutcase from San Francisco, and any residual loyalty he may have felt for her undoubtedly evaporated last year, when she tried to push her fellow anti-warrior, Jack Murtha, into the Majority Leader slot . . .

Hoyer will, we believe, challenge Nancy Pelosi for the Speakership next winter . . . And he will win

Now, we may have been off on the timing by a few months, but the dynamic remains the same. Does anyone think it's a coincidence that Majority Leader Hoyer has gone on record questioning whether the CIA would lie to Mrs. Pelosi and, moreover, laughing off the suggestion that the CIA would deliberately "mislead the Congress?" Does anyone think it is a coincidence that Hoyer is also the only prominent Democrat who has called for a full investigation of the Bush administration's interrogation techniques, of the Congressional briefings on those techniques, and, most notably, of the information that was shared by the CIA with members of Congress, including Speaker Pelosi?

Hoyer smells blood in the water. And, as far as we can tell, his olfactory sense is perfectly intact. Pelosi is done. The only question now is when. We'd guess before the summer is over. But as noted above, timing isn't always our strong suit.

The only thing, we think, that can save Pelosi's speakership now is a joint decision on the part of the Republicans in Congress and representatives of the Obama administration that she is more valuable to them as Speaker than as ex-Speaker. It is easy to see why the Republicans might conclude that Pelosi should be kept around. What could be better, from their perspective, than a damaged, irrational, CIA-targeted fool at the helm of the Congressional opposition? But it's much harder to figure why the Obama folks would want to keep her in that spot. As long as she stays, she'll be a lightning rod for charges of and discussions about Democratic complicity in the approval of enhanced interrogation techniques. And more to the point, she'll be an enormous distraction.

And that brings us to the second likely casualty of Speaker Pelosi's premature and ill-advised declaration of war, namely the Obama administration's agenda. Three weeks ago, we described one of the potential ramifications of a war over "torture" in the following terms:

If President Obama is frustrated now with the pace of "change" in Washington, just wait 'til he gets a load of how difficult things can be when the GOP digs in its heels and targets those Democratic Representatives from conservative districts. The Republicans in Washington obviously do not have the numbers to obstruct votes, but they can and, we presume, will do anything and everything in their power to distract, delay, and derail any piece of legislation the administration prioritizes.

It looks more and more to us like we can expect a summer of what we used to call "blessed gridlock." And given what the Obama team had on the agenda, this is something for which Republicans – and health care consumers in general – should be eternally thankful. This past Friday, John Dickerson, the chief political correspondent for the online magazine *Slate* lamented that Pelosi's declaration of war will distract from the important business at hand, writing:

The escalating mess is exactly why President Obama didn't want a thorough look into the question of torture. Fights like these distract from his effort to get politicians to focus on other matters, and the arguments potentially weaken his party by either undermining its high-road position on torture or making leading Democrats look unsteady, as Pelosi looked during her halting and jittery press conference.

We tend to agree with Dickerson, except for the whole "lamenting" part. For a party that based its entire 2004, 2006, and 2008 campaigns on its opposition to the "rush to war" in Iraq, the Democrats today seem in an awfully big rush to everything else imaginable. The stimulus bill, rushed through Congress this spring in the name of preventing economic catastrophe, is, at best, a joke. Almost none of the funds allocated have been spent. And those that have, have been spent on anything but stimulus, mostly just shoring up local

bureaucracies in relatively well off, affluent areas of the country. Moreover, the Treasury still doesn't know where all the money is going and hasn't figured out how to track it. If Pelosi's disastrous miscalculation last week helps prevent or at least forestall other such policy disasters, then we're all for it. The \$800 billion stimulus debacle was bad enough, but a rush to health care "reform" could be truly devastating.

Now, we don't mean to give you the impression that we think that a war between the parties (with the CIA thrown in for good measure) will be a good thing. Really, we don't. A long, protracted battle over yesterday's news has the potential to be quite ugly. Additionally, having the President and his party alienated from the Central Intelligence Agency is never a good thing, as George W. Bush learned the hard way.

That said, we do think that there are some rather significant silver linings here that might otherwise be overlooked. One of these is, of course, the above-mentioned gridlock. Another rather significant one is the expectation that, at long last, the country will have a real and important debate over national security and the policies that best accommodate it.

It's funny. For years, we agreed with the conventional wisdom that Dick Cheney's decision not to run for president in 2008 was an excellent one that freed him from the shackles of retail politics and made it possible for him to speak his mind, regardless of the political consequences. Now, we're not so sure.

Yes, it's true that Cheney was free from electoral political considerations. But he wasn't exactly free to say much of anything. He was, contrary to left-wing hysteria, the second banana. And he behaved in accordance with that role, which is to say that he said only that which the President Bush thought OK for him to say.

What this meant, then, is that the type of things that Cheney is saying today – the insistence that enhanced interrogation techniques worked, the claim that the "war on terror" saved countless lives in the United States, and the assertion that peace can be achieved

only through strength and not through pandering and diplomacy – went unsaid during last year's presidential campaign.

John McCain is a wonderful American who served and continues to serve his country nobly. But when it comes to knowledge, temperament, and ability to state positions coherently, the guy couldn't hold Cheney's jock. Not that that makes McCain unique among today's political class, mind you. In a fair fight, Cheney would demolish almost any other national politician you can name. And none of these national politicians, but McCain in particular, did much to address the questions of national security policy, aside from Iraq, in last year's election.

All of which is why we think, in retrospect, that it was so tragic that Cheney opted out of the presidential race. He may not have won. Certainly, with a public approval rating lower than Osama bin Laden's, it would have been tough for the Vice President to have had much of a chance. But that's not really the point. He would have forced the debate. And he would have done it quite well. Cheney, for all the venom directed against him, speaks clearly, knowledgeably, and in the soothing dulcet tones of a concerned grandfather. Reports say that many Republican insiders are beside themselves at the prospect of Cheney leading the charge against Pelosi, Harry Reid, and the Obama Justice Department. That's just dumb. If they had the guts and the erudition to lead the fight themselves, that'd be one thing. But they don't. So Cheney is compelled not just to defend himself and the administration in which he served, but to pull these sad-sack Republicans' coals out the fire as well. Again.

We complained for years that the Bush administration's greatest liability was its unwillingness to defend itself and its policies. Dick Cheney, apparently, seeks to remedy that. And good for him. His defense, naturally, comes too late to affect any electoral decisions, but it doesn't come too late to affect the public mood and, in turn, the policies of the nation going forward.

This weekend, *The Weekly Standard's* Bill Kristol called Vice President Cheney the “Most Valuable Republican of the first four months of the Obama administration.” Not only do I agree with that assessment, we think that, given the competition, Cheney probably also came in second, third, and fourth in the balloting. For the most part, the GOP has been steamrolled. Part of that is the fact that there are too few Republicans to do a great deal. But a larger part is the fact that too many of the Republicans left in Washington are overly concerned with message rather than policy position and are too slow and obtuse to make either their positions or their messages palatable anyway.

In this sense, a war of attrition between the parties could be useful, culling not only the useless fools who run the Congressional majority, but those who ostensibly run the minority as well.

Unfortunately, after last week's performance by one of those fools in the majority, the war will no longer be contained to just the two political parties. The CIA is involved now and for no other reason than to defend its honor against foolish and intemperate smears. And at the risk of sounding overly cynical, when today's CIA is the honorable party in a Washington tussle, you know something is deeply and seriously wrong. Moreover, as we noted last week, the CIA being at war with the president and/or his party while 'THE WORLD IS FALLING APART' can never be a positive development.

So San Fran Nan lobbed the first bomb in the war last week. Fortunately, her pitching arm ain't what it used to be, which is to say that said bomb landed right at her feet. Who, in addition to her, the bomb takes out will be one of the most fascinating and potentially fateful questions of the next few months – for better or worse.

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