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THEY SAID IT

The material conclusion from true insight into a century so fraught with danger of the greatest evil should be a radical negation of the whole concept of the lesser evil in politics, because far from protecting us against the greater ones, the lesser evils have invariably led us into them.

Hannah Arendt, "The Eggs Speak Up," 1951.

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THE WEEK THAT WAS, PART ONE.

If we were the compliant sort, we'd probably take our "talking to" from the likes of Shepard Smith and Catherine Herridge, two of Fox News's news readers; apologize for our unfortunate timing, if not our failure to grasp the big picture; and sit down quietly in our corner, duly reprimanded for our foolishness. But then, we're not really the compliant sort. So we won't.

You see, last week, just after we published our second piece this year mocking the Department of Homeland Security for its political hackery and calling its recent report on right-wing extremism a joke, a "right-wing extremist" made us look foolish, opening fire in Washington's Holocaust Museum, killing one of the museum's guards.

Or at least that's the story as it was told to us by Smith and Herridge, who could hardly contain their excitement at the opportunity to deride the silly right-wing kooks who watch the other silly right-wing kooks who populate that network. Indeed, not only did Smith and Herridge argue that we and others of like mind should be ashamed of ourselves for having disparaged the motives of the brave and insightful men and women at DHS, but also for enabling this "right-wing extremist" by not allowing the omniscient government types to do their jobs.

But the fact is, that Smith and Herridge were not just wrong, but tragically and dangerously wrong. They were so wedded to conventional wisdom and its handmaiden the mainstream press that they spun their story to fit the liberal "narrative" and, in doing so, missed the real story entirely, namely that the shooting was a critical event that serves not only as a harbinger of much suffering and commotion to come but as an explication of the ideological and conceptual rot that has characterized the post-9/11 Western world.

Yes, there is a narrative here, a story to be told. But it is not the story that Smith and Herridge and the mainstream press seem to think it is. As far as we can tell, this story can be told in three acts.

First, the shooting at the Holocaust Museum by purported right-winger James von Brunn had nothing – zip, zero, zilch, squadoosh – to do with the report issued earlier this spring by the Department of Homeland Security on the possible resurgence of right-wing extremism, no matter what the so-called experts say.

For starters, the DHS report focused principally on efforts to recruit new members to these right-wing ideologies. Von Brunn is hardly a “new” anything. The guy is 89-years-old. He’s been a white supremacist nut longer than half of The Political Forum has been alive. The factors that DHS claimed would exacerbate the supremacist movements in this country – e.g. Obama’s election, the recession – didn’t really exacerbate anything with regard to von Brunn.

Which brings us to the second point about von Brunn: Not only has the guy been thinking crazy things for a long time, he’s been doing them as well. His first run in with the law over his nuttiness, you may recall, took place not in this, the first year of the Obama administration, but in 1981, the first year of the *Reagan* administration, when he showed up at Fed headquarters waving a shotgun and claiming to have planted bombs in the building. Von Brunn served the remainder of the Reagan administration in prison.

Finally, some of the most excited commentators have insisted that DHS was prescient in tagging veterans as a possible source of violence, given von Brunn’s purported military past. Of course, the DHS report specifically mentions returning Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans, and von Brunn served in World-War-flipping-Two. But apparently that can be overlooked by the smart TV folks.

In any event, the claim that James von Brunn fits the profile described in the Homeland Security report is just plain nonsense. Sure, he’s a white- supremacist.

But nothing else fits. Nothing. At all. And the pretense that it does is just foolish.

The second broad point we’d like to make here is that the labeling of von Brunn as a “right-winger,” both by those who wish to play up the DHS connection and the press in general, is dangerously misleading.

Yes, it’s true that the guy hated the government and was scared of the United Nations, the Federal Reserve, and a host of other things that are generally associated with the political right. But beyond that, there’s not a whole lot that ties him to the right.

If you look at what he wrote, whom he hated, and why he hated them, the guy is actually far closer to many on the left these days than to anyone on the right. He hated, first and foremost, Jews. He was a rabid anti-Semite, which only makes sense, given his choice of targets. But he also hated the dastardly “neocons,” that terrible, horrible, no good, very bad bunch of intellectual types who have, rather successfully, tried to control American foreign policy and, according to the he-man-neocon-haters club, to influence it to the benefit of Israel, not the United States. He also apparently hated the neocon intellectual axis, since he allegedly also planned to attack the headquarters of *The Weekly Standard*, the magazine founded by Bill Kristol, who is also the founder of the Project for a New American Century (PNAC, a “neoconservative” think tank) and the son of one of neoconservatism’s founding fathers.

Does any of this mean he’s a left-winger? Of course not. But it does mean that he shares a great deal in common with the global left and, indeed, with the folks who, for the last eight years, led the opposition to the Bush administration and its foreign policy. Like von Brunn, the anti-Bushies blame the “neocons” for everything. Like von Brunn, the left sees the “Israel Lobby” as a nefarious force trying and succeeding at putting Israel’s interests above any others in this country. Heck, the left has even found intellectual “legitimacy” for this argument in the form of Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, professors of political

science at Harvard and the University of Chicago, respectively, who even wrote a book on the subject and have claimed that the “Israel lobby” “has managed to divert U.S. foreign policy as far from what the American national interest would otherwise suggest, while simultaneously convincing Americans that U.S. and Israeli interests are essentially identical.” And like von Brunn, the political left and anti-warrior types see PNAC and its associates (including the likes of Charles Krauthammer, Paul Wolfowitz, and Richard Perle) as the intellectual core of the neoconservative movement and thus as the enemies of mankind, or at least of “true” American patriots.

Von Brunn’s hero, of course, was Hitler, who, it should be noted, was a big shot in the National *SOCIALIST* movement in Germany. The Nazis, whom von Brunn so idolized, were no friends of capitalism or private industry; they believed that industry and government should work together, partner, collude in pursuit of the best interests of the *volk*. Heck, the Nazis even ran a car company, and designed and built “the people’s car.” What is there for a good leftie not to love?

Now, the point of all of this isn’t that the political left is responsible for von Brunn. It isn’t, any more than the political right is. The guy’s a lone nutjob, or, as *National Review*’s Jonah Goldberg put it, “He’s not a member of anything other than the crazy caucus.”

But there is a broader force at work here and a broader problem that should be addressed. The fact that von Brunn’s political views about Jews, neocons, George Bush, 9/11, and the rest are indistinguishable from the views of the anti-Bush forces and a great many alleged “thinkers” on the political left is indicative of the mainstreaming of anti-Semitism that has taken place since 9/11 and since the start of the Iraq War in particular.

Just a few years ago, open and virulent hatred of the Jews was reserved for a few members of the political fringes, who were rejected by every respectable political force in the country. Since 9/11, though, anti-Semitic thought and paranoia has been creeping up in Western political philosophy, most especially on

the left. Once only the fringe nutjobs who followed Lyndon LaRouche worried about the political “neocons” and their dastardly Jewish roots, whereas today, you’d be hard-pressed to find a mainstream political commentator who doesn’t feel comfortable attacking neocons as a matter of casual conversation. Again, to borrow from Jonah Goldberg:

For years, mainstream liberalism and other outposts of paranoid Bush hatred have portrayed neoconservatives – usually code for conservative Jews and other supporters of Israel – as an alien, pernicious cabal. “They have penetrated the culture at nearly every level from the halls of academia to the halls of the Pentagon,” observed the *New York Times*. “They’ve accumulated the wherewithal financially [and] professionally to broadcast what they think over the airwaves to the masses or over cocktails to those at the highest levels of government.”

NBC’s Chris Matthews routinely used the word “neocon” as if it was code for “traitor.” He asked one guest whether White House neocons are “loyal to the Kristol neoconservative movement, or to the president.” Von Brunn may have wondered the same thing, which is why he reportedly had the offices of Bill Kristol’s *Weekly Standard* on his hit list.

Unhinged Bush-hater Andrew Sullivan insists that “The closer you examine it, the clearer it is that neoconservatism, in large part, is simply about enabling the most irredentist elements in Israel and sustaining a permanent war against anyone or any country who disagrees with the Israeli right.” Leading liberal intellectual Michael Lind warned about the alarming fact that “the foreign policy of the world’s only global power is being made by a small clique” of neoconservative plotters.

Today, Democratic politicians openly opine about the reprehensible influence of the “Jewish Lobby,” and not only are they not embarrassed, they are routinely re-elected. Israel has become the official bad guy in global politics, the “oppressor” who tortures and punishes the poor, misunderstood Palestinians. Everywhere, criticism of Jews is considered more or less acceptable, as long as euphemisms like “neocon” or “Zionist” are substituted for “Jew.” Last week, President Obama’s spiritual mentor and longtime friend, Jeremiah Wright, declared that he was unable to get in touch with his former pupil because “Them Jews ain’t going to let him talk to me.” Feeling apologetic later in the week, Wright clarified his remarks, declaring that he’d meant say “Zionists” instead of “Jews,” which, he presumed, would make everything better. Pardon us, but oy vey.

And that brings us to our third broad point. In his initial response to the shooting at the Holocaust Museum, and the specific fact that an armed guard was shot, the columnist James Lileks wrote, “The fact that the Holocaust Museum has several armed guards tells you why we need a Holocaust Museum.” It’s hard to imagine truer or more astute words.

Anti-Semitism is *the* bedrock prejudice of Western Civilization. It is the cornerstone, the hatred to which much of the civilization returns, over and over again, when times get tough. In the grand scheme of things, von Brunn and his pathetic little shooting spree don’t matter a whit. But the mainstreaming of anti-Semitism, the fact that von Brunn’s rants about and against Jews are identical to those that pass for acceptable commentary, the nature of the ideological hatred that informs the status quo in foreign affairs – all of these do, in fact, matter. And they matter a great deal.

As the “global community” deals with economic collapse, with economic rebirth and the related shifts in power, with the attempt to find a solution for the millennia-old Arab-Israeli problems, and with the nuclearization of Iran, it needs to be aware of its singular and most ancient prejudice and the effects that it can have on otherwise rational decision makers.

Anti-Semitism has, stealthily, been gaining credence over the last decade or so. Unless it is stopped and re-stigmatized, the results could be catastrophic or, more ominously, apocalyptic.

THE WEEK THAT WAS, PART TWO.

There can be no question that “elections” are the theme of the week, at least for those us who care about foreign affairs. Election results – legitimate, fraudulent, and otherwise – have been in the headlines for the past several days, and we would be remiss not to discuss them and their potential impact on the global scene.

Unfortunately, the most fascinating election results are the ones about which we have the least to say. Is anyone surprised that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won last Friday’s contest in Iran? Is anyone surprised that the vote was rigged? Is anyone surprised that this has made some people unhappy? And is anyone surprised that the unlucky, unhappy few are currently getting their skulls caved in by the regime’s storm troopers?

Iran is a brutal state run by a handful of brutal men. These brutal men hide behind their religion to foment anger, hatred, and death. They are desperate to acquire the means to make their threats more serious and the death they encourage more extensive. What’s to know here?

As we go to press, the riots in Iran continue, as does the silence from the Obama White House. We can only hope that the President is either preparing a statement in support of liberty and in opposition to armed brutality or, that he will make us aware, eventually, of the role that clandestine American forces had in encouraging and supporting the Iranian opposition. We will not hold our breath, but we remain hopeful.

Beyond that, what can we say about Iran that will not be overtaken by events? If this insurrection results in anything other than the spilling of a great deal of innocent Iranian blood, we will be thrilled, though

surprised. Likewise, if the Obama administration does anything but shrink from this challenge, we will be both thrilled and surprised.

That said, there are other recent election results to address, results, which while less dramatic than the Iranian results, may portend equal disorder.

As you may or may not know, last weekend, the nations of Europe held elections for the European Parliament – not exactly the most important elections in the world, but still important enough to hint at the political tenor in many of countries and, specifically, to assess the current state of the battle between left and right. The columnist Anne Applebaum explains:

In France, Germany, Italy, and Poland – four of Europe’s six largest countries – center-right governments got unexpectedly enthusiastic endorsements. In the two other large countries, Britain and Spain, left-wing ruling parties got hammered, as did socialists in Hungary, Austria, Bulgaria, and elsewhere. In some places the results were stark indeed: In London this weekend, I could hardly walk down the street without being assaulted by angry, screaming newspaper headlines, all declaring the Labor government of Prime Minister Gordon Brown weak, corrupt, tired, arrogant, and, yes, very unpopular. In some constituencies, European candidates of the ruling Labor Party finished behind fringe parties that normally don’t get noticed at all. So rapidly are British ministers resigning from the Cabinet that it’s hard to keep track of them (four in the last week – I think).

Unfortunately, the election results in Europe have been misinterpreted by a great many observers, who seem to have missed what is really going on. Again, Ms. Applebaum:

In last weekend’s European parliamentary elections, capitalism triumphed, at least in its mushy European form

But how is it possible that the European right is doing so well—and so much better than their U.S. counterparts—during what is widely described as a crisis of global capitalism? At least in part, the Europeans are winning because their leaders have the courage of their economic convictions

If nothing else, the success of the European center-right during the current crisis proves that there is something to their political formula. They are fiscally conservative. They are, if not socially liberal, then at least socially centrist. They haven’t been swayed by the fashion for big spending. They are trying to keep some semblance of budget sanity. And, at least at the moment, they win elections.

This is nuts, to put it mildly. The ideas that European conservatives are fiscal conservatives and that somehow fiscally conservatism coupled with social liberalism is a formula for electoral success are, more or less, figments of Applebaum’s imagination. European conservatives are the kind of conservatives whom people like Applebaum really dig. Hey, they’re not all fuddy-duddy about a little welfare here or there. They don’t get caught up in religious hokum. They’re not obsessed with all this tax cutting nonsense. They’re cool. Not like that square Mitt Romney or that religious nutcase George Bush.

The only problem with this fantasy is that it is coupled with a broader reality, namely that the “conservatives” in Europe tend as well to be nationalists, anti-immigrationists, and purported defenders of national and cultural identity, which is to say that they’re not always as cool as the Applebaums of the world might think, at least to the Applebaums of the world.

In a piece published last week by *City Journal*, Bruce Bawer, a gay American expat living in Amsterdam, noted that Europe’s rightward shift, including the

recent EU elections, is more a sign of frustration with the status quo on immigration and national identity than anything else. He put it this way:

The shift has two principal, and related, causes. The more significant one is that over the last three decades, social-democratic Europe's political, cultural, academic, and media elites have presided over, and vigorously defended, a vast wave of immigration from the Muslim world—the largest such influx in human history. According to *Foreign Affairs*, Muslims in Western Europe numbered between 15 and 20 million in 2005. One source estimates that Britain's Muslim population rose from about 82,000 in 1961 to 553,000 in 1981 to 2 million in 2000—a demographic change roughly representative of Western Europe as a whole during that period. According to the *London Times*, the number of Muslims in the U.K. climbed by half a million between 2004 and 2008 alone—a rate of growth ten times that of the rest of that country's population.

Yet instead of encouraging these immigrants to integrate and become part of their new societies, Western Europe's governments have allowed them to form self-segregating parallel societies run more or less according to sharia. Many of the residents of these patriarchal enclaves subsist on government benefits, speak the language of their adopted country poorly or not at all, despise pluralistic democracy, look forward to Europe's incorporation into the House of Islam, and support—at least in spirit—terrorism against the West. A 2006 *Sunday Telegraph* poll, for example, showed that 40 percent of British Muslims wanted sharia in Britain, 14 percent approved of attacks on Danish embassies in retribution for the famous Mohammed cartoons, 13 percent supported violence against those who insulted Islam, and 20 percent sympathized with the July 2005 London bombers

More and more Western Europeans, recognizing the threat to their safety and way of life, have turned their backs on the establishment, which has done little or nothing to address these problems, and begun voting for parties—some relatively new, and all considered right-wing—that have dared to speak up about them. One measure of the dimensions of this shift: owing to the rise in gay-bashings by Muslim youths, Dutch gays—who ten years ago constituted a reliable left-wing voting bloc—now support conservative parties by a nearly two-to-one margin.

It should be noted here that the unfortunate election results for Britain's Labor Party did not necessarily mean fortunate results for its Tories, or at least not for its Tories alone. The anti-Europe United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) finished just behind the Tories, and the British National Party (BNP), an openly racist and avowedly fascist group, also polled very well. Indeed, the BNP won two seats in the European Parliament, making it the first fascist party even to win such high office in Britain.

While Applebaum and the rest may go on pretending that this is an economic or soft-left social rebellion, what it is, in reality, is the opening shot in Europe's battle for self. It's not really a culture war, as we understand the term in this country, but it is a war over culture, over who will control it, and whether the distinct national cultures of Europe will even survive the coming decades.

As with the Iranian elections, we're hopeful that things will turn out well regarding this cultural battle, but we're not particularly confident. While we certainly would like to see Britain and France and Germany and the rest reassert their unique identities and make a greater effort at assimilating their immigrant populations, we're not convinced that there is the will to do so and, more to the point, if there is the will, whether it can be harnessed peacefully. The Islamists have always assumed that they have the Europeans on the run, and they may well be right. Europe may die with a whimper, not a bang. But if it does not,

if the Europeans fight back, there is a real possibility that streets of the continent's cities will run with blood. Recall that Nazism and fascism are European creations. And it is hardly outside of the realm of possibility that a backlash will be both excessive and bloody.

THE WEEK THAT WAS, CONCLUSION.

Believe it or not, the two stories presented above are connected, at least tangentially. How, you ask? The *Washington Post* explains:

Von Brunn sometimes spoke of having fought for the wrong side in World War II, Blodgett said, and the two men sometimes attended meetings in Arlington County of the American Friends of the British National Party, which raised funds for the British white supremacist group.

There you have it, the Holocaust Museum shooter and the newly elected European Parliamentarians together in one place, hating Jews and eagerly supporting fascism in all its manifest ghastliness.

It is worth recalling, we think, that the extremist ideologies that so dominated the twentieth century – Communism, fascism, National Socialism – were all borne of economic disruption, social upheaval, and political confusion. And clearly something along similar lines is at work in the West today, as a monstrous recession combines with immigration worries, the intellectual assault on traditionalism by post-modernism, and the physical assault by radical Islam.

What does it all mean? How will it all end?

Do we look smart to you?

We have, in short, no idea where this is going. We can say that anti-Semitism is a great and transcendent threat – as the Communists, fascists, National Socialists, British Nationalists, and James von Brunns of the world have demonstrated and continue to demonstrate.

The next several years will be trying, to put it mildly. And we doubt seriously whether platitudinous substitution for real leadership will suffice, either at home or abroad.

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