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THEY SAID IT

Our history hitherto proves . . . that with wisdom and knowledge men may govern themselves; and the duty incumbent on us is to preserve the consistency of this cheering example, and take care that nothing may weaken its authority with the world. If, in our case, the representative system ultimately fail, popular governments must be pronounced impossible. No combination of circumstances more favorable to the experiment can ever be expected to occur. The last hopes of mankind, therefore, rest with us; and if it should be proclaimed that our example had become an argument against the experiment, the knell of popular liberty would be sounded throughout the earth.

Daniel Webster, Speech at the dedication of the Bunker Hill Monument, June 17, 1825.

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Change.

PEOPLE, SHMEOPLE.

What do the *de facto* nationalization of Chrysler and GM, the House of Commons' expenses scandal in the UK, President Obama's proposed health care "reform," and the Obama administration's slow-footed responses to the protests and carnage in the streets of Iran all have in common? And no, the answer we're looking for here is not "all will, at some point in the near future, be the subject of a bad made-for-TV movie."

What they all have in common, what they all demonstrate so clearly and so unmistakably is that the erstwhile "democratic" regimes of the West no longer particularly care much for government of the people, by the people, and for the people. In fact, they hold "the people" in downright contempt. A mixture of ideological conceit, personal egotism, petty corruption, and statist evolution has left the great "democratic" founding states without much interest in the "demos" they purport to represent. The people, it seems, are mere subjects or, worse yet, obstacles to be dodged in the pursuit of "higher" ends.

Let's take a look, for example, at the health care debate, which, mercifully, seems to be losing steam. For years now, we've been told that the current health care system is failing. Not just inadequate or troubled, mind you. But failing. Miserably. We have also been told that only government can solve this mess, bringing both insurance to the uninsured and cost restraint to an otherwise out-of-control inflationary spiral. And mind you, it's not just the current administration selling this poppycock, but the entirety of the Democratic party and nearly the entirety of the mainstream media, as if there's much difference between the two.

And so, after the proverbial full-court press for years, if not decades now, everyone is in agreement then, right? Well, not *everyone*. As it turns out, the "people" aren't really on board and haven't been for years.

A host of new polls shows that the public generally favors the concept of “reform” but detests the specifics of the proposed plans. The people like their own doctors and their own insurance plans. And they are wisely leery of greater federal government intervention into their lives, particularly in pursuit of ends that they don’t see as necessary. Most damning of all is the fact that many of these polls show that the public’s enthusiasm for all of this “hope and change” on health care is actually *lower* than it was sixteen years ago, when Bill and Hillary Clinton sacrificed their co-presidency on the altar of “reform.” Former Clinton pollster Stanley Greenberg tells the story:

Our failure to enact health care reform was tragic for the country, and it played no small part in my exodus from the Clinton White House. But the coming debate over reform is an opportunity that can’t be squandered, and it has prodded me to reconsider this chapter. I’ve been immersing myself in my old surveys and focus groups and memos to the president. It’s even led me to return to the field, posing the same questions to the public, to determine how the mood has shifted and how the forces that oppose reform can best be countered.

Perhaps I should know better than to have sensed any profound changes in the country. And, when I got the results for the new survey, I looked at each question warily, remembering how it all went badly wrong. As I reached the last of the questions, I exclaimed: “Oh no. It can’t be. Nothing’s changed.” . . .

If anything, I found on most of these questions that the desire for change and support for reform was slightly stronger 16 years ago, underscoring the importance of learning some lessons from that history.

Greenberg runs through the numbers, noting, among other things, that “three-quarters are satisfied with their own health insurance.”

Will any of this stop the so-called reformers from pushing their reforms and pushing them aggressively? Of course it won’t. Government has a “moral imperative” to act here, satisfied health care consumers be damned. Reform must be passed and it must be passed quickly. It’s important to get this thing done before more of the public realizes what this “thing” is and what is being “done” to them.

The only hope here is that once again the checks and balances that the nation’s Founders, in all their wisdom, placed into the system may work specifically as designed and prevent the trampling of the people’s will.

Unfortunately, the Founders’ vision could not save the good people of the United States from consequences of the purchase of Chrysler, even though it appeared, very briefly, that the judiciary branch of government, which is dedicated to reining in the executive branch, might actually do so. It didn’t. And the rest is economic history.

And who, you ask, demanded this takeover? Was it the “people”? The market? The bankers and investors? Nope. No one demanded it. Absolutely no one - - that is, except two presidents – the president of the United States and his co-conspirator in this regrettable action, the president of the United Auto Workers.

How well has all of this gone over with the public, you ask? To put a brave face on it, we’ll just say, not well. Scott Rasmussen gives the gory details from his survey published last week:

Eighty percent (80%) of U.S. voters want the government to sell its stake in General Motors and Chrysler as soon as possible.

A Rasmussen Reports national telephone survey finds that only 11% disagree and want the government to retain ownership for a long time.

Support for ending the government ownership is so strong that 64% favor a proposal that would force the government to sell the auto companies within a year. Only 26% are opposed.

Interestingly, Rasmussen breaks down the results further. “A majority of Republicans, Democrats, and unaffiliated voters all support the proposal to force the sale within a year,” he writes. “But,” he continues, “a majority of the Political Class (53%) are opposed.” Is anyone surprised?

The fact of the matter is that the government confiscation of the automakers serves many different purposes, but all of these are the purposes of the confiscators. And no one else.

The Chrysler and GM deals allowed the “political class” (aka The Obama administration) to pay back and buy off the UAW. It allowed for the demonization of “speculators” and other evil sorts who keep the capitalist world going ‘round. And, more to the point, it allowed the political class to bypass the silly and self-centered preferences of the marketplace in order to promote its own political pet projects, provide for the common good, and save the world from American car buyers’ reckless stupidity.

Now, never mind that the new Chairman of GM has admitted that he doesn’t “know anything about cars” or that the guy who spearheaded the administration’s auto policy from transition to takeover is a thirty-something campaign hack who studied no business and, like the new big cheese, “knows nothing about cars.” None of this matters. What matters is that trucks are bad. SUVs are selfish. And high-mileage electric-powered aluminum cans are the future of the American auto industry. Like it or not.

No blood for oil, you say? Just wait until these government-grown greenmobiles happen to have the misfortune of running into a remnant pickup or, heaven forbid, a semi. We guarantee you, the streets will run with blood – but the blood will be that of the people, not of the “political class.”

And speaking of streets running with blood (how’s that for a transition?), what have we learned from the last week of protests and riots by Iranian freedom fighters that could possibly be more somber and stomach-turning than President Obama’s utter indifference to the wants and desires of “the people,” both in Iran and here at home?

Now, there have been dozens of explanations for why President Obama has steadfastly refused to utter any words over the past last week that might be construed as supporting the anti-regime protesters. Some explanations are good; some bad; and some monumentally stupid. The official White House explanation, that the President doesn’t want to be seen as “meddling” in internal Iranian affairs, is ridiculous on its face.

For starters, President Obama hasn’t exactly been shy about meddling in internal Israeli affairs and, according to reports, has even sought backchannel discussions with Kadima Party leader Tzipi Livny, in the hope of bringing down the Netanyahu government and thereby acquiring a more “flexible” negotiating partner. More to the point, the offered rationale for the absence of “meddling,” namely the desire to keep the Mullahs from associating protesters with American provocateurs, is inane, given that the Mullahs have already blamed and continue to blame the uprising on American provocateurs, Obama’s silence notwithstanding.

Other, more complicated explanations focus on such things as Obama’s leftism, his belief in the historically negative role of American agents in the Third World, his belief in the inherent righteousness of people formerly oppressed by Western imperialism, and his related presumption that the Iranian people

deserve “better” than American assistance. These are compelling, no question. But as the deleted Word documents on our computers and crumpled up pieces of paper in our waste baskets tend to demonstrate, such explanations are also quite difficult to write and even more difficult to corroborate – true though they may be.

For our money, Occam’s Razor, which, essentially, posits that the simplest explanation is usually the correct one, leads us to conclude that the most reasonable explanation for Obama’s slightly creepy and rather bizarre behavior is that this stupid revolution has really messed things up for him. It has thrown a wrench into his plans for a grand media event in which he would do what no man has been able to do before, namely enthrall the Mullahs with his winning personality and rugged good looks, beguile them with his exotic ancestry, and entice them to give up their pursuit of nukes just because they find him so damn charming. And despite the obvious illegitimacy of the regime, demonstrated by this week’s brutality (in addition to three decades of wanton murder and slaughter), the President apparently clings to the hope that he will get his chance to schmooze the erstwhile unshmoozable. *The Washington Post’s* Jim Hoagland explains:

The administration’s words suggest Obama is caught in a political version of the theory of relativity – that he moves along a predetermined course that prevents him from seeing the new situation in Tehran exactly as it occurs. He clings to the pre-election paramount goal of keeping alive the chances for a nuclear deal with any government in Tehran.

Obama has repeatedly said – and did so again on Monday – that it really doesn’t matter to him if the Iranian regime is crushing its citizens on the street, he will still negotiate with whoever is in charge once the tear-gas smoke clears. Negotiations are what matter. Plans have been made. The “people” are just screwing

things up, getting in the way of bullets and the like. Don’t they understand that there is work to be done? Important, non-cowboy work.

For the record, when we suggest that President Obama is not particularly solicitous of the “people” where his Iran policy is concerned, it’s not just the Iranian people we have in mind. It’s also the American people and the Israeli people as well. Who other than the Iranians themselves, for example, would stand to benefit the most and the most immediately from a change in regime in Tehran? The Israelis, of course. Not only would they have at least a semblance of a chance to live without the now permanent threat of nuclear annihilation, but their tormentors on nearly every border would suddenly lose their financial, material, and psychological support.

There have been unconfirmed reports from Tehran that the Mullahs imported Hamas fighters from the Palestinian territories to help quell the rebellion, knowing that such forces would be far likelier to slaughter innocent protesters than would the protesters’ fellow Persians. And this could be vitally important. What could benefit Israel more than a new regime in Iran? One that understands the connections between the old regime and anti-Semitic terrorism and between the Palestinian hardliners and the old regime.

Additionally, the American people are threatened by the Mullahs, by their radicalism, their support for terrorism, and their pursuit of nuclear weapons. It used to be that the whole idea of the presidency was to do what was most likely to protect the safety of the American people, to eliminate threats to that safety, regardless of the means. That idea has gone out of vogue of late, though. And we suspect that while the President would certainly like to eliminate such threats, he doesn’t really see them as his principal responsibility. Other things, like “restoring America’s standing in the world,” appear to have taken precedent.

Now we will concede, in closing, that not all of this is Obama’s fault. He may be playing the game better than most, but he certainly didn’t invent it. That’s

why we included, in our introduction, the bit about the expense scandal in Britain's House of Commons. For those of you unfamiliar with said scandal, the inimitable Mark Steyn fills in the blanks:

Well, the Speaker has resigned. No, not Nancy Pelosi, but Michael Martin, Speaker of the House of Commons at Westminster. It's seven-and-a-half centuries since Sir Peter de Montfort served as "parlour" of the "Mad Parliament", and any office that's been around that long is bound to have attracted its share of dodgy characters. Yet Mr. Martin is the first Speaker to be forced from office since Sir John Trevor got the boot in 1695 after accepting a bribe of 1,000 guineas.

A thousand guineas? Ha! What a nickel-and-dime (or penny-and-farthing) loser. Mr Martin presided over a system which eliminated the need for bribes by allowing Members of Parliament to expense just about everything they could conceivably need – and a few things they didn't: You're supposed to claim only for items you use yourself, but Phil Woolas, Britain's Immigration Minister, managed to get reimbursed for a purchase of ladies' clothing and tampons. Perhaps he has some kind of novelty juggling act with which he amuses visiting dignitaries.

Those members less imaginative than Mr Woolas clean up by "flipping" (as it's called) their primary and secondary residences, and letting the taxpayer pay the upkeep of the more expensive. You don't even have to own two properties to get the state to pay for the "second": The Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith, designates her sister's home in London as her primary residence, and gets reimbursed for costs on her "second"

and only home back in Worcestershire. The Viscount Hailsham, as his moniker might suggest, has distinctive property maintenance needs: He was reimbursed £2,115 for the dredging of his moat.

Steyn doesn't mention it here, unfortunately, but among other things, Mrs. Smith, now the *former* Home Secretary and the woman who so piously refused entry into Britain of any "undesirables," including radio talker Michael Savage, also was reimbursed by the taxpayers for her husband's porn film rentals. And if that doesn't suggest contempt for the "little people" and a belief in a difference between said people and their "betters," we can't imagine that anything does. Taxpayer money is not something to be respected and used for the purposes of protecting and developing the nation. It is, rather, a perk, the means by which the important people can enhance their wealth and "get back" for all those years of dreary "public service." It's what the political class is "owed" – be it for personal, public, or even pronographic use.

What we have here, you see, is a condition whereby politicians – in the UK, in the United States, Labor, Tory, Republican, Democrat, whatever – have come to the conclusion that they are *different*, that is, better than "the people." They are better educated. Better informed. Better traveled. They know better what the country needs. And know better how to get it. They need not be troubled by the little folks, by their concerns about money, or by their worries about the future. The "people" are fine lot, but a lot that needs to understand its place and to understand that it can't possibly fathom just how difficult it is to run a country, much less the world.

Truth be told, we have never been the greatest defenders of democracy, and we are quite grateful to the Founders for establishing a republic, with its checks, balances, and obstructionist institutions. Moreover, we expect that the elected officials will often serve as a brake on the will of the people, providing leavening, prudence, and caution. Yet all of this – this overt distrust of and contempt for the

people – runs counter to the spirit and the character of the Anglo-American experiment and the exaltation of individual liberty. And that is disturbing, to say the least, and portends great ill.

This is, we are afraid, part and parcel of our longstanding bugaboo, the advance of the administrative state. Why do the people and their opinions matter, when “experts” can render a far more “rational” verdict and do so without all the mess and wasted time of politics? What difference do individuals make, when the real decisions can (and presumably should) be made over their heads?

Do the people want health care reform? Do they want the government to own two car companies? Do they want to see the Mullahs overthrown, or at least have their nation stand with the forces of good against evil?

Does anyone care?

CHANGE.

It used to be so simple. We were the good guys and they were the bad guys. Conservatives wanted to blow the hell out of the bad guys. Liberals wanted to talk them into becoming good guys. Neither approach was all that practical. So the competition went on and on for decades. It was as though the global television was constantly tuned to “The Wide World of Sports.” To make things easy for even the dumbest observer to distinguish the good guys from the bad guys, the bad guys built an “iron curtain” around their countries, not to keep people out but, like a giant prison, to keep them in.

Everyone involved understood the game and the rules. And, for the most part, everyone played by the rules, not because they liked them but because they were enforced by the sobering realization that the consequences of cheating were potentially catastrophic, i.e., that the world could get blown to smithereens if one side stepped too far over the line.

The good guys believed that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. From this religiously-based proposition, they recognized the truth of John Locke’s contention that the very foundation of individual freedom is that no one has a right to take another man’s property without his consent.

Lincoln stated this idea this way:

Property is the fruit of labor . . . property is desirable . . . is a positive good in the world. That some should be rich shows that others may become rich, and hence is just encouragement to industry and enterprise. Let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another; but let him labor diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built.

Reagan added this to the discussion in a radio address to the nation in response to the 1982 Soviet crackdown on the Polish union Solidarity.

Someone has said that when anyone is denied freedom, then freedom for everyone is threatened. The struggle in the world today for the hearts and minds of mankind is based on one simple question: Is man born to be free, or slave? In country after country, people have long known the answer to that question. We are free by divine right. We are the masters of our fate, and we create governments for our convenience. Those who would have it otherwise commit a crime and a sin against God and man.

The bad guys, on the other hand, maintained that there is no God, and even if there were, He certainly did not bequeath to anyone any unalienable rights to

anything, particularly not to the fruits of one's own labor. They believed that the state should own all property and that individuals are important not as individuals, and certainly not as products of God's love, but only as citizens of the state.

Interest in this disagreement was intense not only because it might spark a catastrophic nuclear confrontation, but because the subject in dispute involved a fascinating mix of the most fundamental of all human activities, social, economic, and theological. As such, virtually all of the greatest minds of the 20th century were deeply involved in some aspect of this controversy, which made it intellectually as well as practically interesting.

Arguably, one of the most succinct and insightful summaries of the moral nature of the fight was provided by Pope John Paul II in his great encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, written in 1991 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which was the Church's first public refutation of socialism. We've quoted John Paul's words in these in these pages before, but we figure it won't hurt to do it again, given the speed with which the United States is moving toward socialism today.

“. . . the fundamental error of socialism is anthropological in nature. Socialism considers the individual person simply as an element, a molecule within the social organism, so that the good of the individual is completely subordinated to the functioning of the socioeconomic mechanism. Socialism, likewise, maintains that the good of the individual can be realized without reference to his free choice, to the unique and exclusive responsibility which he exercises in the face of good or evil. Man is thus reduced to a series of social relationships, and the concept of the person as the autonomous subject of moral decision disappears, the very subject whose decisions build the social order. From this mistaken

conception of the person there arise both a distortion of law, which defines the sphere of the exercise of freedom, and an opposition to private property. A person who is deprived of something he can call "his own" and of the possibility of earning a living through his own initiative comes to depend on the social machine and on those who control it. This makes it much more difficult for him to recognize his dignity as a person and hinders progress toward the building up of an authentic human community.

When one reflects upon these by-gone days, it becomes startlingly clear that the arguments and tensions and dangers and opportunities and attitudes that govern the affairs of the world's nations today are vastly different from what they were a very short time ago, and that anyone who is interested in writing about or investing in this new environment must weigh these changes carefully.

For starters, it is increasingly apparent that global rivalries no longer have much to do with competing ideologies, values, or belief systems. Ideas involving such non-material issues as freedom, liberty, honor, decency, prudence, integrity, God's role in government, and the government's role in the lives of men no longer stoke the fires of antagonism between nations.

As Barack said in Cairo not too long ago, you guys killed 3,000 innocent people by flying airplanes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and we poured water down the noses of some people we thought might be involved in that action. Shame on both of us. Even Steven. Right? You believe and teach your children that Jews are sub-human, the spawn of monkeys, that God wishes you to kill them. But then, Americans practiced slavery a century and half ago. So, what the heck, can't we all just get along?

So, it's all about stuff today. Americans want "smart phones." The Chinese want in-door plumbing. The Russians want vodka. The Arabs want gold toilet seats, or at least their despots do; and with the

exception of the Iraqis, which Arabs but the despots get to have any stuff? The Afghanis want to grow poppies for the Europeans. The Europeans want Arab immigrants to do their work for them and to save them the trouble of bearing and raising the children who will, theoretically at least, tend to them in their old age.

Americans still talk a lot about the importance of liberty and justice and freedom and equality. And the President himself even throws in a word now and then about God, although after five months in Washington he still cannot find a church that is as appealing to him and his family as the one he left back in Chicago, whose pastor preached that the nation that Barack now leads is a fount of evil and should be damned by God.

Recruiters for the U.S. military still maintain that those who “join up” will be engaged in a noble “global fight for freedom.” But at the same time, Americans at home are surrendering their own freedoms to their own government at such a rapid pace that it won’t be long before they will be as dependent on and subordinate to the whims of the political elite as the Russians and Chinese were during the height of the Cold War.

Almost 20 years ago, Francis Fukuyama said that all the nations of the world were slowly moving toward a common political/economic system, which he described as “western liberal democracy” built upon a foundation of free market capitalism. As we have said numerous times in these pages, while he was correct in foreseeing the coming of a common system, it now appears that the system toward which we are all moving is not liberal democracy, but a bureaucratic partnership between government and big business, in which government is the senior partner; a state in which “the people” freely exchange their freedoms for the comfort of a government administered “safety net” and the promise of a steady supply of “stuff.”

This isn’t all bad, or course. On the plus side, the big nations no longer talk seriously about blowing up the world. After all, in the “age of stuff,” it would be

foolish to blow up the biggest consumer of one’s goods, or better yet, to blow up the nation that is responsible for keeping the global currency sound, even if it doesn’t do such a good job of it.

But there are new dangers to be considered in this globalized world, dangers that involve answers to questions such as these. Can the global marketplace function smoothly and fairly in a world run by gimlet-eyed bureaucrats who disdain the concept of divinely guaranteed individual freedom, which provides the justification for the ownership of property, and which is in turn is the foundation of capitalism? Can the global marketplace function smoothly and fairly without a commitment of sorts by all participants to a set of moral principles designed to reinforce and add vigor to the legal requirements necessary for trade to prosper? Can moral principles even exist and have meaning in a world where there is no universally recognizable set of standards to which one can appeal? Will not the increasing centralization of power in the hands of the *nomenklatura*, unschooled in economics, skilled only in the murky world of bureaucratic politics, lead to a global marketplace that is marked by economic lunacy and massive corruption?

Are we not already seeing a world troubled by these questions taking shape in the actions of the Obama administration, which has concocted an economically insane combination of tax increases, new spending programs, and empty promises of future fiscal responsibility for the sole purpose of relieving short term domestic pressures at the expense of the nation’s long term economic stability? Are we not already seeing a world troubled by these questions taking shape in the Obama administration’s massive attack on the integrity of the dollar, once again in response to short term domestic pressures but this time at the expense of the entire global marketplace.

We don’t know the answers to these questions. But we are fairly certain that we are going to find them out in the not too distant future. Stay tuned, as they say.

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