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THEY SAID IT

The objective indispensability of the once-existing apparatus, with its peculiar, "impersonal" character, means that the mechanism . . . is easily made to work for anybody who knows how to gain control over it. A rationally ordered system of officials continues to function smoothly after the enemy has occupied the area; he merely needs to change the top officials. This body of officials continues to operate because it is to the vital interest of everyone concerned, including above all the enemy.

Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1922.

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BUREAUCRACY AND TRAGEDY.

Any of you who have read our musings here for more than a couple of weeks undoubtedly know that we have spent a great deal of time fretting over the bureaucratization of this country and the rise of the administrative state. Of course, it's not just us. Bureaucracy as an ill-defined entity has been the near-universal antagonist for conservative politicians, pundits, and prosthetizers for more than three decades. Bureaucracy is bad, you see. And conservatism offers an alternative. Or something like that.

The problem with this formulation is that it is not quite correct. Bureaucracy is not the enemy. Excessive bureaucracy or the over-reliance on bureaucracy or the unchecked growth of the federal bureaucracy – these are the enemies. Bureaucracy itself is merely a form of social organization, one that is prevalent in the West because it is, relatively speaking, an efficient and rational instrument for harnessing the diffusion of specialized knowledge that characterizes advanced societies.

We know that many of our compatriots on the right are guilty of linguistic sloppiness with regard to bureaucracy. And we suspect that we too have, on occasion, been careless with our language. So let us be perfectly clear and careful this time: Bureaucracy is not a bad thing. It is not a good thing. It is a thing. The perversion of bureaucracy – by over reliance upon it, by the introduction of political correctness and its requisite betrayal of rationality, by the arrogance and overreach of the bureaucratic class, etc. – is a bad thing, a very bad thing that threatens the future of the freedom, liberty, and justice that characterize governance in the United States and a great many of its Western brethren. And today it does so in a new and troubling way, threatening the one bureaucracy that was, up until recently, generally immune from the excesses of the organizational type.

It is easy sometimes to forget, but Max Weber's depiction of bureaucracy was DEScriptive, not PREscriptive, which is to say that he described a phenomenon that existed but did not advocate on behalf of that phenomenon. Indeed, he warned that the perversion of and excessive deference to that phenomenon would be the undoing of the West. Weber admired bureaucracy, but wisely feared it as well. He put it thusly:

Bureaucracy inevitably accompanies modern mass democracy . . . This results from the characteristic principle of bureaucracy: the abstract regularity of the execution of authority, which is a result of the demand for "equality before the law" in the personal and functional sense – hence the horror of "privilege." . . .

Once it is fully established, bureaucracy is among those social structures which are the hardest to destroy. Bureaucracy is the means of carrying "community action" over into rationally ordered "societal action." Therefore, as an instrument for "societalizing" relations of power, bureaucracy has been and is a power instrument of the first order – for the one who controls the bureaucratic apparatus.

Under otherwise equal conditions, a "societal action," which is methodically ordered and led, is superior to every resistance of "mass" or even of "communal action." And where the bureaucratization of administration has been completely carried through, a form of power relation is established that is practically unshatterable.

The individual bureaucrat cannot squirm out of the apparatus in which he is harnessed. . . . The official is entrusted with specialized tasks and normally the mechanism cannot be put into motion or arrested by him, but only from the very top. The individual bureaucrat is

thus forged to the community of all the functionaries who are integrated into the mechanism. They have a common interest in seeing that the mechanism continues its functions and that the societally exercised authority carries on.

The ruled, for their part, cannot dispense with or replace the bureaucratic apparatus of authority once it exists. For this bureaucracy rests upon expert training, a functional specialization of work, and an attitude set for habitual and virtuoso-like mastery of single yet methodically integrated functions. If the official stops working, or if his work is forcefully interrupted, chaos results, and it is difficult to improvise replacements from among the governed who are fit to master such chaos. . . . More and more the material fate of the masses depends upon the steady and correct function of the increasingly bureaucratic organizations of private capitalism. The idea of eliminating these organizations becomes more and more utopian. . . .

Now, one of the most critical bureaucracies in this nation also just so happens to be one of the few shining examples of a bureaucracy that functions almost precisely as it should, utilizing the tools and characteristics of the organizational structure to promote rational management and effective outcomes. That bureaucracy is the United States armed forces. Or at least it was.

A bureaucracy, as described by Weber, is hierarchical, meaning that there is a division of labor with a coherent system of supervision and subordination. A bureaucracy relies heavily on job-specific training derived from and related to function. It relies on written rules and procedures and on the consistent application of those rules and procedures. And a bureaucracy also rewards proficiency, skill, and experience. Even if you tried, you couldn't possibly come up with a better organizational description for the American military.

And there is no question whatsoever about the effectiveness of this structure in its application by the military. The record speaks for itself. The United States armed forces constitute the best trained, most effective, and most lethal military in world history, limited only by its own will and the scope of its mission. Some of the best and brightest, bravest and boldest Americans can be found in the military; and the structure and organization of the services only enhance their skills and gallantry.

If there is a question about the military bureaucracy, it is how that bureaucracy has managed to remain so functional and so rational and how it has managed to insulate itself from the excesses that drive over-bureaucratization and have turned this erstwhile beneficial structure into the enemy of liberty. The answer is complicated, to say the least. And it is undoubtedly beyond the scope of this essay. But it should suffice for our purposes here to say that the constitutional and statutory limitations on the military's growth, authority, and dominion constitute the bulk of that explanation.

Civilian control of the military is a near-universally accepted principle in American governance, and an elected official (namely the President of the United States) sits at the top of the military's bureaucratic hierarchy. Both parties generally take their responsibility to oversee the military seriously, and both fight earnestly and determinedly over military funding.

All things considered, then, civilian supervision of the military helps to explain why the military remains the only truly functional large-scale public bureaucracy left in this country. Unfortunately, it also helps to explain why this functionality may well prove fleeting.

All one needs to do to see the threat posed to today's military is read, even if ever so briefly, the reporting on the military's investigation of the shooting at Ft. Hood. It is wearisome. And frightening. Here, for example, is a bit from *The Boston Globe*:

Army superiors were warned about the radicalization of Major Nidal Malik Hasan years before he allegedly

massacred 13 soldiers at Fort Hood, Texas, but did not act in part because they valued the rare diversity of having a Muslim psychiatrist, military investigators wrote in previously undisclosed reports.

An obvious "problem child" spouting extremist views, Hasan made numerous statements that were not protected by the First Amendment and were grounds for discharge by violating his military oath, investigators found.

Examples of Hasan's radical behavior have previously been disclosed in press accounts based on interviews with unnamed Army officials, including his defense of suicide bombings and assertions that Islamic law took priority over his allegiance to the United States.

But the Pentagon's careful documentation of individual episodes dating back to 2005 and the subsequent inaction of his superiors have not been made public before.

The Globe was permitted to review the Army's more complete findings on the condition that it not name supervisory officers who did not act, some of whom are facing possible disciplinary action.

In searching for explanations for why superiors did not move to revoke Hasan's security clearances or expel him from the Army, the report portrays colleagues and superiors as possibly reluctant to lose one of the Army's few Muslim mental health specialists.

The report concludes that because the Army had attracted only one Muslim psychiatrist in addition to Hasan since 2001, "it is possible some were afraid" of losing such diversity "and thus were willing to overlook Hasan's deficiencies as an officer."

It is worthwhile, we think, to keep all of this in mind as the debate over “Don’t ask/Don’t tell” begins to heat up. Personally, we have no problem with gay men and women serving in the military. It doesn’t bother us a bit. But, of course, we really don’t know anything about it. We don’t know the pluses and minuses of changing the current policy, and we have no idea how a new, gay-friendly policy might affect the function of the military structures.

Those who do, however, tend to worry about a change in policy and the effect that it might have on such nebulous concepts as unit cohesion. Note, for the record, that this complaint has nothing specifically to do with gay men and women, but with the conception of dedication to one’s unit and the unbiased execution of one’s duty. In a recent *Wall Street Journal* piece, the military historian and intellectual Mackubin Thomas Owens put it this way:

There are many foolish reasons to exclude homosexuals from serving in the armed services. One is simple antihomosexual bigotry. But as the late Charles Moskos, the noted military sociologist, observed during the Clinton years, this does not mean that we should ignore the good ones. And the most important is expressed in the 1993 law: that open homosexuality is incompatible with military service because it undermines the military ethos upon which success in war ultimately depends.

Winning the nation’s wars is the military’s functional imperative. Indeed, it is the only reason for a liberal society to maintain a military organization. War is terror. War is confusion. War is characterized by chance, uncertainty and friction. The military’s ethos constitutes an evolutionary response to these factors—an attempt to minimize their impact.

Accordingly, the military stresses such martial virtues as courage, both physical and moral, a sense of honor and duty, discipline, a professional code of

conduct, and loyalty. It places a premium on such factors as unit cohesion and morale. The glue of the military ethos is what the Greeks called *philia*—friendship, comradeship or brotherly love. *Philia*, the bond among disparate individuals who have nothing in common but facing death and misery together, is the source of the unit cohesion that most research has shown to be critical to battlefield success.

Philia depends on fairness and the absence of favoritism. Favoritism and double standards are deadly to *philia* and its associated phenomena—cohesion, morale and discipline—are absolutely critical to the success of a military organization.

The presence of open homosexuals in the close confines of ships or military units opens the possibility that *eros*—which unlike *philia* is sexual, and therefore individual and exclusive—will be unleashed into the environment. *Eros* manifests itself as sexual competition, protectiveness and favoritism, all of which undermine the nonsexual bonding essential to unit cohesion, good order, discipline and morale.

Is Owens right? We have no idea. But we do know that it is unlikely that his argument is going to get much of a hearing today, simply because it violates the tenets of political correctness. Even though President Obama himself appears to lack the guts to change the policy on gays in the military, that doesn’t mean that anyone who is foolish enough to open his mouth in opposition to altering the policy won’t suffer the consequences.

With so many incredibly gifted, talented, and courageous soldiers serving in today’s military, competition for promotion is exceptionally strong. And one little slip-up can mean the difference between promotion and the end of a career. With that sort of pressure as the backdrop, it is easy to see how the civilian obsession with political correctness and

with the culture of victimization could transform the erstwhile immune military culture, thereby attacking its bureaucratic balance, diminishing its effectiveness, and, ultimately, costing lives.

In the immediate aftermath of the Ft. Hood shooting, the Chief of Staff of the Army, General George Casey, declared that, “What happened at Fort Hood was a tragedy, but I believe it would be an even greater tragedy if our diversity becomes a casualty here.” At best, this is fatuous nonsense. At worst, it is dangerous fatuous nonsense, the kind of fatuous nonsense that indicates that even the military is unable to resist the temptations of bureaucratic disintegration. As the inimitable Mark Steyn recently ranted:

For 30 years we have watched as politically correct fatuities swallowed the entire educational system, while we deluded ourselves that it was just a phase, something kids had to put up with as the price for getting a better job a couple years down the road. The idea that two generations could be soaked in this corrosive bilge and it would have no broader impact was always absurd. When the chief of staff of the United States Army has got the disease, you’re in big (and probably terminal) trouble.

Education, obviously, was the first casualty of political correctness. But sadly, it was hardly the last. Almost no aspect of American life is free from the influence of political correctness today, and certainly no government bureaucracy. Given that the mindless adherence to PC platitudes tends to run counter to reason and rational behavior, it is hardly surprising that this has diminished the effectiveness and increased the foolishness of the bureaucratic structure.

Unfortunately, the immunity from this nonsense formerly enjoyed by the military appears compromised, and will all but certainly grow more so as debate over “Don’t ask/Don’t tell” progresses. That’s a shame.

Worse than that, it’s a tragedy.

LE MORTE D’PROGRESSIVISM.

For the better part of two years now, we’ve been told – over and over and over again – that the key to the fledgling Obama administration’s effectiveness would be its smart, savvy, and politically connected Chicago tag-alongs, most especially the much-ballyhooed Rahm Emanuel. Emanuel, you see, learned the game of politics from the Daley machine in Chicago, where the only rule is “win, whatever the cost.” He polished his skills in the Clinton administration, where the rules were much the same. Finally, he burnished his image and fostered his own legend by leading the Democratic counter-revolution that won back Congress in 2006 and made him the only serious threat to Minority Leader-cum-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and her power base. Rahm and the Chicago mob were the ultimate power players, the political *capos* who would see that the will of their charismatic and magnetic, yet woefully inexperienced godfather was enforced.

Or at least that’s what we were told.

Today, one could be forgiven for wondering what all the fuss was about. It’s possible that Rahm was never much more than a tough-talking goon who was able to intimidate those most willing to be intimidated, but who holds no sway over the rest of the world. It’s also possible that he really is the slick, menacing operator we were told he was, but that his loyalties lie not with the Chicago mob, but with the Hot Springs mob – which is to say that he’s playing Obama for a fool and making him look like a fool, all in an effort to win power back for the Clinton crowd.

Or – and our guess is that this is the most likely explanation – it could be that Rahm is just as arrogant and self-absorbed as his boss; that he thinks that there is no problem that the two of them can’t solve; that there is no one he can’t “convince” of his and his boss’s “rightness;” that all the world needs is greater exposure to him and, more to the point, to his boss. Did we mention yet – last week, perhaps – that these people are clueless?

Insanity, it is said (and apocryphally attributed to both Benjamin Franklin and Albert Einstein), is repeatedly doing the same thing over and over again, expecting the results to change. If this is the case, then Obama,

Rahm, and the rest of the administration could, rather easily, be classified certifiable. Obama showed up in Copenhagen, expecting that his mere presence would win the Olympics for Chicago. And he failed. He showed up in Copenhagen again, expecting that his mere presence would facilitate a global agreement on carbon emissions and “climate change.” And again he failed again. Over and over, the story is the same: Obama and his coterie show up and expect that their presence will be enough to secure victory. And it never works.

The most recent example of this, of course, is last week’s health care summit debacle. Obama held his little gathering, apparently expecting to befuddle the Republicans with his superior knowledge of the issue and thereby to convince the American public of his wonderfulness and the wonderfulness of his policy prescriptions. And it didn’t work.

Several things went wrong for Team Obama last week. For starters, they expected normal Americans to care about the summit and to watch their guy pummel the Republicans. They didn’t care. They didn’t watch. And even if they did, they didn’t see anyone get pummeled.

That brings us to the second failure for Obama, namely the fact that he didn’t win the debate. Indeed, he was, if anything, debated to a draw by the Tennessee Senator (and former governor) Lamar Alexander. Now, we have nothing against Alexander and actually think he’s a reasonably smart guy. But honestly. He’s also a guy who lost his run for the Republican presidential nomination in 1996. Think about that for a second. The One was unable to out-duel the man who was previously out-dueled by Bob Dole. Does anyone suppose that was the outcome that Obama and his political minders envisioned?

Worse yet, Obama’s performance reinforced the negative stereotypes about him, most notably that he prefers lecture to discussion, is shockingly superficial, and thinks that those to whom he is lecturing are too stupid to notice.

One of Obama’s anecdotes in particular demonstrated these failings most vividly. In a discussion about the fairness of insurance mandates and the need for

comprehensive governmental involvement, Obama told the following story:

When I was young, just got out of college, I had to buy auto insurance. I had a beat-up old car. And I won’t name the name of the insurance company, but there was a company — let’s call it Acme Insurance in Illinois. And I was paying my premiums every month. After about six months I got rear-ended and I called up Acme and said, I’d like to see if I can get my car repaired, and they laughed at me over the phone because really this was set up not to actually provide insurance; what it was set up was to meet the legal requirements. But it really wasn’t serious insurance.

Now, it’s one thing if you’ve got an old beat-up car that you can’t get fixed. It’s another thing if your kid is sick, or you’ve got breast cancer.

So what we have here is a case of young Obama, presumably buying the minimum insurance mandated by law to enjoy the STATE-GRANTED PRIVILEGE to *drive* a car. And not only does he complain that this minimal insurance didn’t pay for his repairs, but he compares it to the legally mandated insurance that he would require everyone to buy for the GOD-GIVEN RIGHT to *walk* among his or her fellow citizens.

Even if you can get over the monumental disconnect between state-granted privileges and fundamental rights, there is still the small problem stemming from the fact that the smartest president who ever lived and the former constitutional law professor doesn’t know what “liability” insurance covers. Either that or he believes that the American people are too stupid to know what liability insurance covers or too stupid to question his veracity. Whichever the case, the guy came off as smug, condescending, and no smarter than anyone else in the room (Nancy Pelosi, excepted, of course). Again, these can’t be the aesthetics for which the White House was hoping.

What Obama and his team apparently fail to recognize is that the overwhelming majority of people in the world are not nearly as impressed with him as they

are. This morning, Victor Davis Hanson noted that “Every President starts to wear on the public. But the omnipresent Obama has become wearisome in record time.”

Part of the reason for this “wearing” is the omnipresence Hanson cites. Obama may love to hear his own voice, but most people have grown tired of it, having heard it from one platform or another virtually every single day of their lives for the past two years. The guy never shuts up, never gives anyone a moment’s rest. A week or so after the blessed day when this poor damn fool leaves the White House, no one will be surprised if they find him in Chicago’s Lake Shore Park giving a speech to the sparrows.

The bigger part of the reason that the man has become wearisome, though, is the disconnect between expectations and reality. What Obama promised is radically different from what he has delivered – even if one ignores the grandiose promises of seas receding and worlds healing. The guy promised to be different, to bring change. He promised to be post-partisan and to fulfill the dreams and hopes of the long-suffering political cynics. And he hasn’t done any of it. Indeed, he doesn’t seem to have even tried.

Worse yet, he doesn’t seem to understand any of this. He and Rahm (and David Axelrod and Valerie Jarrett and the rest) appear to be but a handful of people in the world who actually still believe the hype. We thought that they were cynical; that they were manipulating the public’s yearning to put past bickering, racial animosity, and political skepticism behind them. In fact, it turns out that they actually believed – and continue to believe – that they and their guy are different, somehow better than anyone who has come before. And this is madness, to put it delicately.

We have, in the past, noted the President’s personal cluelessness and his advisors’ political cluelessness, arguing that these people are, as a collective, really, exceptionally bad at this. If anything, we underestimated their incompetence.

Now, Obama et al. appear to have decided to push their health care “reform” package through Congress, regardless of the consequences. As *The New York Times* reports this morning:

Increasingly, the White House appears to favor having the House pass a version of the measure that cleared the Senate with 60 votes in December. The Senate would then pass changes to the bill to satisfy some demands of House Democrats. That Senate vote would take place under a parliamentary procedure known as reconciliation, which requires 51 votes rather than 60.

With all due respect to the geniuses at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, this is historically stupid. It is a lose-lose for President Obama.

For starters, there is no guarantee that the House will pass the Senate bill. Indeed, there is a great deal of uncertainty about the House’s willingness to go along with the White House on this. The first House bill passed by only five votes. And this bill will likely prove even more contentious, particularly among pro-Life Democrats like Bart Stupak.

Mark our words: if Obama decides to pursue a course of ramming this bill through the Congress, using and abusing the budget reconciliation process, he will regret that decision. If the bill fails; if he is unable, even with huge majorities for his party and with the manipulation of the process, to impose his will on the American people, then his presidency is as good as over. The people in the White House appear completely unaware that the President has only a limited supply of what is called “political capital.” And the more they squander it, the less they will have for future endeavors, which is to say that the more often Obama puts his personal reputation on the line and fails (as he did in Copenhagen twice) the less reputation he has to put on the line the next time. Obama is, in other words, quickly becoming a joke. And if he loses this fight – this rigged and stage-managed fight – the joke will become bigger more quickly. This may well be the point of no return for Obama and his reputation.

And that may be the “good” outcome for him in this mess. If the Democrats pass this bill and do so through the rigging of the process and the abuse of the reconciliation maneuver, it is possible that all hell will break loose among independents and conservatives.

The 30% of the country that comprises the Democratic base may well be happy, but the entire remaining plurality of the electorate is likely to be unhappy. Really unhappy. Really, *really* unhappy.

As we have noted before in these pages, health care was a stupid fight for Obama to pick. The upside is minimal and the downside is monumental. Apparently neither he nor his enforcer Rahm agrees with us. Health care is the left's Holy Grail, we guess, and they've been searching for it for decades. But if Obama – this modern day Galahad – finds that Grail, then he should be prepared to see himself and his political career borne up to heaven by Joseph of Arimathea . . . errr . . . well . . . something like that.

Maybe, like Galahad, The One is willing to make that sacrifice.

Or maybe Rahm is still working for Bill and Hill.

Either way, this should be fun. Ugly, damaging, likely destructive. But fun nonetheless.

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