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THEY SAID IT

If we attend carefully to the psychology of the persons who manifest such an eagerness to serve us, we shall find that they are even more eager to control us. What one discovers, for example, under the altruistic professions of the leaders of a typical organization for humanitarian crusading, like the Anti-Saloon League, is a growing will to power and even an incipient terrorism

On the pretext of social utility they are ready to deprive the individual of every last scrap and vestige of his freedom and finally to subject him to despotic outer control. No one, as Americans of the present day are only too well aware, is more reckless in his attacks on personal liberty than the apostle of "service." He is prone in his furtherance of his schemes of "uplift" not only to ascribe unlimited sovereignty to society as against the individual, but also to look on himself as endowed with a major portion of it, to develop a temper, in short, that is plainly tyrannical.

Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, 1924.

THE NOT SO GREAT IMMIGRATION DEBATE.

Prior to September 11, 2001, the Republican Party was home to a rather large contingent of elected officials, influential pundits, and voters who were strongly in favor of President Bush's considerable efforts to ease U.S. immigration policy, which even included a call for some sort of an amnesty program for illegal immigrants from Mexico.

For decades, the Republican position on immigration had generally been typified by "razor-wire and border-trench" proponents such as Pat Buchanan and the subtler but no less hostile anti-immigration rhetoric of former California Governor Pete Wilson. But President Bush and a group that became known as the "*Wall Street Journal* school of immigration" struggled valiantly to change that by arguing that due to the graying of America, its future economic health depended upon a continuing flow of immigrants. And for the most part, we counted ourselves among the *WSJ* school's supporters.

And then came 9/11, which, needless to say, introduced a rather large and angry fly into the proverbial ointment. Within a few weeks of that fateful day, the *Los Angeles Times* reported the following: "The White House has conceded that the administration's unrelenting focus on counter-terrorism would indefinitely delay a separate drive to relax immigration regulations for Mexican workers."

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The fight was over. It took some time, of course, but even George W. Bush, the compassionate conservative who spoke Spanish and whose brother married a Mexican immigrant, eventually threw in the towel. Everyone, it seemed, including the editorial board of the *Wall Street Journal*, got the picture that comprehensive immigration reform, particularly if it included a “path to citizenship,” was political poison.

Everyone, that is, except Barack Obama.

Last week, the *Los Angeles Times*, reported that Obama has apparently enjoyed the fight over his other “comprehensive” reforms so much that he has decided to take on another mammoth issue and, for good measure, to, yet again, take on the electorate as well. To wit:

Obama took up the issue [of immigration] privately with his staff Monday in a bid to advance a bill through Congress before lawmakers become too distracted by approaching midterm elections.

In the session, Obama and members of his Domestic Policy Council outlined ways to resuscitate the effort in a White House meeting with two senators -- Democrat Charles E. Schumer of New York and Republican Lindsey Graham of South Carolina -- who have spent months trying to craft a bill.

According to a person familiar with the meeting, the White House may ask Schumer and Graham to at least produce a blueprint that could be turned into legislative language.

The basis of a bill would include a path toward citizenship for the 10.8 million people living in the U.S. illegally. [emphasis added]

Umhhh . . . well . . . errr . . . Okay.

We honestly don't know what to say. If the White House were a prison and we were the warden, we'd be taking away the President's belt and shoestrings right about now. Seriously. This -- on top of the cap'n trade fiasco, the stimulus disaster, the health care debacle, and the looming attempt to push health care reform through Congress against the public's will and through the manipulation of parliamentary principles -- is really all the evidence we would need to put this goofball on a suicide watch.

Now, don't get us wrong. We are, in many ways, sympathetic to those who want the current immigration situation remedied and who believe that the nation cannot simply carry on pretending that somewhere between 3% and 10% of its population doesn't exist. There are very real and very serious issues that need to be addressed with regard to immigration in general and the future disposition of the current illegal aliens in particular. But so what?

Like every major issue, immigration reform is about politics at least as much as it is about policy. And politically speaking, tackling comprehensive immigration reform now is a really dumb idea, so dumb that words do not exist to describe its dumbness. It's almost as if Obama is sitting around, reading our critiques of some of his other recent failures and muttering to himself: “They think my health care plans are dumb, huh? Well, they ain't seen nothing yet. If those two pajama-clad reactionaries want to see dumb, I'll show 'em dumb.”

For openers, it is clear that Obama is politically weakened already, even if he, Michelle, and the members of his “Domestic Policy Council” don't know it. This president may think it is fitting for a “transformative leader” to spend his political capital on issues that he believes are morally and ideologically critical. But that's entirely immaterial in this case, given that he is fresh out political capital. Nobody trusts the guy right now, and nobody any longer believes that he has the ability to put the interests of the country ahead of his personal political interests.

Moreover, even if he had the political capital, spending it on immigration would still be nuts. There is no upside at all, and virtually immeasurable downside.

The list of those who actively support and are actively advocating for comprehensive immigration reform is notably short and notably homogeneous. It is also filled, by and large, with groups and individuals whose gratitude and devotion provide Obama with no tangible returns. Does anyone think, for example, that if Obama does not address the immigration issue *La Raza* will take its endorsement and offer it to, say, Mitt Romney?

As for those whose support he can lose, Obama would be well served to tread lightly here. We know, we know: the only people who oppose the “path toward citizenship” and resent the lack of serious concern about border security are backward, racist, bible-and-gun-clinging hillbillies. Unfortunately for Obama, that’s a growing gang and includes everyone from legal immigrants to union workers to the much-ballyhooed difference-making “youth voters” – even some of those who congregate in such places as the nerve center of American leftism, The University of California at Berkeley.

The Obama administration may take heart in last week’s unemployment figures, which showed that “only” 36,000 more Americans lost their jobs last month, but the fact remains that the unemployment rate is holding at near 10%. And those who are suffering most during this jobless recovery are those most likely to resent any attempt by any politician stupid enough to try right now to assimilate some 10 to 30 million new workers.

As it is, the youth unemployment rate – i.e. the rate of unemployment among those who would be competing with most new immigrants (or newly assimilated illegal immigrants) for entry-level jobs – is more like 25%. Obama’s election in 2008 represented the first time in modern history that the much-ballyhooed “youth vote” actually showed up to any degree (though not the same degree as was initially claimed). If he wants

to ensure that this will *not* be the case in 2012, he should push the idea of comprehensive immigration reform.

And please note that it’s not just working-class youth who are likely to be upset by any effort to absorb the existing illegal immigrant population. Listen carefully to the spoiled children protesting the idea that they might have to bear some of the burden for the recent excesses in state spending. Underneath all the usual blather about fighting “oppression” and gaining “access” for everyone, fear of “the other” is a prominent motivator. As one protestor in Berkeley told an interviewer:

Well . . . um . . . in the fall the UC regents voted in a 32% fee increase to over \$10,000 a year for in-state tuition. This at a time that they are cutting classes, *letting in fewer students from in-state and more students from out of state*. Um . . . so effectively we are closing off the campus, making it less accessible to people, and those who are here are getting less out of their education. (emphasis added)

Those “out-of-state” students about whom this unhappy protestor is . . . well . . . unhappy are, in large part, “out-of-country” students as well. This conflict over in-state and out-of-state status is part and parcel of the debate over illegal immigrants, their children, and the tuition they should pay for California’s state-sponsored higher education.

As the protests in California and elsewhere turn violent and reveal the pent-up rage and selfishness of the Millennium generation, President Obama would do well to keep in mind that anti-immigrant (or anti-illegal-immigrant, to be more precise) sentiment percolates just beneath the surface, waiting for someone stupid enough make it a fundamental issue. Perhaps it would be in the President’s best interests not to be that stupid someone. But then, what do we know?

Of course, since the President himself appears to lack the political instincts to avoid such stupidity, it is incumbent upon his staff to see that he does. And, as we have discussed repeatedly, they seem even less inclined to avoid political stupidity than he does, if such a thing is possible.

This is a problem for Obama, obviously. But it is swiftly becoming a problem for the nation as a whole as well. The fact of the matter is that Barack Obama will be the President of the United States for nearly three more years, regardless of how poorly he performs, how stupidly he behaves, or how weak he becomes. And the more stupidly he behaves with respect to domestic politics and policies, the weaker he becomes, which reflects poorly on his global policies.

No one in the world fears Obama, save one or two erstwhile allies who are still unsure what to make of this political marvel. Indeed, no one believes that he has the ability or the will to do much of anything. Add to that the widespread expectation that his presidency is as good as over, that he is a lame duck only fourteen months into his term, and the world will grow even more dangerous, more complicated, and more unpredictable.

When Barack took the oath of office last January, many conservatives (and a few liberals) worried openly that his would be a replay of the Carter presidency. Over the course of the last year, some of those observers, most notably Instapundit's Glenn Reynolds, have worried that a replay of Carter would be a "best-case" scenario.

We're not sure we're at that point yet, largely because Obama has, in many instances decided simply to defer to his predecessor on matters of foreign and national security policy. Still, the weaker the guy gets, the less likely any of this will make any difference to the likes of Putin, Ahmadinejad, Hu, Kim, Chavez, and the rest.

All of this, we suppose, is the natural result of electing a man with no experience who surrounds himself with worshipers and sycophants rather than actual seasoned

political operatives. Any advisor who would allow Obama to push immigration next is out of his or her mind. Either that or he or she is working for the other side.

Remind us again what we wrote about Rahm last week?

IT'S THE GOVERNMENT, STUPID.

George Will was once a great writer. He's not so great anymore, but who can blame him? If we got paid as much to be on TV as he does, we probably wouldn't worry all that much about our writing either.

In any case, great or merely just good, Will is still eminently readable. Moreover, he dares to tackle subjects that most political writers would shun. For example, this week, Will addresses the topic of slackers, specifically male slackers, that is, men who prefer to remain adolescents rather than grow up and assume the kind of responsibility that normally accompanies adulthood. Will writes:

In 1956, the median age of men marrying was 22.5. But between 1980 and 2004, the percentage of men reaching age 40 without marrying increased from 6 to 16.5. A recent study found that 55 percent of men 18 to 24 are living in their parents' homes, as are 13 percent of men 25 to 34, compared to 8 percent of women.

Mike Stivic, a.k.a. Meathead, the liberal graduate student in *All in the Family*, reflected society's belief in the cultural superiority of youth, but he was a leading indicator of something else: He lived in his father-in-law Archie Bunker's home. What are today's "basement boys" doing down there? Perhaps watching *Friends* and *Seinfeld* reruns about a culture of extended youth utterly unlike the world of young adults in previous generations.

What or who is to blame for this extended adolescence, you ask? Well, according to Will – and to the authors he cites – it’s the liberal Baby Boomers, destroyers of civilizations, crushers of dreams, and ruiners of things wonderful:

Permissive parenting, [the Penn State Historian Gary] Cross says, made children less submissive, and the decline of deference coincided with the rise of consumer and media cultures celebrating the indefinite retention of the tastes and habits of childhood . . .

All this led to “ambiguity and confusion about what fathers were to do in the postwar home and, even more, about what it meant to grow up male.” Playboy magazine, a harbinger of perpetual adolescence, sold trinkets for would-be social dropouts: “Join the beat generation! Buy a beat generation tieclasp.” Think about that.

Although Cross, an aging academic boomer, was a student leftist, he believes that 1960s radicalism became “a retreat into childish tantrums” symptomatic “of how permissive parents infantilized the boomer generation.” . . .

At the 2006 Super Bowl, the Rolling Stones sang “Satisfaction,” a song older than the Super Bowl. At this year’s game, another long-of-tooth act, the Who, continued the commerce of catering to baby boomers’ limitless appetite for nostalgia. “My generation’s obsession with youth and its memories,” Cross writes, “stands out in the history of human vanity.”

Now, don’t get us wrong. We like blaming the lefty Boomers for the world’s ills as much as anyone. And, moreover, we agree with Will that the vanity and entitlement demonstrated by many of the Boomers is off-putting and civically deleterious, to say the least.

That said, this argument is lazy and incomplete. Not to pick on Will, but once upon a time, he would have written a great column on this topic. Now, he simply writes food for thought.

You see, Will misses a critical point here, namely that big government liberalism is designed specifically to make wards of its citizens. That’s its cause. And that’s its effect. Sure, the baby Boomers infantilized themselves and much of the nation. But the Boomers themselves were not the crucial component in that infantilization. It was the Boomers’ affection for and uncritical embrace of big government liberalism and the expansion of the Leviathan.

This is not, we should note, a unique thought on our part. Big government turns men into boys, women into girls, and all of us into dependents of the state. Tocqueville wrote this all down for any fool to see some one-hundred-and-seventy years ago. Hilaire Belloc wrote it down as well, one-hundred years ago. Hayek followed with his own take sixty-six years ago. Heck, we ourselves wrote it nearly seven years ago – and countless times before and since. Consider, if you will, the following, which comes from a piece we penned in September, 2003, in the aftermath of a rash of heat-related deaths in France:

As it turns out, the heat wave that gripped France came at an exceptionally inconvenient time for the French. July and August are when much of France shuts down and goes on vacation. And while on vacation, too many French, by their own admission and that of their political leaders, simply couldn’t be bothered to worry a whole lot about their elderly relatives literally roasting to death back home.

According to an August 28 article in *The International Herald Tribune*, the debate in France and Italy, where an additional thousand or so people died from the heat, “broadened to a general discussion on the dissolution of the traditionally

tight-knit family structure.” “Many older people died, it is said,” the *IHT* noted, “because they had been abandoned by families going on vacation.”

Sadly, that’s not even the worst of it. Literally hundreds of corpses were stored throughout Paris in both real and makeshift refrigerated morgues for weeks because the same relatives who couldn’t be bothered to interrupt their vacations to assure their alleged “loved ones” were alive, also couldn’t be bothered to interrupt their vacations to claim the old gal after she’d already died.

According to *The New York Times*, Bernard Mazeyrie, a managing director of General Funeral Services, confirmed that many relatives simply didn’t want their holiday weekends screwed up by an old relative who’d had the discourtesy to die inopportunistly. The *Times* reported that Mazeyrie told them “Some [of the notified families] . . . informed of the death of relatives, postponed funerals, not to interrupt the August 15 holiday weekend, and left the bodies in the refrigerated hall.”

Two weeks after the heat wave had ended and the last of the corpses had piled up, some 400 remained “unclaimed.” Of those, only 57 were finally determined to have no family to claim them. The families of the remaining 340-plus had to be tracked down by a special government task force and compelled to come pick up their “loved one.”

Of course, one could make up any number of explanations why the French don’t care much about their elderly, so little in fact that they would let them die before letting them become an inconvenience. But such conjecture

is mostly unnecessary, as the answer is pretty clear to anyone who is paying attention.

As the *IHT* noted above, “tight-knit family structure” is dying throughout Europe. And the reason it is dying is because in the big- government, socialist nanny states of the EU, the family structure is no longer all that necessary. Whereas the family, the Church, or even the community at large, once took responsibility for the aged, today the ubiquitous state has assumed the responsibility.

In the wake of the heat wave deaths, one of France’s largest daily newspapers, *Le Parisien*, opined that, “It is not up to the state to take care of our elderly. It is up to us.” But nothing could be further from the truth. The leviathan governments of Europe have usurped the role and the responsibility of the family with regard to the aged, in this case with deadly consequences.

Obviously, the parallel here isn’t exact. But the point is one worth reiterating: big government destroys the traditional civic relationships, places itself in the stead of traditional caregivers, and redefines the roles and responsibilities of “conscientious” citizens.

As we have mentioned countless times in these pages, the problem with big government isn’t the spending or the deficits or the debt. The problem with big government is big government, which turns freemen into George Will’s “basement boys.”

Why do families in generous welfare states have so few kids? Because they need so few kids. Once kids were required to take care of their parents into their dotage. But now the state does that.

Why do families in generous welfare states leave grandma to roast while they're at the beach? For the same reason, namely because looking after Grams is the state's job.

Why do so many European youth live with their parents, despite the fact that they no longer want to nor need to take care of mom and pops? What else are they going to do? Where else are they going to live? Under the guise of providing "affordable housing," big government throughout Europe (and in much of the United States) has given us "rent control," which caps rents for those fortunate enough to have a place to live, but which also kills any incentive to build or make affordable rental properties available, and, in turn, actually produces a net housing shortage.

Why do so many young Americans currently live at home, sponging off of their folks? In part, it's because they're broke. And they're broke because they have no jobs. And they have no jobs because Uncle Sam decided to do something "nice" for them and raise the minimum wage. As we note in our companion piece today, youth unemployment is roughly 25%. And a big part of the reason it's so high is because of recent hikes in the minimum wage. The evidence is massive and largely indisputable: when the minimum wage goes up, jobs disappear. Junior might as well play his Xbox and watch *Seinfeld* because he has nothing better to do.

Permissive parenting is a bad thing. We'll give ol' George Will that. And the liberal Boomers were responsible for some pretty awful things. Again, that's a charge we won't dispute.

But if you want to know why men these days act more like boys, understand that the problem is deeper and more permanent than bad parenting on the part of those dirty old hippies.

It's the government, stupid.

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