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## THEY SAID IT

When the force of the State was in the hands of their [the socialists'] adversaries, they acknowledged, naturally enough, that it was being employed to violate justice, and they then proved that one might with a good conscience "step out of the region of legality in order to enter that of justice" (to borrow a phrase of the Bonapartists); when they could not overthrow the government, they tried at least to intimidate it. But when they attacked the people who for the time being controlled the force of the State, they did not at all desire to suppress that force, for they wished to utilize it someday for their own profit; all the revolutionary disturbances of the nineteenth century have ended in reinforcing the power of the State . . . That is why our parliamentary socialists, who spring from the middle classes and who know nothing outside the ideology of the State, are so bewildered when they are confronted with working-class violence. They cannot apply to it the commonplaces which generally serve them when they speak about force, and they look with terror on movements which may result in the ruin of the institutions by which they live.

Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 1908

## COGNITIVE DISSONANCE AND THE G20.

Don't look now, boys and girls, but the masters of the financial universe have gathered once again, this time in Toronto, to determine the fate of the developed world. And, once again, they were joined in their work by the Western world's idle class, those men and women, most but not all of whom are young and "idealistic," who have no idea how the world works, no knowledge of economics, no understanding of human nature, and no first-hand experience with the businesses they want desperately for the masters of the universe to destroy and/or regulate into non-existence.

And for the record, no, our reference here is not to President Obama and the American contingent to the summit. Rather, we refer here to the usual suspects, the "youth" who follow the G20 types around like lost puppies, insisting that the leftists who run the world are not leftist enough and that they need simply to suspend the laws of nature or suffer the consequences. Sometimes it's hard to tell the difference between the two crowds, we'll grant, though the distinction in this case is critical.

We get a chuckle out of the whole business, you know, since the various parties in this comic struggle are the very same parties who always participate in the struggle, only some have changed sides. The nihilistic and violent protestors are, of course, the figurative and, in some cases, literal progeny of the former anti-

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establishment radicals and anti-establishment “community activists” who now constitute the establishment.

The cycle moves on, ever so tirelessly and tiresomely. As Sorel notes in the “They Said it” quote above, the power of the state remains ever constant, as those who feign protest against the state seek, in truth, merely to harness that state and its power for themselves. And when they do, they’ll be confronted by others in the same mold, with the same brash declarations and same furtive desire simply to replace the opinion of those in charge with their own. On and on it goes . . .

About the only thing even remotely interesting or unique about this particular round of meetings and affiliated protests is the fact that, to a great extent, the influence of the respective crowds has been reversed, with the angry nihilist wannabes in the protest crowd generating far more deference and far greater accommodation than the angry fiscal nihilists who are official participants in the summit.

That is to say that while President Obama still fancies himself a big time player on the global stage, most of his fellow global leaders have taken their measure of the man and found him wanting. He can and does blather on, insisting that what he says is somehow relevant, but the world’s leaders appear to know better. They know that what he says is not germane and not useful. Moreover, they understand, that despite his self-designation as the world’s greatest diplomat, his influence is waning, both at home and abroad.

The discrepancy between the treatment afforded the protestors and that afforded Obama et al. has to gall Obama, particularly given the fact he values himself so deeply and enthusiastically and must, therefore, be at a loss to understand why others don’t share his opinion. He came to Toronto to fix things, to set the Europeans straight about the dangers of responsibility. And instead, he set them straight about the dangers of his own political myopia.

When the history books are written, they will, undoubtedly, show that John Maynard Keynes was killed by a series of heart attacks. Technically, that may be true, but it is arguably just as accurate to say that he was killed by Barack Obama, with help from his accomplices Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi.

Upon taking office, Obama convinced the country that the problems left to him by his successor were so great and so loaded with tragic potential that they had to be met head on with nearly a trillion dollars in stimulus. The country conceded, grudgingly, only to see that stimulus squandered mostly on bloated state and local governments and specifically on said governments’ union contingents. In response, Obama came begging for more. And more. And more again.

And still the economy drags on sluggishly, unemployment drags on persistently, and the fiscal balance continues to deteriorate at an alarming pace. This isn’t the way it was supposed to work, not that anyone with any sense couldn’t have predicted it. But those with sense, like chief economic advisor Christina Romer, for example, either lost their minds temporarily or simply shut their mouths out of political necessity. Either way, the results were the same. “Stimulus” did nothing – or at least nothing positive.

The irony is if it did anything at all, it alerted the leaders of the rest of the G20 to Barack Obama’s relative irrelevance. While Obama has been busy implementing the European welfare state at home, the Europeans are busy making plans to dismantle their version, having come far too close of late to seeing its downside in all its glory. They see the future and it’s grim. Moreover, Barack Obama isn’t in it. He’s already yesterday’s news, a tired man wed to a tired ideology, pitching a tired fiscal program.

And so Obama and his minions showed up in Toronto, merely to be told to wait over in the corner until someone could get to them.

This is not to say that the rest of the G20 has somehow come to its senses. Indeed, the very concept of a G20 summit is evidence that they have not. A more pointless exercise we'd be hard-pressed to identify.

More to the point, the G20 and its hosts bent over backward to accommodate and even to coddle the miscreants who inevitably accompanied the world's leaders to Toronto. Erstwhile Canadian Mark Steyn summed up the atmosphere north of the border:

I may have to revise my old line about the British police being “the most monumentally useless in the developed world.” For the G20 summit, the Toronto coppers ordered up a ton of new body armor, weaponry, gas masks, etc - and then stood around in their state-of-the-art riot gear watching as a bunch of middle-class “anarchists” trashed the city. Streetcars were left abandoned, and even police cruisers were seized, vandalized and burned. But hey, it's the taxpayers who pay for 'em, right? And I'm sure they'll have replacements ready when Constable Plod needs to drive over to Tim Hortons for his mid-morning Boston Crème . . .

The Toronto PD are your go-to guys if you want a fetching police escort for the Queens Against Israeli Apartheid float in the Pride Parade, but they don't otherwise seem to perform any useful function.

What all of this tells us about the West is both fascinating and deeply disturbing. For starters, this tells us that the West is, indeed, in its twilight. This is the behavior of a culture and a civilization that is either unable or unwilling to rouse itself to its own defense much less to make the effort to distinguish between competing and incompatible conceptions of a just society. Actual violence is OK, apparently,

as long as it's undertaken with in the proper spirit of cultural ecumenism, while the simple act of judging cultures based on results is somehow beyond the pale and comparable to spiritual violence, which, naturally, is more abhorrent than real violence. This is cultural nihilism writ large.

What this also tells us, therefore, is that despite the tough talk and economic pragmatism of the non-American Westerners in Toronto, it is quite likely too late for them and too late for their austerity to turn the tide of decline. The cultural and spiritual damage has been done and is all but certainly irreversible.

The welfare state itself may be something that can be amended or, to some extent, decelerated. But it cannot be reversed. The economic damage done by the massive and unconstrained meddling of government in the private sector is but the tip of the proverbial iceberg. The spiritual and cultural damage is far greater and far more menacing. The “welfare state” is, in essence, more than just a welfare state; it is more than merely a set of programs or the means of providing for those in need; it is, rather, a cultural phenomenon by which formerly free men and women are acculturated into the ethos of the state. And once that acculturation has taken place, there is no going back.

The protestors who are unhappy with the state of the world showed up in Toronto wanting the governments of the world to do two things, according to media reports, to quit destroying the planet by use of fossil fuels and to provide for the world's poor. The cognitive dissonance at work here is amusing, staggering, and sadly telling. These twerps and wackos clearly have no idea how wealth is created, how governments manage to attach themselves to portions of that wealth, and how “the poor” are thereby provided for.

To them, the state is the ultimate power and therefore the ultimate provider. And it never occurs to them that the state might be unable to fabricate wealth on its own and that evil, carbon-burning private companies

might somehow be a critical link in the chain that creates wealth and permits those without the means of survival nevertheless to survive. The very idea of such a process is so foreign to them that they are unable to grasp the basic contradictions of their demands.

And it is these people to whom the Toronto police showed deference. It is these people who were rewarded for their barbarity with fawning media reports. And it is these people whom the G20's participants apparently view as more relevant than Barack Obama.

We're not sure whether that says something tragic about the Obama administration or something tragic about the rest of the G20. But we suspect that it's a little of both. The cognitive dissonance radiating from the Obama administration is so trifling and bewildering that even the inanities spewed by the violent and banal protestors is afforded greater weight.

This is pathetic. And tiresome.

And above all, deeply depressing.

## WASHINGTON, THE WHITE HOUSE, AND WEIRDOS.

Way back when, ten or eleven years ago, when George W. Bush was running to succeed Bill Clinton as president, we noted that Bush's greatest appeal to the American public was his "normalcy." He was and, as far we know, still is just a normal guy. He loved his wife. He loved his kids. He went to bed early and worked hard. He was foolish and reckless in his youth, but he grew out of it. He was, as has been noted more times than we can count, the kind of guy you'd enjoy having a beer with, if he still drank. He was as ordinary an American as any man could be who desired to be President of the United States and whose father already had occupied that office.

Naturally, this made Bush the perfect antidote to what was then called "Clinton fatigue." Good ol' Bill wore the American people out. He exhausted everyone. He was so . . . well . . . atypical. Just keeping up with

his scandals, his exploits, and his conquests was hard work. Observing Bill was, as the late, great Father Richard John Neuhaus wrote, like watching "with fascinating disgust as an unstoppable toilet backs up into [your] living room." It was enthralling, of course. But then there was the mess that was left when all the excitement was over.

Funny thing is, it turns out that ol' Bill may have been the normal one in the "Bill and Al" show. Not "normal" as in really normal. But "normal" as in "compared to Al." After all, while Bill was many things, and had been called many things, to our knowledge at least, no one had then, nor has since then, had occasion to call him a "crazed sex poodle."

Sure, we always suspected that Al was a little . . . "off." Who didn't? He was, from his childhood, a creature of Washington, which is a strange town, inhabited by strange people, and which has a tendency to make anyone who stays too long considerably stranger than when he arrived.

And Al spent every moment there; grew up there; learned to live, love, and lie there. Al was not just a blowhard, but a blowhard's blowhard; the kind of guy who would make a career out of damning the internal combustion engine while living a life of leisure courtesy of Occidental Petroleum and its Stalinist leader, Armand Hammer; the kind of guy who would shake down Bhuddist nuns and then insist that he didn't know it was wrong because he had drunk too much iced tea on the day that the White House counsel covered that topic and had been out of the room at the time testing the White House urinals; the kind of guy who would claim to have invented the Internet, to have written lines for Hubert Humphrey, and to have been the inspiration for *Love Story*.

We would like very much to say that, all of that notwithstanding, we never, ever suspected that he was the kind of guy who would grope, bully, belittle, beg, and bother a \$500 per hour masseuse. But we have to admit that when we read the Gore-y details of Al's alleged assault, we couldn't manage to muster any semblance of shock. It's true that his accuser seems

a little flaky, to put it mildly. Additionally, it is true that her story was rejected out of hand by police due to several inconsistencies, and that a couple of media organizations, who investigated the story, found that it didn't hold together. Still, truth be told, no one who has watched Al over the years could possibly have been surprised by the charges. They just seem too believable, particularly the deep and abiding creepiness of Al's alleged behavior. Love him, hate him, agree with him, think he's a congenital liar, whatever. There is something undeniably and unavoidably deeply creepy about him.

Obviously, though, it's not just Al. Think, for just a minute, about the men who have run for the presidency over the last several election cycles. "Deeply creepy" probably doesn't begin to scratch the surface.

John Kerry, the Boston Brahmin who calculated every moment of his life to lead to the presidency, may have been the weirdest of them all. From French finishing school to Yale to the calculated and fleeting trip to Vietnam; from the Winter Soldiers to the faux medal tossing incident to the serial gold-digging and the convenient if suspect annulment, every move in this guy's post-adolescence was geared specifically toward the Oval Office. And if you don't think that such a life warps and damages a psyche, then clearly you need to listen to Kerry more carefully – if, that is, you can manage to stay awake.

Of course, for all Kerry's weirdness, he clearly didn't have the flair for the dramatic that his running mate on the 2004 ticket possessed. But then, for sheer drama, how does a guy even compete with a man (and we use that term advisedly) who is so vain that he would earn the nickname "the Breck girl" and so contemptuous of others that he would cheat on his dying wife, get the girl pregnant, and insist for months that both the affair and the baby belonged to his friend and campaign aide? Believe it or not, candidate John Edwards was spot on. There really are "two Americas": one for normal people and the other for those who think that a life well lived should resemble a prime-time soap opera.

Not that Republicans are immune from this epidemic of weirdness. The GOP presidential nominee in 2008 may be the only big time candidate in recent memory with a legitimate explanation and justification for his weirdness, but there was no denying that he was more than little bit odd. And what does it say about the state of political affairs in this country that one of his leading rivals for the Republican presidential nomination in 2008 was a cross-dressing, twice-divorced, man-about-town whose kids hate him and who was tossed out his home a couple of years previously and had to move in with a couple of gay pals? Don't get us wrong. We love Giuliani. And, more to the point, we think that he, like McCain, is a genuine American hero. But there's no denying that "normal" wouldn't be anywhere on the list of the words you'd use to describe the guy.

And that brings us, inevitably, to the current occupant of the White House, Barack Obama, himself a bizarre and inscrutable man.

Last week, the columnist Richard Cohen, a man once described by Florence King as the *Washington Post's* resident "oh my!", set out to find out who, exactly, is Barack Obama. "The president," the ever-insightful Cohen concluded, is a strange duck, a man who "seems to stand foursquare for nothing much." Cohen continued: "This, of course, is the Obama enigma: Who is this guy? What are his core beliefs?"

As the inimitable Mark Steyn noted, Cohen's inquiry is, unfortunately, just a little bit tardy. "Gee," Steyn mockingly lamented over the weekend, "if only your newspaper had thought to ask those fascinating questions oh, say, a month before the Iowa caucuses." Had the *Post*, or anyone else, done so, what they might have learned about Obama would have been interesting, to say the very least.

In Obama, we have elected a constitutional law professor who appears not to have any interest whatsoever in either the Constitution or the law. Neither is seen as a hindrance to him, and neither is, in any way, a check against his ambitions. If, for example, the law of the land calls for the protection of

the borders, the President feels that said law is flexible, even to the point of having his Justice Department sue any state that chooses to take its border obligations seriously in an effort to protect its citizens and its infrastructure alike.

As we noted last week, the President of the United States simply does not have the power or the authority to demand, say, \$20 billion in tribute from foreign-based oil companies. Nor does he have the authority to decide, unilaterally, how to apportion that levy. Apparently, though, our conceptions of the law and the powers granted (and not granted) to the chief executive of the land are quainter and more literal than said chief executive's interpretations.

What this means, then, taken to its ultimate end, is that Barack Obama is a man who chose to accumulate personal power in the world's utmost democracy despite the fact that he has nothing but contempt for the *demos* itself. The will of the people, Obama has repeatedly and unashamedly demonstrated, is unimportant to him. If the people don't want his health care overhaul, so what? They're incidental in his eyes. If they don't much care for his cap-and-tax schemes to raise energy costs in order to save them from a crisis they don't even acknowledge exists, again, so what? They need simply to shut up and take it.

And what of a people who want government spending cuts and taxes lowered, or at the very least stabilized? Once again, they can kiss off. The wants and needs of the people are simply irrelevant to this man. Over the weekend, at the G20 summit, where he was the last Keynesian standing, Obama declared his intention once again to ignore the will of those whose will he has sworn to execute. Regarding those intentions, Obama said the following:

Somehow people say, why are you doing that, I'm not sure that's good politics. I'm doing it because I said I was going to do it and I think it's the right thing to do. People should learn that lesson about me because next year when I start presenting some very difficult choices to the country, I hope some of these folks

who are hollering about deficits and debt step-up because I'm calling their bluff. We'll see how much of that, how much of the political arguments that they're making right now are real and how much of it was just politics.

Now, when he says that he will "start presenting some very difficult choices to the country," what he means is that he will tell the people that his promise to them that he would not raise taxes was just so much campaign cant. And when he says that "I hope some of these folks who are hollering about deficits and debt step-up because I'm calling their bluff," what he means is that he's going to tar anyone who disagrees with his plans to raise taxes as a hypocrite and a charlatan.

We vacillate in our beliefs about Obama and about his ambitions. Last week, we were sure that the guy had thrown in the proverbial towel. He seemed disinterested in the country's problems and, more to the point, disinterested in his responsibility to address them or even to be bothered by them.

This week, by contrast, we're not so sure. While it remains true that the problems and concerns of his constituents appear inconsequential to him, we doubt that this says anything at all about his ambitions. Instead, it speaks to his beliefs about the relevance of the people, their "petty" problems, and the distraction they represent in his grander scheme to remake the nation.

Liberals are unhappy with Obama. Conservatives are unhappy with Obama. Independents and undecideds are unhappy with Obama. And he doesn't seem to care about any of them. Neither they nor their power to deny him re-election seems to concern him in any way. It's a long time from now until January 20, 2013, and, as the most powerful man in the world, he has, at his disposal the means to do just about anything he wants to do between now and then. To hell with re-election. As Obama himself has warned, he will be happier with one, "productive" term than with two terms producing less cumulative "change."

In this sense, Obama may well be the weirdest politician that the nation has seen in some time. But he will not be the last of his type.

Some critics of the President console themselves with the expectation that the next guy, or the next Congress will be able to undue much of the damage done. They cling to the old saw that the electorate, in its wisdom, generally settles on a candidate whose positive attributes reflect a distinct break from his predecessor's negative attributes. They chose Bush, for example, as a direct contrast to Clinton. And, in turn, they chose Obama as a contrast to Bush.

This is all well and good, we suppose, but it rests on the faulty presumption that there will be a "normal" person available and willing to take the job, two years hence. And this, we believe, is a misreading of recent history. If George W. Bush was, in fact, a normal guy, he was also the exception, rather than the rule. The history of the American presidency, in other words, is a case study in the bizarre, the neurotic, and the pathologically self-absorbed.

Indeed, despite their manifest weirdness, the current and recent crop of this country's politicians might be considered rather tame by historical standards. Clinton was a philanderer, it's true. But he was a piker next to Kennedy. And Obama may be a self-serving, self-absorbed, pseudo-intellectual suffering from delusions of godliness, but he too is a rank amateur by comparison to the likes of Roosevelt, Roosevelt, and Wilson.

The fact of the matter is that the American system itself has, over the years, come to vest far too much power in the hands of one man. Such a system attracts loonies. It attracts other, saner types as well, naturally. But it packs the field with so many loonies that the odds that a loony will grab the brass ring get higher in every election.

Machiavelli famously (or infamously) described the ideal government as a benign dictatorship, with the principal catch being the inability to ensure that next guy will be equally benign. The same principle holds sway in the American system today. Americans provide their president with enormous power on the assumption that he or she will be sane, even though he or she will inevitably be chosen from a pool of candidates that resembles the cast for "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest."

There is but one solution to this problem and that is for the states to take power back from the federal government. And some of them are doing this. In our opinion, America's future prosperity will depend on how successful and how quickly this process proceeds.

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