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THEY SAID IT

[Reference] the new-fangled collectivistic liberals, desirous of receiving everything from the state, but insistent that they owe the state nothing in return – not even loyalty. John Milton knew such gentlemen three centuries ago:

‘This is got by casting pearls to hogs,
That bawl for freedom in their senseless mood,
And still revolt when truth would set them free.
License they mean when they cry liberty;
For who loves that, must first be wise and good.’

My general argument is this: liberty, prescriptive freedom as we Americans know it, cannot endure without order. Our constitutions were established that order might make true freedom possible.

Russell Kirk, *Beyond The Dreams of Avarice*, 1956.

SOFT AND UNCOMPETITIVE? YOU BET!

For those of you who missed it, the President of these here United States declared last week that the problem with the country he leads is that its citizens have become sissies. Buck up, little campers, was his message for the week. To wit:

The way I think about it is, you know, this is a great, great country that had gotten a little soft and, you know, we didn’t have that same competitive edge that we needed over the last couple of decades. We need to get back on track.

Now we will happily concede that we have neither expertise nor experience in the fine art/science/scam of political campaigning. But we have a modicum of common sense, and it tells us that only a deeply strange politician running a deeply strange campaign could possibly believe that his chances of winning the hearts and minds of the electorate are enhanced by condescendingly insulting said electorate.

What, we cannot help but wonder, could possibly be the point of saying such a stupid thing, even if he believes it? And does he believe it? And if he does, how does he square this belief with his views on the role of government?

Given that there have been no official or even unofficial answers to these questions from the President or his factotums, it has been left to us and those like us to piece together a plausible understanding of what this says about Barack Obama and his presidency. To this end, it is, we think, probably easier to answer the last

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two questions first, and then backtrack, using those answers as context to help explain why he would even broach such a subject at all and what it means for him, for his campaign, and for his governing strategy going forward.

So...does Obama really think the country has gotten a little soft and has lost its competitive edge? Yes, he does. Absolutely. And it upsets him to no end. But, not surprisingly, given Barack's strange world view, it's a peculiar and specific kind of soft that Obama has in mind.

Think about it for just a minute. Under the Obama administration, the roll-back of welfare reform has begun in earnest. Today, there are far more people receiving far more from the government than at any point in the history of the nation. And given the size of the country and the size of its government, this means that there are far more people receiving far more from this government than from any government *in the history of the world*.

In 2010, nearly 47% of Americans received financial support in one form or another from the United States government, by far a record. Some 40 million people last year and between 19 and 21 million households participated in the food stamp program, also a record. And of those who took food stamps, nearly three-fourths had no other income. The citizenry of the United States is, in short, becoming more and more dependent on government for everything, including sustenance. In addition, then, to being the largest debtor nation the planet has ever known, the United States is also the largest welfare state that the planet has ever known.

As for Obama himself, the man personally does not strike fear into the hearts of his enemies. Or his friends. Or children at play. Or dogs. Or cats. Or . . . well . . . much of anybody. He's tall. And thin. Frail, almost. He doesn't look like he has ever done a hard day's work in his life, or could do so if the need arose. When he was running for the Democratic presidential nomination, he asked a crowd in Iowa if they had seen the price of arugula lately and expected them to

commiserate. He's a "modern" man, through-and-through. He's sensitive. He has soft, lotion-y hands. His pants are reeeeeaaaaaaly nicely creased, if the *New York Times'* David Brooks can be believed. He grew up on the beaches of Hawaii and went to prep school. As *National Review's* Jonah Goldberg put it:

Seriously, in 2008 we elected a community organizer, state senator, college instructor, first term senator over a guy who spent five years in a Vietnamese prison. And now he's lecturing us about how America's gone "soft"?

As for the notion that this country is losing its competitive edge, let us not forget who Barack Obama is, what he believes, and what he has done as chief executive of the United States. Two weeks ago, in a piece entitled "The Obama Oligarchy" we argued that the left today – and during this administration in particular – is corporatist, which is to say, very loosely, that it supports an arrangement in which the interests of government and the interests of big business are aligned in a way that suits both and serves to minimize "extraneous" liberty and competition. We concluded that piece thusly:

The fact of the matter is this: managed economies are doomed to fail. They are unable to meet the needs of employers, the wants of consumers, and the nature of man. It doesn't matter if this managed economy is a more-or-less faithful Marxist planned economy or the more gently and judiciously managed "capitalism" of liberal/progressive corporatism. The result, in the end, is the same, namely oligarchy. A small group of well-connected elites winds up reaping the benefits of government management and the masses are essentially squeezed out the picture, left to fight over whatever scraps the ruling class feels it can spare.

The hard-core lefties complain all the time about the growing inequality in society and about the fact that so few individuals now control so much of the nation's wealth. Yet they never stop long enough to think why this might be so. It's a closed club with a revolving door and expanding government only makes it worse. Did you really think that Warren Buffett wanted higher taxes and bigger government because he thinks it will make him poorer or because he thinks it will help distribute wealth more evenly? Have you been paying any attention?

When the left governs in this country, the number of poor increases, as does the nation's collective misery. This is no coincidence. It is, as they say in the world of software programming, a feature, not a bug.

Again, think about left-ish economics in practice. Does anyone think that government involvement increases competition or intensifies a competitive edge? The industries with the greatest amount of government and public-sector involvement are also the industries that are the least competitive, least productive, and least likely to turn a profit without taxpayer support. Think, for example, about the domestic auto industry. Or the "green energy" industry. Or better yet, about the health care industry. Why does health care inflation consistently outpace inflation in general? Why do drug prices soar while research stagnates? Why are vaccines so few and far between? With respect to this last question, the *Wall Street Journal* took a crack at explaining it just over eight years ago:

Everyone knows America's vaccine industry is in serious trouble, with an ever dwindling number of producers and recent severe vaccine shortages. What everyone also should know is that the National Academy of Science's Institute of Medicine has now pinned much of the blame on Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Well, not in so many words. The panel of doctors and economists issuing a report on vaccines last week was too polite to mention the former First Lady by name. But they identify as a fundamental cause of the problem the fact that the government purchases 55% of the childhood vaccine market at forced discount prices. The result has been "declining financial incentives to develop and produce vaccines."

The root of this government role goes back to August 1993, when Congress passed Mrs. Clinton's Vaccines for Children program. A dream of Hillary's friends at the Children's Defense Fund, her vaccines plan was to use federal power to ensure universal immunization. So the government agreed to purchase a third of the national vaccine supply (the Clintons had pushed for 100%) at a forced discount of half price, then distribute it to doctors to deliver to the poor and the un- and under-insured.

The result is a cautionary tale for anyone who favors national health care. Already very high in 1993, childhood vaccination rates barely budged. A General Accounting Office report at the time noted that "vaccines are already free" for the truly needy through programs like Medicaid. Meanwhile, however, the Hillary project dealt the vaccine industry another financial body blow.

Thirty years ago, the Institute report notes, 25 companies produced vaccines for the U.S. market. Today only five remain, and a number of critical shots have only one producer. Recent years have brought shortages of numerous vaccines, including those for whooping cough, diphtheria and chicken pox.

How's that for a competitive edge?

What we're left with, then, is a country that increasingly doesn't work and that is driven by a rickety, broken down, and increasingly corrupt government run by sissies who openly and unapologetically undermine competition. In short, then, we're left with a country that is indeed soft and uncompetitive. About this, Obama is correct. But what's strange is that all of this – every single bit of it – is the result of policies supported in the past, present, and future by Barack Obama and those like him, which is to say that his making an issue of this is bizarre, at least in a conventional sense.

As far as we can tell, the most important clue to understanding what is in this strange man's twisted mind can be found in a speech that his wife gave in February 2008 in which she promised that, as president, her husband would insist that we do things his way . . . OR ELSE!

Barack Obama will require you to work. He is going to demand that you shed your cynicism. That you put down your divisions. That you come out of your isolation, that you move out of your comfort zones. That you push yourselves to be better. And that you engage. Barack will never allow you to go back to your lives as usual, uninvolved, uninformed.

“Barack Obama,” she said, “will require you to work.” He will require you to do what he wants you to do to advance his agenda. He will demand that you do whatever is necessary to make his vision a reality, even if you don't want to do so. He will make “you move out of your comfort zones.”

Of course, the dear woman puts some preposterously positive spin on what that agenda will involve – no cynicism, no divisions, being better informed, etc. But the outlines of the means by which that agenda are to be achieved are right there, out in the open for the whole world to see: as president, Barack Obama will

expect you to do as he tells you to do. And if you refuse, he will presume that the problem is with you, not him. If you reject his agenda, it's because you are stupid. If you vote for the other guys, it's because you have been misled. And if you refuse to “come out of your isolation” and do the “work” that he tells you is required of you, it's because you have gone soft and have lost your competitive edge.

This has nothing whatsoever to do with the real world. Or material survival. Or actual competitiveness. It has everything to do with *Barack Obama*. And how well the country is supporting him. And to be perfectly blunt, thus far, the country is letting him down. And he's peeved about it.

Over the weekend, Byron York, who was once the best investigative reporter in Washington and who is now one of the most insightful political columnists in Washington, also suggested that this “soft and uncompetitive” business was, in truth, all about Obama and how well we are measuring up to the President's expectations. York put it this way:

Look at Obama's speeches in the last couple of months, and he has repeatedly scolded audiences for not working hard enough and for not sacrificing enough to achieve the goals he has set for his administration. He's done it with both supporters and with adversaries. With friends, his message has been: Nobody told you this would be easy, and you've got to work harder to enact my agenda. With adversaries, his message is: You've had it too easy, and you've got to make sacrifices to enact my agenda. Obama's “gotten a little soft” remark fits into that theme: A soft America is one that is insufficiently willing to work and sacrifice to enact the Obama agenda.

Look at Obama's September 24 speech to the Congressional Black Caucus in Washington. In recent weeks, Obama has been increasingly exasperated with

liberal supporters who have complained that he has not done enough for them, and in the CBC speech, he let them have it. “I expect all of you to march with me and press on,” he told the crowd. “Take off your bedroom slippers, put on your marching shoes. Shake it off. Stop complaining, stop grumbling, stop crying. We are going to press on. We’ve got work to do, CBC.” Is it any stretch at all to suggest that Obama was telling the Black Caucus that it had gotten a little soft?

Obama has said similar things to liberal audiences in recent weeks. “I never promised you easy,” he told a crowd at a September 26 fundraiser at a glitzy restaurant in Los Angeles. “If you wanted easy, you wouldn’t have campaigned for Barack Hussein Obama.” At another fundraiser, on September 20 in New York, Obama said, “When I was in Grant Park [on election night 2008], I warned everybody, this is going to be hard.” The message was the same as the one Obama delivered to the Congressional Black Caucus: Shape up and get to work. For me.

One word that appears over and over in Obama’s speeches: “sacrifice.”

We have written repeatedly in these pages about Obama’s unusual sense of destiny. Despite never having accomplished much of anything and certainly never having accomplished anything that would distinguish him from any of literally hundreds of thousands of other Ivy League grads, he believes that he has been endowed by the Creator with a special and incontrovertible mission, the disputation of which signals nothing short of treachery. In the quotes provided above – both by us and by York – it is clear that nothing – not even an economic disaster caused by his policies -- could disabuse the President of this sense of destiny.

Over the weekend, former President Bill Clinton – a man for whom you may recall we had no deep affection – told the world that he is unhappy that he isn’t given as much credit as he deserves for his successful presidency. Specifically, he said:

“I go crazy every time I read the conventional wisdom,” he said Friday night at his presidential library in Little Rock, Ark.

“So part of the Republican narrative is that I was ‘saved’ from myself by the election of the Republican Congress [in 1994] that ‘forced me’ to do welfare reform and ‘made the balanced budget possible.’”

Clinton said reporters and commentators “keep saying this, overlooking all relevant facts.”

The 42nd president said Arkansas had been a test case for reform during his governorship. At the federal level, he said 43 states received federal waivers to implement welfare reform before the GOP-controlled House passed the final bill.

“And yet I kept reading how this was ‘a Republican idea,’ just because President Reagan had a good story about a welfare queen and a Cadillac who didn’t exist,” Clinton said.

On the one hand, Clinton remains Clinton and therefore remains insistent on sucking all of the oxygen out the room wherever he is and demanding that everyone tell him how wonderful he is. On the other hand, he’s right. In 1994, just as in 2010, the Democratic president got his backside handed to him. But then, as opposed to now, the president had the sense to heed the electorate’s message and to amend his political agenda. Whether you want to credit Newt or Bill is beside the point. The fact of

the matter is that the two worked together, in light of the electorate's rejection of the early Clinton years and forged a successful decade with many successful reforms and a strong economy.

By contrast, today, no such thing is happening or is likely to happen. Whereas Clinton had the sense – or the ego or the desire for affection or whatever – to take the electorate's rejection as a sign that he was wrong, Obama takes it as a sign that the electorate is wrong. And soft. And lacking a competitive edge.

What this tells us, therefore, is that any expectations that anyone may have about Obama mellowing or compromising more or moving to the center as the election grows closer are nuts. He's going to do what he wants to do, because he knows that he is right. And anyone who disagrees with him – on the right, the left, black, white, Hispanic, whatever – is unworthy of his affection, unless or until they get their act together and start pulling their weight toward the goal he has set.

Ironically, given the Michelle Obama speech quoted above, the White House has made it clear that it will run its re-election campaign based purely on a strategy of cynicism and divisiveness. Whereas Clinton looked at a similar electoral picture and “triangulated” his way to victory, Obama will run exclusively by trying to demonize his opponent as “weird” (Romney), “racist” (Perry), “undisciplined” (read: fat; Christie), or “crazy” (Bachmann, Paul, etc.). He will also assume, rightly we think, that the unhappy lefty/progressives who are not pulling their weight will not know that he is insulting them and will eventually fall in line because they have no one else for whom to vote. All things considered, this will be one of the ugliest and least appealing presidential races in recent memory.

The net result, we suspect, will be even greater cynicism among the voting public about their elected officials and the political class in general, regardless of who wins. On the one hand, this suits us just fine, since the political class is more than deserving of cynicism and disdain. But on the other hand, it bodes ill for the future of the Republic. Another five years

of complete and utter disconnect between the political class and the country class strikes us as untenable. Either something will have to change in Washington or the people will change it. And if it comes to that, the soft and the uncompetitive will suffer the most, among whom is – drum roll here – Barack Obama.

CHRIS CHRISTIE AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT.

Don't look now, but New Jersey Governor Chris Christie is fat. No, seriously. He is. You know how we know? Because our friendly “mainstream” (read: liberal) political columnists have told us. He's a big guy. Rotund, even. And you know what that means, don't you? It means he can't be president. You think we're joking? Check this out:

Look, I'm sorry, but New Jersey Governor Chris Christie cannot be president: He is just too fat. Maybe, if he runs for president and we get to know him, we will overlook this awkward issue because we are so impressed with the way he stands up to teachers' unions. But we shouldn't overlook it – unless he goes on a diet and shows he can stick to it.

Or how about this:

Whether or not he lets himself be persuaded to run for president, Chris Christie needs to find some way to lose weight . . .

The NIH estimates that nearly 34 percent of U.S. adults can be classified as “obese,” meaning they have a body mass index of more than 30. By this standard, a man who stands 5-foot-11 — Christie's reported height — would be obese if his weight reached 215 pounds. While Christie does not disclose his weight, it appears to exceed the 286 pounds that

would place him among the 5.7 percent of American adults whom NIH classifies as “extremely obese.” . . .

Politically, I disagree with Christie on almost everything. I’ll have plenty of opportunities to tell him why. Today, I’d just like to offer him a bit of unsolicited, nonpartisan, sincere advice: Eat a salad and take a walk.

The first bit is from Michael Kinsley, the eternal liberal scold best known for his classic definition of a political gaffe, i.e. when a politician accidentally tells the truth. The second, which is our favorite, was written by the *Washington Post’s* Eugene Robinson. We like it best, we think, because it involves Robinson, a black liberal, telling a man that he can’t be president because of the way he looks. That’s good stuff.

What’s fun about this is that Christie has, thus far, denied that he is running for president – repeatedly. And while he might change his mind, we doubt that he really cares very much what the scolds and bullies in the media think of his personal appearance. If he did, he would have lost weight long before running for governor, knowing full well that such a high-profile job, so close the New York, would earn him plenty of unwanted attention. So all of this, we imagine, is just pointless thumb-sucking on the part of some scared-to-death journalists who worry that anyone with the capabilities to show some political leadership might derail the re-election bid of their hero and savior, Barack Hussein Obama.

What’s UNfunny about this is that Christie and the media’s obsession with his weight will simply serve as a starting point to further the conversation about weight in America and the purported obesity “epidemic.” Indeed, it already has. Back to Eugene “You Don’t Look Right” Robinson:

I refer to obesity as an epidemic because the percentage of obese adults has doubled in the past 40 years — and childhood obesity is increasing even

more rapidly. Again according to the NIH, “obesity is associated with over 112,000 excess deaths due to cardiovascular disease, over 15,000 excess deaths due to cancer, and over 35,000 excess deaths due to non-cancer, non-cardiovascular disease causes per year.”

On average, health-care costs for obese persons are 42 percent higher than costs for individuals whose weight falls into the “normal” range. It costs Medicare \$1,723 more a year for an obese beneficiary than a non-obese one. For Medicaid the differential is \$1,021, and for private insurers it’s \$1,140. In other words, obesity is helping propel the rise in health-care costs, which are fueling the long-term rise in the national debt.

Notice, of course, that none of this has anything whatsoever to do with Chris Christie. He’s not on Medicare. He’s not on Medicaid. We don’t have any idea what his medical bills are or what they might be if he were thinner. Moreover, we don’t know what they would be if he were a smoker – like certain other presidential candidates towards whom Robinson is more kindly disposed. But that’s not going to stop Robinson from talking about it. And that’s not going to stop him from trying to make the case – using Christie as an excuse – for greater government intervention in the lives of people to save them from themselves.

We were, we must admit, somewhat remiss last week in our discussion of Elizabeth Warren and the social contract. Because it suited our purposes, we kept our discussion to the social contracts of Locke and Rousseau. In our defense, that made a certain amount of sense, given both the subject and the prevalence of the two in the formation of the political thought on the right and the left in the West and in the United States in particular. At the same time, we completely ignored Thomas Hobbes, which, as this Christie business demonstrates, was a mistake.

Hobbes, of course, wrote *The Leviathan*, in which he posited, essentially, that men come together and form societies and governments specifically to protect themselves from one another and to diminish the danger, hardship, and malevolence – the *war* – that exists in the state of nature. To wit:

Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war as is of every man against every man. For war consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known: and therefore the notion of time is to be considered in the nature of war, as it is in the nature of weather. For as the nature of foul weather lieth not in a shower or two of rain, but in an inclination thereto of many days together: so the nature of war consisteth not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is peace.

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man, the same consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short . . .

THE final cause, end, or design of men (who naturally love liberty, and dominion over others) in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves, in which we see them live in Commonwealths, is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of war which is necessarily consequent, as hath been shown, to the natural passions of men when there is no visible power to keep them in awe, and tie them by fear of punishment to the performance of their covenants, and observation of those laws of nature . . .

To Hobbes, the bellicosity of the state of nature requires that society be placed under the control of a sovereign with absolute power; that sovereign being monarchical, aristocratic, or democratic. Of course, it's the "absolute" part that gets today's statist – that is "progressives" and liberals – all juiced up.

In the statist mindset, there are countless dangers from which people must be protected, against which they are incapable of defending themselves, and to which they must turn to government, even if they aren't actually willing to concede that they must turn to government. The list of dangers faced by modern man is endless, but some dangers are more, well, dangerous than others. In the 1920s those dangers included alcohol. In the 1990s, they included cigarettes. And today, of course, they include food. Once upon a time, in the state of nature, other men were waging war against you and trying to kill you and steal your food, but today, it's the food itself that's out to get you.

Last week, while participating in the United Nations General Assembly's summit on non-communicable diseases, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the proto-absolute-sovereign, declared that:

To halt the worldwide epidemic of non-communicable diseases, governments at

all levels must make healthy solutions the default social option. That is ultimately government's highest duty.

Now, you may have thought a government's "highest duty" was to protect property rights or ensure life and liberty or something else stupid like that, but you were wrong. Government's highest duty, it turns out, is to make sure that you eat bran flakes. And don't smoke. At least not inside. And don't eat margarine. Or butter, for that matter. And don't drink sodas. Or coffee. Hell, don't do anything. Just sit there! Except don't really sit there; do it aerobically. Five times a week. For thirty minutes. *Etc., etc. ad nauseam.*

It's not just Chris Christie who is fat, you see. It's you too. And you. And you. And you . . .

And the leftists will use the excuse of costs to public health programs as an excuse, that's exactly what it is, an excuse. The real issue here is that they feel that the social contract – as defined by Hobbes and as agreed to by you – gives them the right and the responsibility to protect you from everything – or at least everything that fits their world view. That this is a dramatic perversion of Hobbes doesn't matter. As far as today's left is concerned, Hobbes was a stuffed tiger who hung out with a trouble-making blonde-haired kid in the funny papers. They don't really care. They just like the "absolute sovereign" bit.

Truth be told, we're not terribly excited about the current Republican presidential field and we'd like to see Chris Christie get into the race. But we're not sure that it's worth it. With Michelle Obama already serving as dietician-in-chief and Nanny Bloomberg doing his best to shove low-salt bran-loaves down our throats, we've had enough of the weight debate already. Add in the health care takeover and now the opportunity that Christie brings to make fun of and disparage fat people for being unable to control themselves without the Leviathan's help and we're absolutely certain to lose our minds over this mess.

As we noted last week, this view of the social contract is un-American in a very real sense of the word, the Founders' social contract being Lockean. This view is also totalitarian and a complete misreading of Hobbes, which makes it all the more problematic. But it's for our own good, they'll tell us. And for Chris Christie's. He's fat, after all.

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