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THEY SAID IT

Yearning to do good and obsessed by the power of the state to do it, relieved by this power of their age-old feeling of futility, they are destroying in the name of social welfare the foundations of freedom. Arthur Koestler warned us some years ago against the “men of good will with strong frustrations and feeble brains, the wishful thinkers and the idealistic cowards, the fellow-travelers on the death train.” We have accepted his warning. At least we have learned the meaning of the word fellow traveler, and are no longer falling in droves for these unlovely accomplices of the tyrant. We must arm our minds now against the less obvious, the more strong and plausible and patriotic enemies of freedom, the advocates of a state-planned economy. They are not on the train and have no thought of getting on, but they are laying the tracks along which another death train will travel.

Max Eastman, *Reflections on the Failure of Socialism*, 1955.

OBAMA’S DREAM WORLD.

The question of the week, kids, is what happens to a country that is in the middle of hard times, and is led by a guy who is more lethargic, depressed, and depressing than the people he is leading? You know, a guy who says to folks who are either down and out or scared to death about becoming down and out that they have “gotten a little soft,” or have become “a little bit lazy over the last couple of decades,” or condescendingly includes himself in the equation, as in “we have lost our ambition, our imagination and our willingness to do the things that built the Golden Gate Bridge.” What happens to a country like that?

Well, the answer is that things keep getting worse until this leader is replaced. A country cannot regain health under such leadership. People like that are carriers of a deadly, contagious sickness called nihilism. Nihilism is caused by a long association with ideologies such as socialism and communism that promise unachievable earthly utopias, which then results in disappointment and despair. If allowed to continue, such a leader will eventually blame his flock for the failure of his plans and strike out at them. From hence came the “death trains” to which Eastman refers in the above quote.

In his great classic, *The New Science of Politics*, Eric Veogelin labels this a Gnostic dream world and describes the working of such a world as follows:

In the Gnostic dream world . . . nonrecognition of reality is the first principle. As a consequence, types of action which in the real world would be considered as morally insane, because of the real effects which they have, will be considered moral in the dream world, because they intended an entirely different effect. The gap between intended and real effect will be imputed not to the Gnostic

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immorality of ignoring the structure of reality but to the immorality of some other person or society that does not behave as it should behave according to the dream conception of cause and effect.

The trick, of course, is to escape this Gnostic dream world. And we have no doubt that the United States will do so. As Herb Stein once wisely noted, “If something cannot go on forever, it will end.” The question then becomes whether the escape will come before lasting and crippling damage is done to the sinews that keep the societal body intact.

It is not certain that it will. Yes, it is true that when that poor little sap Jimmy Carter played the “malaise card,” voters said enough already and elected Ronald Reagan, who declared boldly that “America’s best days are ahead of us.” And *voila*, America recovered. But it is worth noting in this context that Reagan made that statement in 1981. At that time the oldest baby boomer was 35, the youngest 16. That is, the largest, healthiest, best educated, most ambitious and egotistical generation that the nation had ever produced was entering its most productive years. We revere Reagan and his wisdom. But that prediction of his was a layup. These folks would have walked over anyone who had tried to keep them down.

Tomorrow’s Reagan, if there is one, is going to be addressing a different crowd. For the sad truth is that many of today’s Americans are exactly as Obama has described them: soft, lazy, lacking both ambition and imagination.

This is grim stuff, so let’s take a break for a joke of sorts. This fellow spends three days climbing to the top of a mountain to ask the guru who lives there for the meaning of life. The guru tells him that life is a veil of tears, filled with pain, hardship, disappointment, ending in death. Not satisfied, the fellow climbs another mountain to ask another guru the same question. Three days later, he arrives, tired and depressed. He asks his question. The guru says life is a joy, a great pleasure, a chance to serve God

and to earn a place at his side in heaven. The fellow tells this guru what the other guru said, and the second guru answers, “That’s his life.”

And today, for millions of Americans that’s their life. They are Obama’s people. He is their guru. Like him and like all denizens of the Left, they lack the joy that comes with the belief that there is something more to life than the material and the sensate. Like Marx, they dream of a “worker’s paradise” on earth.

The aforementioned Voegelin once noted that the perfect world envisioned by the famous utopian dreamer Marie Jean Atoine Nicholas de Caritat, known to history as the Marquis de Condorcet, was one in which everyone was a French intellectual.

Marx certainly considered himself to be an intellectual. But his own best of all possible worlds was in keeping with his almost pathological aversion to real work, the resultant poverty, and the anger he once focused on a “schweinhund” grocer, who was so unreasonable that he expected Marx to pay his food bill. Thus, it is no surprise that this “great economist” cherished the expectation of a world where “each” was provided for “according to his needs,” and no one would need to work at any one particular job in order to feed his family. He described this Huckleberry Finn dream as follows in *The German Ideology*.

In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic . . .

One shudders to imagine what the paradise envisioned by Obama and his ilk would look like.

Over the weekend, Charles Blow, the aptly named *New York Times* purveyor of left-wing wisdom, penned a

piece discussing the current state of the American spirit and the risk that it poses to the broader American experiment. To wit:

Is America exceptional among nations? Are we, as a country and a people and a culture, set apart and better than others? Are we, indeed, the “shining city upon a hill” that Ronald Reagan described? Are we “chosen by God and commissioned by history to be a model to the world” as George W. Bush said?

This year, for the first time, most Americans did not say yes.

According to a report issued on Thursday by the Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project, when Americans were asked if they agreed with the statement “our people are not perfect but our culture is superior to others,” only 49 percent agreed. That’s down from 60 percent in 2002, the first time that Pew asked the question.

This is depressing, to put it mildly. It describes a people who are, as Obama noted, dispirited, exhausted even. It describes a people who have been hit hard by economic breakdown . . . and something else as well. And what might that be? Well, they got bamboozled.

Three years ago, 69 million of the damn fools believed they would be given “hope” and “change” by a guy who had never “hit a lick,” who had never earned a nickel with the sweat of his own labor, who lacked sufficient credentials to run the produce department of a small grocery store. For the record, that’s seven million more than had voted for any president in the history of the country. Of course, they’re dispirited. They’re lucky they didn’t end up drinking Kool-Aid in some God-forsaken jungle somewhere in South America. And now they’re unhappy. Well, as the song goes, ain’t that a shame.

So, back to the question: will the United States escape this nightmare with no lasting damage? To which the answer is, “probably yes.” But only after a long and painful rehabilitation process that will demonstrate the

truth of the Darwinian notion of the survival of the fittest.

Those who have an abundance of faith, courage, hope, and love will survive. Those who expect the government to minister to their needs will not. They will hang out with the other losers like themselves and complain that the handouts on which they are living are getting skimpier and skimpier.

Now, we don’t mean to be mean. We really don’t. But the question of whether the country can recover begs an answer of this sort. For the fact of the matter is, as we have said in these pages for years, Washington is not going to solve the nation’s problems, fiscal or social. It cannot. It is incapable of doing so. Why? Well, simply stated, slowly but ever so surely, since the appearance of the Progressives a century ago, all of the safeguards that the Founding Fathers had placed in the Constitution to guard against mob rule have been eliminated. And now it is dog eat dog, and this is not conducive to compromise. Our representatives in Congress get a lot of grief, but they are, like it or not, paid paladins of the interests of the people whom they represent against the interests of others who are grasping for a piece of the same pie. And as such, they are acting just as one would expect them to act.

This means that the outcome of the upcoming recovery process will be decided by the marketplace. Our friend Ed Yardeni’s bond vigilantes will arise from their current stupor and smite the philistines. At which point, Lady Day’s famous plaintive song, “God Bless the Child That Has His Own,” written during the midst of the Great Depression, will once again have meaning.

NEWT, MITT, AND WINSTON CHURCHILL?

So . . . Herman Cain is done, eh? Out! Kaput! Brought down by a combination of media misfeasance, public relations incompetence, and foreign policy incoherence. And, as has always been the case before, in his stead a new anti-Romney rises, this one, perhaps, the greatest of them all.

You see, it's different this time. This time, the anti-Romney looks familiar. And that's because he *is* familiar! Why, it's our old pal Newt, whom we and everyone else without the last name "Gingrich" buried and left for dead last summer. And he's back in the race, fit as a fiddle, not because he has a long and impressive business resume or because he is a media darling who looks the part. No, Newt's back because he has been, by far, the most substantive and most coherent debater on stage – not just this year but for several presidential cycles now. And it's working. Newt now leads among primary contenders nationally. And he's the first of all the anti-Romneys to challenge Mitt's dominance in New Hampshire. For months, Romney's coronation has been assumed by the media and political establishment. But if he loses New Hampshire – or even if he wins only narrowly – he can pack his bags and join the "second-tier" of candidates. New England is his turf. And if Newt is rising on Mitt's turf, then he is, indeed, different from the previous Iowa-only contenders.

As we've noted before in these pages, the perpetual rise-and-fall of the anti-Romneys says something very profound and disturbing about Romney and his candidacy, namely that Republican voters are desperate to find someone else for whom they can vote in the primaries, so as not to be saddled next November with the "establishment choice" whose defining asset is his purported electability.

In this case, though, the ascendancy of the latest anti-Romney also says something – or several somethings – rather interesting and enlightening about the Republican electorate itself and about some of the other critical players in the upcoming presidential contest.

For starters, what this says about the GOP primary voters is that they are paying attention and are, contrary to popular political theory, paying attention to substance and proficiency, rather than appearance and hype. We don't mean to sound cruel here, but Newt doesn't exactly "look" the part of the typical presidential candidate. If you were to put all of the GOP hopefuls in a beauty contest, for example, big,

ol', roly-poly Newt would probably not finish in the top half – particularly against the two guys who look like they walked right out of central casting for "The American President."

Moreover, Newt has a legislative record that is not easily forgotten. He was, for all intents and purposes, run out of town almost a decade-and-a-half ago, tossed overboard by his own party, including, among others, the man who currently wields the Speaker's gavel that was once Newt's. Gingrich led a revolution in 1994, but then nearly squandered it, running a House that actually *lost* seats to a Democratic party whose president was in his sixth year (normally a huge year for the non-presidential party) and who was being impeached.

Additionally, Newt has a reputation for a rather all-consuming and unattractive self-absorption, thinking that the world – or at least Washington – revolves around him. We're not sure if this reputation is earned or if this depiction is particularly fair. But it is the public perception, or at least the perception of the media types who filter the "news" to the public.

Taken together, what all of this says about Newt's newfound popularity among the GOP voters is that it is exclusively the result of the fact that he has been the smartest guy on the stage at every debate this year and has given the solidest, most substantive answers to every question he's been asked. This speaks well not only of Newt, of his skill, and of his proficiency with the language and material of public policy, but of the electorate as well. Voters – or at least Republican voters – are serious this time around. They have seen the trouble that electing a glib, inexperienced huckster can cause. And they are bound and determined not to nominate someone similarly superficial. No one – not the voters, not the media, not the Democratic Party leaders – vetted Obama during the 2008 campaign. And the GOP voters are resolute in ensuring that the public trust will not be similarly compromised again. And good for them.

Another thing that Newt's ascendancy says about the GOP voters is that they are either incredibly forgiving or so desperate to beat Barack Obama that they are

willing to sacrifice the principles they once considered sacrosanct. It goes without saying that Newt has had a rather . . . ummm . . . “interesting” personal history. And while he and his family (and presumably his PR team) have spent much of the last several weeks debunking old and patently false stories about delivering divorce papers to his first wife while she was dying of cancer in the hospital, Newt still has some rather spooky skeletons chasing around after him.

Among other things, Newt was “courting” Mrs. Gingrich #3 while still married to Mrs. Gingrich #2. To make matters worse, while this was going on, #3 (Callista) was a staffer on the Agriculture Committee, and Newt was, as noted above, running the House of Representatives, which was in the process of impeaching Bill Clinton for crimes stemming from *his* affair with an intern at the White House. Needless to say, this put Newt in a rather awkward position. And many GOP faithful (ourselves included, on occasion) have wondered whether Mr. Gingrich didn’t simply betray Mrs. Gingrich, but whether Speaker of the House Gingrich betrayed the GOP House conference and indeed the broader Republican Party as well.

Gingrich is 68 years-old now, and presumably his catting-around days are behind him. But as we used to say in the ‘90s, “character counts,” and one can be forgiven for wondering how Republican voters – particularly in Evangelical-heavy Iowa – will square this particular circle.

If we had to guess, we’d say that they won’t even try – to square the circle, that is. And they won’t because they don’t think it matters, or at least they don’t think it matters as much as beating Obama does. Beating Obama and ending his experiment in self-reverential leftist creative destruction (with an emphasis on the “destruction”) is, we’re quite certain, the top priority for Republican voters. And they will bend a little on whatever principles they have to in order to make that happen.

What makes us think that? Well, the fact that Newt is rising in the polls at all, to be honest. You see, the fact of the matter is that Newt’s personal life is the

least of his worries with the GOP base in this election cycle. Newt would actually rather people think about, talk about, and focus on his personal life than anything else, largely because he can explain that away: The stories are lies; I made mistakes; I’ve made amends and even the Catholic Church has seen fit to bless my marriage. But what Newt can’t explain away is the fact that he is, in the year of the war-against-the-political-class, the consummate political-class warrior.

When Newt Gingrich left the House in 1998, he was, for the most part, a man of modest means. He had been a history professor. He had written a few books. But he had also managed to get himself fined \$300,000 by the House for issues related to the use and sale of one of those books. He was an average Newt. Now, he’s a rich Newt. And he has become so by engaging in the world’s second-oldest profession, influence peddling.

According to *The Washington Post*, the health care think tank founded by Gingrich, The Center for Health Transformation, collected some \$37 million over the last eight years, largely in return for such prized items as “access to Newt Gingrich” and “direct Newt interaction.” Last Sunday, on “This Week,” conservative icon George Will noted that Newt shilled for the pharmaceutical companies in support of the Medicare drug benefit and continues to support considerable government investment in ethanol, something even Al Gore no longer does.

Most damning of all, though, is the disclosure, reiterated last week by *Bloomberg*, that Newt – like so many others in Washington’s privileged class – got rich selling himself and access to him to the mortgage giants, in his case Freddie Mac. To wit:

Newt Gingrich made between \$1.6 million and \$1.8 million in consulting fees from two contracts with mortgage company Freddie Mac, according to two people familiar with the arrangement . . .

Gingrich’s business relationship with Freddie Mac spanned a period of eight years. When asked at the debate what he

did to earn a \$300,000 payment in 2006, the former speaker said he “offered them advice on precisely what they didn’t do,” and warned the company that its lending practices were “insane.” Former Freddie Mac executives who worked with Gingrich dispute that account . . .

What he did for the money is a subject of disagreement. Gingrich said during the CNBC debate that he advised the troubled firm as a “historian.” Gingrich said he warned that the company’s business model was a “bubble” and its lending practices were “insane.”

None of the former Freddie Mac officials who spoke on condition of anonymity said Gingrich raised the issue of the housing bubble or was critical of Freddie Mac’s business model . . .

Former Freddie Mac officials familiar with his work in 2006 say Gingrich was asked to build bridges to Capitol Hill Republicans and develop an argument on behalf of the company’s public-private structure that would resonate with conservatives seeking to dismantle it.

He was expected to provide written material that could be circulated among free-market conservatives in Congress and in outside organizations, said two former company executives familiar with Gingrich’s role at the firm. He didn’t produce a white paper or any other document the firm could use on its behalf, they said.

Newt did precisely what you would have expected Newt to do. That’s the thing. Newt Gingrich is an insider. Indeed, he’s an insider’s insider. And he enjoys it. Heck, he *lives* for it. The guy loves being Newt Gingrich. Just as Bill Clinton loves being Bill Clinton. It’s who he is.

Now, in normal times and operating under conventional wisdom, one would expect that this crass, impenitent influence peddling would kill Gingrich’s candidacy in its proverbial crib. The Tea Party, we are told, is uncompromising, unthinking, unreasonable, and unwilling to tolerate any insider-y hanky-panky. Yet here we have Newt, more loaded up with insider-y hanky-panky than he and Clinton used to be with the more traditional kind of hanky-panky. To the true believer – either the true-believing Tea Partier or the true-believing anti-statist/anti-political-classist like ourselves – “government-cutting” conservative Newt is a fraud, plain and simple. He is, in many ways, more a part of the problem than the solution.

But these are not normal times, and the inside-the-Beltway conventional wisdom is wrong more often than it is right. In a recent essay for *The American Spectator*, Jeffrey Lord, a former Reagan White House political director, compared Newt to Winston Churchill, of all people. And while even Lord admits that this sounds nuts on the face of it, he thinks there is a case to be made:

By the time he reached his sixties he was thought to be politically finished. He had already served as “minister for the colonies and for trade, home affairs, finance, and all three of the armed services.” A book emerged called *The Tragedy of Winston Churchill* in which the facts of his many controversies, particularly his controversial strategy on the Dardanelles in World War I, were deliberately misrepresented, the findings of fact that exonerated Churchill in the incident willfully ignored in order to pronounce him a “brilliant failure, of whom it has been repeatedly said that he secretly despises those who pass him on the road to office and power.” His Parliament peers “detested him and everything he represented.” Precisely because in the course of all those jobs he had attracted so much controversy he was seen as “an erratic genius . . .

utterly unreliable”; someone to whom the British public had wised up, a figure from the past.

And yet. And yet.

In the words of Bernard Shaw: “The moment we got a good fright, and had to find a man who could and would do something, we were on our knees to Winston Churchill.” . . .

While it was indeed Hitler who gave the British a “good fright” – in fact a “good fright” is not an uncommon occurrence in history. All manner of events in American history from 9/11 to the economic turmoil and Iranian hostage crisis of the 1970s on back through the assassination of John F. Kennedy to the Cuban Missile Crisis to the attack on Pearl Harbor to the Great Depression to the prospect of Civil War have given Americans a “good fright” – sending them running to political figures they once doubted or rejected such as George W. Bush, Ronald Reagan, Lyndon Johnson, John F. Kennedy, Franklin Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln. The turn to Newt Gingrich is not hard to understand.

Americans have now seen the Obama Left in action. Hell-bent on imposing on our country a European-style socialism on their country, a nation that culturally and politically is built on a tradition of opportunity, liberty, freedom, hard work, and entrepreneurship -- the direct opposite of socialist principles. On top of which it sees an American government seemingly paralyzed as the virulently anti-Semitic Mahmoud Ahmadinejad patiently goes about the building of an Iranian nuclear bomb that could easily launch a nuclear

war in the Middle East. All of which is leaving millions of Americans with Shaw’s “good fright” – and damn mad on top of that. In this atmosphere the Republican candidates in these televised debates are being carefully vetted.

And repeatedly – in every single debate – it is the now-68-year-old battle-scarred Newt Gingrich who emerges precisely as the battle-scarred Winston Churchill suddenly emerged in 1939 and 1940. Suddenly Republicans – like frightened and angry British Conservatives before them so many decades ago – find themselves looking at a man who has been scorned as was Churchill. The “brilliant failure” derided as a “genius without judgment” turns out to be the man of hard earned wisdom with rock hard principles and the best judgment after all. The man once seen as “erratic” is suddenly recognized as the man whose bone-deep understanding of history, strategy and human nature gives him the steely ability to see over the horizon while all around him are essentially blind. And displays the supreme virtue of being unafraid to act.

You will forgive us – and perhaps Newt will too, someday – but despite Lord’s game effort, we still think that this is indeed a bridge too far (far too far). For starters, we’re nowhere near convinced that Newt is brilliant, failure or not, or exactly a genius, with or without judgment. We pretty sure, however, that Newt thinks he is both brilliant and a genius. And certainly he has convinced a great many of his fans to agree with him.

But unlike Churchill, Newt is not a man whose wisdom and intellect will resonate for years and years after his demise. We know he’ll never win a Nobel Prize in Literature, like Churchill did. We are, we must confess, more inclined to agree with the inimitable Jennifer Rubin, who noted last week that “Gingrich’s

mind is an attic of throwaway, unusable and downright goofy ideas, piled high like newspapers in the room of a troubled subject on ‘Hoarders’ The volume is great, the quality is shoddy.”

The question arises, though, whether any of that matters. Or, more to the point, in this particular fight, might it not be to Newt’s advantage – and to the nation’s – if he is not the ballyhooed, transformative super-genius and, moreover, not the longed-for Washington-outsider? After all, the nation elected one of those super-geniuses three years ago didn’t it? And he turned out to be a super-genius of the Wile E. Coyote variety. And the GOP base has been trying to find itself a real, bona fide outsider all primary season, only to wind up with one guy who can’t remember what cabinet level department he wants to cut and another guy who openly and unremorsefully admits that he neither knows nor much cares what is going on in Libya or any other part of the world outside of the IRS.

So maybe Newt is perfectly positioned to take down the robo-statist Romney and then to take on the wildly unpopular Obama. Who knows? Maybe the “just-smart-enough-and-smarter-than-all-the-rest-insider-who-knows-how-to-play-the-game” candidate is really the guy the GOP faithful has been waiting for. And maybe – just maybe – that’s just what the country needs right now. Again, who knows?

Maybe there is some parallel between Newt and Churchill after all. Churchill was, you may recall, essentially the last of his kind: the aristocratic, empire-loving, bold militarist man’s man, who, despite his class and his love of empire, nevertheless oversaw what amounted to the end of both the aristocracy’s monopoly on power and the British Empire.

Is it too much to think that perhaps the influence-peddling consummate Washington rental-politician (as George Will put it) might be the last of his kind as well?

Who better, after all, to oversee the end of the bloated administrative state than one of its prime architects of the last two decades? And how could Newt possibly do anything else, if elected, given the expectations and muscle of those who put him in power?

Maybe we’re getting ahead of ourselves. But then again, maybe we’re not.

We learned a long time ago not to have any expectations of national-level politicians, given their inability to meet even the lowest of them. And while that might sound cynical, it’s not unreasonable, given the general behavior of most of Washington’s players – Newt included.

Strangely, though, that might be just what it takes this time around. A man with no beliefs who is typically more concerned with the admiration and affection of his fellow-countrymen than anything else wouldn’t be above dismantling the administrative apparatus he might otherwise abuse, presuming it brought him sufficient glory?

Perhaps that’s a chance GOP primary voters are willing to take. After all, what other choice do they have? A man with no beliefs who clearly won’t dismantle the administrative apparatus? What good is he?

Obviously, we’re not ready to write this latter man off yet, and the smart money still has to be on the pre-appointed Romney.

But maybe – against all odds and surprising everyone, including us – Newt will turn out to be the anti-Romney who sticks around. Certainly, he has a better chance than any of the previous holders of that title did.

We guess we’ll know soon enough. 42 days to Iowa.

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