

The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events
impacting the world's financial markets*

Mark L. Melcher
Publisher
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

Stephen R. Soukup
Senior Editor
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

Friday, March 13, 2005

A REPRINT FROM A PIECE PUBLISHED OCTOBER 13, 1999

THE DAWN OF A NEW POLITICAL ERA – PART III

**Mark L. Melcher
Stephen R. Soukup**

Last summer I wrote two articles entitled "The Dawn Of A New Political Era, Parts I and II," in which I argued that both traditional American liberalism and traditional American conservatism, as these terms have been generally understood since the end of World War II, have been slowly dying ever since the end of the cold war.

I was reminded of these articles twice in recent months. The first time was last August when a movie actor named Warren Beatty announced that he might run for president unless he can persuade "the slightly more liberal one of the two accounting firms we call our major parties to return to the principles of the Democratic Party of my youth."

The second time was more recently when political pundit Pat Buchanan threatened to leave the race for the nomination of the Republican party and run for president as a third party candidate because he felt the GOP "at the national level has become a Xerox copy basically of the Democratic Party."

Now I think it is safe to say that Buchanan's wacky mix of nativism, protectionism, populism, isolationism, xenophobia, and pro-labor policies could hardly be called traditional conservatism, or even traditional Republicanism. And it is difficult to determine from Beatty's strange kick-off political message, which appeared as an op-ed piece in the *New York Times*, whether he is either literate or lucid, much less understands what it means to be a "Roosevelt-Truman-Stevenson-Kennedy Democrat."

But that's beside the point. The fact is that each man is, I believe, essentially correct in arguing that the political party to which he has belonged throughout his adult life has changed dramatically for the worse in recent years, standing for less and less and having less and less influence over day to day affairs of the nation.

Subscriptions to The Political Forum are available by contacting:
The Political Forum

8563 Senedo Rd., Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842
Tel 540-477-9762, Fax 540-477-3359, Email melcher@thepoliticalforum.com,
or visit us at www.thepoliticalforum.com

So what is replacing these two venerable old American political institutions, liberalism and conservatism? Well, at the end of each of the above-mentioned articles, I promised that I would, in a future issue, speculate on this topic, or as I put it, paraphrasing Yeats, “What rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches towards Washington to be born.” So here goes.

For starters, I will turn to Tocqueville’s thoughts, not on American democracy, but on the French Revolution, for it is in his remarkable, uncompleted final work, *L’Ancien Regime et la Revolution*, that the great political commentator made the profound observation that the destruction of a society’s traditional social institutions and class structure never strengthens the power of “the people,” as Marx and Engels believed it would, but inevitably increases the power of the centralized state. Prior to the revolution, Tocqueville noted, the state shared power with privileged and powerful groups. Afterward, the state stood alone.

As one reads the following thoughts from Tocqueville on the political aftermath of the French revolution, it is easy, I believe, to identify similar consequences resulting from the relentless, revolutionary efforts over the past 35 years by America’s own Jacobins to destroy their nation’s non-governmental sources of social order and stability, including church, family, and respect for traditional customs, mores, and morals. Among these consequences are the rise in the power of the state, the decline in respect for law and order, and the increase in violence.

Since the object of the Revolution was not merely to change an old form of government but to abolish the entire social structure of pre-revolutionary France, it was obliged to declare war simultaneously on all established powers, to destroy all recognized prerogatives, to make short work of all traditions, and to institute new ways of living, new conventions. Thus one of its first acts was to rid men’s minds of all those notions that had ensured their obedience to authority under the old regime. Hence, its so markedly anarchic tendencies.

But beneath the seemingly chaotic surface there was developing a vast, highly centralized power which attracted to itself and welded into an organic whole all the elements of authority and influence that hitherto had been dispersed among a crowd of lesser, uncoordinated powers . . . Never since the fall of the Roman Empire had the world seen a government so highly centralized. This new power was created by the Revolution, or, rather, grew up almost automatically out of the havoc wrought by it.

This was a keen observation on Tocqueville’s part. But it became historically brilliant when he noted that this formula for concentrating heretofore unheard of power in the hands of the state, by destroying competing repositories of power in the name of “equality,” began to be followed by despots everywhere. Once again, it is easy, I believe, to identify in Tocqueville’s 150-year-old observations, similar pursuits by America’s establishment liberals.

Thus we see all these rulers doing what they can to abolish privileges and remove immunities within their territories. Everywhere they are breaking down class distinctions, leveling out inequalities, replacing members of the aristocracy with trained civil servants, local charters with uniform regulations, and a diversity of powers with a strong, centralized government. They are putting through these revolutionary measures

with unflagging energy and sometimes even have recourse to the methods and maxims of the Great Revolution when obstacles arise.

From Tocqueville, I will turn to the thoughts of the great economist and social historian, Max Weber, whose writings, like Tocqueville's, have also graced these pages on numerous past occasions, most notably in an August, 1997 piece entitled "The New Political Paradigm."

Writing early in the 20th century, Weber expanded on Tocqueville's theme, arguing that the Marxist ideal of a society without domination was utopian (or dystopian, if you prefer). The vast power accumulated by the state as a result of revolutionary leveling would, he said, eventually concentrate in gigantic, omnipotent bureaucracies. In the end, he continued, the capitalist entrepreneur would be replaced by the state administrator, and the result would be a monolithic power structure as oppressive as that of ancient Egypt and as economically stagnant as that of late imperial Rome.

In a narrative that is, in my opinion, as horrifying as anything the Stephen King or Edgar Allen Poe ever wrote, Weber put it this way.

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

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

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

The individual bureaucrat cannot squirm out of the apparatus in which he is harnessed. . . The official is entrusted with specialized tasks and normally the mechanism cannot be put into motion or arrested by him, but only from the very top. The individual bureaucrat is thus forged to the community of all the functionaries who are integrated into the mechanism. They have a common interest in seeing that the mechanism continues its functions and that the societally exercised authority carries on.

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

fate of the masses depends upon the steady and correct function of the increasingly bureaucratic organizations of private capitalism. The idea of eliminating these organizations becomes more and more utopian. . . .

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

Next I will turn to some thoughts from Cornell University’s great political scientist, Theodore Lowi, who noted in the mid-1960s that the vast bureaucratization predicted by Tocqueville and Weber had arrived in America in full force. More importantly, he was one of the first to observe that it quickly rendering obsolete the old liberal-conservative dialogue that had dominated American politics for so many years, slowly replacing it with a single system, willingly participated in by both parties, that he called “interest-group liberalism.”

Lowi did this in his classic 1969 book (revised in 1979), *The End of Liberalism*. It is a fascinating study of American politics. Among other things, it identifies and analyzes the nature of a brand new wrinkle in the growth of the bureaucratic juggernaut that was unforeseen by either Tocqueville or Weber. This wrinkle is the merger between giant private interest groups and their bureaucratic counterparts in government, to form political power bases that dominate the decision making process in all areas that concern them.

[T]he liberal-conservative debate has become almost purely ritualistic. And its persistence even in ritualistic form has produced a number of evil effects among which the most important is the blinding of the nation to the emergence of a new and ersatz public philosophy. The coexistence of a purely ritualistic public dialogue and an ersatz and unrecognized new public philosophy has produced most of the political pathologies of the 1960s and the 1970s. The decline of a meaningful dialogue between a liberalism and a conservatism has meant the decline of meaningful adversary political proceeding in favor of administrative, technical, and logrolling politics.

In a nutshell, politics became a question of equity rather than a question of morality. Adjustment comes first, rules of law come last, if at all. The tendency of individuals to accept government decisions simply because these decisions are good has probably at no time in American history, save during the Civil War, been less widely distributed and less intensely felt. Cynicism and distrust in everyday political processes have never been more widespread. The emerging public philosophy, interest-group liberalism, has sought to solve the problems of public authority in a large modern state by defining them away. This has simply added the element of demoralization to that illegitimacy. Interest-group liberalism seeks to justify power by avoiding law and by parceling out to private parties the power to make public policy.

And this brings us to today, 20 years after the second edition of Lowi's book was published, a time when politicians still fight noisily in Congress over a host of issues and still are identified as "conservatives" and "liberal."

"Liberals" still purport to represent the interests of "the poor," but there aren't many "poor" around anymore, so they concentrate their efforts on boosting middle class entitlements and log rolling for labor unions, trial lawyers, public employees, and school teachers.

They support things that would have been anathema to liberals just a few years ago: big defense spending, bombing third world nations, welfare cutbacks, the death penalty, curtailment of the "rights" of accused criminals, normal relations with nations that demonstrate no respect for human rights, and a wink at sexual activities in the White House that once formed the centerpiece of the "feminist" agenda.

Conservatives still pay lip service to conservative themes, such as smaller government, sharply lower taxes, and a reverence for traditional moral and ethical behavior. But it's all nonsense, as was amply demonstrated by the pathetic actions of the Senate Republicans during the impeachment proceedings, and the lack of any significant effort by the GOP majority in both houses during the budget negotiations of past four years to diminish the power and size of government.

The two parties still fight over marginal differences in the size of the piece of federal pie that each special interest group will receive. But if they argue about the size of the pie itself, which is rare, it is only on the margin. They fight passionately over what they call social issues. But these arguments have virtually no impact on the moral character of society.

On the "hot" issue of abortion, for example, "conservatives" argue that it is the issue that divides the moral from the immoral, while "liberals" argue that it divides those who respect women's rights from those who don't. While they bicker, the nation's entertainment industry and its education establishment are systematically deconstructing the traditional moral and ethical basis that underlies American society, while the President of the United States is setting women's rights to a harassment-free workplace back fifty years.

And even when today's politicians do directly address an important issue, the "solution" they devise involves, in virtually every case, handing the bureaucracy additional responsibility, money, and power.

In short, the rough bureaucratic beast, which politicians created to help them implement their ideas and plans, now has, as predicted by Tocqueville and Weber, and analyzed by Lowi, a mind of its own and a voracious appetite. It demands to be fed an ever-increasing share of the national treasure, snarling at even a hint of a cutback in its huge rations. It routinely refuses to obey orders it doesn't like. It issues, with little oversight, tens of thousands of "regulations" a week, which have the full force of law behind them and which directly effect virtually every aspect of American life.

In addition, as Lowi pointed out, the beast is constantly joining with giant private interest groups to build new, and to shore up old, coalitions, many of which are more powerful than any of three

traditional branches of government. I described it this way in the above-mentioned "The New Political Paradigm" piece.

Unions no longer have the clout to close down vast American enterprises for any serious length of time, as they once did. But government today has the power, vested in mountains of laws, regulations and court rulings, to destroy or badly cripple any business, or any industry, in the United States, large or small, whether it be a meat packing plant in Nebraska, a restaurant in Brooklyn, or the entire tobacco industry. No union boss in U.S. history has ever had this kind of pure, unadulterated muscle.

Government today also has the kind of power to kill, maim, malign and confiscate the property of individual citizens that the nation's founding fathers would have found astonishing, as was discovered, for example, by such a diverse lot as the Branch Davidians in Texas, a falsely accused "terrorist" in Atlanta, and dozens of ordinary farmers, who have been pilloried for filling in low spots in their own fields, which the EPA bureaucrats now call "wet lands."

The scope and raw power of the tens of thousands of nameless, faceless bureaucrats in this nation is almost beyond comprehension. Somewhere, someplace taxpayers are paying people to write hundreds of pages of complicated regulations specifying exactly which public housing residents can own a pet (old people who need companionship), how many black men and how many woman of any color should be fire fighters in Podunk, Iowa, and (how's this for hubris?), how many doctors is "too many."

Helping with this task, are millions of big-company, private sector bureaucrats, whose bosses have learned that fortunes can be made if government bureaucrats can be "helped" to make and enforce decisions that favor them over their competitors; who are blind to the lesson learned by so many Frenchman during "the terror," that those who help place the heads of others on the block soon find their own there.

Operating between these private and public sector bureaucrats and their bosses are tens of thousands of lawyers, who live on the system like blood sucking leaches in a swamp full of sows, operating in a special environment, designed by them, of "legal bribery" and "honest graft."

In many ways this bureaucracy is a benevolent beast. It gives generously of its treasure to huge numbers of citizens, buying both their loyalty and their complacency. But it is also a jealous creature that works night and day to eliminate any and all competitive private sources of power, including the traditional family.

Even foreign policy decisions, including whether and whom to bomb, are today driven not by ideology, Wilsonian or otherwise, but by the collective pressures from various "interest groups," representing commercial businesses, defense manufacturers, ethnic communities, and of course, the bureaucrats themselves, including those in such international organizations as the United Nations and NATO.

For many Americans this is the ideal government. Those who receive more than they give to government love the idea of a dispassionate, impartial bureaucracy redistributing the nation's wealth, based on some idea of "equity" that, wonder of wonders, favors them.

This is all well and good, except that "the beast" is neither dispassionate or impartial. It may favor now, for practical reasons, things that many liberals once favored for ideological ones. But as Weber pointed out, and as Adolph Hitler demonstrated, the bureaucracy will, when the chips are down, follow the orders of the man in charge.

I'll close this admittedly gloomy view of American politics today by pointing out that there are parallels between the Clinton years and the glorious 1920's, when the world was at peace and commerce was king. In his marvelous study of T.S. Eliot's life and work, *Eliot and His Age*, Russell Kirk described the late 1920s in England, as seen through Eliot's eyes, as follows.

This was a time when the world knew a respite from violence: a time when political imagination ought to have been employed, and when the principles of order might have been examined. But Eliot saw the Conservative party unimaginative and timorous, the Labour party dully ideological and materialistic, the Liberal party enfeebled and unprincipled. He saw nothing better in other great states; indeed the prospect was that democracy . . . would give way to something worse—a force and political dogmatism of a fanatical character. The sands were running out.

THE POLITICAL FORUM

Copyright 2005. The Political Forum. 8563 Senedo Road, Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842, tel. 540-477-9762, fax 540-477-3359. All rights reserved. Information contained herein is based on data obtained from recognized services, issuer reports or communications, or other sources believed to be reliable. However, such information has not been verified by us, and we do not make any representations as to its accuracy or completeness, and we are not responsible for typographical errors. Any statements nonfactual in nature constitute only current opinions which are subject to change without notice.