



Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

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Disclaimer: The following "Letters to the Editor" were sent to the respective publications on the dates indicated. Some were printed but many were not. The original articles that are being commented on may or may not be available on the internet and may require registration or subscription to access if they are. Some of the original articles are syndicated and therefore may have appeared in other publications also.

7 November 2009

Editor, The Wall Street
Journal
200 Liberty Street
New York, NY 10281

To the Editor:

Kudos to Mark Spitznagel for drawing attention to the important but neglected work of the late Ludwig von Mises ("The Man Who Predicted the Depression," Nov. 7).

But while Mr. Spitznagel is correct that Keynesians ignored Mises 1912 book *Theorie des Geldes und der Umlaufsmittel* (and its 1934 English-language translation, *The Theory of*

Money and Credit), Keynes himself did not ignore it - and therein lays a revealing tale. When Mises's German-language book first appeared in 1912, Keynes reviewed it in the prestigious *Economic Journal*, dismissing it as being unoriginal.

Seems pretty damning, until we learn that Keynes himself, in his 1930 book *Treatise on Money*, confessed that "in German, I can only clearly understand what I already know - so that new ideas are apt to be veiled from me by the difficulties of the language."

Keynes's influential dismissal of Mises's work was based not on anything as lofty as informed disagreement; it was based instead on incomprehension.

6 November 2009

Editor, Washington Post
1150 15th St., NW
Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

Michael Gerson, Charles Krauthammer, and Eugene Robinson speculate today about Tuesday's election results. What do these results signal about the Republican and Democratic parties? About Pres. Obama? About Michael Steele? Sarah Palin? Glenn Beck?

Speculations centered on party struggles are tiresome.

The real struggle is between persons who love liberty and persons enthralled with power. A liberty lover refuses to exercise power over others and, therefore, has solid principles upon which he can stand when defending himself against those who would exercise power over him. In contrast, someone enthralled with power - by endorsing its exercise over others - kicks out from beneath his own feet the principles he will need to stand on when the time comes for him to defend himself against those who would force him to submit to their power.

5 November 2009

Editor, Washington Post
1150 15th St., NW
Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

Brian Czech repeats one of today's most frequently heard mantras - namely, that economic and population growth spell disaster for the planet and humanity (Letters, Nov. 5).

Virtually all available evidence contradicts this doomsday claim. For example, the earth's population today is seven times larger than it was in 1800, and yet most people today live lives that are far more sanitary, healthy, long, and rich in experiences than were those of all but the most privileged potentates and pooh-bahs before the industrial age. Each hectare of land now feeds more mouths and clothes more bodies than ever before. Water and air in capitalist countries are cleaner than they were a century ago, or even just 50 years ago - and still getting cleaner. Available supplies of oil and most other raw materials show no signs of being depleted, despite the fact that today we use absolutely larger

quantities of these materials.

Mr. Czech commits the common mistake of assuming that humans are net consumers of resources. But when markets are reasonably free and property rights extensive and secure, most people are net producers. History amply supports this claim. I challenge Mr. Czech or anyone else to offer evidence to the contrary.

4 November 2009

Editor, The New York Times
620 Eighth Avenue
New York, NY 10018

To the Editor:

The writers of the eight letters you published today on how to improve teaching join Susan Engel - author of the op-ed that sparked these letters - in utterly misdiagnosing the problem with K-12 education.

Suppose that newspapers were run by government and funded by taxpayers, and that each American was assigned to read only the newspaper published in his or her local area. Clearly, the resulting

quality of journalism would be atrocious.

Would anyone seriously suggest that this problem would be solved if only there were better schools of journalism, or higher pay for journalists, or more people who are "called" to journalism, or newspaper readers who take more active roles in digesting and interpreting the news? Surely not. All sensible people would understand that these fixes would all fail as long as newspapers faced no competition - indeed, as long as journalism is produced by the state.

Why, then, does not Ms. Engel or any of your letter writers see that K-12 education will continue to stink as long as it remains a government-run monopoly?

3 November 2009

Editor, Boston Globe

Dear Editor:

David Bonar says that no Baltimorean deserves a statue more than does former Mayor (and Maryland Governor) William Donald Schaefer (Letters, Nov. 3). I disagree. The Baltimorean most deserving of a statue is H.L. Mencken.

A fountain bearing Mencken's name stands in Union Square (across from his home on Hollins St.), but I believe that Charm City boasts no statue of its greatest son.

A shame - but not surprising given that the determination of who is and who isn't honored publicly with statues is very much in the hands of professional politicians. And Mencken was a sworn enemy of these oily characters. He described them accurately as "the eternal enemies of human peace and security. It is always in the interest of such politicians to arouse fears. They make their living doing so, and then promising to get rid of the bugaboo by quack devices." [H.L. Mencken, Minority Report (Baltimore:

Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997 [1956]), p. 210]

Mencken will be remembered fondly for his works long after future Baltimoreans gaze up in bewilderment at a bird-stained statue as they ask themselves "Who the heck was William Donald Schaefer"?

2 November 2009

Editor, Boston Globe

Dear Editor:

In a column best described as a Niagara of hackneyed pieties, Lou Ureneck complains that "The important work of being informed about public issues has been crowded out of our lives at the very time that big money has found a way to insinuate itself into nearly every cavity of government" ("Adrift in an ocean of complexity," Nov. 2).

The root problem is NOT that big money has insinuated itself into nearly every cavity of government; rather, it is that government has insinuated itself into nearly every cavity of the economy. Unless and until this latter intrusion is reversed, big money will be

inseparable from
government.

2 November 2009

Friends,

My GMU colleague and co-blogger, Russ Roberts, weighs in today at the New York Times Opinion site on the question: "Did the Stimulus Work?"

Joining him in this debate are Harvard's Jeff Miron, MIT's Simon Johnson, and Oregon's Mark Thoma.

<http://roomfordebate.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/01/did-the-stimulus-work/>