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Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

Donald J. Boudreaux
Chairman, Department of Economics
George Mason University
dboudrea@gmu.edu
<http://www.cafehayek.com>

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.

11 April 2010

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

Dear Editor:

Like Jonathan Yardley ("Mencken on Mencken," April 11), I deeply admire H.L. Mencken - not only Mencken's vibrant prose but, especially, his unfailingly realistic observations of us humans and our condition. Here is just one of those observations, relevant now and always: "The worst government is the most moral. One composed of cynics is often very tolerant and humane. But when

fanatics are on top there is no limit to oppression."
[H.L. Mencken, Minority Report (Johns Hopkins University Press, [1956] 1997), p. 327]

11 April 2010

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

Dear Editor:

Arthur Kroeber explodes many myths about China's economy ("Five myths about China's economy," April 11). In the course of doing so, he reports two facts that, when considered together, explode an additional myth - namely, a

myth about the environmental impact of economic growth.

The first of these facts is that China's GDP is "barely one-third the size of the \$14 trillion U.S. economy." The second fact is that "China is now the biggest producer of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming." That is, America's economy - nearly three times larger than China's economy - produces less pollution than does China's economy.

So much for the myth that economic growth inevitably and always increases

pollution and environmental damage. Clearly, after some point, continued growth can REDUCE pollution and environmental harm.

10 April 2010

Editor, USA Today

Dear Editor:

Bob Beckel and Cal Thomas wonder why politics is uglier today than in the past ("Ugly politics: How low can we go?" April 9).

One reason is that with fewer and fewer constitutional restraints on the exercise of Uncle Sam's power, struggles among politicians and interest-groups to get that awesome power - and struggles by ordinary people to seek protection from that power - grow more intense.

Politicians and interest-groups use the state to further their own narrow goals. And in this greedy quest they are cheered on by unwitting intellectuals whose blind "Progressive" faith assures them that pretty words in a statute book combined with Smart and Caring Public Servants working away in the capital city are both necessary

and sufficient to cure society of all real and imaginary ailments.

I suspect that Tea Partiers - whatever their flaws and internal differences - at least understand that this "Progressive" faith is as laughable as was the faith cherished by some primitive tribes that the way to appease angry gods was to hurl virgins into volcanoes.

Because it's insulting, degrading, and dangerous to be ruled by the primitivism that calls itself "Progressivism," sensible people react harshly when, as now, that primitivism gains ground.

9 April 2010

News Editor, WTOP Radio
Washington, DC

Dear Sir or Madam:

Your interview yesterday with someone from the New America Foundation was replayed today during the 5am hour. That person - a supporter of Pres. Obama's activist legislative and regulatory agenda - said, very poetically, of the President's opponents "They can't achieve anything by saying no to everything."

I write not to defend Republicans but, rather, to correct the widespread myth that saying "yes" to government interventions is a more positive and creative agenda than is saying "no" to those interventions.

Most of the interventions proposed by Mr. Obama and his party take decision-making authority away from each of millions of individuals and give it to officials in Washington. These interventions, therefore, say "no" those of us who wish to provide for our own pensions without contributing to Social Security - "No!" to those who wish not to spend money on health-insurance of the sort mandated by Uncle Sam - "No!" to those who wish to buy low-priced tires from China - "No!" to those who ask Uncle Sam not to further saddle our children with the burden of paying off the debt he accumulates as a result of his incontinent spending - "No!" to young men and women who wish to work as unpaid interns for private corporations.

If we opponents of centralized government power form a "party of 'no,'" it is only because the proponents of such power form a far more dangerous

party, namely, the "party of 'know-it-alls.'"

9 April 2010

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

Dear Editor:

You wisely criticize Sen. Schumer's call for punitive taxes on Americans who buy Chinese goods ("Progress with China," April 9). In the course of doing so, though, you inadvertently reveal a confusion that infects discussions of today's economic slump.

You write that "But China kept the party going by accumulating \$2.3 trillion in reserves and plowing much of it back into U.S. bonds - rather than letting China's currency appreciate freely and, in effect, forcing the United States to save more and consume less. Post-boom, of course, it's clear that the two sides pushed this arrangement beyond the point of diminishing returns." So you alleged that this recession was caused, at least in part, by Americans saving too little and spending too much.

But you also support "stimulus" spending.

If spending too much got us into this mess, how will spending even more get us out of it?

8 April 2010

Editor, The Wall Street Journal
1211 6th Ave.
New York 10036

To the Editor:

John Lahey alleges that the Irish potato famine was caused by "British laissez-faire policies" (Letters, April 8). Not so. This calamity was caused by British prohibitions on land-ownership by the Catholic Irish, burdensome taxation, and public-works projects that built roads that were useless for carrying goods and foodstuffs from places where they were abundant to places where they were in short supply.

The great 19th-century French economist, Jean-Baptiste Say, writing in the early 1800s, harshly criticized these British interventions: "What is lacking in Ireland is not subsistence but the ability to pay for it. With landowners far away [in Britain], without capitalists who might introduce productive businesses, and with numerous government employees, ecclesiastics,

and military personal to feed, heavy taxes to pay, and the ignorance resulting from so many evils, the Irish simply lack the means of improving their condition." [Quoted on page 108 of Robert Roswell Palmer, ed., J.-B. Say: An Economist in Troubled Times (Princeton University Press, 1997)]

Doesn't sound like laissez faire to me.

7 April 2010

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

Dear Editor:

Harold Meyerson is appalled that producers of branded consumer products help to fund - and, hence, get their products featured in - many Hollywood movies ("Moviemaking becomes commercial art," April 7).

Is he equally appalled that the very same Internet pages on which his column appears today are funded in part by - and, hence, feature ads for - Open Skies Airlines, Ryan Homes, Sprint, Fidelity Investments, and (egads!) the American Petroleum Institute? Should your readers conclude that the

quality and sincerity of the Post's news reports and opinion pieces are compromised by appearing on the same computer screen as ads for a wide array of commercial products? And will Mr. Meyerson have the moral mettle to refuse from now on to write for the Post as long as you continue your cheap and compromising practice of accepting ads from philistine capitalists?

7 April 2010

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

Dear Editor:

According to Harold Meyerson, "none of those systems - be they theocratic, feudal, capitalist or communist - has a logic that's ultimately compatible with that of the artist" ("Moviemaking becomes commercial art," April 7). He's wrong about capitalism.

What has done as much as capitalism's creation of consumer electronics to give nearly everyone in capitalist societies inexpensive and round-the-clock access to music, from rap to renaissance? And access to movies, from Caddyshack to

Citizen Kane? And what is it if not the profit motive that spurred the likes of Shakespeare, Mozart, Orson Welles, and Lennon & McCartney to create their masterpieces? Here, for example, is Mozart writing to his father: "Believe me, my sole purpose is to make as much money as possible; for after good health it is the best thing to have."

The mantra that capitalism either compromises or crushes artists silly slapstick.

6 April 2010

Editor, The Wall Street Journal
1211 6th Ave.
New York 10036

To the Editor:

So the Obama administration is rescuing exploited American youth from working as unpaid interns at for-profit companies ("War on Interns," April 7).

It's unclear, however, why the same young people whom the President judges to be unfit to choose for themselves whether or not to work as unpaid interns at for-profit firms are fit to choose for themselves whether or not to work as

unpaid interns at not-for-profit organizations. So I urge this administration, which is ever-vigilant at protecting us from our irrational and helpless selves, also to prohibit young people from working as unpaid interns at not-for-profit outfits - such as political campaigns.

Indeed, Mr. Obama should not only apologize to the thousands of young, unpaid volunteers whom he exploited in 2008 for his own profit - namely, to win election to the highest pulpit in the land - he should also give to each and every one of them back pay (with interest) for their efforts on his behalf.

Our Father-in-Chief surely doesn't want history to remember him as a cruel exploiter.

6 April 2010

News Editor, WTOP Radio
Washington, DC

Dear Sir or Madam:

A talking-head interviewed this afternoon by Hillary Howard and Shawn Anderson expressed his "hope that Barack Obama may yet turn out to be another Franklin Roosevelt."

I hope NOT, in part because I know what Raymond Moley - organizer of F.D.R.'s original 'Brain Trust' and author of much of Roosevelt's first inaugural address - said of that President in 1936: "I was impressed as never before by the utter lack of logic of the man, the scantiness of his precise knowledge of things that he was talking about.... My deliberate impression is that he is dangerous in the extreme, and I view the next four years with no inconsiderable apprehension." [Quoted in Burton Folsom, Jr., *New Deal or Raw Deal? How FDR's Economic Legacy Has Damaged America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), p. 135]

Yikes!

6 April 2010

Editor, The Wall Street Journal
1211 6th Ave.
New York 10036

To the Editor:

DuPont's Thomas Sager demands antitrust action against competitor Monsanto (Letters, April 6). A good rule of thumb is always to dismiss any complaint by any firm

alleging that its rivals need to be spanked by government. Seeking genuinely unfair advantages over rivals - and, hence, over consumers - under the guise of antitrust regulation is a time-honored ploy of unethical business people.

If government wants to promote competition in agriculture, it can begin by abolishing trade restrictions on sugar, dairy, and other products. Even if the dubious claim that Monsanto is restricting competition in some genetically enhanced soybean seeds were true, complaining about this problem in light of the huge consumer harms created by Uncle Sam's protectionist policies is like a homeowner complaining about a leaky faucet while ignoring his collapsing roof.

5 April 2010

Editor, The Wall Street Journal
1211 6th Ave.
New York 10036

To the Editor:

Your editorial on the expanding swarm of lobbyists in Washington ("The Mystique of Washington") combines with the current press on

Tea Parties to cause me to imagine a tribe of powerful, primitive people who worship vultures. One day they encounter another tribe, and start slaughtering members of this other tribe. The vulture-worshippers place their victims' bodies on marble altars and wait. Sure enough, vultures swoop in to devour the kill. The vulture-worshippers rejoice.

But members of the other tribe do not stand idly by to be slaughtered. They defend themselves. The vulture-worshippers are aghast at the other tribe's selfish desire to avoid being slaughtered for what the vulture-worshippers know in their heart of hearts to be the greater good.

"Stop resisting," plead the vulture-worshippers to the other tribe, "for the vultures must be fed! And only in being their food will you find true meaning and happiness!" The tribes-people who refuse to feed, or to be fed to, the ever-expanding flock of vultures think the vulture-worshippers to be their enemies. And the vulture-worshippers - so devoted to keeping the vultures well and truly fed - regard these resisters as enemies not only of the vulture-

worshippers themselves, but of all that is good, just, right, and holy.

Party on.

5 April 2010

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

Dear Editor:

Robert Samuelson astutely observes that "American politics caters to people's natural desire to think well of themselves. But in so doing, it often sacrifices pragmatic goals and sows rancor" ("The poisonous politics of self-esteem," April 5).

Because no single vote determines an election's outcome - that outcome will be what it will be no matter how any individual votes - each voter can express his or her moral sensibilities free of charge. No need to ponder the practicalities of how government will actually deliver health-care coverage; no need to weigh carefully the costs and benefits of invading Iraq. Realism need never intrude upon any voter. One's identity (e.g., "conservative") and one's fantasies about government and society, regardless of how far-

etched, become the bases on which too many votes are cast.

A great advantage of the private sphere is that, unlike in the voting booth, each choice has direct and often immediate consequences for each chooser. Such personal feedback encourages the same person who is dreamily unrealistic while in a voting booth to be matter-of-fact practical in his or her private affairs.