



## 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.**

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9 May 2010

Ms. Clara B. Floyd,  
President  
Maryland State Teachers'  
Association

Dear Ms. Floyd:

One of your organization's spokeswomen (speaking today on WTOP radio) explained that performance-based pay for teachers is "unfair" to teachers. The proffered reason is that so much of a child's intellectual development is affected by home environment, neighborhood influences, and other factors outside of teachers' control that it is impossible to determine each teacher's success or

failure simply by measuring changes over time in the academic abilities of that teachers' students.

Fair point. But if it's true that teachers have so little influence over their students' learning that it's "unfair" to tie teacher pay to the measured academic performance of their students, then what's the use of public schooling? If what students learn or don't learn is largely outside of the influence of their schoolteachers, why spend all of these resources, year after year, trying to impart knowledge to children who are so impervious to it that any amount of knowledge that might actually take hold in

young-people's minds as a result of their schooling is too small to be measured?

In short, if your spokeswoman is correct, not only should pleas for performance-based pay for teachers be tossed into history's dustbin, so, too, should government schooling itself be abandoned – for we can have no reliable evidence that it is serving its stated purpose of educating children.

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9 May 2010

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

To the Editor:

The virus of totalitarianism is seldom detected when it is attached to notions dominant among 'progressive' intellectuals. Indeed, under such circumstances this virus not only deludes its hosts' mouthpieces into believing themselves to be well-meaning and forward-thinking agents of beneficial social change, it also protects even the most outrageous demands of these mouthpieces from serious scrutiny by other intellectuals.

Think of the fawning admiration bestowed for many years by the likes of Ida Tarbell, Lowell Thomas, and Sigmund Freud upon Mussolini. Or of Lincoln Steffens's and Dorothy Parker's enthusiasm for Stalinism. Or of Joe Kennedy's present-day coziness with Senor Gen. El Presidente-for-Life Hugo Chavez. Well-meaning intellectuals all, and nary a word of dissent from their contemporary comrades-in-ink-and-paper-and-podium.

Your pages today offer yet another alarming example of how easily 'progressive' intellectuals regress into

championing tyranny. Insisting that Bill McKibben's proposals for saving the planet are too modest (!), Paul Greenberg - reviewing McKibben's latest use of trees to spread the Green gospel - endorses, as allegedly being the only practical means of saving the earth, "some overarching authority, a kind of ecologically minded Lenin" ("Hot Planet, Cold Facts," May 9).

Read Greenberg's words carefully. Read them again. Ponder them.

No degree of global warming poses to humanity anywhere near the danger that is posed by intellectuals who are fascinated with the prospect of rule by strong men.

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8 May 2010

Editor, Washington Times

Dear Editor:

Ridiculing Charlie Crist's "plan" to keep Social Security solvent simply by eliminating "waste and fraud," Samuel Burkeen properly complains that politicians too often insult us with such idiotic and empty promises (Letters, May 8). But the

appropriate response to the likes of Mr. Crist is not to demand that he and other politicians offer substantive "solutions." As Thomas Sowell points out, in economic matters there are seldom "solutions"; overwhelmingly, there are only tradeoffs.

For example, a private couple understands that if they extend their European vacation from one week to two weeks, they will have less money to spend remodeling their home or to save for retirement. This couple faces an unavoidable tradeoff. There's no "solution" available that enables them to enjoy a longer vacation without making sacrifices elsewhere in their lives.

The same is true for taxpayer-funded goods and services.

Regrettably, though, politicians of all stripes regularly promise "solutions." The reason is plain. Any politician who speaks honestly of tradeoffs would remind voters that he or she is a mere mortal, one with no more power than a dentist or a taxi driver to feed the multitudes with only five loaves and two fish. And such a reminder puts that politician at a crushing

disadvantage against opponents who portray themselves as secular saviors.

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7 May 2010

Friends,

Here, published today in the Christian Science Monitor, is my open letter to the Greek protestors: <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2010/0507/Greek-protesters-Ready-to-face-reality-about-the-debt-crisis>

The Greeks especially should not be surprised that attractive gifts can be filled with destructive agents.

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7 May 2010

Mr. Ezra Klein  
Columnist, Washington Post

Dear Mr. Klein:

You allege that when unemployment is high, a slowing of productivity growth helps the economy ("When bad economic news is good news," May 6). The reason, according to you, is that any increase in the number of workers required to produce a given amount of output - everything from a Starbucks' latte to a Boeing

747 - is "good news" because it increases the demand for workers.

The relationship between falling productivity and rising demand for workers isn't this simple. (If the Washington Post lost access to the Internet and found itself stuck with vintage printing presses from 1890, are you sure that that newspaper would hire more workers to compensate for its drop in productivity?) But assuming your premise to be true, why rely only upon unguided forces to reduce worker productivity? Shouldn't government help this beneficial process along - say, by requiring that each employee drink three martinis before reporting to work?

Not only are drunk workers less productive than sober ones, they're also more likely to damage equipment. So mandating employee intoxication promises a helpful double-whammy: employers would hire more workers to produce any given amount of output, AND employers would hire more workers to repair damaged equipment. Presto! Unemployment problem solved!

Shall we drink to this proposal, Mr. Klein?

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6 May 2010

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

Dear Editor:

Ever the romantic about popularly elected government, E.J. Dionne writes that "The central tasks of democratic government, after all, typically involve standing up for the many against the few, the less powerful against the more powerful" ("Can we reverse the tide on government distrust?" May 6).

That's the theory taught to children. Here's the reality understood by adults: The central achievements of democratic government, after all, typically involve standing up for the few against the many, the more powerful against the less powerful.

History overflows with evidence that democratic reality seldom lives up to democratic theory. Tariffs; farm subsidies; military-weapons programs that thrive even in the face of opposition by the Pentagon - these are only three of the more blatant examples

of the many way that government heaps benefits on relatively small interest groups (the few) by screwing the general public (the many).

Gullibility is tolerable in children because kiddies have little decision-making authority. But gullibility in adults is dangerous. And no instance of gullibility is as dangerous as that which leads adults such as Mr. Dionne to "trust" that a handful of people hungry for power and the privilege of spending taxpayers' money, will - once chosen by voters - cast off their human vanities and ignorance to become selfless saviors of millions upon millions of strangers whom these officials will never as much as lay their eyes on.

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5 May 2010

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

Dear Editor:

Virginia's Republican Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli seems hell bent on proving that Democrats rightly caricature conservatives both as buffoons and as gutter fighters who are as willing as Democrats to use the

power of their office for blatantly political - which is to say, anti-social - ends.

First he decides that Virginia's centuries-old state seal - showing Lady Virtus standing triumphantly above slain tyrants - is too risqué given that the victorious warrior's left breast is exposed. As a first step in protecting Virginians from such salacious imagery, Mr. Cuccinelli has ordered new lapel pins in which the hussy's womanhood is fully covered.

And now the Attorney General is subpoenaing documents from a former University of Virginia professor whose scholarship on global warming, Mr. Cuccinelli alleges, is fraudulent.

I'm no more caught up in the global-warming hysteria than is Mr. Cuccinelli. But if this professor's scholarship is flawed or, indeed, even fraudulent, that fact should be, and can be, determined only by free and open scientific inquiry. Such inquiry cannot thrive alongside Mr. Cuccinelli's Nazi-like tactics.

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5 May 2010

Prof. Barry Popkin

Department of Nutrition  
University of North  
Carolina  
Chapel Hill, NC 27516-  
2524

Dear Prof. Popkin:

A segment on WJLA-TV's 11:00pm newscast yesterday featured you endorsing a tax on pizza. You justified such a tax on grounds that Americans today eat too much "junk food."

Believing Americans to be too dimwitted or lacking in self-control to choose for themselves what to eat, you obviously also believe that college professors possess the moral authority to propose that government dictate the contents of other people's diets.

So the rules of civil society, as you see them, are apparently these: If Professor divines that Person isn't acting in Person's own best interests, government should obstruct Person's efforts to live as he wishes and prod Person to live instead according to how Professor wants Person to live.

I can play by these rules, too.

I propose that all articles and books advocating that government intrude into our private choices be taxed at very high rates. Socially irresponsible producers of such "junk" scholarship churn out far too much of it. As a result, unsuspecting Americans' consume harmfully large quantities of this scholarship - scholarship made appealing only because its producers cram it with sweet expressions of noble goals. These empty intellectual 'calories' trick our brains - which, after all, evolved in an environment that lacked today's superabundant access to junk scholarship - into craving larger and larger, even super-sized, portions of such junk.

The tax I propose would reduce Americans' consumption of mentally debilitating, university-processed nonsense that serves only to empower its producers while it makes the rest of us intellectually flabby and clogs our neural pathways with notions that endanger not only each individual who reads it but, also, the entire body-politic.

As a nation, we have a duty to prevent our fellow citizens from mindlessly ruining their minds - for when any one mind is

damaged by the consumption of junk scholarship, the rest of us are harmed by the resulting obesity of the state.

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4 May 2010

Friends,

Ok - I here look and sound a tad bit too angry. But, well, that's how I feel about this immigration issue, as I explain to Judge Andrew Napolitano and Jack Hunter:

<http://video.foxnews.com/v/4178864/paleocons-vs-libertarians>

The freedom of foreigners, including Mexicans, to seek better lives for themselves in America is every bit as sacred to me as is the freedom of us native-born Americans to seek improvements in our lives. As a wise friend of mine says, liberty knows no nationality.

Yet the inevitable and utterly predictable ill-consequences of Uncle Sam's current restrictions on immigration - including restrictions on the ability even of documented immigrants to find gainful employment - are confused as being the unavoidable consequences of immigration itself.

I refuse to be silent when government reacts to the ill-consequences of unjustified restrictions on immigration with yet further restrictions on immigration.

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4 May 2010

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

To the Editor:

Today at Bloggingheads, David Frum and Jonah Goldberg debate the question: "Is Obama a Socialist?" Because of its political toxicity outside of Vermont, the term "socialist" will never be emblazoned on any banner that Mr. Obama chooses to sail under. But no matter. The President has many of the notions, and suffers from many of the tics, shared by all self-proclaimed socialists. I'm reminded of H.L. Mencken's thoughts on the question of whether or not labor-union leader John L. Lewis was a communist:

"Lewis says that he is not a Communist, and there is no reason to doubt him. He is too hard-boiled a fellow to swallow the puerile rubbish that passes for dialectic among

Marxian intellectuals. But all the same he joins in some of their fundamental assumptions, just as he joins in those of the New Deal sorcerers. Especially does he join in the assumption of both outfits that the nation would be vastly benefited if its present scheme could be radically overhauled, and the safeguards now thrown about property eliminated, and all power and prerogative handed over to men of vision, sworn to serve and save the lowly." [H.L. Mencken, On Politics: A Carnival of Buncombe (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956 [1996]), pp. 325-326]

Sounds awfully much like Pres. Obama to me.

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3 May 2010

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

Dear Editor:

Suppose that Robert Samuelson is correct that the Chinese renminbi is undervalued by 40 percent ("A new economic world order?" May 3). His conclusion that the resulting low prices of Chinese exports pose a threat to America's economy doesn't follow.

To see why, ask what would happen if the prices of Chinese exports fell by 40 percent as a result, not of currency manipulation, but of a discovery by Chinese shippers of a proprietary new source of fuel for their warehouses and cargo ships - a highly efficient fuel that cuts energy costs so much that the prices of Chinese exports fall by 40 percent.

Would Mr. Samuelson complain? No less (and no more) than the allegedly undervalued renminbi, this technological advance would increase American imports and intensify competitive pressures on many American exporters. But unless Mr. Samuelson has become a naïve protectionist (which is unlikely), he wouldn't worry about the effects of this technological advance on America's economy. So why does he worry about the nearly identical effects of an undervalued renminbi?