



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.

4 July 2010

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

Dear Editor:

Tom Bateman shares Michael Gerson's wish for politics to be conducted by a Grown-Up Party (Letters, July 4). It's a good wish. But I wonder if it is also too fanciful. Government treats us citizens more and more like children by protecting us from risks that we might otherwise choose to take. The state also increasingly dispenses (or promises to dispense) to us monetary 'allowances' that are

determined by our status - for example, "over-65" or "below the poverty line" - rather than by our individual efforts and achievements.

In short, government treats citizens as children. And an electorate treated like children becomes childlike. Because elected officials are ultimately the agents of the electorate, infantilized politics is the inescapable reflection of an infantilized electorate.

3 July 2010

Editor, The Washington Times

Dear Editor:

Claire Gillen's review of Leo Damrosch's Tocqueville's Discovery of America is superb ("When the aristocrat met democracy," July 3).

With government now bossing us about as never before in personal matters - "Buy health insurance!" "'Contribute' to a government-run pension scheme!" "Eat less salt!" "Don't smoke pot!" "Click It or Ticket!" "You may not use a credit card that Uncle Sam believes charges you too much!" - Tocqueville's relevance remains intense. This astute Frenchman asked, "How can a populace unaccustomed to

freedom in small concerns learn to use it temperately in great affairs?" [Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. by Henry Reeve (Alfred A. Knopf, 1980 [1835 & 1840], p. 95]

Great question. The nanny state might never become brutal, but - unless people learn to cherish freedom and accept responsibility - it is destined to become increasingly intrusive, controlling, and debilitating. Vibrant freedom will be displaced by bleak conformity, officiously enforced. And the spirit of '76 will finally have died.

2 July 2010

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

Dear Editor:

As if repetition makes what is false factual, Harold Meyerson again repeats the myth that American manufacturing output is declining ("In recession battle, Germany and China are winners," July 1). In fact, if Mr. Meyerson would visit this link, he'd discover that data compiled by the Federal Reserve show that the inflation-adjusted total value of industrial output is today (May 2010) - despite the fact that we're in a

recession - 67 percent HIGHER than in January 1986:

http://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/g17/ipdisk/ip_sa.txt

Perhaps Mr. Meyerson wishes to compare today's manufacturing output to that of 1979 - the year prior to America's alleged embrace of laissez-faire capitalism. He can do so by looking also at this link: http://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/g17/iphist/iphist_sa.txt

He'll discover that manufacturing output today is about 80 percent HIGHER than in 1979. Or maybe Mr. Meyerson would prefer to compare today's manufacturing output to that of the mid-1950s, when America was supposedly at the peak of her industrial might. If so, Mr. Meyerson will discover that the real value of today's manufacturing output is 351 percent HIGHER than in 1955.

Mr. Meyerson should cease and desist from all efforts to manufacture the myth that Americans no longer make things.

1 July 2010

Editor, Washington Post
1150 15th St., NW

Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

A prominent group of 18th century economic thinkers - the "Physiocrats" - argued that the ultimate source of all wealth is agriculture. They regarded the then-just-emerging industrial sector to be sterile.

Harold Meyerson is a member of a group that we might call the "Factoryocrats." Just as the Physiocrats misread the once-dominant role of agriculture as proof that the only truly productive activity is farming, Mr. Meyerson's histrionic fears about the decline of manufacturing employment in America suggests that he misreads the once-dominant role of factory work as proof that the only truly productive activity is manufacturing ("In recession battle, Germany and China are winners," July 1).

The Physiocrats would be astonished to learn that Americans today are very well fed (and otherwise provided for) even though a mere 2 percent of the work force is in agriculture. Similarly, if Mr. Meyerson weren't blinded by Factoryocratic myths, he'd see that Americans today

are very well supplied with manufactured goods (and food and services) even though a mere 10 percent of the work force is in manufacturing.

30 June 2010

Friends,

Here's the second installment in my series of columns on unpuzzling the economy's complexity:

http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/opinion/columnists/boudreaux/s_688179.html

29 June 2010

Ms. Marlan S. Maralit
Organizing Department
American Federation of
State County and
Municipal Employees

Dear Ms. Maralit:

Thanks for your mass e-mail this morning inviting me to recommend students for AFSCME's Alternative Union Break: Summer Session. I understand that students who attend this four-day program are taught how to "fight for a better country," and to promote "social and economic justice," by becoming union organizers.

Alas, I know no student who'd be interested in your program. The young men and women who study economics at George Mason University learn, above all, to think rather than to emote. So our students are rightly suspicious of vague terms such as "social and economic justice."

Our students learn also that an economy most beneficial to the poorest amongst us is one that is free and competitive - an economy governed by the laws of property, contract, and tort instead of by the

arbitrary government diktats that are the fetish of labor unions.

Our students understand that widespread prosperity comes only from entrepreneurial creativity, market-driven investment, risk-taking, and hard work - all in response to the demands of consumers free to spend their money as they choose. Our students know that granting monopoly privileges to politically boisterous groups such as yours reduces, rather than produces, prosperity.

Our students understand that entrepreneurs and firms in market economics gain, not by taking wealth from others, but only by creating wealth and sharing that creation with others on terms that are mutually and voluntarily agreed to.

Oh, here's one more important fact that our students understand: labor unions routinely promote INjustice by lobbying for regulations (such as minimum-wage legislation and the Davis-Bacon Act) that price low-skilled workers out of jobs; by endorsing protectionist policies that deny consumers opportunities to get the most value for their

dollars; and by supporting many bailouts and other forms of corporate welfare.

So I invite you to recommend to the young people who go through your program that they attend some of the many programs we have at GMU Economics (and affiliated organizations such as the Institute for Humane Studies and the Mercatus Center) in order to learn how they can truly best promote a society that is just, prosperous, and peaceful.

28 June 2010

Programming Editor,
WTOP Radio
Washington, DC

Dear Sir or Madam:

In this morning's 6 am hour, your Capitol Hill reporter, Dave McConnell, excused Sen. Robert Byrd's long-ago active membership in the KKK as simply being "something that had to be done in West Virginia back then to get ahead in politics."

No doubt. But what does it say about Mr. Byrd that he willingly championed reprehensible ideals just "to get ahead in politics"? And what does it say about politics that it attracts men

and women, such as Mr. Byrd, who will sell their soul to the devil in exchange for the tawdry glory of winning elected office?

28 June 2010

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

Dear Editor:

I share your delight that Pres. Obama changed his mind and now supports the U.S.-Korea Trade Promotion Agreement ("Smart trade," June 28). You are correct that "had it been considered strictly on the merits, this deal would have passed long ago." But, as you also note, it was blocked for a long time by politics. Indeed, the President won't submit the deal to Congress until after the November elections - "a time of relatively muted political pressure."

Here we have an unquestionably beneficial policy that has languished for years because of politics, and will continue to languish for another few months because of politics.

So remind me why you are keen to have so very many aspects of our lives - our investment decisions, our

health-care decisions, even decisions about our diets - further politicized. If politics distorts and disrupts relatively minor pieces of legislation, such as this trade agreement, don't you worry that politics is monstrously malignant in cases of major legislation? If not, why not?