



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.

22 May 2011

Editor, Los Angeles Times

Dear Editor:

Discussing the past 30 years, Neal Gabler asserts that "Conservatives are pushing aside compassion" ("America the stony-hearted," May 22). In doing so, though, he simply ASSUMES his conclusion - namely, that a people's compassion is expressed only, or at least best, through government programs and regulations.

Conservatives (or, more accurately here, skeptics of the welfare state) argue that government programs, because these rely upon

taxation and force, are not the product of a people's compassion. These are instead the product of force-backed greed masquerading as compassion (Ever reflect on why the Food Stamp program is run by the Department of Agriculture, or why labor unions oppose free trade?), as well as of the wide acceptance of the myth that society and state are synonymous with each other.

We welfare-state skeptics might or might not be wrong that true compassion can be expressed only when done voluntarily and that, when compassion is done

voluntarily, it's more effective than is 'compassion' compelled by government commands. But Mr. Gabler is certainly wrong to write as if the argument on this front is settled in favor of those who suppose that a people's compassion can be expressed only through the state.

21 May 2011

Editor, Los Angeles Times

Dear Editor:

I write this letter mere hours before - if the prediction of a small sect of Christians is correct - the world will end. Many people around the country recently have enjoyed a

good laugh when reading accounts of the gullible faithful few who believe this prediction that the world will end later today: after all, evidence for this prediction is utterly lacking.

Yet letter writers in today's (final?) edition of your paper are as certain that the world will soon crash and burn because of population growth as the May 21st doomsters are certain that the world will crash and burn because of Biblical prophesy. And just as for the prediction of the world ending on May 21, 2011, evidence for population growth causing a catastrophe for humanity is utterly lacking.

Are humans today who live on densely populated continents (such as Europe) poorer, less healthy, and suffering shorter life-expectancies than are humans today who live on sparsely populated continents (such as Africa)? No; quite the opposite. Are humans today who live in densely populated urban areas generally poorer, less healthy, and suffering shorter life-expectancies than are humans today who live in sparsely populated rural areas? No; quite the opposite. Has human wealth, health, and

life-expectancy worsened as population grew dramatically over the past two centuries? No; these have improved dramatically.

So in light of this overwhelming evidence that growing population and greater population densities are positively associated with improvements in the human condition, why suppose that growing population nevertheless is a "bomb" destined to explode and hurl us into hell for our sinful refusal to follow the teachings of wild-eyed preachers such as Paul Ehrlich and Lester Brown? Theirs is a fact-immune religious creed that I thoroughly reject.

20 May 2011

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

Dear Editor:

Paul Krugman writes that "Crucially, the manufacturing trade deficit seems to be coming down" ("Making Things in America," May 20).

Why is this fact "crucial"? A dollar's worth of exported services buys just as many

imports - one dollar's worth - as does a dollar's worth of exported manufactured goods. Mr. Krugman, a trade specialist, should recognize this reality.

Suppose that for decades the annual value of American exports of things-bigger-than-a-breadbox exceeded the annual value of American imports of things-bigger-than-a-breadbox. Suppose also that a recent technological advance prompts Americans to specialize much more heavily in the production of things smaller than a breadbox. It's likely that, as a result, the number of Americans employed building things bigger than a breadbox falls and America starts to run annual bigger-than-a-breadbox-things trade deficits. Would Mr. Krugman worry? And would he applaud when some subsequent economic or policy change causes America's bigger-than-a-breadbox-things trade deficit to 'come down'?

Surely not. So why does this Nobel laureate economist lend credence to the popular myth that there's something economically special and worthwhile about value exported in the form of

manufactured goods as opposed to value exported in some form - such as services - other than manufactured goods?

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20 May 2011

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

Dear Editor:

Paul Krugman writes about "the middle years of the last decade" that "Manufacturing, once America's greatest strength, seemed to be in

terminal decline" ("Making Things in America," May 20).

Hosts of reality-tv shows can be forgiven for this misperception about manufacturing, but Princeton economists cannot. The real value of annual U.S. manufacturing output increased steadily and significantly for several decades up to 2007 when it reached an all-time high before the start of the current recession. Nor was there any slowing of this increase in the years leading up to "the middle of the last decade." Indeed, starting in the mid-1990s and continuing (save for the recession year of 2000) through 2007, there was a slight INCREASE in the rate of growth of real annual U.S. manufacturing output.

[<http://mjperry.blogspot.com/2011/01/we-should-take-more-pride-in-our-global.html>]

So how can Mr. Krugman nevertheless write that U.S. manufacturing was "in terminal decline" by the middle of the last decade? Answer: because he - without offering any justification - measures the health of the manufacturing sector by the number of workers it employs. THAT number has indeed fallen

over the years, chiefly because of relentless improvements in technology that raise workers' productivity.

So it's fair to ask: does Mr. Krugman mourn the reality of technological advance and higher worker productivity? And does he believe that America's agricultural sector (also "once America's greatest strength") is now in especially lamentable shambles - despite its vast and growing output - simply because agriculture today employs a mere 2 percent of the U.S. work force even though it once employed 90 percent of working Americans?

19 May 2011

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

Dear Editor:

Rather than deliberate over which world-class bureaucrat will be the next head of the IMF ("Fight to succeed IMF head Strauss-Kahn may pit Europe against developing nations," May 19), why not simply abolish that misfit outfit?

The IMF's original purpose was to help cash-strapped

governments maintain their currencies' fixed exchange rates as directed by the 1944 Bretton Wood system. But that system gasped its dying breath in the summer of 1971, when - with Pres. Nixon's closing of Uncle Sam's gold window - all pretense of an international system of fixed exchange rates was abandoned.

Undeterred by the total disappearance of its purpose, the IMF - flush with continuing streams of subsidies, especially from American taxpayers - morphed into a "development" agency. The quotation marks around "development" are no mistake. There's NO evidence that the IMF's efforts as a development agency have had any positive effects, unless by "positive effects" you include creating among many poor countries a culture of dependency upon foreign "aid," along with propping up authoritarian regimes.

As my great teacher Leland Yeager observed, "self-important international bureaucracies have institutional incentives to invent new functions for themselves, to expand, and to keep client countries dependent on their aid."

Isn't it time to close the window on funding for the IMF?

17 May 2011

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

Dear Editor:

You report that "The White House is threatening to hold up final passage of three coveted free trade agreements unless lawmakers agree to expand retraining assistance for American workers who lose their jobs because of foreign competition" ("White House: No trade deals unless Congress reaches agreement on assistance for US workers," May 17).

Pres. Obama here seeks to subsidize certain workers against the downside of being part of an open and dynamic market economy. Preventing consumers from dealing more freely with foreigners until and unless Congress authorizes such subsidies, however, is economically unjustified because there's nothing unique about international trade in 'destroying' jobs. Market activity of ALL sorts destroys some jobs and

replaces them with other, usually better jobs.

Would it have been appropriate, for example, for the White House to prevent Americans from buying iPods and Kindles until and unless Congress funded the retraining of workers who lost their jobs at Tower Records and Border's? Should government have stopped automakers from improving the quality of their vehicles until and unless the public fisc was tapped for funds to retrain auto mechanics and tow-truck drivers? Ought government restrict consumers' access to Lasik surgery until and unless taxpayers pay to retrain workers who make eyeglasses, contact lenses, and sterile saline solution?

Fact is, the only thing unique about international trade is its ability to be demagogued by politicians seeking votes from the economically uninformed.

17 May 2011

Mr. Newt Gingrich

Dear Mr. Gingrich:

Today's Wall Street Journal quotes you as criticizing Pres. Obama for allegedly turning the U.S.

government into a "secular-socialist machine" ("Gingrich to House GOP: Drop Dead," May 17). Your wording suggests that, should you win a term or two in the Oval Office, you'd turn America away from socialism and use the state to turn Americans away from secularism.

I'm with you 100 percent in rejecting socialism. But your rejection of secularism is damned scary.

A secular government operates independently of religious or theocratic tenets. By remaining utterly aloof from religion, a secular government neither encourages nor discourages religious beliefs among its citizens. One happy result is religious freedom and a culture in which the most devout believers in a personal god get along peacefully with the staunchest atheists.

In contrast, a non-secular government by nature operates according to particular theocratic canons. And it is far too tiny a step from government operating in line with such canons to that government consciously deploying its powers to tax, spend, and regulate in a holy crusade

to engineer into existence an earthly paradise - a crusade that inevitably creates only an earthly hell.

16 May 2011

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

Dear Editor:

Critical of my argument that the quality of K-12 education would be higher if K-12 schools - like grocery stores - had to compete directly for customers, Liana Neyer writes "low-income earners and people living in rural areas have limited access to high-quality supermarkets or fresh produce in their neighborhoods" (Letters, May 16).

First, my argument isn't that people in poor neighborhoods enjoy access to groceries equal in quality to the access enjoyed by people in wealthy neighborhoods. Rather, I argue that more competition in K-12 education would make the schooling available to people in poor neighborhoods better than it is now. However relatively lacking is the selection of groceries in

poor neighborhoods, grocers there still must compete for customers' dollars - a requirement that surely obliges those grocers to be more responsive to their customers than are those neighborhoods' public schools which receive their revenue, not from voluntarily paying customers, but from taxpayers forced to pay regardless of how well or poorly their schools perform. Consider, for example, that 47 percent of adults in Detroit are functionally illiterate while approximately 0 percent are starving or wanting for the likes of toothpaste, paper towels, and laundry detergent.

[\[http://iowntheworld.com/blog/?p=74816 \]](http://iowntheworld.com/blog/?p=74816)

Second, as with education, low-income Americans' relatively poor access to groceries is caused partly by misguided government policies. As I write, DC's government is threatening to stop Wal-Mart from opening stores (which would sell groceries) in low-income DC neighborhoods. Is there better evidence than Wal-Mart's efforts to open stores in poor neighborhoods that competition would serve poor Americans well if only

government would step aside and let entrepreneurs compete freely - in supplying schooling no less than in supplying groceries - for consumer dollars?