



## 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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19 June 2011

Editor, The Browser

Dear Sir or Madam:

Recently interviewed by you, Paul Krugman boasted that "A liberal [such as he] can talk coherently about what the conservative view is because people like me actually do listen. We don't think it's right, but we pay enough attention to see what the other person is trying to get at" ("Paul Krugman on Inspiration for a Liberal Economist").

Curious. Only this past March Mr. Krugman wrote the following on his blog: "Some have asked if there

aren't conservative sites I read regularly. Well, no. I will read anything I've been informed about that's either interesting or revealing; but I don't know of any economics or politics sites on that side that regularly provide analysis or information I need to take seriously."

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19 June 2011

Prof. Paul Krugman  
Dep't. of Economics  
Princeton University

Dear Mr. Krugman:

Interviewed recently in "The Browser," you said that "if you ask a liberal or a saltwater economist, 'What would somebody on

the other side of this divide say here? What would their version of it be?' A liberal can do that. A liberal can talk coherently about what the conservative view is because people like me actually do listen. We don't think it's right, but we pay enough attention to see what the other person is trying to get at. The reverse is not true. You try to get someone who is fiercely anti-Keynesian to even explain what a Keynesian economic argument is, they can't do it. They can't get it remotely right. Or if you ask a conservative, 'What do liberals want?' You get this bizarre stuff - for example, that liberals want

everybody to ride trains, because it makes people more susceptible to collectivism. You just have to look at the realities of the way each side talks and what they know. One side of the picture is open-minded and sceptical. We have views that are different, but they're arrived at through paying attention. The other side has dogmatic views" ("Paul Krugman on Inspiration for a Liberal Economist").

Let's overlook your failure to distinguish conservatives from libertarians - a failure that, for the point I'm about to make, is unimportant.

You're able to conclude that "liberals" are open-minded thinkers while "conservatives" are dumb-as-dung dogmatists only because you compare the works of "liberal" scholars to the pronouncements of conservative popular pundits. However valid or invalid is the artistic license used by conservative celebrities such as Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh (and, for that matter, by "liberal" celebrities such as Rachel Maddow and Keith Olbermann) to entertain large popular audiences, you're wrong to equate the pronouncements of conservative media stars

with the knowledge and works of conservative (and libertarian) scholars.

Because, as you claim, you study carefully the works of non-"liberal" scholars, you surely know that the late Frank Knight, F.A. Hayek, and Milton Friedman - influential economists whom you would classify as "conservative" - were all steeped in and treated seriously the writings of Keynes, Marx, Veblen, Galbraith, and other "liberal" thinkers.

The same is true for still-living influential non-"liberal" scholars.

I'd be obliged to conclude that you in fact, contrary your claim, do NOT carefully engage the works of non-"liberal" scholars if you insist that "liberal" scholarship is ignored by conservative and libertarian thinkers such as James Buchanan, Gordon Tullock, Ronald Coase, Armen Alchian, Harold Demsetz, Anna Schwartz, Gary Becker, Vernon Smith, Henry Manne, Allan Meltzer, Richard Epstein, Tyler Cowen, Arnold Kling, George Selgin, Lawrence H. White, and James Q. Wilson, to name only a few.

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16 June 2011

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

Dear Editor:

Sadly but predictably the U.S. House of Representatives just refused to make meaningful cuts in farm subsidies ("House keeps farm subsidies, cuts food aid as it passes food and farm spending bill," June 16). Buried in this bad news, however, is a speck of good news: over the objection of a majority of House Republicans, that chamber voted to end the crazy year-old scheme of sending more than \$12 million monthly to Brazil in order to induce the government there not to raise tariffs on U.S. exports to Brazil.

That these payments were authorized in the first place - and continue to be supported by most GOP House members - is lunacy. In no rational universe does government A raise taxes on citizens of A in order to bribe government B not to raise taxes on citizens of B.

That a majority of GOP House members voted to maintain this unsavory scheme suggests that that

party, in fact, is populated chiefly by charlatans whose disregard for their oath to uphold the Constitution is matched only by their duplicity in proclaiming a wish to rein in government while pusillanimously voting to keep it galloping ahead at full speed.

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16 June 2011

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

Dear Editor:

Months after ordering the U.S. military to commence the still-ongoing air strikes in Libya - and, hence, after disproving his initial claim that these strikes would last "days, not weeks" - Pres. Obama, as you report, informed Congress yesterday of "the administration's view that the Libyan conflict is too limited to require authorization by Congress under the War Powers Act" ("Obama Defends Libya Intervention," June 16).

Can I cite Pres. Obama as an exemplar if I refuse to pay taxes this year because my view is that my income is too limited to require such payment

under the Internal Revenue Code?

15 June 2011

Mr. Barack Obama  
President of the Executive Branch  
United States Government  
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. Obama:

In your recent interview with NBC News you explained that your policies would promote more private-sector job creation were it not for (as you put it) "some structural issues with our economy where a lot of businesses have learned to become much more efficient with a lot fewer workers. You see it when you go to a bank and you use an ATM, you don't go to a bank teller, or you go to the airport and you're using a kiosk instead of checking in at the gate."

With respect, sir, you are complaining about the source of our prosperity: innovation and the increases it causes in worker productivity.

With no less justification - but with no more validity - any of your predecessors might have issued complaints similar to yours. Pres. Grant, for example, might have grumbled in

1873 about "some structural issues with our economy where a lot of businesses have learned to become much more efficient with a lot fewer workers. You see it when you go to a bank that uses a modern safe and so employs fewer armed guards than before, or when you travel on trains which, compared to stage coaches, transport many more passengers using fewer workers."

Or Pres. Nixon might have grouched in 1973 about such labor-saving innovation: "You see it when you step into an automatic elevator that doesn't require an elevator operator, or when you observe that polio vaccination keeps people alive and active without the aid of nurses and all those workers who were once usefully employed making iron-lung machines, crutches, and wheelchairs."

Do you REALLY wish to suggest that the innovations you blame for thwarting your fiscal policies are "structural issues" that ought to be corrected?

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14 June 2011

Editor, Washington Post  
1150 15th St., NW

Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

Challenging George Will's case against trade-adjustment assistance, Eric Salonen analogizes such assistance to compensation that government pays to people whose properties are taken by the building of a hydroelectric dam (Letters, June 14). This analogy is faulty. Unlike with land, almost no one has a property right to a job (we tenured professors being the unjustified exceptions to this sound rule) – for to have a property right to a job would be to have a property right to the manner in which other people spend their money. Such a 'property right' spread across the economy would completely suffocate the economy's competitiveness and dynamism and, thus, over time impoverish us all.

Moreover, Mr. Salonen's analogy doesn't answer the question posed by Mr. Will: Why should workers who lose their jobs because consumers start buying more imports be treated differently than workers who lose their jobs for any of the many other reasons, unrelated to imports, that workers lose their jobs?

Just as it's unjust to force taxpayers to 'compensate,' say, the brewery worker who loses her job because consumers buy less beer from St. Louis and more wine from Sonoma, it's unjust to 'compensate' the brewery worker who loses her job because consumers buy less beer from St. Louis and more wine from South Africa.

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13 June 2011

Programming Director,  
WTOP Radio  
Washington, DC

Dear Sir or Madam:

In today's 3pm hour you reported on the "pilgrimage" (your reporter's word) that many Americans make every summer to DC "to witness democracy in action first hand."

Your reporter's reverential tone implies that tourists to DC behold here something hallowed. I disagree. Too much of what tourists to DC witness first hand is theater - marble and monuments meant to mobilize the spirit; buildings and boulevards built to bedazzle; ceremonies and celebrations suggesting the sacred. But behind it all are venal politicians grasping for more power and hoping that the stage-props scattered about DC will dupe ordinary people to buy into the ridiculous notion that government officials are saints whose genius is matched only by their grand goodwill.

In fact it's mostly fraudulent - the gaudy props of the power-hungry hungrily and cynically enchanting their

victims with the illusion of earthly salvation by flesh-and-blood saints. As dramatist David Mamet writes in his new book "The Secret Knowledge," "Having spent my life in the theatre, I knew that people could be formed into an audience, that is, a group which surrenders for two hours, part of its rationality, in order to enjoy an illusion. As I began reading and thinking about politics I saw, to my horror, how easily people could also assemble themselves into a mob, which would either attract or be called into being by those who profited from the surrender of reason and liberty - and these people are called politicians."

DC is a stage on which the greedy dupe credulous audiences into self-destructive subservience.

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13 June 2011

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

Dear Editor:

GE's Jeff Immelt's and American Express's Ken Chenault's essay on how the President's Jobs and Competitiveness Council - on which these CEOs

serve - will create jobs and "improve America's competitiveness" is little more than a whoop-tee-do of proposals designed to titillate policy-wonks in ways that sexting porn stars titillate certain Congressmen ("How We're Meeting the Job Creation Challenge," June 13). It prompts many questions, such as:

Among their Council's few (potentially) sensible proposals is that America be made a more attractive destination for foreign direct investment. If this proposal succeeds, one result will be a higher U.S. trade deficit. Will Messrs. Immelt and Chenault then explain to politicians and the American public that the higher trade deficit should be celebrated rather than decried?

Messrs. Immelt and Chenault identify "construction, manufacturing, health care and tourism" as being among those U.S. industries that their Council wishes to promote. Are they aware that propping up specific industries involves shrinking others? How will government officials weigh the policy-induced gains in these and other favored industries against losses in, say, IT or

forestry? And what if it turns out - as it very well might - that expanding employment in their favored industries can be done only by forcing those industries to adopt less-efficient but more labor-intensive production methods? Will Washington then applaud the higher employment in these industries? Or will it decry these industries' loss of 'competitiveness'?