



Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

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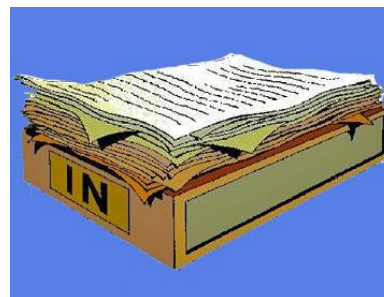
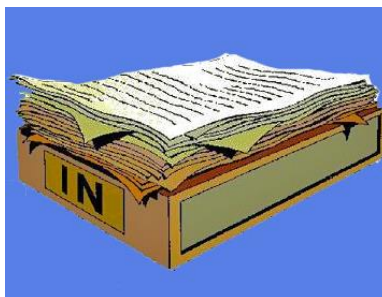
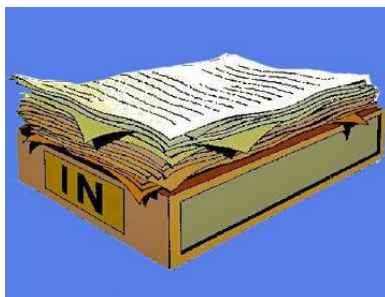
Martha and Nelson Getchell Chair for Free Market Capitalism

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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 if they are, they may require registration or subscription to access. Some of the articles being commented on are syndicated, therefore, they may also have appeared in other publications.

31 January 2016

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

Dear Editor:

Geoffrey Manne rightly applauds Facebook's offering of Free Basics ("a 'zero-rated' service that allows users to access Facebook - and other useful websites - without incurring data charges") which has given Internet access to millions of poor people ("Since When Is Free Web Access A Bad Thing?" Jan. 29). Yet as Mr. Manne explains, 'net-neutralists' object; they demand that service providers be forced to charge one, flat price for access to all of these providers' services and content.

Mr. Manne's essay prompts me to imagine what the world would look like if 'food-neutralists' were similarly on the loose:

A hungry woman dying of thirst in the desert is approached by an entrepreneur who offers her bottles of water and a selection of trail mixes, all at a price of \$0. No strings attached. The entrepreneur also informs the woman that, if she wishes, he'll sell to her a seven-course meal (champagne included) for \$100. A moment later an armed regulator shows up. Offering nothing to anyone but diktats, the regulator orders the entrepreneur to cease and desist this practice of differential pricing. Unless the entrepreneur offers to the woman access at one, flat price to all that he sells, the entrepreneur must not offer the woman anything.

Uncertain of the woman's willingness to pay enough for a seven-course meal (champagne included) - and unable to afford to supply such a meal free of charge - the entrepreneur leaves the scene, giving the woman nothing. The woman soon dies as the regulator boasts of his magnanimity at having protected her access to "food-neutrality."

Sincerely,
Donald J. Boudreaux
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and
Martha and Nelson Getchell Chair for the Study of Free Market Capitalism at the
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9 February 2016

Ms. Erica Collins

Dear Ms. Collins:

Thanks for your e-mail. First, I am not conservative. I am liberal in the original and correct sense of that term.

Second, I'm afraid that I don't share your enthusiasm for politics, be they democratic or not. Where you "see citizens [at the polls] selecting our leaders," I see people voting on which power-mad person will crack the whip over those same people and brand and herd them like cattle. Where you are "inspired by candidates campaigning openly to win the election," I am frightened to realize that one of those power-hungry men or women will actually come to possess such power that no man or woman is, or ever will be, fit to possess. Where you are "charged" by the "vigorous debates" among candidates, my stomach is sickened and my intelligence is insulted by the economics-free, fact-strained, and too-often-vacuous talking (and shouting) points that pass for a serious discussion of issues.

And where you say that you "trust voters" more than I trust them, that depends. You're correct that I distrust people *as voters*, for in that capacity they largely express opinions on how other people's (their fellow citizens') money should be spent and on how other people's lives should be led. But I trust - perhaps more than you do, and certainly more than do any of the candidates - those same voters *as individuals* each to spend his or her own money wisely and to lead his or her life well, each according to his or her own lights, without interference or direction from any of the officious, arrogant, and venal candidates seeking power over the lives of other people.

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10 February 2016

Mr. Bobby Hester

Dear Mr. Hester:

You accuse me of “paying no attention to the losses ... caused to U.S. workers by the Chinese.” You add that “only somebody like Donald Trump would protect Americans from that damage.”

With respect, you’re mistaken. First, the losses “caused to U.S. workers” are caused, not by the Chinese, but by your fellow Americans who choose to purchase imports from China. The Chinese merely offer deals that your fellow citizens judge to be good; the Chinese do not compel Americans to accept these deals. What you and Mr. Trump in fact propose to do is to threaten to inflict violence on Americans who would otherwise choose to spend their money as they prefer rather than as you and Mr. Trump think they should spend their money. What right have you or Mr. Trump to tell other people how to spend their money? Do you really believe that the American economy will be strengthened over time if its firms and workers are protected from competition? And do you honestly suppose that such orders from Washington will “make America great again”?

Second, if you truly want to protect yourself from the risks of your fellow Americans choosing to spend less of their money buying whatever it is that you produce, you don’t need Mr. Trump’s help. You already have the power to protect yourself from your fellow Americans’ economic choices. Buy a plot of land on which to grow your own food, make your own clothing, and build your own housing - all with absolutely nothing imported from abroad. And consume nothing that is produced using any materials or labor from outside of your immediate vicinity. You can then live as people lived for millennia upon millennia before the extensive division of labor and trading networks emerged and began to enrich ordinary people.

Do not tell me that my suggestion is impractical, for the only reason it is impractical is that, if you were to follow it, you and your family would become desperately poor by being cut off from the global economy that alone is responsible for your current prosperity. You have no right to lay claim to the fruits of that global prosperity if you refuse to play by the rules that make that prosperity possible - rules that include allowing consumers to spend their money as they wish and allowing entrepreneurs, regardless of nationality, to compete for those consumer dollars.

Sincerely,

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10 February 2016

Mr. Bobby Hester

Dear Mr. Hester:

Thanks for your reply.

You say that I am “naïve to forget about” the “unfairly low prices which the Chinese ruling elite impose on us.”

Please. Low prices in America - especially if they are made artificially low at the expense of non-Americans - are no imposition on Americans; they are a blessing to Americans. (Do you think that we earthlings would be made richer if our rulers adopt policies that require us to start paying more for the light and heat that we have until now imported from the sun at the low price of \$0? If not, why do you think that we Americans would be made richer if our rulers adopt policies that require us to start paying more for the goods that we have until now imported from China at low prices?)

Also, Chinese low wages are largely the consequence of the Chinese people being enslaved, tyrannized, and impoverished for decades by an unspeakably cruel Maoist regime. Do you honestly believe that this terrible history gives the Chinese people today an unfair economic advantage over Americans? If so, you must regret that we Americans were denied the advantage-rich experience of being forced to live in a collectivized, starvation-ridden society ruled by murderous despots. My gosh! If we, too, could today boast the horrifying recent history of China, then we, too, might be as poor as the Chinese and, hence, we, too, would enjoy - as do today's Chinese - all the splendid "advantages" bestowed by such an impoverishing history!

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