

THE FreeMarket

LUDWIG VON MISES INSTITUTE

VOLUME 7, NUMBER 7

JULY 1989

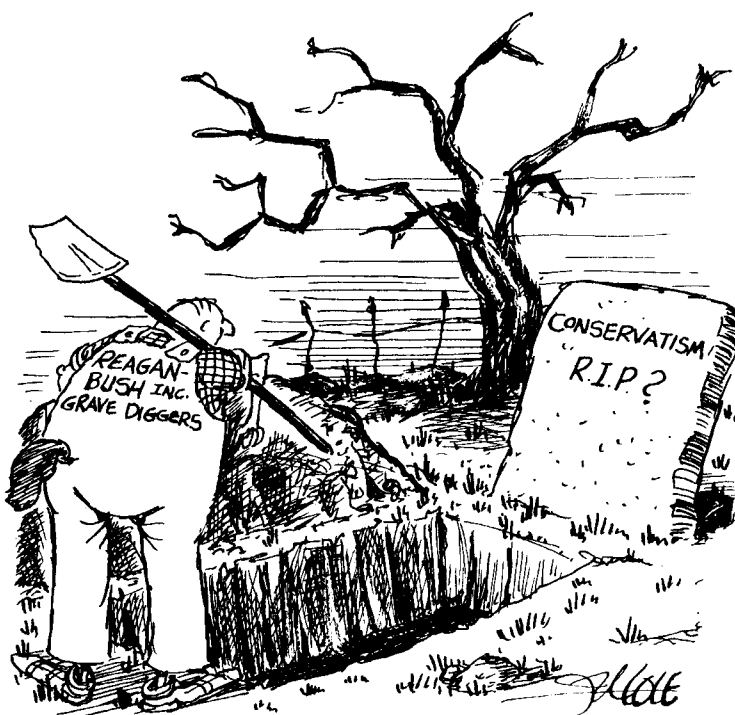
Conservatism in Crisis: the Cause and the Solution

BY JOSEPH SOBRAN

When Ronald Reagan was elected to the presidency in 1980, many conservatives (myself among them) were euphoric. They expected a wholesale reform in American government; there was even talk of a "Reagan Revolution." It seemed likely that there would be an early campaign to repeal the Great Society programs Reagan had always opposed, and, once that was accomplished, a repeal of the New Deal itself.

Liberals, meanwhile, nervously insisted that Reagan had "no mandate" for any such sweeping changes. Some of them predicted, with more hope than confidence, that "reality" would force Reagan to subordinate "ideology" to "pragmatism."

When Reagan left office eight years later, it looked as if the liberals had been right. Not



much had changed. The system remained what it had been in 1980; Reagan hadn't even abolished the federal government's commitment to "affirmative action," which Lyndon Johnson

had established by executive order, and which Reagan could have done away with by the same simple means—a stroke of the pen, requiring no legislative

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Exxon: Biggest Victim of the Alaska Oil Spill

BY LLEWELLYN H. ROCKWELL, JR.

From the hysteria, one would think that Exxon had deliberately spilled 180,000 barrels of oil off Prince William Sound, Alaska. In fact, Exxon is the biggest victim. Through apparent employee negligence, the company has lost valuable oil, a giant tanker, and hundreds of millions of dollars to compensate fishermen and clean up the mess.

Yet night after night on televi-

sion, we were treated to maudlin coverage of oily water and animals, and fervid denunciations of Exxon and oil production in "environmentally sensitive" Alaska. Why is it more sensitive than, say, Texas? Because there are so few people in Valdez, Alaska, and that represents the radical environmentalists' ideal.

From the snail darter to the furbish lousewort to billions of acres of wilderness—all supposedly need government protection from the production of

goods and services for mankind.

Extreme environmentalism holds that nature was in perfect balance before the arrival of modern man, whose crime was economic progress through capitalism. "The only really good technology is no technology at all," says the organization manual of Friends of the Earth. Economic development is "taxation without representation imposed by an elitist species upon the rest of the natural world."

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The Keynesian Dream

BY MURRAY N. ROTHBARD

For a half-century, the Keynesians have harbored a Dream. They have long dreamed of a world without gold, a world rid of any restrictions upon their desire to spend and spend, inflate and inflate, elect and elect. They have achieved a world where governments and Central Banks are free to inflate without suffering the limits and restrictions of the gold standard. But they still chafe at the fact that, although national governments are free to inflate and print money, they yet find themselves limited by depreciation of their currency. If Italy, for example, issues a great many lira, the lira will depreciate in terms of other currencies, and Italians will find the prices of their imports and of foreign resources skyrocketing.

What the Keynesians have dreamed, then, is a world with one fiat currency, the issues of that paper currency being generated and controlled by one World Central Bank. What you call the new currency unit doesn't really matter: Keynes called his proposed unit at the Bretton Woods Conference of 1944, the "bancor;" Harry Dexter White, the U.S. Treasury negotiator at that time, called his proposed money the "unita," and recently, the London *Economist* has dubbed its suggested new world money the "phoenix." Fiat money by any name smells as sour.

Even though the United States and its Keynesian advisers dominated the international monetary scene at the end of World War II, they could not impose the full Keynesian goal; the jealousies and conflicts of national sovereignty were too intense. So the Keynesians reluctantly had to settle for the jerry-built dollar-gold international standard at Bretton Woods, with exchange rates flexibly fixed, and with no World Central Bank at its head.

As determined men with a goal, the Keynesians did not fail from not trying. They launched the Special Drawing Right (SDR) as an attempt to replace gold as an international reserve money, but SDRs proved to be a failure. Prominent Keynesians such as Edward M. Bernstein of the International Monetary Fund and Robert Triffin of Yale, launched well-known Plans bearing their names, but these too were not adopted.

Ever since the Bretton Woods system, hailed for nearly three decades as stable and eternal, collapsed in 1971, the Keynesians have had to suffer the indignity of floating exchange rates. Ever since the accession of Keynesian James R. Baker as Secretary of Treasury in 1985, the United States has abandoned its brief commitment to a monetarist hands-off the foreign exchange market policy, and has tried to engineer a phase transformation of the international monetary system. First, fixed exchange rates would be obtained by coordinated action by the large Central Banks. This has largely been achieved, at first covertly and then openly; the leading Central Banks picked a target point or zone, for, say, the dollar, and then by buying and selling dollars, manipulated exchange rates to stay within that zone. Their main difficulty has been figuring out what target to pick, since, indeed, they have no wisdom in rate-fixing beyond that of the market. Indeed, the concept of a just exchange-rate for the dollar is just as inane as the notion of the "just price" for a particular good.

A tempting opportunity for mischief has been offered the Keynesians by the coming of the European Community in 1992. The Keynesians, led by now Secretary of State James Baker, have been pushing for a new currency unit for this United Europe, to be issued by a European-wide Central Bank. This would not only mean an interna-

tional economic government for Europe, it would also mean that it would become relatively easy for the post-1992 European Central Bank to become coordinated with the Central Banks of the United States and Japan, and to segue without too much trouble to the long-cherished goal of the World Central Bank and world currency unit.

Inflationist European countries, such as Italy and France, are eager for the coordinated European-wide inflation that a regional Central Bank would bring about. Hard-money countries such as West Germany, however, are highly critical of inflationary schemes. You would expect Germany, therefore, to resist these Europeanist demands; so why don't they? The problem is that, ever since World War II, the United States has had enormous political leverage upon West Germany and the United States and its Keynesian foreign secretary Baker have been pushing hard for European monetary unity. Only Great Britain, happily, has been throwing a monkey-wrench into these Keynesian proceedings. Hard-money oriented, and wary of infringements on its sovereignty, Britain might just succeed in blocking the European Central Bank indefinitely.

At best, the Keynesian Dream is a long shot. It is always possible that, not only British opposition, but also the ordinary and numerous frictions between sovereign nations will insure that the Dream will never be achieved. It would be heartening, however, if principled opposition to the Dream can also be mounted. For what the Keynesians want is no less than an internationally coordinated and controlled world-wide paper money inflation, a fine-tuned inflation that would proceed unchecked upon its merry way until, whoops! it landed the entire world smack into the middle of the untold horrors of global runaway hyperinflation. ◀

Writers IN THIS ISSUE

► William Murchison is editorial-page editor of the *Dallas Morning News* and a media fellow of the Ludwig von Mises Institute.

► Llewellyn H. Rockwell, Jr., is founder and president of the Mises Institute, and editor of *The Free Market*.

► Murray N. Rothbard is academic vice president of the Mises Institute and S.J. Hall distinguished professor of economics at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

► Joseph Sobran, a media fellow of the Mises Institute, is a senior editor of *The National Review*.

Exxon: Biggest Victim of the Alaska Oil Spill

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David Brower, former director of the Sierra Club, says: "We've got to march back to our last known safe landmark. I can't say exactly where it is, but I think it's...at the start of the Industrial Revolution."

Ralph Nader told *Rolling Stone* that we ought to consider abolishing the entire petrochemical industry. Since he also believes in outlawing nuclear power, what would we use for energy? "Trees, cornhusks, manure, the sun, the wind."

Trees? In the Pacific Northwest, terrorists drive long metal spikes into trees to splinter and kill any logger who tries to cut them down.

While I enjoy the image of Nader's fireplace full of cornhusks and manure, how would

Pantheistic environmentalism holds that man is simply a part of nature—no more important than sticks or stones or rocks or trees. The Judeo-Christian tradition, on the other hand, teaches that God gave man dominion over the earth and all its resources. They exist for man, and not the reverse. And the free-market, private-property order imparts the same lesson.

It is anti-human to advocate more government intervention and less economic development, i.e., more poverty, as the rabid environmentalists do. It's no coincidence that environmental activists tend to be high-income types who disdain the little guy striving to better himself. The socialized national parks transfer wealth from the majority who

I too love the New Hampshire forests, the Rocky Mountains, and the California desert. But I also remember that modern man cherishes wilderness only from the safe standpoint of industrial civilization. As Robert Tucker points out, before capitalism, the forest was feared as what the Pilgrims called a "desolation of wilderness" filled with "savage beasts and savage Indians." A 15th-century travel writer called the Alps the place "where God had swept up all the debris of Europe to create the plains of Lombardy."

Our view is what it is thanks only to capitalism, and before we allow ourselves to be pushed backwards, we ought to examine closely all the environmental crises promoted by federal scientists, politicians, and others with a vested interest in big government. Is there really too little ozone in the upper atmosphere or too much at street level? Should we really worry that the earth is supposedly a degree warmer—or cooler—than a hundred years ago? How do these people know the optimum temperature? Is it really so bad that Brazilian peasants cut down trees in the rain forests to engage in agriculture? Or should they be permanently sentenced to indentured mildewtude?

Any call to expand big government's parasitical control over our lives has to be opposed, no matter what the alleged justification. The real danger is always and everywhere Washington, D.C., not the fluorocarbons released by cans of hairspray.

Does that mean we should not be concerned about accidents like the one at Valdez? No, but we should not forget the 8,800 tankers that have safely negotiated those waters since 1977, bringing the world 6.8 billion barrels of oil. Nor should we forget that oil is, in the environ-

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The real danger is always
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the rest of us heat or cool our homes, fuel our cars and businesses, or create new jobs? The environmentalist ultras reject that question, however, because they seek the undoing of industrial civilization. "That this would mean the starvation of most of the human race seems not to figure in their calculations," says Murray N. Rothbard.

When the nuclear fusion experiment was announced, top environmentalists Jeremy Rifkin and Paul Ehrlich told the *Los Angeles Times* that a cheap, nearly inexhaustible, non-polluting energy source would be a "disaster." It would allow more economic development, and worst of all, make it possible for more people to live on the earth.

are made poorer to the minority who backpack. Public lands and resources also enable the government to hand out concessions to politically favored special interests, who form a wooden triangle with environmentalists and bureaucrats against the public.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with backpacking in the outdoors. I love it myself. But we the backpackers should pay for it. The federal government already owns more than a third of the United States, including most of Alaska. Selling these federal lands would pay off the national debt, end this gigantic misuse of resources, and raise the average American's standard of living, which has been declining in real terms since 1973 thanks to big government.

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or judicial support.

Federal spending had doubled across the board. The federal government was committed to a budget of over a trillion dollars per year, or about \$4,000 per U.S. citizen. Though nobody took a poll, it seems safe to say that few citizens felt they were getting \$4,000 worth of government "services."

For all that, Reagan left the stage bowing to wild applause, as if his two terms had been an era of heroic achievements. Both he and his Democratic opponents had a vested interest in the idea that he had made radical changes—he because he wanted credit, they because they needed a bogeyman.

No doubt Reagan had made a difference in the *tone* of American politics. He had made conservative and free-market rhetoric fashionable, and helped put liberalism in disrepute. Reagan's presidency had also coincided with the collapse of socialism around the world, and may well have helped supply the impetus for it, though of course the ultimate cause of socialism's collapse was socialism itself.

It isn't easy to assign causes to historical processes. A great many things happen in any eight-year period, and Reagan was surely more symptom than motor of the decline of collectivism. It was part of his political and theatrical genius to personalize the process, modestly assuming the lion's share of the credit for what was happening anyway.

He did give dozens of worthwhile initiatives more support and encouragement than they would have had under almost any other president. Conservatives in Washington are now keenly aware that they enjoy much less access to President Bush than they did to President Reagan, under whom they encountered frustration enough, and there seems to be a concerted effort to remove "Rea-

ganites" from the bureaucracies.

The result is that the conservatives now feel bereft by Reagan's absence. They regard his presidency as a lost opportunity, but at least while it lasted, it seemed an opportunity; now there is barely even the illusion of hope for real reform. George Bush is pretty clearly a status-quo man who wants more than anything to avoid conflict with Congress. He doesn't even daydream of radical change. In fact his rhetoric often implies that he is offering relief from the highly-charged ideological confrontations of the Reagan years.

In his own way, Bush supports the myth that the Reagan years were years of a drastic unsettling of the American political system. His special angle is the suggestion that Reagan's alleged achievements have been so fully realized that there is no need for him to disturb us further by adding anything significant to them.

Conservatives would be much happier, and better off, if they recognized frankly that Reagan was always primarily a politician and an insider, a loyal member of the establishment he seemed to challenge. He simply understood that the way to rise within the system was to make a special appeal to the voters who were dissatisfied with it from conservative motives—moral traditionalists and economic libertarians. He succeeded within that system by growling at it a little, enlisting popular discontent on his side. He was sincere enough. But he was also too prudent ever to enrage the establishment—including the pressure groups and tens of millions of voters who receive income and other special benefits from the federal government—by seriously threatening their interests. The main difference between Reagan and Bush is that Bush dropped his conservative campaign rhetoric almost as soon as he had won his

election; Reagan kept speaking it while in office.

In short, Reagan posed as a right-wing outsider, while he was in fact not much more than the extreme right wing of the insiders. Maybe he couldn't have succeeded any other way; but it was his own success, not that of conservative causes, that was always his real concern. In that sense, Bush was his appropriate successor. Bush is merely less skillful at persuading conservatives that he has their interests at heart.

This is all to the good. Conservatives spent eight years waiting for Ronald Reagan to start acting like the messiah they were hoping for. "Let Reagan be Reagan," they said, unable to see that he *was* being Reagan by arousing their yearnings and enlisting their loyalties while letting them cool their heels. Now they may begin to understand that they are on their own.

During the Reagan years, conservative activists have developed a detailed agenda—securing government appointments for their own, implementing the Strategic Defense Initiative, aiding various insurgent forces around the world—that may or may not be defensible in piecemeal terms but is less and less clearly related to broadly shared principles of government.

This agenda has something baroque about it: more and more, it resembles the familiar menus of liberal causes and programs. In fact, most of its items can co-exist with the liberal programs that have already been installed, which conservatives have quietly stopped trying to repeal. Jack Kemp, the conservative activists' favorite during the 1988 primaries, is the most conspicuous example of the conservative who has come to terms with the liberal programs that have been instituted since the New Deal; it's appropriate that he is now Secretary of Housing and Urban Develop-

Loyalty to Reagan himself has helped make conservatives forget and abandon their traditional purpose of reducing the size of government.

ment. (The career of William Bennett—first as Education Secretary and then as drug czar—also illustrates how readily some conservatives drop their objections to federal power when it is exercised in the name of their “values.”)

Whatever may be said for fine-tuning liberal programs by adapting them to market incentives, this is not an approach that will make conservatism a powerful political force, because it does nothing to assert conservatism as an independent rival principle to collectivism. It merely tries to sell conservatism as a set of superior methods for achieving collectivist goals. This was also the weakness of supply-side economics: it offered to increase rather than cut federal revenues. It located itself in a marginal area of common interest between liberalism and conservatism.

Since Reagan, in other words, conservatives have lost their identity. Loyalty to Reagan himself has helped make them forget and abandon their traditional purpose of reducing the size of government, and, more fundamentally, of defining the role of government in strict and principled terms. If liberals have programs, conservatives now offer alternative programs. They seldom offer philosophical and constitutional objections to the goals of liberalism.

Among other things, this has relieved liberals of the necessity of having, or defending, a philosophy. As a practical matter, everyone seems to accept without discussion the crude assumption that government should solve whatever is presented as a political problem or redress whatever is asserted as a grievance. The result is an ever-growing accretion of State programs, enterprises, institutions, bureaucracies. These are usually failures or waste of money on their own terms, but since there are no firm criteria for success or failure except a literal-minded

common sense that has no political purchase, it hardly matters; once established, they operate autonomously, their subsidization assured.

After all, Lyndon Johnson promised that the War on Poverty would attack the “root causes” of crime, as well as abolish poverty itself; he pledged that the programs would be dismantled if they didn’t achieve these ends. Poverty (variously defined) is still with us, and the crime rate is higher than ever; but nobody in politics proposes to do away with the programs, least of all Secretary Kemp.

Conservatives now do little more than add to the confusion of the current scene. They have given up on the kind of thorough reform they thought was at hand in 1980; they have ceased posing a threat to the status quo of pragmatic interventionist liberalism. Something vital has gone out of the movement, something to which it owed all its original energy and appeal.

People have debated the meaning of conservatism for more than a century, but in the American political context I think it should be defined fairly simply: it’s an attachment to a classic Western understanding of the rule of law. It understands the role of the State to be that of umpire, custodian, and enforcer of some rather minimal rules of conduct, designed to allow citizens to pursue their own private purposes without coercion or violence or fraud.

In the *Politics*, Aristotle explains the character of law well. He recommends that there be as few laws as possible, and that they be altered as seldom as possible. The reason for this is that law should be an extension of our normal sense of right and wrong, so that people can observe it, for the most part, simply by living what they regard as morally upright lives. Law should seem to be impersonal, applying equally to all, rather

than the expression of any special or partisan will or interest. The less frequently it changes and the more permanence it has, the more citizens will feel reverence for it.

When Jefferson says “that government is best which governs least,” he is saying something similar. He means not that the ideal would be no government at all, but that the law should be so much in accordance with the spontaneous behavior of decent people, so harmonious with the community’s moral consensus, that it requires a minimum of surveillance and enforcement. He would probably see the development of an entire “underground economy” as a sign that the State had grown far too powerful. A tax system in which cheating has become endemic among people who would never think of stealing from their neighbors is a sign of a State that takes far more from citizens than they instinctively feel to be fair.

The word “law” has become indiscriminately applied to two fundamentally different, incompatible, and even opposite sorts of things, which have in common only the fact that they may be imposed by the apparatus of the State. One is the genuine rule of conduct, usually negative (“Thou shalt not steal”), which limits rather than specifies behavior, and which requires people to behave as they might ideally behave anyway out of simple respect for their fellows. The other is the command, which is the imposition of the will of some upon others. (“And the King said, Bring me a sword.”)

C.S. Lewis notes that the decline of the idea of natural law, an eternal order of right and wrong to which positive law should conform, gave rise in early modernity to the idea that the source of law is the will, whether the king’s or the people’s. By now we have come to

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take it for granted that this is not only natural but inevitable. The concept of a law that transcends will has been lost, though it lurks in our moral habits, and we act as if it were perfectly proper, in a democracy, for the majority to impose its will on the minority. There should be limits, of course: we somewhat incoherently reserve little pockets of "minority rights," without explaining to ourselves how these can fit in with the principle that the State is entitled to legislate as it pleases, and ought to be (in Lewis's phrase) "incessantly engaged in legislation."

Conservative and classical liberal thinkers are converging on a common insight in this area. Both Michael Oakeshott and F.A. Hayek have distinguished sharply between "nomocracy," or government according to impartial rules, and "teleocracy," or government intended to achieve some substantive purpose of the State itself. Both feel that nomocracy is the true Western tradition, and that this tradition of rule has been unfortunately confused by recent ideologies that can only understand governing as the pursuit of substantive goals, e.g., "social justice." Teleocracy, by its nature, demands that the individual subordinate his will and purposes to the State's. Under Communism, the individual may be directly conscripted into the State's enterprises. Modern democracies are less monolithic, combining a residue of nomocracy with various elements of teleocracy; taxation pays for both the services all receive (e.g., police protection) and for the appeasement of special interests through the redistribution of wealth.

Conservatives and libertarians have been widely dismissed by intellectuals as "reactionaries" defending what are essentially lost causes. On this view, history has passed them by. And those who felt that the Reagan

era was their last chance are implicitly accepting this view. But if Oakeshott, Hayek, and Mises are right, the current despair of conservatives is groundless.

Reagan's election in itself was a symptom of enormous popular discontent with the present system. So are the underground economy and tax cheating; many other examples might be cited. Even the special interests that compete for our wealth have to use various moral and political subterfuges to justify what Frederic Bastiat calls "organized plunder": they don't dare to assert simply that their fellow citizens have a duty to support them, but are forced to claim "need" and "victimhood," implying that their demands are justified exceptions rather than direct rights to others' wealth. A moral stigma is still attached to the idea of "welfare" and to the very concept of "special interests." There is a widespread, probably ineradicable suspicion that special claims on the State's favor are subversive of genuine equality before the law, no matter how such claims are advanced in the name of equality.

The multiplication of special laws, lacking the character of genuine law, has done nothing to improve the lot of the average American citizen. The net effect, in fact, has somehow been to leave him more exposed to criminal violence than ever. Anyone who is not receiving subventions from the federal government is now likely to be deeply suspicious of all its works and pomps. It was this skepticism that Reagan so effectively exploited.

That skepticism deserves to be more seriously exploited. At bottom it is Western man's deep-seated resistance to teleocracy, to any State that pushes him around in the name of any cause, however high-sounding its pretensions.

Modern politics, in its corrupted versions, is a series of devices for obscuring lines of economic, moral, and even sexual responsibility. By directing its concern to alleged victims, while multiplying the categories of victimhood, it increases the number of its dependents and turns the productive into virtual defendants before the tax police. By depriving the earner of his reward, it destroys the ratio between act and consequence and renders constructive action futile and irrational. It systematically undermines not only property ownership but family relations. By pandering to man as victim of circumstance, it makes itself the enemy of man as responsible agent. And by the same token, its chief enemy is not the violent criminal, who after all poses no threat to the redistributive system, but the citizen who wants to keep his own money.

In the current political vocabulary, "need" means wanting to get someone else's money. "Greed," which used to mean what "need" now means, has come to mean wanting to keep your own. "Compassion" means the politician's willingness to arrange the transfer.

If they could leave off the specialized commitments they burdened themselves with during the Reagan years, conservatives could address the clashing principles at stake in every new statist initiative. They might find, to their surprise, that when the issues are properly defined, they belong not to a reactionary minority but to the abiding mainstream of the West. And millions of Americans who feel vaguely oppressed by their own political system, but are not burning with enthusiasm to aid the Nicaraguan contras or install an anti-missile system, might discover that their discontents, far from being idiosyncratic, stem from the irrepressible desire to live as free human beings. ◀



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The Great Society and 25 Years of Decline

BY WILLIAM MURCHISON

Failures of Soviet and Chinese communism are writ large in the eastern sky—and on the covers of the big news magazines. No serious political figure would today stand up for central planning. He would be hooted down.

All this being so, why can't Americans own up to the failures of their own in the public policy sphere? Why can't we even talk about these failures?

The 25th anniversary of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society comes round. The magnitude of the occasion seems not to have sunk in: still less the frustrations, vexation, overheated hopes, and downright dangerous trends set off by a presidential speech that

even, in many cases, less prosperous, though this was the direct reverse of what the reformers had said they wanted.

Government was going to do everything. It would wipe out poverty; it would equalize opportunity; it would enrich the mind and the heart. Broadly speaking, government was going to make people satisfied, fulfilled, and happy. "The pursuit of happiness," a phrase from the Declaration of Independence, became under Johnson's prodigious prodding, an American entitlement.

It did not end as planned. The Great Society enjoyed two efflorescent years, 1964 and 1965, during which Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act (War on Poverty), the Civil Rights Act, the Voting

shown, sundered and shriveled, especially as moral forces. Yet the conventional wisdom still commends the Great Society for its idealism.

"Most of these things, most of these programs," says Sargent Shriver, who once generated the War on Poverty, "are a part of our lives today." As are the 6,000 pages of federal rules and regulations governing welfare; as are 59 major poverty programs, with a 1985 cost of \$132 billion, compared with \$21 billion for all poverty programs in 1960. Poverty likewise still is with us.

What is the matter, that the Great Society's failures go widely unrecognized and unremarked, even while failed central planners in the communist bloc cringe from the spotlight?

The reason is the vested interest of the intelligentsia, special interests, and bureaucracy in seeing the Great Society perpetuated. The jobs it dispenses, the prerequisites it affords, are many and lucrative.

There is yet a second reason the Great Society does not take its fair share of lumps. It may be the most powerful; it is undeniably the saddest. We actually are not supposed to mention it in polite society, but I will take the chance anyway.

The Great Society achieves its real invulnerability from the perception that attacks upon it are racially motivated. Lyndon Johnson sought, so he said, to raise blacks from dependence and poverty to independence and affluence. The programs he persuaded Congress to pass could not have been better calculated to achieve the opposite. But a conspiracy of silence enshrouds this depressing datum. In effect we are invited not to judge programs by their consequences but by their intentions.

Charles Murray, in *Losing Ground*, writes that "social policy after the mid-1960s demanded an extraordinary range of transfers from the most capable poor

The welfare culture of the '60s created a whole new stratum of government dependents — the "underclass," unmotivated, uneducated, ridden with AIDS and cocaine.

should live in infamy.

Said Lyndon Johnson to the graduating class of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, May 22, 1964: "For you in your time we have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society."

The Great Society raised democratic social engineering to its apogee. The New Deal, in which LBJ had participated as a young bureaucrat and, later, as a Democratic congressman, was a politically inspired scheme to redistribute wealth; the Great Society seemingly set out to change humanity. The intention bore fruit. The Great Society helped make Americans unhappier, less self-reliant, less moral, less connected to things permanent—

Rights Act, Medicare, Medicaid, the Appalachian Regional Development Act, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Higher Education Act, and the legislation creating the National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities.

What happened afterward to the Great Society is in some degree less interesting than what didn't happen to public perceptions of it. The Great Society fell flat. Education declined instead of advancing; racial tensions rose instead of falling. The welfare culture of the '60s created a whole new stratum of government dependents—the "underclass," unmotivated, uneducated, ridden with AIDS and cocaine. Intact black families, as Charles Murray's ground-breaking work has

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to the least capable, from the most law-abiding to the least law-abiding, and from the most responsible to the least responsible." The consequence among the intended beneficiaries was a sharp rise in illegitimacy, drug use, and general dependence.

A fully credentialed liberal like Bill Moyers can occasionally mention these matters on television, provided he consents not to dwell on them at unseemly length. However, no such mention can occur in the context of an attack on the ideological foundations of the Great Society, because As Is Well Known (to self-styled spokesmen for minorities), people who advocate less government are indifferent to the poor and downtrodden.

It is chiseled in the minds of

these "spokesmen" that government, not the free marketplace, can best address and solve the problem of submerged minorities, racial or otherwise. Whoever wants less government is no friend of the poor—and let's *don't*, contrary to Al Smith, look at the record, because that would overthrow the whole argument. It would establish that poor people prosper most where the market is free and choices open; and that the Great Society, far from increasing economic opportunities, has foreclosed them for many who would otherwise have enjoyed them.

What hope, then? Are we to go on noting the failure of collectivism abroad but ignoring its baneful effects at home? All we

can do is keep talking. Ludwig von Mises knew "the fulsome praise of the stationary economy" to be "the last remaining argument" of the statist. Today, such fulsome praise embarrasses even communists.

Facts are impossible to disguise after a period of time, which is why Comrade Gorbachev, far from lying about his country's condition, openly laments it.

No fact bulks larger in American life than that the Great Society has not been built here; that the attempt to build it has sapped energies and incomes and impaired the well-being of almost the whole of society. We will persist in pointing to that fact. It should not be long before somebody notices. ◀

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mentalists' lingo — natural, organic, and biodegradable. It will be gone in 12-18 months at the most.

But we do need reforms. The most important would be privatizing all the federally held lands and waters. When logging takes place in the so-called national forests, the trees are clear-cut and the land erodes. When private timber companies harvest trees, they are careful to replant, to grow more trees and prevent erosion. But since no one owns the federal lands, no one cares for them. No private firm would have let Yellowstone Park burn because a forest fire is "natural."

In England, there is relatively little municipal or industrial pollution of rivers and streams because the common law correctly holds that someone dumping filth upstream of someone else's land violates his property rights. In the United States, with na-

tionalized waterways, no such prohibition holds, and water pollution is rampant.

As even Mikhail Gorbachev would admit, socialism is not an efficient method of economic organization. That's true for the Soviet Union, it's true for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service, and it's true for the Mississippi River.

Now that socialism is intellectually dead, however, we can expect the special interests who want to control and live off the rest of us to dress up big government in different guises. One is environmentalism.

That—along with what one environmentalist gleefully told me was the "fantastic PR opportunity of the Exxon Valdez"—accounts for the hysteria directed at Exxon, including the claim that it used the oil spill to raise prices.

But prices are not set by the benevolence or malevolence of

businessmen. They are set by supply and demand. And after the oil spill, market participants realized it would be used to further suppress energy production in Alaska, California, and other areas of the U.S., making all present resources instantly more valuable. An immediate price increase was the just and rational response.

Environmentalists are cutting up their Exxon credit cards and calling for a boycott of Exxon, itself the main victim of the oil spill. The boycott won't affect Exxon much, but it has already harmed gas station owners and their employees. But then environmental extremists have never minded harming innocent people, especially working people.

Amidst what is essentially an anti-human crusade, I am going out of my way to buy Exxon products. If the radical environmentalists win, the rest of us will lose. ◀

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