

Rather, the descent to depravity is reached by small steps. First, suicide is promoted as a virtue Then follows mercy killing of the terminally ill. From there, it is a hop, skip, and a jump to killing people who don't have a good 'quality' of life, perhaps with the prospect of organ harvesting thrown in as a plum to society."

As Smith reminds us, "once we claim the right to judge who should live and die on the basis of subjec-

tive standards such as ... quality of life, ... we have created a disposable caste: fellow human beings who can be killed without legal consequence" *Roe v. Wade* and the culture of death it spawned have ushered us to the brink of the abyss. As we peer into the void below we can dimly see the shadow of barbarism and inhumanity. We must step back to avoid being swept over the edge.

THE MIDNIGHT ECONOMIST

Communism, Fascism, and The New Deal

While they rejected its overt violence, the economics of fascism looked good to many New Dealers.

W I L L I A M R . A L L E N

SO WE have lurched and staggered through another century. In some respects — in medicine and mechanics, in engineering and entertainment — the experience has had its gratifications. But the record is largely embarrassing and dismaying in social organization and activity: In politics and economics, we have much reason to weep and cry havoc. Two strains and stains have been "communism" and "fascism." These are not labels of transcendental clarity, and definitions and interpretations differ. But however designated and described in detail, you can recognize the excrement when you see it.

Almost all of us have rejoiced in the abject failure of attempts to establish communism (or its diluted understudy and presumed precursor, socialism) in the United States, although such vicious nonsense has been a major force in every other democratic country. In their new book, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States*, Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks contend: "Distinctive elements of American culture — antistatism and individualism — negated the appeal of socialism for the mass of American workers."

It is a different story with key aspects of fascism. Consider the saga of the New Deal of the 1930s.

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It has been argued that there were two New Deals.

William R. Allen, from his vantage point in the UCLA Department of Economics, tries to humble the clowns of communism and the fools of fascism.

The first centered on "the cartelism of the NRA," and did not last long. The second was a "free-spending and experimental period that saw ... the injection of the federal government into every aspect of national life."

The dichotomy can be too neatly drawn. The psychological and philosophical orientation toward dominant government initiatives and assumed responsibilities; the reliance on state intervention in and appreciable superseding of the market; the increasing pervasiveness of bureaucratic decree and manipulation — such characteristics provided an underlying consistency for a long episode otherwise marked heavily by analytic incoherence, strategic uncertainty, political inconstancy, and policy improvisation.

In the early 1930s, some articulate people professed to see the workable future in the Russian experience. But communistic state ownership of property was a bit much for all but a few. For many more, fascism approximated the best of all worlds: the trappings and facade of private property and enterprise would be largely retained but in a setting of close alliance among big government, big business, and big labor — with government being the overarching director and final arbiter. It is not to be suggested that President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his Brain Trusters applauded Mussolini's aberrant political attitudes — the exultation of violence and ruthlessness and irrationality. But the thrust of fascistic economic intent and organization looked good to many New Dealers.

The "corporate" economy pursued in Italy would eliminate the individualistic competition of the mar-

ketplace and the struggle between capital and labor. Such wasteful disruption would be replaced by collectivized economic sectors, with mandatory confederation of union and of industry leaders agreeing on fair wages, fair prices, and fair modes of business behavior, all coordinated and approved by government, and with personal gain subordinated to the community's good.

Six weeks after his inauguration in 1933, in a "fire-side chat," the president characterized the United States version of economic fascism:

It is wholly wrong to call the measures that we have taken government control of farming, industry, and transportation. It is rather a partnership between government and farming and industry and transportation, not partnership in profits, for the profits still go to the citizens, but rather a partnership in planning, and a partnership to see that the plans are carried out Government ought to have the right and will have the right, after surveying and planning for an industry, to prevent ... unfair practices and to enforce this agreement by the authority of government.

The president is reported to have remarked that he had "never felt surer of anything in ... [his] life than ... [he did] of the soundness of this passage."

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A Harvard historian has described his lasting love of the great experiment of the 1930s. The scholar concedes that "the New Deal was not a 'social revolution'; "it did not bring full employment"; it "did not bring significant redistribution of income"; and it did

not "set the country on the path toward economic growth." If the New Deal failed in its major efforts, what was so great about it?

Why, the glory of the New Deal is that it was "a revolution in political ideas." The historian was ghost-writer for two of the "brain trusters." In both positions, he says, the "preoccupation" was "to persuade people to look to Washington for help," to convince them that "government is the solution." That government failed, that government could not do what the rousing rhetoric called for and claimed, was not very important. The critical thing was for the president and his brain trusters to convince people that there is no beneficial market mechanism; that the community cannot prosper or even survive through individual initiative and accountability in a stable setting of wide options provided by a severely contained government; that government — with neither market incentives nor market guidance — must be our chief producer (and distributor) of wealth; that government — reeking of purity and wisdom — will save us from the nefarious forces of greed and stupidity.

The historian must realize that history has been dominated by dominating government and that that domination has yielded a consistent story of both tyranny and poverty. Fascism, communism, and socialism — along with the New Deal — have failed to produce the goods. But the historian claims — unhappily, with much reason — that in the "revolution of ideas," the New Dealers largely "succeeded." It matters little to these purported descendants of Thomas Jefferson that the people live poorly, so long as they embrace Big Brother. For them, ideology is vastly more important than performance.

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Follow the Bouncing Columnists

At the Times, Mike Downey is out, Peter King returns — and the Grey Whale's pundit migration is having a musical-chairs effect on other big papers in the state.

T I M W . F E R G U S O N

THERE'S NO more influential space in a newspaper than a column on Page A3 or the front of the local section, preferably with one's stamp-size photo attached. A regular slot on the editorial or op-ed page is second best.

So the movement of such pundits can be grounds for a bit of Kremlinology. This winter saw the most significant changes at the *Los Angeles Times*, but with a musical-chairs effect on other big papers in the state.

At the *Times*, now being run by managers chosen by parent Tribune Co. of Chicago, the ax finally fell on Mike Downey, the former sportswriter whom the former regime had placed on the "state" page, presumably to liven things up. He was a waste of time. His politics, best as could be told, were those of your average journalist chatting at the water cooler about events of the day. About as deep and about as funny. Except that the news types never accepted him so he had to do his chatting in print. His spot was filled at first by Peter King, a former *Times* man who'd gone on to be a pundit for the *Bees*. King, a more pronounced liberal, was as welcomed by the journos as Downey was scorned. His return to the *Times* means he will no longer appear in papers that like to pick up *Bee* material, like the *Orange County Register*. Downey's real sub, Steve Lopez of *Time* magazine, dislikes sprawl and Pat Buchanan's politics and depicted Gray Davis in 1999 as "the most fearless governor in America."

At the same time, the *Register* has been picking up Daniel Weintraub (a former *Registerite*, as well as former *Times* man), who now is a shoe-leather *Bee* pundit. Weintraub's right-of-center bent contrasts with

Tim W. Ferguson is California Political Review's press critic.

Peter Schrag's left-of-center orientation and works out—when combined with editorial columnist Dan Walters—to give papers taking the McClatchy feed a better balance than the *Times* offered before or now.

The state's second largest daily, the *San Francisco Chronicle* (now owned by Hearst Corp.), runs liberals like Rob Morse and Stephanie Salter who moved over from the old *Examiner*, along with a bazaar of slice-of-life stuff befitting its hometown.

On the local pages, the *Times* continues to offer politically-correct pabulum while most of the papers just offer pabulum. Gordon Dillow of the *Orange County Register* — sometimes dissed by his Diversity-driven newsroom colleagues — is known to stoke conservative fires with the likes of his column questioning the cost of Martin Luther King Day, which is basically a holiday for the government sector. (Dare he repeat the question for Cesar Chavez Day?) Needless to say, that kind of thinking is rare in all of the metro California dailies.

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For those with the time and inclination to read the opinion pages, the energy crunch has been well-enough explained. Probably no pundit did a better job of it than Holman Jenkins of the *Wall Street Journal* (writing from New York), whose columns got picked up in a few California outlets. Jenkins early on fingered Gray Davis for dodging and weaving, trying to escape responsibility for letting a true marketplace work. Other commentators made much the same point to those with a sufficient attention span. Several pointed out that the rules in force go back to Pete Wilson's days.

But the sad fact is that most Californians will never