

wasteland over which a leviathan state presides for the enforcement of equality and in which a political and economic regimen centered on and driven by envy and by what President Washington called the "spirit of innovation" prevails?

"Russell Kirk, Friedrich Hayek, and Irving Kristol," Mr. Kesler writes, "would agree that a healthy nation cannot really be dedicated to any proposition or abstract truth, because a nation is a kind of spontaneous social order emerging from historical experience and the unguided evolution of market and cultural forces." In Mr. Kesler's view this kind of traditionalism, which avoids universalist assertions, accounts for the conservative failure "to bring about a genuine political realignment." "The difficulty is that conservatism seems to have no clear commitment to those principles or, more precisely, that it does not seem to understand why they are so important. It has not yet learned the vernacular of American politics, despite its great and numerous successes."

For all his critique of conventional conservative traditionalism, however, Mr. Kesler nowhere offers a defense of the truth of the philosophical abstraction he espouses. His defense of equality as the center of the American order is merely that it is our tradition, "our ancient faith," as Lincoln put it, and that this line of defense does not differ in form from the arguments of other, conventional conservative traditionalists such as Messrs. Kirk, Bradford, or Kendall—except that they make a historically more literate case for their very different reading of what the American tradition is.

One suspects that Mr. Kesler offers no philosophical defense for his idea of equality because there is no such defense. John Locke (and Thomas Jefferson, insofar as he was Locke's disciple) presumed an anthropology of the "state of nature" and a "social contract" that never existed. The natural equality of rights by which Mr. Kesler wants to define America as a political order is entirely derivative from Lockean fiction. It cannot stand in the absence of this fiction, nor can Locke's view of government and society as artificial products of the universal consent of their members. Pace Mr. Kesler, the US Constitution was not "made" at Philadelphia in four

months, but in the long and complex evolution of European, British, colonial, and post-colonial history. At no time in the 18th century were Americans in a "state of nature," and the state and federal constitutions they drafted were in no way Lockean social contracts.

Whatever facile charms Mr. Kesler's egalitarianism may possess, it has managed to miss the point of the teaching that traditionalists have long asserted. That point is to defend an inherited way of life that cannot be reduced to easy formulas and neat slogans, and which philosophical texts and legalistic charters by themselves cannot adequately articulate. When conservative leaders have understood, and based their campaigns and policies upon, this unique, concrete, specific, and habitual ethos, which, as Kendall perceived, Americans understand "in their hips," they have prospered. When, like Mr. Jaffa's other disciple, Rep. Jack Kemp, they have followed Mr. Kesler's counsel, they have failed miserably.

Political success, of course, is of less importance to those who keep the real American tablets than the task of preserving the tablets themselves. As long as they are intact, we will be able to distinguish them from counterfeits such as Mr. Kesler offers, and there will be some firm ground from which their keepers may challenge, rather than merely mimic, those who try to erase them.

Samuel Francis is deputy editorial page editor of The Washington Times.

Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

Under the (Smoking) Gun



In *The Wall Street Journal* on June 16 last, Mr. Alexander Cockburn—whose regular presence in the premier organ of capitalist opinion, by the way, nicely illustrates Lenin's maxim about rope—argued that the current anti-smoking hysteria is a capitalist plot. The loathsome Cockburn adduced an article in an obscure publication of the Spartacist League that maintained that

antismoking campaigns are intended to control workers more closely, to increase productivity without increasing wages, and to reduce corporate ventilation costs. Cockburn also observed that an early, and rabid, antismoker was Adolf Hitler.

All of this was delivered deadpan, and it is no more ludicrous or far-fetched than Cockburn's other opinions, so he may even believe it. But he was purveying disinformation (maybe not for the first time): it is well-known in these parts that antismokers are serving the international Communist conspiracy.

I offer in evidence the copies of *Pravda* that Philip Morris recently sent to several hundred newspaper editors and the like, with a note observing that "*Pravda* does not carry cigarette advertising, or indeed any advertising." That may seem a little silly, but get a load of the pinko response: according to *The New York Times*, Democrat Congressman Mike Synar accused Philip Morris of "red-baiting" and called the mailing an "embarrassing throwback to the dark days of McCarthyism."

Synar ought to look at *Tobacco Culture*, a recent book by historian Tim Breen that attributes American independence to the irritation of Virginia tobacco growers at being jerked around by English merchants. No smoking, no US—get it, Synar?

Their attitude was a lot like my buddy Eugene's. When Northwest Airlines announced a smoking ban on all of its flights, Eugene announced that he was going to boycott the company. Since Northwest doesn't go anywhere Eugene wants to go, I recognized this as a statement of principle. Besides, Eugene doesn't smoke. When I asked him why a nonsmoker would object to a no-smoking policy, he said: "I might decide to start." Don't tread on Eugene. He doesn't like being told he can't do things.

Given tobacco's association with the cause of freedom, I don't think the present climate of epidemical fanaticism (Burke's phrase) augurs well for the Republic. So I'm on the smokers' side.

Besides, I like smokers. Pipe-smokers, especially, tend to be pleasant folks. My favorite example of a self-evident truth is Mike Royko's observation that no one was ever mugged by a

pipe-smoker. Child molesting, maybe, but not mugging. Some time ago the *Lutheran Standard* ran a photograph of a man with a pipe, and some churlish Mrs. Grundy wrote to complain. Another reader, a pipe-man, wrote wistfully about “the little song that Johann Sebastian Bach wrote for Anna Magdalene, *Erbauliche Gedanken eines Tobackrauchers*,” with its happy reflection on the spiritual meaning of pipe smoking — “the smoke that rises like incense, the fire that reminds one of hell, and so forth.” He translated the refrain thus: “And so on land, on sea, at home, abroad, / I’ll smoke my pipe and worship God.” Lutherans, he wrote, should resist “the further Methodistization of what was once the church of the Bible, Bach, and beer.” Amen to that, says this disaffected Anglican.

I like the company of smokers, even of cigarette smokers. I like to be with them when they’re smoking, because passive smoking is the only kind I allow myself these days, and when they’re not, because they tend to be good folks. Didn’t you ever notice that people in the smoking sections of airplanes were having more *fun* than the folks up front? Laughing and joking and talking with one another? Getting acquainted, not just staring glumly at their newspapers and avoiding eye contact? Smokers are sociable folks. That’s why most of them started smoking in the first place. I wish airlines would set aside special sections for smokers, even if they won’t let people smoke. I’d ride there.

Yes, I like smokers for their good nature. I also like their humility. Smokers are acquainted with human weakness and frailty. They know that people are a pretty sorry lot. They don’t have great hopes of changing human nature. Few are into social reform in a big way. Hell, they can’t even quit smoking.

Many smokers would agree with Robert Rosner of the (antismoking) Smoking Policy Institute who said this to *The Wall Street Journal*: “Smoking — the very fact of a cigarette dangling from one’s mouth — is viewed as a breakdown in someone’s self-discipline.” But they would go on to ask whether self-discipline is the highest of virtues. Higher than charity? Compassion? Humility? Not all of us admire

the ostentatiously self-disciplined. But someone like Rosner (who makes his living “help[ing] companies to establish smoking restrictions” — and what kind of job is *that*?) couldn’t be expected to understand.

So I like smokers, and I feel sorry for them, even more than for other abused and downtrodden minorities. As the habit wanes, I also feel sorry for the tobacco farmers and cigarette-factory workers whose taxes pay my salary, and for Garland, my long-time tobacconist and friend.

But I must say I’m damned if I feel sorry for the tobacco companies. Like rats leaving a sinking ship, they’re diversifying out of the cigarette business as fast as they can. I see here where RJR Nabisco has even developed a “smokeless cigarette” — about the sort of limp-wristed accommodationism you’d expect from a cookie company, isn’t it? That’s the act of a company that doesn’t believe in its product.

I don’t like cigarette companies that imply that there’s something wrong with smoke. Smoke is their business and they ought to *like* it. I do: one of my early memories is of my grandfather’s smoking Camels at a high-school football game — a crisp November evening, and that marvelous fragrance. Sneer if you will, but if people can wax lyrical about wood smoke on the New England air or burning leaves in the small-town Midwest, I reserve the right to my own smelly nostalgia. I smoked for 30 years, and quit for health reasons, not because I didn’t like smoke.

So I’d have more respect for RJR if they’d taken a lead from the success of Jolt Cola (“All the sugar, twice the caffeine”). That Jolt is selling out in US college towns tells me that college kids are sick of being told what’s good for them by middle-aged health-and-safety fascists. If RJR really wanted to *sell cigarettes*, they wouldn’t dink around with gimmicky smokeless cigarette-type nicotine-delivery devices. They’d bring out something like “Death” cigarettes: “All the nicotine, twice the tar.” They’d put a skull and crossbones on the pack, print the surgeon general’s warning twice the required size, and sell them with slogans like “What the hell!” and “Do you want to live forever?”

If they smelled like those Camels

did back in 1950, who could resist?

John Shelton Reed teaches at the University of North Carolina. He hasn’t smoked for several years, but is looking forward to starting again when he’s told he has six months to live.

Letter From Paris

by Curtis Cate

But Why the “Red Flag” of Revolution?



I have never been a flag-waver, nor felt much sympathy for howling mobs, particularly when bent on destruction. But since this year, 1989, marks the bicentennial of the world’s first and most influential revolution (there is hardly a revolutionary notion or *motif* that cannot be traced back to Danton, Robespierre, Marat, Babeuf, and their spiritual ancestor, Rousseau), we might pause to ask ourselves how it is that the once royal, not to say imperial, color of red should in our time have come to symbolize the cause of the downtrodden proletariat. For it was during the revolutionary turmoil that accompanied the death of France’s *ancien régime* that the red flag was first brandished, though not, curiously enough, by proletarians.

It is indeed a curious story, and one more proof of how, like words and everyday expressions, traditional symbols can be semantically inverted and invested with radically different meanings. For a long time red and its first cousin, crimson, were colors closely associated with authority and power. Two thousand years ago, when the tinctorial art was still in its infancy, crimson — or what the Romans called *purpura* — became the privileged color of successive emperors because of the extreme costliness of its production, the hue being derived from a Mediterranean shellfish that gave rise to the famous Tyrian dye. Later, the descendants of Saint Peter having inherited the mantle of the Caesars, the cardinals of Rome took to robing themselves in red.

In the Middle Ages red became the favorite color of the Crusaders, and it was under a scarlet banner with a big