

celebrate, just a European-American majority and an African-American minority—a situation as old as the republic itself. The politics of multiculturalism is impossible to imagine without the mass immigration that both created and sustains it. Is it mere accident that the surge of inequality since the 1980's has coincided with the tidal wave of Third World immigrants to this country? Or that the same thing happened in the late 19th century?

Tom Ashbrook's *On Point* (an NPR program) recently broadcast a four-part series about inequality, on which one of his guests was Robert Rubin, the former treasury secretary under Clinton. Rubin's opinions would not have surprised Murray Rothbard, who was well aware of how successful elites seek to control and neutralize the reform process. Rubin was not sure what we should do about the income divide (his answers were vague and evasive), but he was sure about what we should *not* do—interfere with “free trade” or curb immigration. He brought this up five times in one hour.

Readers of *Chronicles* will have some serious disagreements with the author, but that should not prevent our recognizing an important and valuable work. “Inequality,” Montesquieu warned, “will enter at the point not protected by the laws, and the republic will be lost.”

Herbert Arthur Scott Trask is the author of “Condy Raguette and the Northern Laissez-Faire, State-Rights Tradition,” soon to be submitted for publication, and is at work on his Civil War book, “Copperheads and Conservatives: The Northern Antiwar Movement, 1861-65.”

All Honorable Means

by Clark Stooksbury

Beating the Powers That Be
by Sean Scallon
Baltimore: Publish America;
203 pp., \$19.95



The political culture of the United States is cramped and stunted by the narrow range of acceptable viewpoints and the utterly banal, subliterate tone of our political campaigns—to compare American elections to the marketing of soap is an insult to the people

who sell soap. If, as Sean Scallon notes in *Beating the Powers That Be*, culture precedes politics, the state of American politics says nothing good about the state of American culture.

Beating the Powers That Be is, in part, a story of the constriction of the American political spectrum since World War II. Scallon describes three related political movements that began in the Upper Midwest in the first half of the 20th century: the Progressive Party in Wisconsin, the Farmer-Labor Party in Minnesota, and the Non-Partisan League in North Dakota. These organizations were representative of the far left in this country at a time when the left cared more for working people than about securing the civil rights of the transgendered.

Scallon begins his narrative with a remembrance of the late Sen. Paul Wellstone of Minnesota, the latest in a line of “Minnesota Mavericks” that include U.S. Rep. Charles Lindbergh, Sr., and Sen. Eugene McCarthy. Wellstone was a professor who wanted to make a difference. “He wanted to link academics with social activism the way professors did back during the Great Depression and the New Deal years of the 1930s . . .” Wellstone entered politics and served two full terms in the U.S. Senate before his untimely death in a plane crash in October 2002, only days after courageously voting against the then wildly popular Iraq-war resolution.

The tradition that Wellstone represented began in 1918, when the Farmer-Labor Party was founded. (It later merged with Minnesota's Democratic Party.) Unlike the fringe third parties we are used to today, Farmer-Labor was once powerful in Minnesota, winning elections for governor and senator. Scallon describes the factors that lay behind the alliance between farmers and laborers:

A farmer owns his land and pays taxes on it, no matter how small the plot. Holding onto that land

and making a profit from it to provide for [his family] and pass [it] on to [them] is his primary concern. . . . He can be radical if ownership of his land is at stake and be quite conservative in order to use that land as he . . . sees fit. . . . Before World War II a laborer didn't own much more than his or her labor power. A laborer can be conservative if that labor is perceived at stake . . . Or he . . . may turn radical if working conditions are so tough [that he feels he has] nothing left to lose.

Owing to the efforts of Floyd B. Olson and the suffering of the Great Depression, the Farmer-Labor Party dominated Minnesota in the 1930's, but it couldn't long survive the death in 1936 of then-governor Olson. Although the party still carries the name Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, Scallon pronounces it dead as of November 5, 2002.

The election results declare that Minnesota has officially become suburbia just like everywhere else—and the Democrats will adjust accordingly. There are far more soccer moms and office-park dads in the land of 10,000 lakes than there are farmers, factory workers and the Scandinavian socialists who once formed the DFL's backbone.

To Minnesota's east lies Wisconsin, a state whose political culture is described by Scallon as “clean, high-minded and infused with a civic tradition and ethos.” Here, Robert La Follette, Sr., disgusted with corruption in the state Republican Party, became a progressive reformer, advocating regulation of banks, railroads, and insurance companies. A very successful politician, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives before serving as governor and senator from Wis-

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consin. In 1912, his first presidential campaign was done in by another progressive Republican—Teddy Roosevelt:

[W]hat both men thought progressivism was began to diverge by 1912. To LaFollette, it was a movement of political reform and social justice. Inequities in the great transition from farm to factory and the corruption it spawned would be straightened out . . .

[M]ore so than just being from the East, Roosevelt's views resonated with those who weren't just interested in anti-trust legislation or removing some hack politician from a county commission for corruption. [His progressivism] was about changing the nature of man itself so [he] would no longer accept bribes or be so greedy. It led to beliefs that man could be made perfect or progress from his primal urges and lusts.

As David Frum says, "War is a great clarifier." La Follette distinguished himself from Roosevelt by opposing America's entry into World War I, for which he was called a traitor by the *New York Times*.

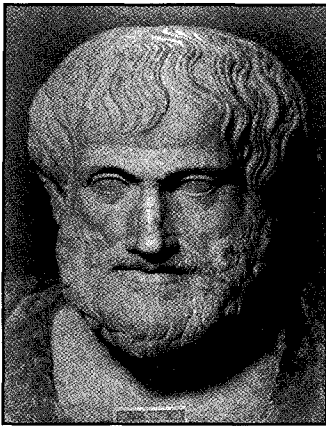
Robert La Follette, Jr., succeeded his father in the Senate—both as a Republican and, later, as a representative of the Progressive Party—and opposed Franklin Roosevelt's committing the country to World War II.

After the New Deal and World War II, there was little room in America for the kind of movement that Scallion describes. As the federal government grew, taking over many of the functions of the states, Cold War conformity narrowed the scope of acceptable opinion. On occasion, broad discontent with the *status quo* bubbled up in the form of presidential campaigns by such candidates as George Wallace and Ross Perot, but Scallion notes a more interesting phenomenon occurring in political movements at lower levels of government. He focuses on three such movements—two in the New England states of Vermont and New Hampshire and a regional movement in the South, where the League of the South seeks to promote the "independence of the South 'by all honorable means.'" I remain somewhat skeptical of the prospects for success of this last enterprise. Nothing about the quality of political leaders that the South has produced in the last few years, including our sitting presi-

dent and his immediate predecessor, inspires my confidence (as a Tennessean) in a Southern regime. Decentralization of our monstrously overgrown federal government, however, remains an excellent idea, while dissolution of the Union should be a legitimate topic of discussion, not a hate crime.

Accordingly, Scallion profiles the Second Vermont Republic, an organization dedicated to keeping the Green Mountain State from becoming a giant Wal-Mart-McDonald's-big-box strip mall and reestablishing it as the independent republic it was from 1777 to 1791. And, next door, the Free State Project is working to encourage at least 20,000 libertarian ideologues to move to New Hampshire for the purpose of taking over the state's political system. While the thought of an invasion by libertarians may be frightening, the free marketeers are, in fact, relatively harmless. If the Free State Project succeeds in making any change more substantive than requiring Granite State high-schoolers to suffer through *Atlas Shrugged*—including all 60 pages of John Galt's speech—I'll be surprised.

Clark Stooksbury writes from Knoxville, Tennessee.



The Greek Conservative Mind

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Letter to the Bishop

by Joe Ecclesia

A Plea for Clarity

Your Excellency:

I trust you are in robust spirits as you face the rigors of the Christmas season. Surely, nowhere is there greater evidence that sin is a good wrongly twisted than in the manner in which we Americans celebrate Christmas. Contrary to our Church's teaching, which emphasizes the penitential and preparatory aspects of Advent, many Catholics (like other Americans) spend December shopping like mall rats, eating and drinking like sybarites, and dashing from party to party like girls during a sorority rush. Is it any wonder so many celebrants are delighted to see the backside of Christmas? On the Feast of Stephen, brigades of holiday-weary women hurl denuded conifers curbside for pickup, while strong, otherwise stoic men weep at kitchen tables over smoldering credit cards. Christmas-tide, that garland of feast days leading to Epiphany when our hearts should be riotous with celebration, finds many of us staggering and wan, debilitated as bachelor uncles after a month-long bender.

Here, Your Excellency, you deserve our thanks. Every Advent, you and your fellow priests remind us to make Christmas more than a bacchanal of department stores and gluttony.

Speaking of reminders: One of our parish priests gave yet another homily on the Catholic obligation to applaud the ongoing invasion of the United States. About once a month, Father beats us about the head with facts and fantasies regarding immigration. (He never uses the word *illegal*.) Last Sunday, he presented the standard arguments for open borders: We are a nation of immigrants; our economy would collapse without immigrants; immigrants do jobs Americans won't do. He ended with the theological right bower, reminding us that the poor will enter Heaven more easily than the rich. (A question, Your Excellency: If being poor is a virtue, why are we trying to eliminate poverty? I often give my pocket change to street beggars; am I keeping souls from Heaven?) Father also pointed us toward a recent statement from the Most Reverend William Skylstad, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, in

which you and your fellow bishops support Father's position.

Accustomed to Father's one-sided arguments and his attacks on the fascists and bigots in the pews—*i.e.*, white folks—I confess I paid scant attention to his homily. Only when he mentioned the Catholic ideal of a living wage did I perk up, attuned not to his remarks on immigration but to his abuse of language and reason. Didn't he realize that immigrants help to keep wages low?

Wondering whether Bishop Skylstad's missive was equally illogical, I found the statement on comprehensive immigration reform on the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website (usccb.org). Praiseworthy for its brevity (it isn't quite 300 words) and general clarity (Churchese is minimized), this "statement" is nonetheless lacking in fairness and diction. Archbishop Skylstad writes that you bishops have heard from many people, including Catholics, who oppose the flood of illegal immigrants, but he never cites the reasons for their opposition. He writes that we must practice compassion toward immigrants but doesn't address the plight of thousands of workers here in Western North Carolina—and the millions nationwide—whose jobs went to Mexico or China. He advocates fairness but doesn't mention the financial distress of a Mexican-American in California whose construction company must compete with cheap illegal labor. He demands a better life for immigrants but doesn't hint at the burden placed on taxpayers by the increased cost of social services and schools.

This lack of fairness and charity are reflected in the document's offenses against the English language. The writers of this "statement"—only a committee could compose prose this awful—prefer the passive to the active voice, a voice favored by politicians (and, apparently, bishops) to escape responsibility for their actions. The writers haul out certain catch phrases (my favorite is "the human person," an expression favored by our late pontiff that now appears routinely in Church missives. Human person as opposed to what? Squirrel persons? Inhuman persons? The Three Persons of the Holy Trinity?



What in the name of Strunk & White do you mean?) In an ugly use of the adverb, the writers tell us our immigration policy needs "to be reformed urgently," though they don't explain why you bishops have waited 40 years to demand urgent reform. Is it because most Americans now oppose illegal immigration? The writers state that "the status quo is morally unacceptable" without telling us what the "status quo" is. Finally, the authors write with a smug, sanctimonious tone inimical to Christian debate.

After glancing at some other dreadfully composed USCCB documents, let me make a suggestion, Your Excellency. Go online and search for George Orwell's "Politics and the English Language." Distribute copies of this essay to your staff. Mail them to your fellow bishops. Many will be sympathetic, at least before they read the essay, for, like them, Orwell was a lefty. The difference between him and many lefty Church bureaucrats is that Orwell had the guts to call a lie a lie when he heard one. After citing examples of dishonest writing in what he called "a catalogue of swindles and perversions," Orwell discusses at length why "political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging, and sheer cloudy vagueness."

Much the same can be said of ecclesiastical language. From the loophole-riddled documents of Vatican II to the bloated, ineffectual statements of the USCCB, the Church has often sown discord and confusion in the place of Truth. Given this failing, I might also recommend the USCCB hire someone trained in grammar and logic to vet its written pronouncements. Perhaps then more people might begin listening to you again.

Wishing you a Blessed Advent,

Joe Ecclesia