

The Country of the Blind

In the 1960's and 70's, when European countries were admitting large migrant populations from predominantly Muslim regions, Western governments had a powerful vested interest in encouraging the growth of politicized Islam of the strictest sect. European political attitudes were shaped absolutely by the Cold War confrontation, and the Middle East featured chiefly as a theater of East-West ideological rivalry. The nightmare was that Soviet-tied communists would establish themselves throughout the region, probably using secular socialist and nationalist parties as fronts, and that would place the vast oil resources in the hands of the Soviet bloc.

The primary danger seemed to be the modernizing nationalism of Nasserism, Ba'athism, or revolutionary socialism, the fashionable and exciting Middle Eastern ideologies of the day. Incidentally, many of these modernizing movements had a potent Christian element in their history and leadership. Christian intellectuals and militants were much in evidence both in Ba'athism and among the radical Palestinian guerrilla groups. To combat this threat, Western governments and intelligence agencies actively cooperated with the enemies of secular governments such as Nasser's Egypt or Ba'athist Syria and Iraq—the sponsors of all those pesky Christian terrorists—and that meant tolerating and allying with the Muslim Brotherhood, the Ikhwan. The Israelis tried to destabilize the leftists by promoting their own Palestinian Islamic faction, Hamas.

Internationally, the West saw conservative monarchies such as Saudi Arabia as its principal allies in the region and welcomed Saudi efforts to spread conservative varieties of Islam. In 1962, the Saudi government founded the World Muslim League as a means of financing mosques, preachers, and propaganda that reflected its particular form of Wahhabi Islam. As


Islamist exiles fled to Europe in the 1950's, Western governments made no objection to them establishing mosques and institutional networks, which would serve as valuable foundations for later organization. Ikhwan leader Said Ramadan established the Munich mosque that would become the critical center of Islamist radicalism in Germany. Much has been written about the circumstances surrounding the creation of this institution in the early 1960's, and among the bewildering network of clandestine forces involved, we find U.S. and German intelligence agencies as well as the Muslim Brotherhood, and Muslim veterans of the Third Reich. Ramadan also founded the Islamic Society of Germany and was associated with the World Muslim League. His son Tariq Ramadan is today a controversial face of European Islam.

For Western governments, Islamization served a double benefit, combating the communist world internationally, but also providing a rival attraction for Muslim immigrants on their own soil. After all, very few of these came from cultures with any strong tradition of *usuliya* fundamentalism: For most, Islam rather meant the eclectic faith of the Sufi brotherhoods, which is anathema to strict Islamists such as the Wahhabis. Perhaps one fifth of the Turks arriving in Germany were Alevis, secularized and anticlerical members of a notionally Islamic sect that observes virtually none of the standard Muslim prohibitions and which retains odd vestiges of an ancient crypto-Christianity. Politically, ordinary immigrants were generally to the left, predictably, since it was the left-wing parties who supported them against nativist attacks.

From the 1980's, European governments permitted and encouraged the growth of foreign-derived and foreign-based Islamic organizations among their immigrants. While the



Saudis are famous for projecting their militant agenda, the governments of Algeria, Morocco, and Turkey have a vested interest in reducing dissident influences among their communities abroad. In turn, Western governments were happy to support such foreign dabbling as a means of preventing the upsurge of radicalism among immigrant communities. To accomplish their goal, foreign states and their ministries for religious affairs become closely involved in choosing the imams who teach in such mosques and prepare teaching material for children in religious schools. Thus, clergy are conspicuously the least assimilated members of many Muslim communities, and the most likely to have close foreign ties. They have provided the main pressure for women to don the veil and for children to secede from public schools. When European governments try to communicate with their Muslim minorities, they usually speak to the national federations that claim to represent those populations, but which in reality report to foreign governments and international radical movements. These federations represent the largest single obstacle to assimilation.

European states, then, accepted foreign immigration, but the radical Islamism was in large part their own creation. As good secularists, European politicians and bureaucrats knew that religion no longer mattered to any rational person; obviously, no harm could arise from exploiting religious loyalties among others. Just how much damage may arise from this blunder remains to be seen. 

by Scott P. Richert

The Vanishing Middle (America)

The rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer; the politicians and pundits tell us every evening on the news. Lost in the rhetoric is any concern for members of the middle class, who are in danger of becoming nothing more than a footnote in future histories of the United States.

If England was once a nation of shopkeepers, the United States, in the mid-20th century, was a nation of small businessmen and white-collar workers—all, in their own way, decidedly middle class. Many in the working class, too, strove to afford the comforts of a middle-class lifestyle—and, even if they would never enter the middle class themselves, America's prosperity and educational opportunities held out the promise that their children might leave the working class behind.

To that end, they provided a home and schooling for growing families and looked forward to the day when they would make the final payment on their mortgage, followed a few years later by retirement, a gold watch, pension payments, and days of traveling and doting on grandchildren.

The fact that we cannot read such a description today without thinking it a wild oversimplification, even a caricature, tells us more about the decline of the prospects of the working class than all of the facts and figures economists and politicians can muster. Still, a few of those figures do fill out the picture. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average hourly wage (adjusted for inflation) of American workers has risen only 36 cents per hour in 33 years, from \$16.39 per hour in 1973 to \$16.75 in 2006. By 2007, only 14 million Americans were still employed in manufacturing.

Today, of course, the average wage of those who hold the remaining jobs is declining, not rising (despite a near doubling of productivity since 1973). Those who cry, "Good riddance!" when multinational corporations with

no loyalty to the country in which they are based transfer production (read: "jobs") overseas usually blame the decline of American manufacturing on unions that became so greedy they killed the golden goose. "Of course companies are seeking cheaper labor markets; they've been bled dry. Who could blame them?"

Who, indeed? Well, perhaps the employees who never unionized, who worked hand-in-hand with the management of family-owned factories before a new generation of owners, less interested in the businesses their families had built than in what the profits from those businesses could buy, brought in outside managers who presided over the mergers and acquisitions of the late 20th century that made their companies just divisions of some faceless multinational.

When most Americans think of manufacturing, they think of the auto industry, and so they cannot be blamed for their obsession with unions. But there's more to manufacturing than Ford, Chrysler, and GM; and throughout the industrial Midwest, most small manufacturers were not unionized. Yet somehow, they managed to pay their workers a living wage, and then some.

Today, after the loss of 20 percent of Rockford's manufacturing jobs since the election of George W. Bush, Rockford's median household income has slipped below the national median. And President Bush's generous offer of federal funds to retrain factory workers who lost an \$18 per hour job to work in the "healthcare industry" (read: "empty bedpans at \$9 per hour") isn't going to move that number in the right direction.

"The jobs are never coming back," presumptive Republican presidential nominee John McCain has told workers in Michigan, Ohio, South Carolina. Strangely, the countries to which multinationals are moving American jobs



cannot absorb them quickly enough. They want more, and they want them now; they're not training (much less retraining) their workers for a "postindustrial economy."

McCain's platform promises funds to retrain "displaced" blue-collar workers for jobs in the "information economy"—good white-collar, middle-class jobs. In an ideal world, that would be a step up; but for Americans, the information-economy bubble burst some time ago. Former Fed Vice Chairman Alan S. Blinder, one of the chief supporters of NAFTA when he served on President Clinton's Council of Economic Advisors and still a strong supporter of globalization, estimates that 29 to 38 million more American jobs are "offshorable" in the near future. Most of those, he claims, are not in manufacturing but in the very "information economy" fields that McCain believes represent the future of American jobs.

The very fact that such jobs pay better than the national average makes them prime targets for "offshoring." In the March-April 2006 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Blinder compares the disruptive effects of the coming exodus of jobs with those of the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution, of course, made the rise of a broad middle class possible, but it also gave us the first urban underclass and the first *nouveaux-riches*.

This time around, we can see the ranks of the new underclass swelling, as the new-new rich drive the transformation. If a new middle class is being created, however, it must be somewhere "offshore." <C>