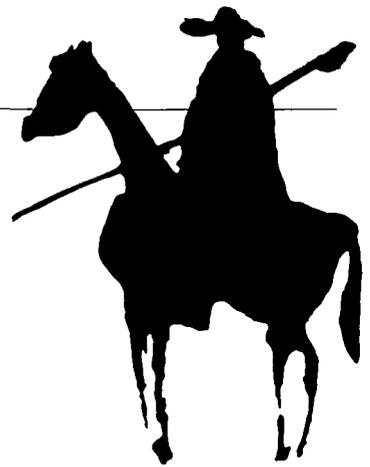


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# TILTING AT WINDMILLS



**T**hose who think money has to be decisive in politics should ponder the example of Sharon Pratt Dixon, who won the Democratic nomination for mayor of the District of Columbia by spending just \$5.38 per voter. Her four opponents spent \$15.76, \$29.89, \$34.43, and \$35.33 respectively. . . .

While our troops were broiling in the Arabian desert during August and September, where were the brave leaders of Kuwait they had been sent to restore to power? The princes and their courtiers reside, in the words of Andrew Borowiec of *The Washington Times*, “in the quiet elegance of a luxury hotel” in a mountain resort where “the air is cool and pure,” and “where silent waiters incessantly fill tiny cups with scented coffee.” . . .

The October 1 issue of *Newsweek* contains a touching tale of an elderly couple in California who, needing money to meet the problems of age, want to sell their house but are unable to get their \$285,000 asking price because of the decline in real estate prices.

The article attaches no significance to the fact that the couple has rejected an offer of \$200,000 even though they paid only \$14,000 for the house when they bought it. But doesn't this story really tell us what spoiled children most Americans have become during the real estate boom of the past 30 years? We have come to think that Natural Law demands that we get the highest price the market attained during that period even though the prices seemed absurdly high at the time and even though many of us, like the California couple, could still realize almost unbelievable multiples of our original investment by selling at today's still-generous-if-somewhat-reduced-from-their-peak prices. . . .

The inspiring moral leadership of the American Bar has never been more manifest than in a Delaware Superior Court where Michael Nussbaum, an attorney with the firm of Nussbaum & Wald of Washington, D.C., arguing in behalf of lawyers who were accused of misleading the court, conceded that telling the truth in civil litigation “is, of

course, a very attractive proposition,” but went on to say, “it is not the way the system operates in litigation in this country.” . . .

Snobbery is now more powerful than sex. If you doubt me, consider the advertising done by Victoria's Secret. It used to be firmly in the Frederick's of Hollywood tradition, but it is steadily moving toward the elite atmosphere favored by Ralph Lauren and—if volume of advertising provides any indication of prosperity—the firm appears to be flourishing. . . .

Speaking of our troops in the Middle East, those who had to endure the scorching desert heat during August and September should sue every officer who has held a responsible position in military supply since 1983. For it was then that our troops in Grenada first complained that their uniforms—made of material that was half nylon—were intensely uncomfortable in a hot climate. Troops in Saudi Arabia are wearing the same uniforms.

Frank Johnson, a spokesperson for the Defense Personnel Support

Center, defended the uniforms as more durable and better suited to a war in Europe. If you recall, we have been spending hundreds of billions on a military budget that for many years was geared to fighting two-and-a-half wars. Were they all supposed to be in temperate zones? . . .

Speaking of spokespersons, when Mary Crawford, the one for the Small Business Administration, was asked if it was not a bit suspicious that 23 of 30 official business trips taken by the agency's administrator, Susan S. Engeleiter, happened to be to or near her hometown of Minneapolis, she told *The Washington Times*: "You can paint any type of picture you want and for every picture you paint, someone else could paint a thousand other pictures." . . .

And speaking of coincidental travel, Gerald W. Frank, an administrative assistant to Senator Mark Hatfield, lives in Oregon and commutes to Washington, D.C. about twice a month. He also publishes an annual "New York City Travel Guide." By odd coincidence, Frank's official taxpayer-financed travel during the past five years has, according to Portland's KATU-TV, included 52 visits to New York City. . . .

**S**peaking of spokespersons again, have you noticed that almost every governmental unit in America now has one? I'm sure that if you had a complaint about your garbage it would be answered with an artfully evasive response from a spokesperson for the Refuse Collection Administration. What's more, they all use spokesspeak, a language that is deeply rooted in memospeak where "appropriate" is king and "constructive discussions" are the

princes of the realm.

Of course, there have always been press secretaries at the White House, but the notion that each bureaucratic unit must have its own mouthpiece did not take hold until Hodding Carter was on the news as the State Department spokesman almost every night during the Iran hostage crisis. I used to want to hurl a book at the TV as Carter droned on. But I didn't know how well off I was. Margaret Tutwiler makes him seem like a model of clarity and crispness. . . .

The Far Left has long contended that America got suckered into the Korean War because the conflict was provoked not by the North but by the South. Now the *Moscow News* has published an interview with Li Sancho, a former North Korean ambassador to the Soviet Union, who says that the invasion was "carefully prepared" by the North.

I mention this because it corrects a long held conviction not only of the Far Left, but of most liberals who came of age in the Vietnam era and assumed that Korea had been just another pointless war that our macho militarists had gotten us into.

Korea was a clear case of aggression, about which we were right to take a stand just as we are right today to oppose Iraq's aggression against Kuwait.

But even in a just cause, we need to keep a sense of proportion. The crisis in the Gulf is not the Battle of Britain. Neither was Korea or Vietnam, even though Douglas MacArthur and Lyndon Johnson tried to convince us the stakes were of similar magnitude in both places. By losing their sense of perspective MacArthur and Johnson caused bloodbaths, the former by crossing the 38th parallel in the fall of 1950, and the latter by sending

ground forces into Vietnam in the summer of 1965. George Bush has repeated Johnson's error by sending ground forces to Saudi Arabia. I hope they will be quickly replaced by a largely Arab multinational force in which we play no more than a minor role. If that can't be arranged I think we should still withdraw our ground forces and devote our energies to thinking of ways to make Saddam Hussein's life miserable without risking the lives of thousands of our troops. . . .

**A**mong the many reasons we should switch to the Canadian health care system is this fact from a study conducted by the inspector general of the Department of Health and Human Services: Medicaid paid \$474 million more for prescriptions than it would have paid under the Canadian system. . . .

What kind of conference does corporate America feel so urgently meets its needs that it will cough up \$995 per person to have its executives attend? "Strategies for Preventing White Collar Criminal and Civil Prosecution" charged precisely that sum for the October 25 and 26 sessions at Disney World. How edifying it must have been for all the children to see their pin-striped elders ashen with anxiety about how to cover up their misdeeds and avoid indictment and incarceration. . . .

The self-importance of Washington journalists has grown steadily since I arrived here in 1961. But even back then, as Dean Rusk points out in *As I Saw It*, there were some notable pioneers in the realm of arrogance: Soon after he took office as secretary of state, Rusk says, "both Walter Lippmann and Arthur Krock sent me messages that, if I wanted to

call on them, they would be glad to receive me.” . . .

“White House Wins Victory at GATT” proclaimed an October headline in *The New York Times*. What was this triumph? An agreement allowing American tobacco companies to sell cigarettes in Thailand. . . .

Maybe you’ve heard this story that environmentalists tell, but I hadn’t until I saw it in a recent *Los Angeles Times*:

“A plane loaded with reporters was flying to see the damage caused by the eruption of Mount St. Helen’s. The sight brought gasps of disbelief—it looked,” said the *Times*, “like ground zero at a nuclear explosion. It looked like the moon, or hell.”

“Wow,” they said to their guide.

“Wait a minute,” he replied, “we’re not at the volcano yet, this is just a clear cut.”

As a West Virginian who saw his state raped by strip miners, I was horrified on my first visit to Oregon a couple of years ago to see the same destructive scars created by clear-cutting. Oregonians, save your state while there’s still time. In West Virginia, we waited until it was too late, until many counties had been damaged beyond nature’s capacity to repair within our lifetimes. . . .

The one problem with Senator Howell Heflin’s description of Republicans as “the Grey Poupon crowd, the Gucci-poochie-coochie shoe-wearing, Mercedes-driving, polo-playing, Jacuzzi-soaking, Perrier-drinking, Aspen-skiing, ritzy-rich,” is that it also applies to an unfortunately large number of chic liberal Democrats. . . .

Seven years ago, Marion Barry unveiled a reform that substituted

a one-stop center for the eight different places contractors and homeowners had to go to get construction permits. Recently, Nancy Lewis of *The Washington Post* followed an applicant through the center. Arriving just after 9 a.m., he found himself 43rd in line. Two hours later, he reached the information desk and two hours after that he was able to get two permits. Because applicants are allowed to get only two permits at a time and the offices close at 3 p.m., he had to come back the next day to get the remaining permits he needed. It was the seventh time in seven months he had been required to repeat this process. The reason: the permits run for only 30 days each. . . .

During the week of the Kuwait invasion, as I was trying to think of the kind of military force we could use that would not risk a lot of American lives, it occurred to me that cruise missiles fired at Iraqi targets from afar seemed to fill the bill. So I asked a Navy veteran I know what ships we had that could fire cruise missiles. He began with, “Well, there’s the *Wisconsin*.” I later learned that in August the *Wisconsin*’s cruise missiles, if launched, would have been as likely to hit Cairo as Baghdad. It seems that it would take about a month for our spy cameras to take the photographs needed to compose the electronic maps needed to guide the missiles. Will this be true whenever we need these weapons? . . .

A few weeks ago I was having dinner with an old friend from West Virginia who knows the local political situation well. I said I had noticed that there had been a marked decline in the number of lawyers in the state legislature since I had served there in 1961-

62. The reason, he explained, is now that the bar association rules permit lawyers to advertise, the fellows don’t have to run for office in order to make themselves known to potential clients. . . .

Did you know that almost half of all farm subsidies go to the affluent? In 1988, for example, such farmers, with an average net income of \$96,000 per year, received 43 percent of the agricultural subsidies. . . .

In his new biography of William Casey, Joseph Persico quotes Ronald Reagan as saying this about Casey’s habit of mumbling: “My problem with Bill was that I didn’t understand him at meetings. Now you can ask a person to repeat himself once. You can ask him twice. But you can’t ask him a third time. You start to sound rude. So I just nod my head, but I didn’t know what he was actually saying.” Do you suspect that one of those mumbles might have proposed the Iran-contra plot? . . .

“Nonproductive” time, the time spent on coffee breaks and similar activities, has tripled in the Postal Service over the past 20 years, according to a report by *The Washington Post*’s Dana Priest. And because the cost of wages has gone up during the period, the cost to the government of paying employees for not working rose from \$118 million in 1969 to \$1.82 billion in 1989. . . .

*The Boston Globe* recently looked into the time of day when the judges who are always telling you how overworked they are actually depart from the court house. Six judges were photographed as they were making their exit. The exact times of departure were 3:33 p.m., 3:20 p.m., 2:35 p.m., 12:05 p.m., 12:01 p.m., and 11:10 a.m. Judge Walter

J. Hurley, who went home at 12:20 p.m., was described by the *Globe* as “leaving a courtroom so silent and empty that his court officer was able to lie down on a bench and nap the afternoon away.” . . .

One of the problems Sharon Pratt Dixon is going to have in carrying out her promise to get rid of 2,000 District employees (see Scott Shuger’s article on p. 41) is a series of Supreme Court decisions beginning with *Elrod v. Burns* that say that public employees can’t be hired or fired for political reasons—the latter, incredibly, even if they were originally patronage employees—unless they are clearly in policy-making positions.

The decisions were the product of a tendency that has been growing steadily over the past century among respectable liberals and conservatives to place their faith not in officials elected by the people but in tenured civil servants, who are not accountable to the people. The result has been the proliferation of self-perpetuating bureaucracies in which comparative merit is determined by credentials or written tests that have at best a marginal relationship to the actual ability to perform the job involved, or, in the many cases where inside influence plays a role in hiring or promotion, by the “buddy” rather than the political system of patronage. Under the buddy system, you get the job not because you have worked in a campaign, but because you live next door to a civil servant who gives you advance notice of a vacancy and gives you sophisticated advice on how to tailor your application to the job description—and sometimes even tailors the job description itself—so that you are the one selected.

An unfortunate byproduct of

the civil-servicing of America is that political parties can no longer reward those who work in campaigns with jobs. So now large sums have to be raised to pay professional campaign workers.

And because officials who are elected are not free to choose as subordinates those who believed in their programs enough to have campaigned for them, the officials have to accept subordinates from the civil service who are indifferent to their programs. Finally, because the parties don’t have patronage, they have little power. The vacuum has been filled by the political action committees controlled by special interests.

Since the founding of this magazine, we have been largely alone in arguing the pro-patronage position. But the most recent Supreme Court decision last spring seems to have awakened at least some of the respectables to the smug stupidity that characterized its reasoning.

It is, as Justice Scalia pointed out in his dissent, “rare that a Federal administration of one party will appoint a judge from another party. Thus the new principle that the Court today announces will be entered by a corps of judges (the members of this court included) who overwhelmingly owe their office to its violation. Something must be wrong here and I suggest it is the court.”

Now that Scalia’s reasoning has been applauded by such eminences as David Broder and George Will, one can’t help but think the other respectables won’t be far behind. Still, the power of the conventional prejudice against patronage is so great that arguments against it were not even mentioned until the 13th and 17th paragraphs of the two stories about the case that appeared in *The New York Times*, and were not mentioned at all in The Associated Press story that appeared in *The Washington Times*.

I know that this prejudice is so strong that at this very moment many of my readers are saying “Charlie, do you mean to tell me you are for hiring a bunch of incompetent political hacks?” The answer is no. There is no reason why we cannot require that political appointees be able to do a job. But from the qualified applicants, shouldn’t an official be able to choose those who are dedicated to helping him carry out his program? I would hate to think that I had to hire people to work at this magazine solely on the basis of their competence and without regard to their commitment to the aims and ideals that are at the heart of the *Monthly*.

Certainly there is a case to be made for a small core of civil servants, not just to show the new fellows where the bathrooms are, but to carry the lessons of experience from one administration to another. But when a government has become as inept as the District of Columbia’s, its leader should have wide latitude to clean house from top to bottom. What does democracy mean if not that we can change the government with our votes?

Clearly, Ms. Dixon needs some good lawyers, not only to straighten out the Supreme Court but for the other important missions discussed in Shuger’s article. As a matter of fact there happen to be hundreds of talented lawyers in this city who are doing work that, if it is not actually demeaning, is certainly not something they will be eager to tell their children and grandchildren about. Many of them actually started out with high ideals and have lost their way. I would like to speak to them from the heart right now and say: Why not seize this opportunity to join the new administration and do work you can be proud of? . . .

—Charles Peters

# The Stupidity of Free-Market Chic . . .

## . . . in the Middle East

*If Americans understood that there's no such thing as a free market, they'd realize there are better ways to break Saddam than going to war*

by James Bennet

As compensation for the loss of a good chunk of their ideological foundation in the past two years, American conservatives have had the satisfaction of watching liberals slink quietly away from their old economic biases. Surveying the “end of history” a year ago, George Will merrily observed, “There are a few brackish backwaters of Marxism—Managua, Pyongyang, Cambridge, Massachusetts—but no longer is it *de rigueur* for ‘advanced’ thinkers to think that bourgeois society is a backward, doomed stage of development toward a shimmering socialist future.” The subsequent success of Violetta Chamorro in Nicaragua and John Silber in Massachusetts suggests it’s getting less *de rigueur* by the day. A friend in Cambridge reports that guests make fun of her for keeping Marx on the shelf.

Mercifully, no one freely uses the word “corporate” to mean “evil” anymore. Liberals are finally willing to recognize that businessmen can contribute to society. But many are settling on a new bias that is no less knee-jerk—that “free market” means “good,” which leads to the dangerous assumption that government intervention inevitably sours the economy. This bias pervades the breathless reporting on economic change (always called “reform”) in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (see Jonathan Rowe, p.

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20). It is also affecting the way Americans view their own government, as free market chic creeps from the editorial pages of *The Wall Street Journal* into the organs of conventional liberal opinion. “Re-regulate?” asked *The New York Times* last summer in a classic editorial oversimplification of the debate about transportation and telecommunications. “Not on your life.”

This spreading bias has manifested itself most starkly in the American response to Saddam Hussein. George Bush, who in some ways—working through the U.N., bringing the Arabs on board—has handled the Middle East crisis superbly, nonetheless seemed far more willing to send tens of thousands more potential victims into the desert than he was to offset the economic impact of the invasion by tapping the strategic petroleum reserves—or even by calling vigorously for conservation at home. By the time Bush finally opened the reserves, it was too little, too late. “[T]he core explanation for the administration’s caution seems to be a deep reluctance to tamper with private markets,” reported the *Times*, which to its credit endorsed the idea of tapping the reserves early in the crisis. Meanwhile, the closest Bush has come to issuing a clarion call for national sacrifice on behalf of the military effort has been to point out in an advertisement during a baseball playoff game that if our troops in Saudi Arabia can take the time to send in