



The Lowest Common Denominator The Obama Administration and its Muscular Socialism

Carmen Berra once asked her husband Yogi, former Yankee great, if he wanted his pizza in four or eight slices. He opted for *four* because he could not *eat eight!* Fractions have also baffled students for generations. The first rule in fractions is to reduce them to their lowest common denominator. When that rule is applied to a nation's political economy, fractions assume a sinister dimension that can threaten its freedom.

An Open Conspiracy

Many college textbooks describe American history as a conflict between individual freedom and government power. In the United States this theory has transcended all its wars and economic crises since the Revolutionary War. The economic crash of 2008-09 has been one of the most potentially devastating events ever to happen to Americans as a perfect storm of high unemployment, a steep decline in real estate values and housing foreclosures saturated the airways and the newspapers with apocalyptic cries of the end of the existing world.

A country's basic freedoms are vulnerable during such times of national distress. The best aid that unscrupulous politicians have during such times is ignorance and indifference. A recent edition of *The Investor's Daily Journal* wondered why more people were not worried about President Barack Obama's escalating socialistic solutions for the country's financial crisis. The article answered its own question with the conclusion that most people had no idea of what was happening because of educational and media indoctrination which had effectively screened them from the truth.

Socialism in America has not just happened. It has evolved over a long period of time. Its essential fallacy is that it cannot deliver on its promises because they run counter to the grain of human nature, which thrives on the personal incentive to better its condition while preserving individual liberty. No matter how noble socialism's egalitarian rhetoric, it can only deliver on its promises by using its substantial power to coerce the people to reduce their standard of living to the lowest common denominator.

With a giddy sense of triumph, *Newsweek Magazine's* headline for February 16, 2009 read: *We Are All Socialists Now*. However the article denied that President Obama's *bailouts, protectionism and talk of bank nationalism are not a socialist conspiracy*. What has really happened in the last 100 years has not been the result of any secret cabal but more along the lines of what H. G. Wells called *an open conspiracy*.

American Socialist Norman Thomas once said, *the American people will never knowingly adopt socialism, but under the name of liberalism, they will adopt every fragment of the socialist program until one day, America will be a socialist nation without ever knowing how it happened*. Thomas' prophecy of *creeping socialism* has come true under a veneer of a liberal addiction to expecting eternal progress.

Baby Steps

Socialistic creeping evolved into the *baby steps* of the Progressivism Movement at the dawning of the 20th century. It began in the big cities as several progressive mayors enacted *gas and water socialism* where the cities *owned* the local utilities as a matter of public necessity. Progressivism has been described as a middle class reform movement that revolted against the materialism of the Gilded Age where the disparity between the wealthy and the poor had increased disproportionately.

The rationale behind progressive thinking was much more sophisticated than the doctrines of utopian socialists, such as the Comte de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, or Robert Owen. Historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch believes many American progressives got their inspiration from studying at German universities where they *came to appreciate the Hegelian theory of a strong state and Prussian militarism as the most efficient way of organizing modern societies*.

Progressivism's final product was more homespun. Early in American history political factions in America revolved around the political philosophies of Thomas Jefferson, who believed in small independent units of economic activity and

Alexander Hamilton who saw the country's future in a strong centralized government that fostered nationalism, manufacturing and export. Herbert Croly, the founder of the *New Republic*, wedded the means of Hamilton's Big Government with Jeffersonian welfare ends into a dynamic hybrid that has driven the American political engine for 100 years.

To affect their socialist change, progressives also utilized higher education to bring American institutions more in line with their European antecedents. It was the *Wisconsin Idea*, a term generally attributed to former University of Wisconsin President Charles Van Hise. Van Hise employed his faculty to advise legislators on many groundbreaking laws, including the nation's first workers' compensation legislation, tax reforms such as the graduated income tax, and the public regulation of utilities.

A Mirror Image

Due to the progressives, the American people have been conditioned to petition government in times of crises. This idea ran counter to the American individualistic spirit until the Great Depression of the 1930's. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's massive intervention caused liberal historians to credit erroneously his New Deal with rescuing America's free-enterprise system from itself and its *failed policies*. This fallacy is a mirror image of the true picture. FDR did more than any prior president to derail America from its free enterprise system. According to James Powell's 2003 book, *FDR's Folly: How Roosevelt and His New Deal Prolonged the Great Depression*, 13 years of Roosevelt conditioned the American people to call on Washington to solve all its economic and social needs.

Most historians ignore this fact and focus on Roosevelt's charismatic personality and his exceptional communication skills. They paid scant attention to the legacy effects of his policies. Under FDR the federal government created an alphabet soup of new government agencies that implemented a myriad of new laws and regulations. His major banking reform, the second Glass-Steagall Act, weakened the banking system by breaking up the strongest banks to separate commercial banking from investment banking.

By 1938 the effects of the Depression were much worse than they had been in 1933. The irony of the Great Depression was that Roosevelt's New Deal did more to prolong it than alleviate its economic distress. It was the increased economic activity and industrial expansion, resulting during World War II that eventually ended the Depression.

A Running Socialism

Roosevelt and Barack Obama seem to be cut from the same ideological cloth. While FDR provided the skeletal legs for a *walking* Big Government, during his first months in

office Obama has been producing a *running socialism*. His Chief of Staff Rahm Emmanuel revealed his strategy with his frank admission to the *Wall Street Journal* *you never should let a serious crisis go to waste because it permits you to do things you thought you could not do before*. Taking full advantage of America's economic crisis, the Obama administration is making radical changes that will drastically alter the American political, moral, economic and social landscape.

This is in accord with Communist Party leader William Z. Foster's bold prediction in his 1932 book, *Toward Soviet America*, that *the national government would assume more and more control over the economy*, which in finance would mean *the nationalization of the banking system and its concentration around a central State bank*.

Impossible Dreams

Writing in the *New Republic* before the election, David Samuels described Senator Obama in the terms of Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man*. While the *Hawaiian Candidate* (Jan.2009 MR) was difficult to fathom before the election, since he became president, Obama has become a more *visible man* who cannot disguise his statist beliefs and who demonstrates his obvious lack of experience.

Resting on the tired chimeras of the past, Obama appears like the Kevin Kline character in the 1993 film, *DAVE*, where a presidential look-alike is forced to sit-in for a president who has suffered a stroke. Like the woefully unprepared *Dave*, Obama's simplistic solutions for the nation's dire problems have exposed his campaign slogans of *hope and change* as little more than vain promises blowing in the political wind.

Americans are slowly waking up to how Obama's *efficient socialism* will affect their lives. Writing in *The Wanderer*, James Fitzpatrick faulted the president for his willingness to *pay the price of hobbled American economy and weakened American middle class, if that's what it takes to establish in the United States the central elements of a European-style welfare state*. Europeans love Obama because his ideas resonate with their trade unionists, elite socialists, technocrats, and populists whose alliance to *Marxist principles varies by only slight shades in the crimson palette of European politics*.

President Obama's main method is to make the government the guarantor of middle class security, says the *WSJ*. His wish list for American entitlements comes from the New Deal toy bag. He wants to make college education a new entitlement. He wants universal health care no matter what the cost. He wants a *cap and trade tax* that would punish the main sources of U. S. energy and hand Washington a vast new source of revenue. And like Roosevelt, Obama expects the *wealthy* to pay for his impossible dreams.

A Third Way

Economic issues have always been a concern of the Catholic Church because of the nation's underprivileged. With the Church's emphasis on the *preferential option for the poor*, it is easy for Catholics to be influenced by a culture that demonizes the wealthy. The current economic crisis with its attendant wealth evaporation, has not only directly impacted the poor, but also the ability of wealthy people to support the Church's programs for the needy. It has also seriously challenged the Church's involvement and understanding of the country's political economy.

The Wanderer columnist James Fitzpatrick reminds his fellow Catholics *we should not lose sight of where the wealth, the tax base, needed to finance our social programs came from in the first place.* He cautions liberal clerics and parishioners that the socialists will *eventually run out of rich people's money to tax and redistribute their wealth.*

Paul Likoudis, also writing in *The Wanderer*, saw the increased interest in the Catholic principle of *Distributism* as a sign of the fearsome economic times. More commonly known as *Distributive Justice*, this principle is often called the *third way*, between raw capitalism and unfettered socialism. According to *Distributive Justice*, the state has the duty of distributing the common burdens and privileges equitably. The state should make it possible for each citizen to exercise his or her natural rights without undue intervention. And finally the state should foster the conditions among its citizens so they may live in relative peace and harmony.

Some Catholics cite the Church's social encyclicals, such as Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and John XXIII's (1963) *Pacem in Terris* to support a statist agenda. It is false to say that any of the popes, G. K. Chesterton or Hilarie Belloc advocated socialism for the government or the Church. To the contrary, popes and Catholic apologists have consistently condemned socialism as one of the great heresies of moral philosophy because of its deleterious economic and moral effects on both the Church and the poor. Pope John Paul II made this point in his 1991 encyclical, *Centesimus Annus* when he wrote, *Marxism does not rid the world of the situations of injustice and oppression, which Marxism itself exploited and on which it fed.*

In his recent book, *Against the Grain*, George Weigel offers some sage advice for Catholic bishops and intellectuals. They must stop thinking of the so-called 'gap' *between the developed and the underdeveloped as the chief defining characteristic of the world economic situation*, and ask with *Centesimus Annus*, how to unleash the potential of the poor so *they can participate in networks of productivity and exchange.*

A Wake-Up Call

In Federalist #51 James Madison wrote, *if men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.* In an effort to *repeal* this brilliant republican idea, Americans have been conditioned for over 100 years to a gradual socialism, not unlike the frog in the pot of warm water that was gradually increased until it cooked him. In his first few months in office, President Obama has dramatically increased the thermostat to near the boiling point. Trillions of new debt, a virtual government ownership of the banks and auto industry indicate big trouble ahead. The speed by which his presidency is promoting the socialist dogma that a nation can spend and tax its way back into prosperity and still remain free will only play so long. His haste to profit from this economic crisis is a serious miscalculation.

As bad as things may appear now, the Apocalypse is not upon our country. Americans are waking up to the fact that the pursuit of power has replaced their pursuit of happiness. There is a populist spirit of rebellion that goes back to the 18th century and has lain dormant since the Reagan years. Obama's fast-paced exercise in tyranny just might snap us out of our lethargy.

The April outburst of *tea parties* is a good indication that there is a vibrant spirit in America that will not let our values go down the Obaman road to serfdom, nor do we want to sink to the lowest common denominator that reduces our freedoms and destroys our sovereignty.

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Congratulations Rev. Edmund Fairbanks McCaffrey, Ph.D.



Rev. Edmund Fairbanks McCaffrey celebrated 50 years of his ordination into the priesthood. This blessed occasion occurred on the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima, May 13, 2009 at St. Michael's Catholic Church of Garden City Beach, SC.

Father Edmund F. McCaffrey, Ph.D. is the Former Abbot Ordinary of Belmont Abbey in North Carolina. He is Co-Founder and served as Executive Vice-President and Director of the Institute on Religious Life, Chicago, Illinois. He has been a columnist for the National Catholic Register and Catholic Twin Circle. He has appeared on Mother Angelica's Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) in his series "Christ in Our Lives."

For 25 years, he has generously lectured from coast-to-coast for the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation on its Faith, Family, Freedom Conferences.

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ST. PAUL TO THE ROMANS 5:5

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