

Tell Us What You Really Think, Tim

Kevin Carson

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Tim Cavanaugh bitch-slaps the “big government conservatives”:

The genius of neoconservatism is that it’s exactly in step with the progressivist, middle-of-the-road, big state view of American history they teach in school: The Articles of Confederation resulted in a disaster that taught the founders the value of a strong central state; the Whiskey rebels were dangerous kooks, not unlike the Branch Davidians of our own time; “States’ Rights” has always been a code word for slavery; President Woodrow Wilson was a man of vision but sadly was unable to achieve his goals for an international order; the America Firsters were even kookier and more marginal than the Whiskey rebels, and the best way to deal with one is to sock him in the jaw like in *The Best Years of Our Lives*; many well intentioned folks on the left underestimated the danger of the Soviet Union, but the anti-communist witch hunts of the fifties were a regrettable overreaction (the Left didn’t become dangerous until the late sixties and early seventies, when it embraced separatist and militant views that undermined the politics of consensus that made this country great); real civil rights progress only came when the federal government asserted its power over the refractory states; September 11 shocked America out of its isolationism and freed President George W. Bush (an excellent man, but distressingly shortsighted in some matters) from his naive opposition to nation-building. And so on.

Compare this to Voltairine de Cleyre’s acid remarks on the Little Red Schoolhouse version of American history, which consisted of little more than a hagiographic account of the wisdom and foresight of our “Founding Fathers”:

To the average American of today, the Revolution means the series of battles fought by the patriot army with the armies of England. The millions of school children who attend our public schools are taught to draw maps of the siege of Boston and the siege of Yorktown, to know the general plan of the several campaigns, to quote the number of prisoners of war surrendered with Burgoyne; they are required to remember the date when Washington crossed the Delaware on the ice; they are told to “Remember Paoli,” to repeat “Molly Stark’s a widow,” to call General Wayne “Mad

Anthony Wayne,” and to execrate Benedict Arnold; they know that the Declaration of Independence was signed on the Fourth of July, 1776, and the Treaty of Paris in 1783; and then they think they have learned the Revolution...blessed be George Washington! They have no idea why it should have been called a “revolution” instead of the “English war”...

Pick up today any common school history, and see how much of this spirit [of the Revolution] you will find therein. On the contrary, from cover to cover you will find nothing but the cheapest sort of patriotism, the inculcation of the most unquestioning acquiescence in the deeds of government, a lullaby of rest, security, confidence, — the doctrine that the Law can do no wrong, a Te Deum in praise of the continuous encroachments of the powers of the general government upon the reserved rights of the States, shameless falsification of all acts of rebellion, to put the government in the right and the rebels in the wrong, pyrotechnic glorifications of union, power, and force, and a complete ignoring of the essential liberties to maintain which was the purpose of the revolutionists...

Such is the spirit of government-provided schools. Ask any child what he knows about Shays’s rebellion, and he will answer, “Oh, some of the farmers couldn’t pay their taxes, and Shays led a rebellion against the court-house at Worcester, so they could burn up the deeds; and when Washington heard of it he sent over an army quick and taught them a good lesson” — “And what was the result of it?” “The result? Why — why — the result was — Oh yes, I remember — the result was they saw the need of a strong federal government to collect the taxes and pay the debts.” Ask if he knows what was said on the other side of the story, ask if he knows that the men who had given their goods and their health and their strength for the freeing of the country now found themselves cast into prison for debt, sick, disabled, and poor, facing a new tyranny for the old; that their demand was that the land should become the free communal possession of those who wished to work it, not subject to tribute, and the child will answer “No.”...

Such are the fruits of government schools.

Tim Cavanaugh’s *not juste* reminds me of something B.K. Marcus wrote a few weeks ago about an old high school project in which he interviewed his mom and his girlfriend’s mom as typical examples of “liberals” and “conservatives” (in fact, his mom was a social democrat and his girlfriend’s mom was a neocon who’d worked for Norman Podhoretz).

One thing I remember from the neocon mom was that she rejected the “Old Right” (which I’d never heard of) and considered herself a JFK Democrat, a trade-unionist, etc., but the establishment Left had moved away from what she saw as the correct positions on the Cold War and culture.

Somebody, I forget where, suggested that a neoconservative is the kind of a conservative that a liberal wouldn’t be ashamed to invite over for a drink. Or maybe it’s just that, as Matt Taibbi recently wrote of Tucker Carlson, the left finds them so non-threatening:

In the same way that the helpless, ineffectual Colmes is a reassuring image to hard-core conservatives, Carlson puts a soothing face on conservatism for educated East-coast progressives—because even the biggest neo-Marxist wanker from Brown takes one look at Carlson and sees the one man in America he would feel sure of being able to kick the shit out of in a back alley.

Come to think of it, neocons often seem to express more hostility for the Old Right than for either the Old or New Left. As Jesse Walker points out in his review of Ron Radosh's *Commies*, Radosh is quite vocal about all the nuances of New Left politics during his involvement, but strangely reticent about his ties to Murray Rothbard. But Radosh neglects to mention that his "first friendly contacts with the right" predated the '80s considerably.

They came in the '60s, when the group around the journal **Studies on the Left**, which included Radosh, pioneered the idea of "corporate liberalism." This was the notion that, as Radosh puts it here, "the dominant worldview of American political leaders was not one of laissez faire, but rather a managerial form of liberalism." In its "cruder form," Radosh continues, the theory "was used to argue that in the United States, the true enemy of the left was not the 'reactionaries,' i.e. old-style Republicans and conservatives, but rather the liberals who comprised what they liked to call the 'vital center.'"

This stance allowed a certain measure of cooperation between the **Studies** leftists and Murray Rothbard's circle of isolationist libertarians. Rothbard contributed to **Studies on the Left**, and in 1967, Radosh in turn contributed to Rothbard's **Left and Right**. In 1972, the two co-edited **A New History of Leviathan**, with contributions from both sides of the anti-liberal aisle; three years later, Radosh published **Prophets on the Right**, a sympathetic study of the conservative critics of American imperialism.

Virtually all of this is missing from **Commies**...

...At times, **Commies** seems less interesting for its insights than for those moment when insight suddenly, intriguingly disappears.

I recall someone commenting once on a discussion list that neocons like Radosh and David Horowitz had more sympathy for the Old Right when they were commies than they do today as so-called "conservatives."

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