

Graffiti for intellectuals



SIMON SAYS



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Si Frumkin

FORGIVE ME, COMRADE LENIN!

I know it's hard to believe but fair is fair – I owe Lenin an apology. I misquoted him in a recent article and even though no one noticed I should have known better and so, please forgive me, Vladimir Ilyich, I will be more careful in the future!

My article (The More it Changes, Etc., Etc. - GRAFFITI, Jan.22,2007) was about Russia's current aggressive economic policy that included the de facto governmental appropriation of a major Western project in the Sakhalin oil and natural gas fields and the added humiliation of the Western and Japanese oil companies when their CEOs were required to thank Putin for having taken over their project.



I started that article by quoting Lenin's famous prediction that communists would hang the last capitalist using the rope another capitalist sold them. It is one of the best known of Lenin's quotes and the only thing wrong with it is that Lenin never said it.

I should have known that unless he is quoting an old Russian proverb – like Nikita Khrushchev - a communist leader is physically unable to speak in short quotable sentences. This is why speeches go on for hours and newspaper columns are at least three times as long as in the States. The Russian principle is that if something can be said adequately in 100 words – surely it is much better said in 500 or even 2000. This may be genetic – this affliction of superfluous verbosity is practiced by the American legal profession many of whom are descended from, what else, immigrants from Russia.

After Putin expressed how he felt about America at the recent conference in Munich I realized that long-windedness was alive and well and that Lenin probably couldn't have been as brief as he supposedly was. So I searched and, guess what, once again what everyone knew was the truth turned out not to be.

Here is what Lenin really said:

"The [capitalists] will furnish credits which will serve us for the support of the Communist Party in their countries and, by supplying us with materials and technical equipment which we lack, will restore our military industry necessary for our future attacks against our suppliers." Same thing but longer, right?

Lenin should get the credit for this advice. It goes back to the 1920s and Putin is doing now – and all his predecessors have also done - is exactly what Lenin advised, except that he isn't just buying rope to hang us. He is using Europe's energy dependence on Russia's gas to force European cooperation with Russia's newly found economic independence. He has taught some painful lessons to former Soviet republics that had forgotten that Mother Russia has the resources and the will to be Eastern Europe's alpha dog.



And in Munich he showed that he is no longer interested in America's goodwill and patronage, even hinting at consequences of reviving the Cold War and referring to George W. in somewhat patronizing language.

Because of the rise in oil prices Russia is currently afloat in hard currency. Acquisition-minded Russian companies have obviously been ordered by Putin to extend their global reach. A perfect example of the consequence of this policy is the recent decision by the U. S. Government Committee on Foreign

Investment (CFIUS) to allow the Russian steel company Evraz to acquire Oregon Steel Mills for \$2.35 billion. CFIUS doesn't appear to be bothered by the fact that Oregon Steel is a major supplier of armor plate to our military that is also dependent on armor plate from China.

Putin's man in Europe is London-based Roman Abramovich who is practically alone among the oligarchs in having retained Putin's favor. It is possible that the Litvinenko assassination was a gentle reminder of Putin's reach and a hint for Abramovich to stay loyal. Another useful hint is Abramovich's appointment as governor of Chukotka, a remote Siberian region, where not so coincidentally, Khodorkovsky, an oligarch who offended Putin, is imprisoned.

So far the Oregon Steel/Evraz deal has not generated anywhere the attention and concern that followed the acquisition of port facilities by an Arab company. I suppose it would take an order to reduce deliveries of steel to the military by Oregon Steel to remind our capitalists of Lenin's dictum.

Meanwhile Europeans, Americans and Japanese are continuing trying to penetrate Russian markets and improve and modernize Russian economy. Even Shell, Mitsubishi and Mitsui oil corporations, after their loss and humiliation of the Sakhalin project, are again standing in line for Russian business.



Another quote that is wrongly attributed to the Soviets is "useful idiots", those who for whatever reason - ideology, greed, stupidity, ignorance – act in ways that will surely have tragic consequences for themselves. Unfortunately, history has shown again and again that useful idiots have never been and never will be in short supply.

GLOBAL COOLING COSTS TOO MUCH

There are no solutions in the realm of the politically possible. Jonah Goldberg, 2/9/2007


Public policy is all about trade-offs. Economists understand this better than politicians because voters want to have their cake and eat it too, and politicians think whatever is popular must also be true.

Economists understand that if we put a chicken in every pot, it might cost us an aircraft carrier or a hospital. We can build a hospital, but it might come at the expense of a little patch of forest. We can protect a wetland, but that will make a new school more expensive.

You get it already. But in the history of trade-offs, never has there been a better one than trading a tiny amount of global warming for a massive amount of global prosperity.

Earth got about 0.7 degrees Celsius warmer in the 20th century while it increased its GDP by 1,800 percent, by one estimate. How much of that 0.7 degrees can be laid at the feet of that 1,800 percent is unknowable, but let's stipulate that all of the warming was the result of our prosperity and that this warming is in fact indisputably bad (which is hardly obvious).

That's still an amazing bargain. Life expectancies in the United States increased from about 47 years to about 77 years. Literacy, medicine, leisure and even, in many respects, the environment have improved



mightily over the course of the 20th century, at least in the prosperous West. Given the option of getting another 1,800 percent richer in exchange for another 0.7 degrees warmer, I'd take the heat in a heartbeat. Of course, warming might get more expensive for us (and we might get a lot richer than 1,800 percent too). There are tipping points in every sphere of life, and what cost us little in the 20th century could cost us enormously in the 21st — at least that's what we're told.

And boy, are we told. We're (deceitfully) told polar bears are the canaries in the global coal mine. Al Gore even hosts an apocalyptic infomercial on the subject, complete with fancy renderings of New York City underwater.

Skeptics are heckled for calling attention to global warming scare tactics. But the simple fact is that activists need to hype the threat, and not just because that's what the media demand of them. Their proposed remedies cost so much money — bidding starts at 1 percent of global GDP a year and rises quickly — they have to ratchet up the fear factor just to get the conversation started.

The costs are just too high for too little payoff. Even if the Kyoto Protocol were put into effect tomorrow — a total impossibility — we'd barely affect global warming. Jerry Mahlman of the National Center for Atmospheric Research speculated in Science maga-

zine that "it might take another 30 Kyotos over the next century" to beat back global warming.

Thirty Kyotos! That's going to be tough considering that China alone plans on building an additional 2,200 coal plants by 2030. Oh, but because China (like India) is exempt from Kyoto as a developing country, the West will just have to reduce its own emissions even more.

A more persuasive cost-benefit analysis hinges not on prophecies of environmental doom but on geopolitics. We buy too much oil

those regimes nastier.

Environmentalists like to claim the "energy independence" issue, but it's not a neat fit. We could be energy independent soon enough with coal and nuclear power. But coal contributes to global warming, and nuclear power is icky. So, instead, we're going to massively subsidize the government-brewed moonshine called ethanol.

Here again, the benefits barely outweigh the costs. Ethanol requires almost as much energy to make as it provides, and the costs to the environment and the economy may be staggering.

Frankly, I don't think the trade-off is worth it — yet. The history of capitalism and technology tells us that what starts out expensive



and arduous becomes cheap and easy over time.

Lewis and Clark took months to do what a truck carrying Tickle-Me Elmos does every week. Technology 10 years from now could solve global warming at a fraction of today's costs. What technologies? I don't know. Maybe fusion. Maybe hydrogen. Maybe we'll harness the perpetual motion of Sen. Joe Biden's mouth.

The fact is we can't afford to fix global warming right now, in part because poor countries want to get rich, too. And rich countries, where the global warming debate is settled, are finding even the first of 30 Kyotos too fiscally onerous. There are no solutions in the realm of the politically possible. So why throw trillions of dollars into "remedies" that even their proponents concede won't solve the problem?

from places we shouldn't, which makes us dependent on nasty regimes and makes

— Jonah Goldberg is Editor-at-Large of National Review Online.

THE QUESTION NOT ASKED:

WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

Dennis Prager, February 6, 2007

In general, the Left does not ask the question, "What will happen next?" when formulating social policy. Not thinking through the long-range consequences of their positions is liberalism's tragic flaw.

Take almost any position that distinguishes the Left:

Will higher taxes help the economy?

The major reason the Left advocates tax increases is not that these tax increases will help the American economy. Higher taxes rarely help the economy, and most liberals don't even make that argument. Their argument is about equality, the Left's paramount value. The animating factor for the Left is narrowing the gap between the rich and poor. That is why so few on the Left have had moral problems with Fidel Castro's totalitarian regime -- Cubans may not have liberty, but almost all Cubans are equally poor. Likewise, that explains left-wing support for Venezuela's Hugo Chavez even as he develops into a Castro-like dictator: He advocates economic equality.

Is continued illegal immigration good for America or for Mexico?



Regarding illegal immigration, what most concerns the Left is not the consequences of illegal

immigration. It is compassion for the illegal immigrant. Now, I happen share that concern -- were I a poor Mexican seeing no hope for me or my children in my corrupt homeland, I, too, would try to enter America illegally. But it is not enough to have compassion for the illegal immigrant; the responsible citizen needs to consider the consequences of vast numbers of people illegally entering his country. If America is increasingly unable to sustain -- economically, demographically, in terms of crime -- the great number of illegal immigrants, it is incumbent on all responsible people to figure out how to stem the flow of illegal immigrants. It is not even good for Mexico, because it enables that country to avoid needed reforms. Any country that knows its poorest citizens can go to another country from which they will also send back billions of dollars is hardly being pressured



into doing anything about its poverty.

Is bilingual education good for immigrant children?

Here, too, compassion trumps effectiveness. The country that has success-

fully assimilated the greatest percentage of immigrants is Israel, and that country does not have bilingual education. Immigrant children in its public schools are immersed in Hebrew, despite the fact that Hebrew is far more difficult than English is for most of its immigrants (especially those speaking Latin languages). But it is not what works that matters for liberals advocating bilingual education; it is their perception of compassion and multiculturalism.

Does affirmative action help black students?

The Left supports colleges changing admissions standards to enable more African Americans, among other minorities, to enroll. Despite all the evidence that such policies often hurt minority students -- they fail or drop out of college at greater rates than other students; they are not prepared for the demands of a more elite college; they feel they are seen as not having entered the college on their own merits -- liberals continue to support race-based affirmative action. It may not help blacks, but they nevertheless deserve it because of America's racist past.

What would the Kyoto Protocols do to the American and world economies?



As noted by the internationally respected Danish environmentalist Professor Bjorn Lomborg, the economic price America would pay if it abided by the Kyoto Protocols on carbon emissions would

catastrophically impact the American -- and therefore world -- economy. Moreover, abiding by the Protocols would have a negligible effect on carbon emissions and global warming. But the Left has embraced global warming hysteria. And hysteria it is -- according to the latest UN report, for example, the potential ocean level increase due to global warming is 1 foot, not the 20 feet of Al Gore's documentary on global warming and lower than the 1.5 feet projected in the previous UN report.

Would withdrawal from Iraq increase or decrease human suffering?

Left-wing "peace activists" do not seem to concern themselves with the question of what happens if their policies are enacted and America leaves Iraq. But those of us who are concerned with this question are certain that war and murder, torture and rape of the innocent will increase. That is why "peace activist" is usually a misnomer. They usually bring war, not peace.

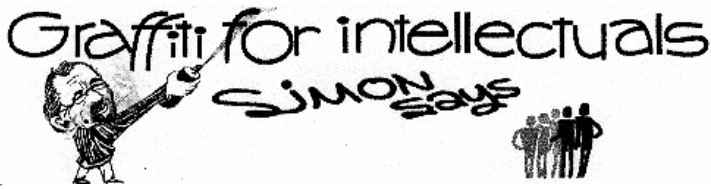
Does nationalized health insurance work?

Press reports and formal studies about Canada's and Britain's health care strongly suggest that

those nationalized health care systems provide increasingly poor care to their nations' citizens. But for those on the Left who want nationalized health insurance to come to America, Sweden is the preferred model, as if a relatively tiny, homogeneous, nearly all-middle-class country provides a more effective model than Canada or the United Kingdom.

In the view of many liberals, "What happens next?" is a pragmatic, but not idealistic, question by which to guide social policy. In fact, however, no question is as idealistic as "What happens next?" Asking it means that social policy is made by noble and compassionate minds, not hearts alone. In the rest of life, thinking through the consequences of actions is called "responsible" and "mature." Those remain worthy goals in public life as well. ●





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THE LOUSE THAT ROARED, Max Boot, Los Angeles Times, 2/14/07

The American delegates to the recent Munich Conference on Security Policy, an annual trans-Atlantic gathering of policymakers and defense experts, were not predisposed to embrace Vladimir Putin after we learned that the Russian president's entourage had booked more than 100 rooms in the conference hotel, the stately Bayerischer Hof, relegating most of us to a ho-hum Hilton in the hinterlands. (It could have been worse. As one journalist joked, if President Bush had been in attendance, the White House would have taken so many rooms that we would have been commuting from Lichtenstein.)

Putin's speech did not win over anyone either. Sounding as if he had stepped out of a Cold War time warp, he accused the U.S. and NATO of threatening his country. With its "hyper-use of force," he thundered, ". . . the United States has overstepped its national borders in every way. . . . No one feels safe anymore, because nobody can feel that international law is like a stone wall that will protect them."

At a superficial level, his remarks might sound like the standard complaints from Western liberals about American "unilateralism," which is how they were portrayed in some European news accounts. But coming from such an illiberal leader, these comments had a different mien -- sinister and absurd at once.

Putin, for instance, complained that a bipolar world order dominated by the U.S. was undemocratic. His concern might be touching if he hadn't spent the last few years dismantling the vestiges of Russia's own democracy. He dismissed questions about his increasingly despotic practices with doubletalk, claiming (falsely) that nongovernmental organizations haven't complained about harassment and (accurately) that more journalists have been killed in Iraq than in Russia. That hardly reassures those who suspect that Putin's security forces were behind the murder of Anna Politkovskaya and other investigative reporters.

Putin's condemnation of the United States'

"illegitimate" use of force was no more convincing, given the scorched-earth campaign he has carried out in Chechnya. While insisting that the U.S. needs U.N. sanction for its military actions --- which, he failed to note, was granted in Afghanistan and Iraq -- he argued that Russia needed no such approval in Chechnya because it was acting in "self-defense." (Try telling that to a Chechen.)

Or consider Putin's claim that the United States was starting a new "arms race" by deploying missile defenses to Eastern Europe. This from the largest exporter of arms to the developing world, with clients that include such charmers as Syria and Venezuela. Putin actually had the nerve to claim that Russia's sale of \$700 million worth of anti-aircraft missiles to Iran, which will surely be used to defend Tehran's nuclear program, was a public service: "We don't want Iran to feel cornered. We want them to know they've got friends."

Putin did not win many friends in Munich with such remarks. He alienated the audience even more when he turned from criticizing the U.S. to deriding the innocuous Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which seeks to promote human rights and free elections, as a "vulgar instrument." In fact, Putin did the United States a favor by scaring the Europeans and showing why a trans-Atlantic alliance remains necessary.

So why did Putin choose to bang his shoe, at least figuratively, on the podium? Many

analysts hypothesized that his remarks were intended for domestic consumption. Some thought that he might even be signaling that he does not intend to give up power when his term expires next year. There is no doubt that most Russians eat up such nationalist rhetoric, if only because it distracts them from their own decline.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Kremlin has gone from ruling 293 million people (not counting Eastern Europe) to 143 million, fewer than Bangladesh. Given Russia's low birth rate and life expectancy (on average, men die at 60), its population is projected to fall to just 109 million by 2050, making it about the same size as Vietnam.

The once-mighty Red Army has been reduced to a shell of its Cold War self, falling from 5.2 million soldiers in 1988 to 1 million, most of whom have terrible morale and worse equipment. Even with oil prices high, Russia's GDP is just \$763 billion, ranking No. 14 in the world, ahead of Australia but behind Mexico, according to the World Bank.

Putin has done little to address his country's serious woes. Instead, he has used its oil wealth to expand its influence in a pathetic attempt to maintain the illusion that Russia remains a great power. To paraphrase Dean Acheson, Russia has lost an empire and has not yet found a role.

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