

hostages, you'll recall, were released *while* Reagan took office—during the inauguration festivities, in fact).

Sick also says (though he's not sure it's true) that Bush was seen in Paris, according to three witnesses, when the deal was consummated, around October 20, 1980. That should be easy to check out. If you can't nail down the whereabouts of a vice-presidential candidate barely two weeks before the election, when he should be in full public view, with dozens of journalists tagging along, something is fishy.

Yet Bush's whereabouts on that date were precisely what federal prosecutors proved *unable* to nail down in the trial of Richard Brennecke, a minor figure in the story who was indicted on a largely unrelated matter.

Sick is convinced that some deal was made, whether Bush was involved or not. (Reagan probably didn't know of it. Probably never will.) But for now it's just a wild rumor—as the stories of Kennedy philandering, Johnson's epic crookedness, Nixon's involvement in a coverup, and Reagan's terminal incompetence were once wild rumors.

But this too would explain a lot, such as the strange silence of both Reagan and Bush about the incredible barbarities of the Iranian regime, which has killed 90,000 Iranians, presumably controls the remaining Western hostages in Lebanon, and openly aspires to "liberate" the entire Middle East, including Mecca and Jerusalem. This is what the Arab states are really afraid of; they regarded Iraq, before the invasion of Kuwait, as the chief bulwark against Iran. And

this is why Bush stopped General Schwarzkopf's drive to Baghdad.

Yet he's chary of saying so. When Iran struck at rebel bases inside Iraq in March and April, he said nothing, except a pious wish that "everyone" would stay out of Iraq. It looks very much as if he's afraid to confront Iran, even verbally, at a time when he has huge forces in the region, right after a triumphant war to reaffirm the sanctity of existing borders. Why? Do the Iranians still have something on him?

Even this quick romp through recent history suggests a little lesson for the naive: that where there is power, there is usually crime. It would be gratifying if our customary disillusionment with our leaders more often came in time to do some good. ●

## Education: Rethinking "Choice"

by M.N.R.

Now that George Bush has ended all problems in the Middle East by exterminating several hundred thousand Iraqis, he has moved to fulfill his campaign threat to become our "Education President." His first step was to fire bumbling education bureaucrat Lauro Cavazos as Education Secretary, and to replace him with the beloved Governor Lamar Alexander, who is under the control of those baleful neocons. In

particular, Alexander's Control is neocon education theorist Chester Finn, aided by educational historian Diane Ravitch. Essentially, the neocon program for education is to bring us more of the problem rather than the solution: that is, to escalate the already calamitous statization of the fam-

ily, and to bring all kids under the domination of the swollen and monstrous educationist bureaucracy. In the battle over education, the neocon view is all power to the teachers and administrators (good)—that is, to the State's technocrat New Class,

whom the neocons represent, and all power to be taken from the parents (bad). More renamed "magnet" schools, expensive national testing—to be administered by you know who—and we can expect that, sooner or later, the spectre of "merit pay" boodle for the aforesaid New Class will not be far behind. [N.B. Neocon attacks on the "New Class" are not to be taken seriously. They are essentially nuanced though nonetheless bitter family feuds *within* the statist New Class, waged between Truman-Humphrey Democrats (the neocons) and McGovern-Kennedy Democrats ("left-liberals").]

But what about the tiny carrot of "choice" held out by the Bush Administration? Shouldn't libertarians welcome any elements of parental choice in education? Shouldn't we therefore

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favor some form of federal aid to private schools, thereby allegedly expanding parental choice?

There is no doubt about the ultimate libertarian position on the public school question: it is to abolish that monstrous system root and branch, and return education to the total control, management, and choice of the parents. Another plank in that the libertarian program is to abolish the despotism of compulsory school laws, which dragoons kids into either the public school system itself or into private schools *duly certified and approved the State*.

That last clause should be noted and underlined, because it underscores the major problem with many "transition programs" that libertarians have fallen for in recent years. Simply calling for abolition of the public school system seems too sectarian to most libertarians, who yearn to advance their ideas realistically in the public arena. Hence, in education as in many other areas, libertarians have latched onto transition demands that would bring us half or third of the libertarian loaf as better than achieving nothing at all. While I agree that half a loaf is better than achieving nothing at all, it is of the utmost importance to make sure that the transition demand is (a) substantial and radical enough to worry about, and (b) helps to achieve the full program rather than undercutting it. In other words, the transition goal must not be such as to undercut our work against the ultimate goal itself.

On education, the favorite transition demand, pushed par-

ticularly by Friedmanite "free market" economists, is the "voucher" plan, touted as expanding parental choice. The parent receives a voucher which he can use to pay tuition at a private as well as a public school of his choice. I have always opposed the voucher scheme bitterly, because it enshrines in "libertarian" favor a policy forcing taxpayers to pay for the education of other people's children. It is in no sense a privatization or market policy.

Furthermore, Friedmanites do not even label vouchers as a transition demand, but hail it as a good in itself. But in that case, why not have taxpayer-financed vouchers for everything else: housing, food, clothing, etc.? Vouchers look like nothing so much as a slightly more efficient, and slightly freer form of welfare state, and it would be especially pernicious in diverting libertarian energies to enshrining and sanctifying that State.

As an alternative to the Friedmanite voucher scheme, I have long supported the idea of tuition tax-credits. Parents would be able to deduct their private school tuition *off the top* from their income tax bills [that is, as a tax "credit" and not as a mere *deduction* from taxable income.] The standard free-market

critique of tax credits is that such credits are really "subsidies" fully as much as vouchers, but I have rebutted vehemently that tax credits or exemptions are *not* "subsidies," because it can never be a "subsidy" to allow people to keep more of their own money. A

subsidy to X only exists when the State takes money out of Y's pocket to give to X. And, of course, if you don't pay enough income tax to cover school tuition, then your credits are indeed limited to your tax payment, so that the credit scheme can never entail a genuine subsidy.

Well, once in a blue moon, I change my mind

**Once in a blue moon, I change my mind on a political issue.**

on a political issue, and this is one case. I have now abandoned support for tax credits. I have been convinced by an argument relayed to me from an old friend, paleo-conservative Dr. Gary North, and seconded by other leading paleos. My God, have I abandoned liberty at last, under the terrible influence of these "horrible fascists," as one Modal has called them? Not quite. North's argument is as follows, and it will be instructive for all Modals out there to parse it carefully: whether it be vouchers or tax credits, the State will decide which private schools are worthy to receive them. If those schools are not deemed worthy, that is, if they are not Politically Correct in

all sorts of ways, they will be stricken from the approved list. The result, then, of vouchers or tax credits will be, *in the name of expanding parental choice*, to destroy the current private school system and to bring it under total governmental control. Parents who want to send their kids to *really* private schools, schools which may be Politically Incorrect in many ways, will then have to pay tuition to a *third* set of genuinely private schools, after paying taxes to support two sets of schools, the public and the Officially Approved Private.

I had only to hear this argument to be converted. It's not that I had never *thought* of the problem of approved private schools before, it's just that I had not given it sufficient weight. One argument that paleoconservatives make about libertarians is that we tend to become so enamored of our "abstract" though correct theory that we tend to underweigh concrete political or cultural problems, and here is a lovely example. Once we focus on the question, it should be clear that, *in our present rotten political and cultural climate*, there is no way that the State would allow parents to choose genuinely private schools in a tax credit system. So the problem with tax credits is not the Subsidy Question, but granting the state any right to rule over our choices.

So do we have any transitional demands left in education, short of abolishing the public school system? Sure we do. In addition to abolishing compulsory schooling (*i.e.* school truant laws), we can battle against every school bond issue, every

expansion of public school budgets, and in favor of all attempts to cut and restrict them, and *within* those budgets to slash away at federal and state budgets, and to try to decentralize and localize as much as possible. Is that enough to do? ●

## Diversity, Death, and Reason by M.N.R.

Has anyone noticed how the Modals, despite their blather about cultural and sexual diversity, *can't stand* difference of opinion, especially from libertarians? They go bananas, they flip out. Oh, they don't mind abstruse differences in libertarian theory; they can and do chew the cud endlessly, for example, about whether utilitarianism or natural rights is the proper groundwork for libertarian doctrine. I mean differences about social and cultural values, about fundamental strategy, about the petty racketeering endemic to the movement.

We have already pointed out gleefully in these pages how Sarah Barton's revealing pin-pricks have driven all the *pomposo* Left-nihilos, especially those in power positions in the movement, totally bananas.

But there is more, far more. Take Lew Rockwell, for example, who has a treasured capacity to get under the skin of the Modals. Hardly had they begun to recover from his *Anti-Environmental Manifesto*, when Lew's dissent from the fashionable ACLU-Al Sharpton line on the videotaping

of the arrest of one Rodney King sent every Modal in the country into orbit, twanging with shock and hatred. So far, *Reason* magazine, rousing itself from its umpteenth treatise on local garbage disposal, has devoted an editorial plus an article by a Rick Henderson to fulminating against Rockwell on this issue. What's the matter, guys? Can't stand some dissent? [Consider, incidentally, the double standard indulged in by the ACLU. That outfit, which would demand "due process" for Genghis Khan, leaps to judgment and takes out ads demanding L.A. Police Chief Gates' instant dismissal!]

The newly Postrelized *Reason*, by the way, has polarized itself into a truly lovely position: neocon and pro-war on foreign policy, and Left-nihilo-Modal on everything else. *Reason's* new position is epitomized by assistant editor Jacob Sullum, who was ardently in favor of the mass murder of the Gulf War, and equally ardently in favor of the revived cryonics movement, along with its systemic practice of "assisted" suicide. The cryonics movement, in fact, strikes me as the Ultimate Modality. It is remarkable that here we have Modals, to a man aggressive atheists who scorn Christians as credulous "mystics," paying some characters to freeze their heads—in the libertarian-oriented Alcor group, indeed, to freeze them "pre-mortem"—in the trusting faith that these guys will keep those heads properly frozen for centuries, that there will be no power outage or failure to pay electric bills, and that, some centuries in the future the god