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The Menace of Egalitarianism

by Murray N. Rothbard

After the New Left of the late 1960s and early 70s had been discredited by its bizarre turn to violence, it took the advice of its liberal elders and joined the system. New Leftists launched a successful Gramscian long march through the institutions, and by becoming lawyers and academics particularly in the humanities, philosophy, and the soft social sciences they have managed to acquire hegemony over our culture. Seeing themselves defeated and routed on the strictly economic front (in contrast to the Old Left of the 1930s, Marxian economics and the labor theory of value was never the New Left's strong suit), the Left turned to the allegedly moral high ground of egalitarianism. And, as they did so, they turned increasingly to de-emphasizing old-fashioned economic egalitarianism in favor of stamping out broader aspects of human variety.

Older egalitarianism stressed making income or wealth equal; but, as Helmut Schoeck brilliantly realized, the logic of their argument was to stamp out in the name of fairness, all instances of human diversity and therefore implicit or explicit superiority of some persons over others. In short, envy of the superiority of others is to be institutionalized,

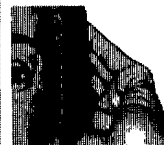
and all possible sources of such envy eradicated.

In his book on *Envy*, Helmut Schoeck analyzed a chilling dystopian novel by the British writer, L.P. Hartley. In his work, *Facial Justice*, published in 1960, Hartley, extrapolating from the attitudes he saw in British life after World War II, opens by noting that after the Third World War, Justice had made great strides. Economic Justice, Social Justice, and other forms of justice had been achieved, but there were still areas of life to conquer. In particular, *Facial Justice* had not yet been attained, since pretty girls had an unfair advantage over ugly ones. Hence, under the direction of the Ministry of Face Equality, all Alpha (pretty) girls and all Gamma (ugly) girls

were forced to undergo operations at the Equalization (Faces) Centre so as all to attain Beta (pleasantly average) faces.

Coincidentally, in 1961, Kurt Vonnegut published a pithy and even more bitterly satirical short story depicting a comprehensively egalitarian society, even more thoroughgoing than Hartley's. Vonnegut's Harrison Bergeron begins: "The year was 2081, and everybody was finally equal. They weren't only equal before God

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THE EAR

by Sarah Barton

America's Only Libertarian

Gossip Columnist

Hey, what's this? Bill ("Mr. Machiavelli") Evers is outdoing even his own formidable record

for intrigue. Now, he's trying to recruit support for Professor Earl Ravenal, as LP candidate for President! The beauty part is that Bill was largely responsible for smashing Earl's race for the LF nomination at the 1983 convention, when Earl was the stooge-candidate of Ed "Sexual Diversity" Crane and the Kochtopus. Politics

sure makes strange bedfellows!

But what's happened to Bill's judgment? Has he outfoxed himself at last? Why should Earl run now that the LP is falling apart, when he was kicked in the teeth when the party was a lot stronger? Is Bill trying to cozy up to the Crane Machine, after all these years?

The California LP convention at Monterey, traditionally on the President's Birthday week-

(Cont. next page, col. 1)

The key to being Politically Correct is to never, ever, in any area, make judgments of difference or superiority.

Charles Koch will buy *Reason* magazine for him and move it to Cato—a move vociferously opposed by Richie Fink. A previous attempt fell through when Charles refused to meet libertarian giant (and *Reason* founder) Bob Poole's price by \$10,000.

An old "acquaintance" of Ed Crane's was hired by a Kochtopus organization, and their first criterion—before experience, salary, or ideology—was Yours Truly. Did she know R, R, or S? Would she keep her mouth shut? Did she realize she would be instantly fired, and permanently blackballed, if she leaked any info? "Sarah," she told me, "your little jabs are driving them even further up the wall than you think." P.S. She got the job, and I got another mole.

Neocon warmonger (or do I repeat myself?) Elliot Abrams, son-in-law to Norman Podhoretz and Midge Decter, is a new trustee at Francisco Marroquin University in Guatemala. The neocon takeover of libertarian organizations (Manhattan, *Reason*, Cato, etc.) continues at top speed.

Wore my new dress to the Cato party, and *no one noticed* because they spent the entire evening denouncing the second R for being politically incorrect. Sure he is, but *that's why we love him!* ●

(The Menace... cont. from P.1) and the law. They were equal every which way. Nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else. All this equality was due to the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution, and to the unceasing vigilance of agents of the United States Handicapper General."

The handicapping worked partly as follows: "Hazel had a perfectly average intelligence, which meant she couldn't think about anything except in short bursts. And George, while his intelligence was way above normal, had a little mental handicap radio in his ear. He was required by law to wear it at all

times. It was tuned to a government transmitter. Every twenty minutes or so, the transmitter would send out some sharp noise to keep people like George from taking unfair advantage of their brains."

This sort of egalitarian emphasis on non-economic inequalities has proliferated and intensified in the decades since these men penned their seemingly exaggerated Orwellian dystopias. In academic and literary circles Political Correctness is now enforced with an increasingly iron hand; and the key to being Politically Correct is never, ever, in any area, to make judgments of difference or superiority. Thus, we find that a Smith

College handout from the Office of Student Affairs lists ten different kinds of oppression allegedly inflicted by making judgments about people. They include: heterosexism, defined as oppression of those with non-heterosexual orientations, which include not acknowledging their existence; and ablism, defined as oppression of the differently abled (known in less enlightened days as disabled or handicapped), by the temporarily able. Particularly relevant to our two dystopian writers is ageism, oppression of the young and the old by youngish and middle-aged adults, and lookism (or looksism), defined as the construction of a standard of beauty/attractiveness.

Oppression is also supposed to consist, not only of discriminating in some way against the unattractive, but even in noticing the difference. Perhaps the most chilling recently created category is logism or logo-centricism, the tyranny of the knowledgeable and articulate. A set of feminist scholarship guidelines sponsored by the state of New Jersey for its college campuses attacks knowledge and scientific inquiry *per se* as a male rape of nature. It charges: mind was "male. Nature was female, and knowledge was created as an act of aggression. A passive nature had to be interrogated, unclothed, penetrated, and compelled by man to reveal her secrets."

Oppression is of course broadly defined so as to indict the very existence of possible superiority and therefore an occasion for envy in any realm. The dominant literary theory of deconstructionism fiercely argues that there can be

The neocon takeover of libertarian organizations continues at top speed.

no standards to judge one literary text superior to another. At a recent conference, when one political science professor referred correctly to Czeslaw Milosz's book *The Captive Mind* as a classic, another female professor declared that "the very word classic makes me feel oppressed." The clear implication is that any reference to someone else's superior product may engender resentment and envy in the rank-and-file, and that catering to these feelings of oppression must be the central focus of scholarship and criticism.

The whole point of academia and other research institutions has always been an untrammelled search for truth. This ideal has now been challenged and superseded by catering to the sensitive feelings of the politically correct. This emphasis on subjective feelings rather than truth is evident in the current furor over the teaching of the distinguished Berkeley anthropologist, Vincent Sarich. Sarich's examination of genetic influences on racial differences in achievement was denounced by a fellow faculty member as "attempting to destroy the self-esteem of black students in the class."

Indeed, one radical change has been the rapid and accelerating transformation of old-fashioned egalitarianism, which wanted to make every individual

equal, into group-egalitarianism on behalf of groups that are officially designated as oppressed. In employment, positions, and status generally, oppressed groups are supposed to be guaranteed their quotal share of the well-paid or prestigious positions. (No one seems to be agitating for quotal representation in the ranks of ditch-diggers.) I first attacked this trend in a paper on the quotal representation for designated groups insisted upon by the McGovern movement at the 1972 Democratic Convention.

These victorious Democrats insisted that groups such as women, youth, blacks, and Chicanos had fallen below their quotal proportion of the population as elected delegates to previous conventions; this had to be rectified by the Democratic Party overriding the choices of their members and insisting upon due quotal representation of these allegedly oppressed groups. I noted the particular idiocy of the claim that youths aged 18-25 had been grievously under-represented in the past, and indulged in what would now be called a politically inappropriate *reductio ad absurdum* by suggesting an immediate correction to the heinous and chronic under representation of five-year-old "men and women."

And yet, only two years

before that convention, another form of quotal appeal had met with proper scorn and ridicule from left-liberals. When one of President Nixon's failed Supreme Court nominees was derided as being mediocre, Senator Roman Hruska (R., Neb.) wondered why the mediocre folk of America did not deserve representation on the highest Court. Liberal critics mockingly charged the Senator with engaging in special pleading. The self-same charge, levelled against denouncers of logism would drive such critics from public life. But times, and standards of Political Correctness, have changed.

It is difficult, indeed, to parody or satirize a movement which seems to be a living self-parody, and which can bring about such deplorable results. Thus, two eminent American historians, Bernard Bailyn and Stephan Thernstrom, were literally forced to abandon their course at Harvard on the history of American race relations, because of absurd charges of racism levelled by a few students, charges that were treated with utmost seriousness by everyone concerned. Of particular interest here was the charge against Bailyn's course on race relations in the colonial era. The student grievance against Bailyn is that he had read from the diary of a Southern planter without giving equal time to the memoirs of a slave.

To the complainants, this practice clearly amounted to a "covert defense of slavery." Bailyn had patiently explained during the offending lecture that no diaries, journals, or letters by slaves in that era had ever been found. But

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to these students, Bailyn had clearly failed to understand the problem: Since it was impossible to give equal representation to the slaves, Bailyn ought to have dispensed with the planter's diary altogether.

Spokesmen for group quotas in behalf of the oppressed (labelled for public relations purposes with the positive-sounding phrase affirmative action) generally claim that a quota system is the furthest thing from their minds: that all they want is positive action to increase representation of the favored groups. They are either being flagrantly disingenuous or else fail to understand elementary arithmetic. If Oppressed Group X is to have its representation increased from, say, 8 to 20%, then *some* group or combination of groups is going to have their total representation reduced by 12%. The hidden, or sometimes not-so-hidden, agenda, of course, is that the quotal declines are supposed to occur in the ranks of designated Oppressor Groups, who presumably deserve their fate.

In this regime of group egalitarianism, it becomes particularly important to take one's place in the ranks of the Oppressed rather than the Oppressors. Who, then, *are* the Oppressed? It is difficult to determine, since new groups of oppressed are being discovered all the time. One almost longs for the good old days of classic Marxism, when there was only one oppressed class, the proletariat, and one or at most a very few classes of oppressors: the capitalists or bourgeois, plus sometimes the feudal landlords or perhaps the petit bourgeoisie. But now, as the ranks of the oppressed

and therefore the groups specially privileged by society and the State keep multiplying, and the ranks of the oppressors keep dwindling, the problem of income and wealth egalitarianism reappears and is redoubled. For more and greater varieties of groups are continually being added to the parasitic burden weighing upon an ever-dwindling supply of oppressors. And since it is obviously worth everyone's while to leave the ranks of the oppressors and move over to the oppressed, pressure groups will increasingly succeed in doing so, so long as this dysfunctional ideology continues to flourish.

Specifically, achieving the label of Officially Oppressed entitles one to share in an endless flow of benefits in money, status, and prestige from the hapless Oppressors, who are made to feel guilty forevermore, even as they are forced to sustain and expand the endless flow. It is not surprising that attaining oppressed status takes a great deal of pressure and organization. As Joseph Sobran wittily puts it: it takes a lot of clout to be a victim. Eventually, if trends continue, the result must be the twin death of parasite and host alike, and an end to any flourishing economy or civilization.

There is virtually an infinite number of groups or classes in society: the class of people named

Smith, the class of men over 6 feet tall, the class of bald people, and so on. Which of these groups may find themselves among the oppressed? Who knows? It is easy to invent a new oppressed group.

Professor Saul D. Feldman, himself a distinguished short, had at last brought science to bear on the age-old oppression of the shorts by the tall.

I might come up with a study, for example, demonstrating that the class of people named Doe has an average income or wealth or status lower than that of other names. I could then coin a hypothesis that people named Doe have been discriminated against because their names John Doe and Jane Doe have been

stereotyped as associated with faceless anonymity, and Presto, we have one more group who are able to leave the burdened ranks of the oppressors and join the happy ranks of the oppressed.

A political theorist friend of mine thought he could coin a satiric Oppressed Group: short people, who suffer from heightism. I informed him that he was seriously anticipated two decades ago, again demonstrating the impossibility of parodying the current ideology. I noted in an article almost twenty years ago that Professor Saul D. Feldman, a sociologist at Case-Western Reserve, and himself a distinguished short, had at last brought science to bear on the age-old oppression of the shorts by the tall. Feldman reported that out of recent University of Pitts-

burgh graduating seniors, those 6'2" and taller received an average starting salary 12.4% higher than graduates under 6', and that a marketing professor at Eastern Michigan University had quizzed 140 business recruiters about their preferences between two hypothetical, equally qualified applicants for the job of salesman. One of the hypothetical salesmen was to be 6'1" the other 5'5". The recruiters answered as follows: 27% expressed the politically correct no preference; 1% would hire the short man; and no less than 72% would hire the tallie.

In addition to this clear-cut oppression of tall over shorts, Feldman pointed out that women notoriously prefer tall over short men. He might have pointed out, too that Alan Ladd could only play the romantic lead in movies produced by bigoted Hollywood moguls by standing on a hidden box, and that even the great character actor Sydney Greenstreet was invariably shot upward from a low-placed camera to make him appear much taller than he was. (The Hollywood studio heads were generally short themselves, but were betraying their short comrades by pandering to the pro-tall culture.) Feldman also perceptively pointed to the anti-short prejudice that pervades our language in such phrases as people being

"short-sighted, short-changed, short-circuited, and short in cash." He added that among the two major party candidates for president, the taller is almost invariably elected.

I went on in my article to call for a short liberation movement to

end short oppression, and asked: where are the short corporation leaders, the short bankers, the short senators and presidents? I asked for short pride, short institutes, short history courses, short quotas everywhere, and for shorts to stop internalizing the age-old propaganda of our tall culture that shorts are genetically or culturally

inferior. (Look at Napoleon!) Short people, arise! You have nothing to lose but your elevator shoes.

I ended by assuring the tallies that we were *not* anti-tall, and that we welcome progressive, guilt-ridden tall as pro-short sympathizers and auxiliaries in our movement. If my own consciousness had been sufficiently raised at the time, I would have of course added a demand that the tall compensate the shorts for umpteen thousand years of tall tyranny.

The above is excerpted from the new introduction to M.N.R.'s classic *Freedom, Inequality, Primitivism, and the Division of Labor*, due out soon from the Mises Institute. ●

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Useful Idiocies

by Joseph Sobran

Now I know how liberals felt about Nixon. As I watch that cynical ninny George Bush congratulating himself on his easy victory over Iraq, I feel the total exasperation one feels in the presence of invincible moral complacency.

Bush is reaping undeserved glory from the efficiency of the U.S. military machine. People are even saying he'll be unbeatable in 1992. I don't know about that, but he does seem certain to escape the war crimes trial I'd envisioned. (That was *my* first step toward a New World Order.)

Well, you have to hand it to the armed forces. Bush ordered them to kill a rat, no matter what the cost, and they went out and did it. Somehow the skill of their execution has made the order itself seem inspired. So the public is cheering Bush, instead of asking the obvious question: If this Iraqi bird was such a pushover, how could he ever have been the threat Bush said he was?

As usual, victory justifies itself. We've gotten so caught up in the success of the war that it no longer matters whether there was any reason for it in the first place. The thing is, we won!

Ah, the ways of the modern state. Saddam Hussein threatened our "vital national interests." But do you know a single real human being who said, "My God! If someone doesn't stop this guy, I'm a goner!"? No, you don't. Nobody specifiable was menaced by him. True, as one Canadian observer writes, the West has a