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 (Cont. page 4, col. 2)

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.

Necon 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 necon 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!

**RRR**

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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 looksism (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 logocentrism, 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
no standards to judge one literary
text superior to another. At a re-
cent conference, when one po-
litical 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 op-
pressed.” The clear implication is
that any reference to someone
else’s superior product may en-
gender resentment and envy in
the rank-and-file, and that cater-
ing to these feelings of oppres-
sion must be the central focus of
scholarship and
criticism.

The whole point
of academia and
other research in-
stitutions has al-
ways been an un-
trammelled search
for truth. This ideal
has now been chal-
lenged and super-
seded by catering
to the sensitive
feelings of the po-
itically correct. This
emphasis on sub-
jective feelings
rather than truth is
evident in the cur-
rent furor over the teaching of the
distinguished Berkeley anthro-
pologist, Vincent Sarich. Sarich's
examination of genetic influences
on racial differences in achieve-
ment 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 accel-
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. 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.

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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 tallies 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 talk 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.

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