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POLITICAL MASOCHISM

By Gary North

"There are two kinds of income recipients in the world," H. L. Mencken once quipped, "people who work for a living, and people who vote for a living."

It's a good line. I wish I'd said it. Yet the grim reality of contemporary political life is that it really is not that significant when the ballots are tallied. The fact of the matter is that poor people generally don't vote. One reason why people are poor is that they care so little for the personal self-discipline associated with responsibility. They just aren't willing to spend the effort to vote. The percentage of eligible voters who actually vote in the ghettos of America is much lower than in middle-class neighborhoods.

Why, then, do we see the growth of welfarism in most Western, industrial nations? Even when if growth of welfarism is finally being checked, it is already such a large part of national and state budgets that most spending programs are still sacrosanct politically. Why is it that the middle class, which has the controlling votes, seems unable to reverse the drift into socialism?

One reason is the existence of the public education system. Government schools, controlled by state and, because of financing, Federal bureaucrats, are by definition agents of the State. They are financed to produce, students who vote for more government programs and greater Federal power. To imagine that state-approved textbooks are anything other than propaganda for the statist system, is naive. The government has used our confiscated dollars to finance a generation of students who regard such confiscation as morally valid and economically sound.

Another reason is guilt. The widespread sense of guilt among the citizenry of modern societies is unquestionable. The psychiatric profession has developed in terms of a vast market for guilt-ridden citizens. Rushdoony's comments are significant in this regard:

The development of a good conscience and a Christian culture is thus an important aspect of the Christian life. A contrary development is increasingly in evidence in the Western world, and especially in the United States, i.e., the development by systematic indoctrination of a **bad** conscience. The political cultivation of guilt is a central means to power, for guilty men are slaves; their conscience is in bondage, and hence they are easily made objects of control. Guilt is

thus systematically taught for purposes of control. (R. J. Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilt and Pity* [Thoburn Press, 11121 Pope's Head Rd., Fairfax, VA 22030, (1970) 1978, \$5], p. 19.)

The Bible teaches that a godly moral order leads directly to an outpouring of economic, political, military, and familial blessings. This is taught in many places, but especially in two chapters of the book of Deuteronomy, 8 and 28. But these chapters also warn against the temptations associated with these visible, external blessings. They can become snares, tempting men to puff themselves up and attribute their blessings to themselves and their own power, rather than to their faithfulness to God and a godly law-order.

Modern secular civilization has abandoned the religious roots of its prosperity, and increasingly it is abandoning the moral and legal roots. Therefore, concludes Rushdoony:

The more a civilization advances, the deeper will its sense of sin become, because the increase of prosperity and cultural advantages will only increase the masochistic desire to pay for progress, which the individuals unconsciously believe requires atonement before enjoyment. As a result, the very liberating forces of civilization themselves call into existence the forces of enslavement. The citizens of the civilization progressively demand political enslavement as their masochistic price for advancement. As a result, the most ruthless totalitarian enslavement is invited, and the culture uses its material liberation to forge a new slavery. (*Politics of Guilt and Pity*, p. 12.)

Hollywood's Maoists

Have you ever wondered why it appears that the biggest stars on stage, screen, and television are proponents of politically liberal causes? Isn't it strange that the conservative politicians have just about run out of actors to endorse them, now that the John Wayne crowd is dead or retired (Ward Bond, Walter Brennan, etc.)? The rock stars aren't belting out their 100-decibel lyrics for the likes of Ronald Reagan. (The fact that rock concerts can be presented as benefits, and that such funds are not subject to "fair campaign" law restrictions, has

delivered an important fund-raising tool into the hands of political liberals.)

Consider the nature of the economics of stardom. Some otherwise undistinguished citizen has a particular gift for pleasing the public: good looks, a sense of humor, the ability to produce emotional responses from viewers if the script is good enough, or whatever. These gifts are in limited quantity, and even among those who have them, only a few seem to climb to the top. Only a handful stay there. (John Wayne, Henry Fonda, Jimmy Stewart, and a few others survived among the men, and Katherine Hepburn and, maybe, Bette Davis, among the women. Why? Even they can't, or couldn't, explain it.)

The public showers them with money. They please millions of people by means of the camera. All those millions of little people pay a few cents per ticket to the actor, but there are so many tickets sold that the actor gets rich. He doesn't really understand or appreciate market economics. He simply knows that he is getting fabulously wealthy. Lots of other people aren't, he notices, including people with truly extraordinary talents—talents that don't happen to have broad market appeal. These other people “help humanity,” meaning that they help a few people in important ways, but they don't help millions of people in a seemingly unimportant way, namely, to enjoy themselves, for an hour or two at the movies or on a weekly T.V. show.

Then there are the millions of people—yes, even billions of people—who are poor and who will remain poor. The actor compares their plight with his wealth. He makes the comparison in terms of the only framework he has, the brand of economics and politics presented in his high school or junior college textbooks. He then listens to the famous economists (like John Kenneth Galbraith), and they also reinforce his basically low opinion of his profession's contribution to Western civilization. He is getting rich, he is recognized on the street, he is fawned over by fans, he is invited to cocktail parties by the rich, and all those billions of poor people go to bed hungry at night. This bothers him.

If guilt were a disease, Hollywood would be suffering an epidemic. It is not a disease, however. It is a state of mind and a judicial position before God. If men are unwilling to deal with guilt by means of Christ's atonement, then they will seek other means of atonement, and one of these means is to vote for political programs that will take some of their money—which they feel guilty about—and lots of the middle class' money—which they also have tended to feel guilty about—and way too much of **my** money, which I don't feel guilty about in the slightest. Instead of adopting the principle of the tithe, the promoters of **political atonement by means of class masochism** have adopted the principle of the involuntary triple or quadruple tithe—a tithe which is paid to the State, not the needy, and then is filtered down to the poor in order to strengthen the goals of the State bureaucrats. The chief goals are these: **Institutional survival and control.**

Self-Defense

Guilt-manipulators are very skilled, and they have used their skills to claw their way to the top positions of the media. (I would certainly include the pulpit and the classroom as media.) They have used their verbal or literary skills to spread the gospel of guilt-reduction by means of masochism, especially political

masochism. There can be little doubt concerning their success over the last three generations.

What can people do to reduce the threat of manipulation by the guilt hucksters? **First**, to take care of the root cause, which happens to be personal guilt before God. (See the book of John, chapter three, and the book of Romans, chapter 5, for starters.) **Second**, to begin to take steps to remove the traces of guilt in their interpersonal relationships. If a person has wronged another, he should make **restitution**. This is the basis of all biblical ethics. **Third**, he should adopt the tithe as a normal part of his expenditure patterns. He should give some of his income away to private charities that are contributing something positive to society. He must take care to investigate the actual results of the efforts of such charities; throwing money around aimlessly is Washington's way of dealing with guilt, not God's. **Fourth**, he should take care of his own family (I Timothy 5:8 is specific in this regard). Charity might not begin at home, but it sure begins before the tax man's unrighteous confiscation. **Fifth**, he should learn to recognize the arguments of the guilt-manipulators, starting with the argument that one man's wealth is the cause of several other people's poverty. **Sixth**, he should begin to convert a portion of his capital into forms less easily confiscated by the political agents of the guilt-manipulators. His goal is to keep his capital intact, so that he might better achieve his ends in life, not the State's. **Seventh**, he should endeavor to make more money. Increasing one's personal capital strengthens the private sector of the economy. Making money (i.e., increasing one's capital) is a healthy activity when accomplished within the proper moral and legal framework. It increases one's control of external affairs, thereby reducing the necessity of creating huge, expensive, inept, and tyrannical bureaucracies to control one's external affairs.

In other words, people have got to begin to abandon the politics of guilt and pity. Political salvation through class masochism is a dead-end. It leads to economic breakdown, precisely because it leads to moral breakdown. People are burdened with a sense of guilt, and then they are misled concerning the ways to reduce that guilt. **Guilt-ridden people cannot be trusted to make personally responsible decisions.** That's one reason why there are so many people in mental institutions today. They simply cannot handle their sense of guilt, and neither the psychiatrists nor the politicians have helped most of them to recover.

Guiltaholics Anonymous

We need an institution for the guiltaholics to visit in order to dry out. A successful one would probably be based on some version of Alcoholics Anonymous' 12 pillars. (Churches used to be suitable institutions, but too many of them have been captured.) Patients would acknowledge to themselves and others that they have reached the end of the road, that they can no longer handle their guilt feelings. They would admit that their own unaided efforts have heretofore failed. They would call upon a higher personal power to aid them. They would try to undo the damage their previous actions caused, by making restitution, and they would discipline themselves not to worry about past actions for which they cannot possibly make resti-

tution. They would cease making grandiose plans and resolutions for future success over social guilt, and they would adopt a philosophy of "easy does it" when confronting the problems of the world. They would, in short, take full responsibility for their actions, while admitting that God will assist them in achieving their sobriety, and denying that a new political program would be anything more than another shot glass full of poison.

The politics of guilt and pity, which is intimately linked to the politics of envy, is the politics of the twentieth century. Until we can rid ourselves of this political burden, we will continue to see the grinding down of our personal freedoms, not to mention the eventual reduction of our per capita productivity. The battle for economic freedom is and will continue to be a theological battle, not primarily a debate over comparative efficiency or output per unit of resource input. This battle will not be won by means of graphs alone.

FREEDOM, PRODUCTIVITY, AND PROGRESS

by Edward P. Coleson

EMERSON once remarked that if a man made a better mousetrap the world would beat a path to his door, but he neglected to mention what some of the folks would do when they got there. It is to be expected that the Amalgamated Mice of America would mouse-cott the new arrangement, nor can one help sympathizing with those who may be hurt in the short run by the march of progress. But more than likely, the Emerson Better Mousetrap Company would come in for a lot of opposition from others with less obvious reasons for objecting to the innovation. Unfortunately, it seems that ever since our stone age grandparents thought of moving out of the cave, anyone who upset the status quo by trying to do things a bit more efficiently has been suspect. Doubtless that is why human history is largely the story of poverty and stagnation.

We often fail to realize how hard it was to get the machine age in motion and how hostile forces threatened to swallow the fresh new ideas which sparked this revolution before it got started. Progress is not inevitable or automatic. Picture James Watt struggling to build a steam engine without the tools and equipment we take for granted. The modern industrialist, used to dealing in thousandths of an inch may begin to appreciate the problems of these pioneers when he notes the satisfaction expressed by Watt's partner when they succeeded in boring a fifty-inch cylinder that "does not err the thickness of an old shilling in any part." Try using a thin dime as a precision gauge, or imagine a "fit" that sloppy.

But that was not the greatest hurdle. Years before, when Watt wanted to set up his workshop in Glasgow, he was not permitted to do so because the local tradesmen thought there were already more than enough such establishments. Watt got his chance only because the University took him as their instrument maker. Later, when factories were developing

in England to make use of the new power and equipment, mobs of workers swept down upon the mills and destroyed them. The new technique, incredibly crude by our standards, might produce too much and drive the price of cloth below the starvation level for the weavers who still plied their trade by hand. Their fears were justified: they couldn't compete with the Frankenstein monster which spewed abundance and threatened their jobs.

We may imagine that the "surplus" problem is modern, a tragic consequence of the phenomenal productivity of the machine, now being automated to further compound the difficulty. But mankind's neurotic fear of abundance (pleniphobia, if one may coin a term) is deep-seated and was old when Englishmen first discovered that a mechanical device could spin several threads in place of one. It is hard for us to see how they could have imagined that their **little** was too much; but they so believed, and responded by rigging the market just as we do. The result was to render the "times"—or as we would say, the economy—"out of joint." Eventually, we may see that our maladjustments grow out of the same regulations and controls which they belatedly realized were causing rather than curing their difficulties.

The sudden burst of productivity, coming nearly two centuries ago to a world with a chronic and psychopathic fear of abundance, generated a bitterness against the machine which persists even today. Generations of soft-hearted people, refusing to look beyond the obvious for the true significance of the industrial revolution, are perpetuating a misunderstanding that need not have developed in the first place. For the simple truth is that plenty is desirable. Everyone wants **more** for himself and only seeks to limit output for others because he believes he will get more if they have less—an immoral, selfish, and short-sighted policy which is self-defeating and only leads to economic and political chaos.

We try to dress our ancient practices in modern garb and imagine they are necessitated by the stupendous productivity of the machine. A recent textbook tells the student that two men with a combine can cut and thresh as much wheat in a day as 125 laborers could by hand, or a ratio of 62½ to 1 in our favor. This overlooks the fact that combines are produced, not by rubbing magic lamps, but by a long line of men and machines, which reduces the net ratio considerably. Dr. William H. Peterson of New York University thinks we were perhaps six times as productive in 1960 as in 1800, rather than 62½ times as implied in that other figure. If people today want a dozen times as much as their ancestors did in 1800, there should be no problem; and we know that human wants are insatiable—we feel we must have a multitude of things they never dreamed of having. But, if we devise all sorts of fantastic schemes to reduce output we'll be right back where they were in 1800—cutting and threshing grain by hand.

Pre-Industrial Society

It might help our thinking if we could back up a few centuries to compare the "before-and-after" of industrialization. Practically, we can do almost as well by going to a primitive village in some backward area of the world where people still

farm with a hoe and craftsmen still ply their ancient trades by hand. Having had this experience a few years ago, I assure you that the glamour of "going native," the simple and unspoiled life, fades as quickly as the morning haze under the rays of the tropical sun. Our neighbor was a weaver who spent day after day on his veranda weaving a narrow web of crude cloth on his primitive loom supported by three sticks. "How quaint," you say, but that is only part of the story. The poor native was a man of years, malnourished and unkempt, and his craft had fallen on evil days. Competition from cheap, imported textiles—made with high-priced labor—was driving the old man out of business and he was too old to change. Women in America may think that dry goods are too expensive; everything we ever buy always costs too much and, for some perverse reason, everything we have to sell brings too little. Although our weaver earned only a pittance, his cloth was relatively expensive by our standards and fantastically so for his neighbors. Nor was the reason obscure: he simply produced so little.

A further tragedy in such lands is that staple foods are not cheap either, although some items may be. A balanced and sufficient diet is a luxury few can afford. Throughout the backward areas of the world obesity is associated in the native mind with wealth, since no one else can afford to eat that much. For weeks or even months of the year, after the seed is planted and before the new crop is harvested, the chronic shortage becomes acute—the "Hungry Season" in native parlance. It is impossible to produce an abundance of food on sterile, eroded hillsides with a short-handled hoe.

Their poverty cannot be attributed entirely to crude tools and primitive techniques. Nor is this one of those horrible examples of exploitation with an absentee landlord behind the scenes taking all the profits. It is scarcely worth considering whether things were divided properly in the village where I lived, since redistributing would not make much difference; a man's fair share of the **little** wouldn't be very much.

The real problem is that everyone is poor. And a strong contributing factor must be that no one really owns anything; it belongs to the group, the extended family. If one urges a native farmer to grow more to tide his family over the "hungry season," he will point out the futility of it. If he had a modest surplus when the relatives ran out of food, they would all visit him until it was exhausted. So, why not loaf with the neighbors now and go hungry with them later? Togetherness, with a vengeance!

Another factor may further explain the general backwardness and stagnation. The natives suffer from the familiar socialist delusion that one cannot prosper except at the expense of others. So, if anyone in the village seems to be getting ahead, the word is whispered around that he possesses a charm, "boa medicine," which promotes his interest but harms his neighbors. Assorted tragedies and misfortunes in the village

will build resentment until the charmed one is finally hauled before the local chief. He will then be prosecuted and persecuted until he is reduced to the lowest common denominator of native existence, to the same level of want and misery with everyone else in the village.

The Source of Abundance

It is hard for us to imagine how little their **little** can be. A traveler in a primitive region came upon a family bowed down with grief because they had lost—not a child or mother—just a lowly needle! In colonial America they are said to have burned houses to recover the nails. Nails were even used as money until Jacob Perkins invented a machine in 1795 that would make 60,000 of them a week. (Imagine the "inflation"! After that, they sold nails by the keg, not by the dozen. Ordinary pins once cost twenty cents each (when twenty cents was a fair start on a day's wage) and were given as gifts—until a man broke the pin market with a machine that would turn out two million a week. Wearing fitted shoes was once the exclusive privilege of monarchs and the very wealthy. Ordinary folks wore clodhoppers which fit very sloppily; fitting a pair of tailor-made shoes was like having a portrait painted. A bushel of wheat cost an English laborer the equivalent of five days' pay in 1770. It was not until John Deere's plow broke the prairies, and McCormick's reaper speeded the harvest—plus a lot of other inventions in the last century—that the English laborer had anything like an adequate diet. Famines used to be as common in Western Europe as they still are in under developed areas today.

But, why continue? We can tell the story of modern progress in terms of more adequate food, shelter, clothing, and even luxuries for the average man and his family. Or, we can continue to grieve over the industrially "displaced persons"—the nail-makers, pinmakers, shoemakers, and hoe and sickle farmers that the new machines released for more productive opportunities. I recall seeing an old livery stable operator sitting by his door waiting for the customers that no longer came. Perhaps the automobile should have been abolished! His competitor down the street spent his spare time tinkering with a "tin lizzie," and as the horse and buggy faded out, he converted his stable to a garage. Perhaps a dirge for old dobbin is appropriate, but why not look at the positive side for a while? Progress means growing pains, but growth betokens life, health, and new conveniences and comforts for millions. Let progress reign!

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