

SWADOS

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VC 22 Nov 65

Dear Dick,

I was distressed to hear from Phil Gould & Marco that you have been ill; I am a little confused as to how you got a bum leg from an upset stomach, but maybe that just shows what inaccurate reporters people are. Anyway I hope you are on the mend.

You must forgive me for not acknowledging your book of essays sooner. I wanted to read those with which I wasn't already familiar before writing you, and I have been bogged down with student papers and mountains of galleys (my own and others').

As always I am filled with admiration at the suavity (in the best sense) of your expression. It is particularly admirable when you write so of people who are in one way or another hateful or depressing. I am also as a constitutional radical made uneasy once again by certain assumptions in your argument. It is true that you underline now that the status politics interpretation is to be taken as supplementing rather than supplanting economic determinism; but while that bothered me in your work on the populists & reformers, it is a kind of corollary to that that disturbs me now: Namely the assumption (usually unspoken but made explicit in the Goldwater essay) that only those who operate beyond the bounds of consensus politics, or moderation, or the rules of the two party game, or whatever, are susceptible of analysis in your terms. In short that only the radicals are the Manicheans (the millenarians, the chiliasts), or the paranoids. This latter I think is a most useful concept and it bothers me that you exclude from your analysis the possibility of coexistence (sic) of paranoid politics within consensus politics.

That is why I think your present stance would make it impossible for you to explain a phenomenon like the Vietnam mess (to say nothing of Dominica). If I may say so you fall behind the times when you insist that the paranoid right is basically uninterested in foreign affairs and prefers to hunt for Communists (and when those are unavailable to hunt beatniks, liberals, fluoridizers, etc). What I see happening (vide Genovese & Nixon's hapless Commie baiting in New Jersey in October) is that the paranoid right is losing interest in Commie hunting here at home & is much more taken up with the religious war against the reds abroad--and no longer Moscow at that, our fellow white man, but the gook commies. Drop It, say the buttons of the Buckleyites, and they are not fooling. This is a measure of the distance we have traveled from McCarthyism, and I don't think you have fully taken that measure.

Nor have you taken account of the basic (and I honestly fear, fatal) weakness of consensus politics: namely that the consensus politician, whether Kennedy or Johnson, is always open to blackmail on the part of the paranoid right, since it does after all represent a hard core of say 10% of the American electorate. Every vote counts, and you dare not swing to advancing the notion of Chinese entry into the UN even though you know and all your advisors know that it is not only necessary but advisable, because you'd jeopardize those votes. A fortiori recognition of Communism at China.

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But even this doesn't exhaust the matter as far as I'm concerned. Vietnam goes to the heart of it: Either Johnson is acting there as rationally, coolly, shrewdly, conservatively, etc etc as he is at home... or he is the captive of a paranoid conception of International Communism, namely the fixed unchanging malignancy of Marxian Aggression. I gather that you believe the former; you can gather that I am (nervously) persuaded of the latter. You don't start something the possible consequences of which are an absolute horror unless you are not conservative but paranoid; you don't bomb for peace when it has been demonstrated over & over to the satisfaction of all but the Air Force paranoids that bombing stiffens resistance. You bomb an Absolute Evil Which Must Be Destroyed.

The logical end to this paranoid behavior is the taking out of Chinese nuclear capability through preemptive atomic bombing. My neighbors already speak this way; there are those in NY (a UN correspondent, others) who believe that the fix is already in, that the Russians refuse to intervene in Vietnam because they want the US to have the excuse it needs to bomb the Chinese atomic installations in 1966.

This is the real paranoid politics--and until you confront it within the framework of consensus politics, you will just be reworking earlier interpretations of McCarthyism. I don't mean YOU, I mean all of us. We are in a bind, compounded by Mao's provincial xenophobic paranoia; and if there/no shift from Johnson toward Fulbright I believe we are in for a religious war.

One last word: To my mind the giveaway of Johnson's stance is that it legitimizes the radical right. They are now lined up behind the Commander In Chief and Our Boys Over There; they quote Katzenbach on the Communist direction of anti-Vietnam war demonstrations. This is the reductio ad absurdum of consensus politics; and we out here ~~was~~ in Rockland County who lined up for the Johnson-Humphrey campaign last year, professors, clergymen, and all the rest, find ourselves spat on and called "Garbage, garbage!" when we attempt demonstrations against the war, by the radical rightists who really dig Johnson when he escalates.

To my mind the crucial figure in this entire question of the paranoid right is Forrestal, a certified nut obsessively concerned with Zionist-Communist machinations, a visionary ahead of his time in his determination to Stop Communism. Arnie Rogow muffed a marvelous opportunity to explore this Dostoevskyan figure, & to think aloud about the relationship between the reality of the totalitarian menace and the dreams of the man who crosses the border into another world. Instead, Arnie settled for a softheaded socialscience appeal for Mental Health. It is true that Forrestal was never elected to public office. But then neither was Gen. Thomas Power of SAC, and neither were MacNamara and the Pentagon people now happily escalating toward Hanoi, Haiphong and Peking.

Well, back to my novel. As you see, you always provoke me to turn things around in my mind. Honestly I can ask for nothing better. My thanks. Incidentally I finish my class at Columbia at 9 Tuesday evenings, & altho I am bushed (I teach all day at SLC too) maybe we cd get together for a beer?
yrs *Dan*

PS I have a most sensitive & intelligent letter from Dan; he is a mensch. Nothing about his daily life but intense feelings abt art & self.

8 December 1965

Mr. Harvey Swados
398 Kings Highway
Valley Cottage, New York

Dear Harv:

I have given a lot of thought to your criticisms of my book and while I can't really cope with them adequately there are a few things that can be said.

First, I do not mean to exclude the possibility that the paranoids exert a lot of leverage or, if you will, operate within or upon our consensus politics. If I didn't think that their influence in ~~it~~ or upon it is quite important, I wouldn't have thought and written so much about them these last fifteen years. If you will look at the closing paragraph of my old 1954 essay and the beginning paragraph of my last section of the Goldwater essay, you will see that I have defined them quite explicitly as being of serious importance and of extremely weighty potential. Whether one say they operate within or upon consensus politics does not seem to me to be important, once one grants that they have a lot of weight.

I am not trying to say that only the extreme right or the extreme left will make use of the paranoid style or conceive of the world in that way. It is quite possible that such views can pervade a whole society, as I suppose they temporarily do in wartime. I don't happen to think that Lyndon Johnson looks at our foreign policy from that standpoint, bad though his solutions may be. I do think there is something in this way of looking at the world in our popular attitudes and among some people of great influence. I tried in part to explain this in my rather long remarks about our foreign policy heritage in the Goldwater chapter.

You are absolutely right when you say that the paranoid right is losing interest in red-hunting at home and is taken up with the holy war in foreign policy. When I said the contrary it was in an essay written over eleven years ago, and I had hoped that that would be clear. I don't think we really disagree on this, though you may well feel that I haven't been emphatic enough about stating the change.

About consensus politics, please don't misunderstand me: it is no sacred cow to me. We happen to have been governed, normally, over a long time by this kind of politics. The most I would care to say for it is that while it has its limitations, there are worse ways of being governed. It simply

happens to be the strategy of my Goldwater chapter to try to underline the un-conservative character of Goldwater "conservatism," and to do this it was important to point up the irony in their strong deviation from our traditional ways of doing things. I would be sorry if that is taken as suggesting that I think these ways are impeccable.

The merit of consensus politics has to lie in the way it is practiced. Again I agree with you that there is nothing that intrinsically protects it from being blackmailed by a small minority of hyperactive and vocal right-wingers. On this particular point I couldn't agree with you more. You are altogether right when you say that every vote counts, and that this disposes our politicians to entertain some of the most dangerous policies in order to placate some very bad eggs. Aside from its purely descriptive and analytical content, it is a part of the intellectual strategy of my essays to drive a wedge between such bad eggs and ordinary, decent, moderate conservatives. You may feel that this is impossible, or that I haven't managed to contribute anything to that end, but at any rate that is a part of my essential point.

In short, I think we disagree somewhat less than you imagine, and there may be some lamentable failure of communication in my book. There probably is some residual core of serious difference between us, but right at the moment I am hard put to define just what it is.

With best regards,

Richard Hofstadter

RH:js