

## **Elephants are hypocrites**

Jim Fetzer (READER WEEKLY 15 April 2004, pp. 24-25)

It's not as though my father never warned me to stay away from persons of low repute, such as pimps, prostitutes, and Republicans. He had earned a degree in political science from UCLA and, even though he spent most of his life in accounting without being a CPA, his thoughts on politics had a way of defining the bottom line. "Democrats are better at governing," he told me, "but Republicans are better at campaigning. And Republicans tend to accuse their opponents of the things of which they themselves are most guilty!" *"When you're right, you're right, dad!"* I simply never thought it would be so blatant!

Nostradamus, I am told, predicted that, with the arrival of the new millennium, an idiot would come forth to lead them. Arianna Huffington may have identified him. During visits with school children in the company of our present president, she has observed his preference for the lowest grades and the simplest books. His favorite, *THE HUNGRY CATERPILLAR*, was actually written for pre-schoolers. This is the book he likes to read, even when his audience is as advanced as second or third grade. When a small boy, who had heard it all before, tried to give him another book, his face was fraught with horror.

The Democrats, I have heard, are not quite sure how to come to grips with this warrior chief. But it shouldn't be that hard to figure out. He has created a "shadow government" of his own to conduct business if anything should happen to Washington, D.C. God forbid that anything should happen to Washington, D.C.! Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson think that God allowed 9/11 to occur because of our rampant immorality, including activities by the ACLU! But if God really were of such a disposition, he would have taken out the

White House and the Capitol long ago. Not that Falwell and Robertson are ever wrong!

One of the peculiar features of this "government within a government" is that it only consists of members of the executive branch. The legislative and judiciary branches have never heard of it. Quite remarkable until you recall that illuminating moment during the presidential debates when this man explained that it was the role of the legislature to pass laws and of the executive to interpret them. It was apparent then that he did not possess even a junior-high school understanding of our government.

But the other guy did not notice and the moment passed. The judiciary, whose role he had given to the executive, reciprocated by making him President of the United States. This was very odd since the question of selecting electors is delegated to the states by the Constitution, which, as I understand it, the Supreme Court is supposed to uphold. But Florida afforded a unique opportunity to install a Republican, which several justices wanted so they could retire with Republican replacements assured.

It was a decision that challenged our faith in a government of laws, not of men. Not that the present president really believes in democracy. I shall never forget when he was asked how his first months in office were going and he said, with utter sincerity, that he would like it better if he were dictator! Letting presidents speak their mind can be a hazardous pastime, so we have had Karen Hughes and Ari Fleischer, who say things for him. That way he doesn't have to think or speak, which is how they like it.

The president chimes in with those who claim there is a "left-wing bias" in the press. But for every honest-to-God Geraldo Rivera there appear to be dozens upon dozens of ersatz Rush Limbaugh/Oliver North/G. Gordon Liddy/William Kristol/William Safire/

George Will types, who spend quite a lot of their time denouncing the bias of the press. Maybe things are not really as bad as they look, but from Duluth it looks very much as though the media is suffused with bias from the right, not the left. And even Geraldo has abandoned his devoted followers for a tour as a war correspondent in Afghanistan!

The Republicans repeatedly accuse the Democrats of being a party of special interests, including blacks and gays, feminists and unionists, the poor and the homeless. Exactly what the Republicans represent than other special interests is not entirely clear. What is entirely clear is that the Republican Party is the party of the rich. But, because the rich are small in number, their candidates cannot be elected without receiving support from other segments of society with whom they share practically nothing in common.

The party uses social issues to harvest votes from the non-rich by fanning the flames of emotions over abortion, school prayer, and burning the flag. Since the Supreme Court has ruled that abortions are legal and no one--not even the government!--can stop any one from praying--in school or out--these are implausible planks for a national party. Does anyone think that the rich do not arrange abortions for their daughters when they incur unwanted pregnancies? But the non-rich still rally to their cause by the millions.

Because burning a flag is the proper method for disposing of a flag, it is not really flag burning that provokes such heated opposition but burning the flag as an act of protest against policies of the government of which you disapprove. I would have thought it was far better to burn a symbol of the country than the country itself, but that is not how these social conservatives see it. Only about six flags are actually burned in any given year, so it is not much of a problem, and it brings a lot of voters to their booths.

So, the non-rich, who favor school prayer and oppose abortions and burning the flag, periodically join with the rich, who really could care less, to elect candidates to public office. Since their non-rich supporters are large in number while their rich supporters are few, they are thereby compelled to adopt positions in which they do not believe to promote the interests of the rich, which they want to advance. But only officially as a sop to gain support. Which is why Republicans so often disavow their own platform!

If the party as a whole appears to be schizophrenic, there is yet another variety of conservatives who believe in balanced budgets, states' rights, and (what used to be called) "isolationism" by allowing other nations to conduct their own affairs without foreign (United States) intervention. The present president even campaigned on a platform that opposed intervention and "nation-building" abroad and, once in office, abandoned his predecessor's efforts in searching for peace between Arabs and Jews.

If the members of this group, which now appears to be an endangered species, were bothered by the administration's approach by promoting enormous tax cuts before it had even prepared its budget, they did not speak up. And when the recession came into play, they did not speak out. And after 9/11, they seem to have lost their tongue entirely. The president threatens to bomb sovereign nations and install governments more to our liking during his State of the Union--and he receives nothing but praise!

He has promoted his plan for privatizing Social Security by claiming that someone today who had retired after 45 years of work would receive \$1,128 per month, but that if he had invested in the stock market instead, over the same period of time he would have

had an income of more than \$3,700. But he neglects to mention that this calculation assumes that he had invested every single cent of his retirement savings and payroll taxes and that this just happened to be a period of unparalleled stock market growth!

Having stacked his Social Security Reform Commission exclusively with proponents of privatization, he persists even after the Enron scandal, which should have taught us, if it taught us anything, that investments in the market are gambles. Not only would a transition to privatization cost an additional trillion to compensate for the money no longer available to support retirees, but the trillion it replaces will go into the market with all its uncertainties. The only certainty is that the rich will be that much richer.

Like another not so great president, this one appears to believe that the business of government is business. More precisely, he believes in a government of, by, and for corporations. That always struck me as just a bit peculiar, because if the business of government is business, then who is going to keep business from robbing us blind? Does anyone believe that Ford and Firestone, for example, would ever have settled without the threat of action by the government to bring them into line? Anyone?

Among his most daring deeds has been to propose a transfer in costs for cleanups of toxic sites from the corporations that actually caused them to the citizens who suffer from them. The Superfund waste cleanup program was founded based on the principle that "the polluter pays". The fund has been used to clean up about 30 percent of sites on the EPA's priority list, with the other 70 percent left to the corporations. Congress permitted the law to expire in 1995 under pressure from chemical and oil companies. That let's you know who's really running the country.

He has also launched an all-out assault on those who oppose drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. His Interior Secretary Gale Norton has recently announced that the impact will be limited to only 2,000 out of 1.9 million acres of the refuge, which makes it sound like a minuscule portion that none of us is even going to notice. But that calculation was based on the area that is covered by drilling rigs themselves, ignoring the roads, the pipelines, and other support that come with them. Not to mention destruction of the wildlife and their refuge.

The administration has not only grossly minimized the environmental impact of this project but has also massively exaggerated its potential benefits. At most, there may be enough oil to cover our needs for approximately six months, less than our needs would be reduced by raising automobile efficiency standards by 3 miles per gallon. This guy stands up for "supply side" policies, which benefit from increasing demand. He should be stressing conservation at least as much as increased supply, but a coherent energy policy might reduce corporate profits.

And this is not the worst of it. He has also endorsed a plan to store the nation's nuclear waste in Yucca Mountain, which is a volcanic ridge 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas. More than \$7 billion spent on scientific studies suggest this is not a wise choice for the storage of waste with half-lives of hundreds of thousands of years. A geologically unstable region with more than 35 faults, the mountain is composed of porous rock through which sediment can seep into an aquifer below.

Since much of that water nourishes southern Californians, maybe the government considers that suitable punishment for having voted Democratic in the last election.

This waste is currently stored in nuclear facilities distributed around the country. Perhaps you have noticed one in your vicinity. No matter where you live, however, you are likely to be affected, because transporting that waste to Nevada is going to mean hauling it through no less than 45 of the 48 contiguous states; and even then it will be stored above ground for as long as 100 years before it's put underground.

If you live in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Colorado, or any of the other states that are going to be exposed to radioactive waste transportation, think of the excitement when one of the inevitable spillages occurs! At least no one should worry about terrorist attacks. Who would even tell them that nuclear waste was on its way? And have I mentioned that satisfactory storage containers for all this waste have yet to be designed? We don't actually know that we can bury this stuff, but our leader sent this proposal to Congress after less than 24 hours of study.

Without big government as a counterbalance to corporations, businesses consume the consumer, treating the people as nothing but resources for exploitation. Which is one more reason why the nation needs a government of, by, and for the people. Liberals believe, as our founding fathers believed, that everyone deserves representation, not just the rich! Which my father believed as well. The Republicans must be a party of hypocrisy, since otherwise it could not exist. Which is why elephants are hypocrites.

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