

"nation" has a single sovereign authority with unlimited powers; definite boundaries that usually have no connection with ethnic and ecological reality; a war machine whose dual purpose is to intimidate its own people and punish its enemies; and a policy of competition rather than cooperation with other nation-states. But the days of western supremacy are numbered, and we are rediscovering alternative political ideas that are more in harmony with the way the Earth actually works. UNPO has already begun the hard work of redefinition by insisting that "nations" are made up of people, not territories, and that they themselves have the sole right to determine who and what they are.

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## Volunteering ain't what it used to be

David Hansen, writing in *The Other Texan*, noted recently that "national service may some day be like driver's licenses in some states, where you have to be attending high school or you can't have a license. This could be the first step toward a new type of conscription, with the ultimate goal of subsidizing big business by paying minimum wages to an army of forced volunteers -- a kind of a third-worlding of the US service economy."

This vision might seem paranoid were it not for clear willingness of Clinton and other American leaders to trade off rights and benefits for obligations and regimentation. The potential for variations on this theme is boggling. For example, the state of Wisconsin has introduced a form of "workfare" that includes requirements that some recipients attend motivational workshops and another rule that withholds part of the monthly welfare payments to parents whose children are chronic truants. As for national service, consider this:

Before you write this off as paranoia, consider this:

- From the beginning of discussions of national service there has been -- and remains -- congressional support for a mandatory program.

- An increasing number of public schools are requiring community service. Although this is being challenged in the courts on the ground that it represents involuntary servitude, it suggests the increasing willingness of our society to draft the young into programs it deems beneficial.

Even as a voluntary activity, some the implications of the Clinton national service trust fund were glossed over in the rush to pass the enabling legislation. For example:

- Over half of all American adults already volunteer an average of four hours a week as it is and nearly two thirds of youths-12-17 give at least three hours -- for an

estimated total of 2.1 billion hours annually. According to Pacific News Service, the LA city government has more than 14,000 volunteers. The town of El Cerrito, CA, is run by 100 paid employees and nearly 500 volunteers. When Lafayette CA got into fiscal trouble it asked for help from volunteer accountant and management consultants who came up with a plan to save about a tenth of the city's budget. So what exactly is the purpose of attempting to nationalize all this activity, converting what was formerly *community service* into *national service*?

- There is a strong argument to be made that many volunteer agencies need not more volunteers but more facilities, equipment and logistical support to help them function. The per-participant cost of the Clinton program will be about four times the minimum wage. Further, although available to non-college students, the program will clearly serve as a subsidy to members of the country's future elite.

National service was presented to the country as an unmitigated good, and even the Republicans could effectively challenge it only on cost grounds. Undoubtedly, the national service trust fund will support worthy projects, provide valuable and, in some cases, transformational experiences for those involved. Yet whatever its salutary effects on individual participants and those they assist, the national service program will have little effect on the country's social and economic problems, will not greatly increase the number of America's community service volunteers, nor is likely to create a rush to public service careers.

National service was nonetheless early destined for a life much grander than its actual product could warrant because of its ubiquitous symbolic utility. To the young the service program offered a chance to do something meaningful for society. To the country it was an outward and visible -- and inexpensive -- sign of caring, devoid of such complications as the potential political and economic empowerment of the poor that undermined support for VISTA. For the Clinton administration and congressional supporters it represented a commitment to social values, concern for the poor, and a bit of regimentation for the purportedly unruly and undirected young. One even caught a whiff of a generation that had avoided the draft using their children to atone for their own lack of national service.

The Clinton plan clearly seeks echoes of the Peace Corps. But the Peace Corps was the product of a far less cynical and manipulative American government. And even it was eventually perverted, as when Ronald Reagan announced that 900 Peace Corps volunteers in the field would implement the Caribbean Basin Initiative, three quarters of which involved military aid to the government of El Salvador.

It is noteworthy that national service is itself not without military overtones. The Pentagon has America's cities in its sights. Senator Sam Nunn, chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, early proposed using military



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specialists to help urban and private agencies on city problems. Nunn's urban pacification program would "assist civilian authorities in addressing the critical fundamentals upon which a healthy society and economy are built."

A number of the new-style community service programs upon which Clinton smiles include such paramilitary appurtenances as early morning calisthenics, an activity that Jane Addams and her social work descendents might find a trifle strange, but which lend a touch of 90's style machismo. Some of the national service funds would go to pay for police officers and buried in the scheme is a plan for a Civilian Community Corps that would further federal efforts at urban pacification by having ex-military personnel run boot camps for community service teams. A few have raised questions about the civil liberties implications of such militarization of urban policy, among them former Boston Mayor Ray Flynn. More typical, however, was the bland parallel drawn by St. Paul's mayor Jim Scheibel between US military intervention in Somalia and military involvement in American cities.

The president and his supporters have hardly been modest in describing the program. Clinton said, "National service will take on our nation's most pressing unmet needs while empowering a new generation to serve as leaders for change." Al From, president of the conservative Democratic Leadership Council even took credit for reinventing civic spirit:

"National service, the cornerstone of the New Democrat agenda, replaces the two dominant ethics of the 1980s -- every man for himself and something for nothing - - with a simple philosophy that calls for a new spirit of civic obligation and participation in America."

While the national service plan will have undoubtedly have beneficial effects, to declare it a cornerstone of one's

domestic policy reveals the paucity of the New Democrat agenda. Poverty, joblessness, the urban health and housing crises are not the product of too few college sophomores giving to the community. And it is hardly encouraging to find Mary McGrory declaring the program "the best of Bill Clinton," and blandly asserting that "if successful, it could demonstrate a new Democratic philosophy, giving people to problems rather than money." How people -- however well motivated -- provide housing, health services, food and jobs to America's cities without money remains a mystery.

Making us all better persons has considerable appeal to some politicians and policy grubbers these days. It will provide grist for interminable rhetoric about the nobility of the young, matched only by that praising the wisdom of those in public office brilliant enough to have thought of the idea in the first place. Cheaply virtuous, and superficially non-ideological, it is the sort of program that Washington loves most. -- Sam Smith

Morton Mintz and the Advocacy Institute have uncovered the unpleasant truth that the ACLU has been taking money from the tobacco industry for some time -- and never told its members. Mintz found that the civil liberties group received a half million dollars from Philip Morris between 1987 and 1992. The ACLU has also helped the tobacco industry in its fight against advertising restrictions. At one point the ACLU's Morton Halperin told a Senate hearing, "there is simply no evidence that tobacco advertising increases the level of smoking."

# FLOTSAM & JETSAM

## How I got fired as a liberal

I have recently been officially fired as a liberal, ignominiously stripped of my rank as an executive vice president of Americans for Democratic Action, keeper of the holy grail of liberalism.

When I first heard that this was going to happen -- shortly before entering the hospital for surgery -- I was stunned. For all other executive vice presidents the only apparent grounds for termination had been death. Did the leadership of ADA know something that I didn't?

No, it was just that ADA had decided to end years of populist insurgency in its ranks, simulating the Democratic Leadership Council's successful efforts at quashing dissent within the Democratic Party. I and a number of other board members who had failed to hew to the party line were to be purged. Liberalism would once again be safe from the winds of change. Included in our number was a former national treasurer, the present chair of the Chicago chapter, the former chair of Youth for Democratic Action.

About a year and a half ago we had formed a progressive caucus within ADA. The paleoliberals in the leadership took kindly to neither the idea nor the irony of the name. To be sure, we were not openly accused of political incorrectitude. At first we weren't accused of anything. Later -- and only after the fact, when Washington's *City Paper* got wind of the purge -- we were charged with being "disruptive troublemakers." I was personally accused of acting like both John the Baptist and Svengali, a truly remarkable blend of virtues and vices. In fact, our troublemaking had consisted largely of writing letters and introducing resolutions the ADA leadership didn't like. Apparently in ADA, dissent is considered a political dirty trick.

I was initially quite aggravated at the developments but then it occurred to me that being a certified ex-liberal had a certain appeal. I fantasized about being called before the House UnMainstream Activities Committee to testify on how cells of heavily armed liberals had undermined the first six months of the Clinton administration, how gays were planning a mass assault on the Morman Tabernacle, or about next season's secret line up of TV series aimed at perverting family values. I could only fantasize, however, because the truth is that liberals these days don't do much at all. Contrary to Rush Limbaugh's allegations and Senator Boren's anxieties, liberalism in the past decade or so has been

marked by its ineffectiveness. Certainly this had been true of ADA, the leading multi-issue liberal organization in the country. ADA's most notable achievements had been its annual rating of Congress and its Christmastide toy safety survey. Now even the toy survey is gone.

To some of us in the organization, ADA's ineffectiveness seemed unfortunate and unnecessary. We naively assumed that the group would be open to new ideas and strategic approaches. Nothing proved further than the truth. Even when an alternative drug policy was twice approved by a national convention over the almost apoplectic opposition of ADA's leadership, the matter was simply filed away so that no one outside the organization would ever hear about it. As the Texas politician said, I don't mind losing when I lose, but I hate losing when I win.

The ADA establishment -- some which goes back to the organization's founding in the late 1940s -- is as adept at internal judo as it is lethargic in political action. Thus an extraordinary amount of effort is spent on maintaining political correctness within the group while the nation drifts undisputed towards the right. Some of the organization's leaders bring to mind Charles Hodge, who taught at Princeton Seminary in the early 19th century. Hodge boasted that in his fifty years of teaching he had never broached a new or original idea.

To be sure, as in a bad movie, occasional cameo scenes bring things to life. For example, ADA helped to sink the Bork nomination and has been working hard on single-payer health insurance. Many of ADA's other positions are admirable, although one often admires them somewhat in the sense that one admires a restored Studebaker.

ADA seems largely unaware of the depth of the growing revulsion against an overexpensive, overauthoritarian and overcentralized government. It ignores such major new ideological influences as the Green movement. It feels threatened whenever anyone suggests a modification of the standard liberal canon. Most of all, it no longer fulfills its former role as a political catalyst. Not only is no one afraid of ADA today; many haven't even heard of it, or will tell you that "I thought that died years ago." This is sad and, given an annual budget of about \$750,000., doesn't have to be.

But the organization has other priorities. What it seems to want, above all, is to retain its status as the official voice of liberals in Washington, even if this status has some of the limited elan, say, of being an alleged Russian count in Manhattan. To challenge liberal orthodoxy would risk losing caste with its orthodox liberal allies in Congress and losing funding from its orthodox labor backers. In fact, ADA is even afraid of challenging the Clinton administration. It implicitly perceives that it can not regain its former political stature without risking its social position. It is better to leave things alone. Thus this once vibrant organization rests on the political landscape, as Disraeli once said of the opposition bench, like a range of exhausted volcanoes. --Sam Smith