



R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

THE LIBERAL CRACK-UP

Having spent 15 years studying *Homo liberalis*, Dr. Tyrrell emerges from his lab to reveal some findings.

What do the Liberals of the New Age think in their heart of hearts? Since the late 1960s these ardent pontificators have infiltrated the Republic with sundry brands of cheap thought, all promising the esoteric insight, the higher understanding, good vibes, or some other infantile desiderata. They have politicized heretofore virgin areas of American life. They have pelted us with misnomers, presumptuous cant, and suffering situations that leave the world appearing lugubrious and pathetic. By the early 1980s the *gringo* citizenry had been dragged through hundreds of unlovely episodes of which Vietnam, Watergate, Jonestown, the racial hullabaloo over the Atlanta murders, and the Iranian "hostage crisis" were only the most clamorous.

Still what the Liberals of the New Age really favor remains mysterious. As the era aged, the incoherence of their credenda worsened, suggesting that a kind of uninhibited senility was settling upon the movement. Their whole agenda was in flux. Smoking in public places, once a chic right defended by the forward-lookers, is of a sudden a deadly affront, subject to a new prohibition. Exuberant carnality, previously boomed as salubrious and liberating, is devalued, reassessed as "sexual harassment," and considered a prelude to rape. Throughout the era the number of good causes the Liberals abandoned was exceeded only by the number they betrayed. What, then, is it that they are really after?

Studious analysis of all relevant materials and much prayerful meditation have led me to conclude that Liberals in the New Age have, indeed,

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had one sublime goal that unites all the diverse enthusiasts: All felt enjoined by high principle to disturb their neighbors, most of whom they dismissed as idiots. This mighty goal is the great constant of their public lives: their ad hoc committees, letters to the editor, protest demonstrations, and every "issue" from "peace" to animal rights.

At times, I admit, it appears that the Liberals' goal is really to abridge the Bill of Rights and to limit personal liberty, for their reforms are frequently being frustrated by the common man's liberty-loving ways, and they often leap to restrain him. But then, just as we are ready to categorize the New Age Liberal as *au fond* an opponent of freedom, he begins thrusting upon us exotic freedoms whose *bona fides* even the late Jean-Jacques Rousseau might have doubted—for instance: our absolute dirty-book rights, the right to deaden our brains with drugs, the right to pull down our pants in public. Does this make the Liberal an absolutist for freedom? As likely as not he is equally vehement about mandatory and inescapable automobile seat belts. To what is he really devoted? The only constant in all his multifarious good causes and pious tantrums is the noble

goal of disturbing his neighbors; and, if peace and justice be our goals, it is worth noting that this noble goal is legally termed "disturbing the peace," a misdemeanor in all civilized criminal codes.

Sometimes the noble goal is merely adumbrated, as when the New Age consumerist forced upon the Republic medicine bottles that were nearly unopenable, particularly by the sick; or when the career do-gooders, acting with their customary furtiveness, suddenly plowed up our sidewalks, leaving mischievous channels through which a solitary wheelchair might pass. In the meantime thousands of us stumble into the infernal depressions, presenting the Liberals with the happy prospect that still more of us may become handicapped, at least temporarily, thus qualifying as fit subjects for their odious compassion.

Yet at other times the New Age Liberal has been very forthcoming about his noble goal, which, as I have suggested, is probably criminal. "Challenge the orthodox," the pol of the New Age is wont to say. "Confront the iniquitous" is another of his lines, along with "Afflict the comfortable." Once removed from the coy

realms of politics the New Age Liberal is even more blatant. The art critic bases almost all his aesthetic judgments on the oft-repeated belief that art's transcendent purpose is to disturb us: to scrape the bones, crack the skull, gouge eyes, and tear off an ear. Modern art, if it is truly aglow with Minerva's light, is supposed to make us feel like morons. The New Age cleric is just as avid for disturbance. Today he hounds the faithful into holding hands in church and embracing perfect strangers; tomorrow he will have them placing their thumbs perpendicular to their noses while wagging their fingers at their next-door neighbors. Then there is the New Age prof who abominates all Christendom on the premise that his students must experience his violence if ever they are to shake the bourgeois coil and enter the palmy provinces of Dr. Karl Marx and Dr. Leo Buscaglia. Yet no New Age eminento that I have ever known has believed that he is similarly improved by having his life disturbed. That is going too far, and those who would disturb him are the agents of reaction or the late Senator Joseph McCarthy or some other horror from the dank of American history.

In strict political terms, then, the New Age Liberal has been neither libertarian nor authoritarian. He has been a pest, a public nuisance, and somewhat deranged at that.¹ To probe the cause of his derangement is to discover the causes for the New Age itself. It was created willy-nilly by those who could not bear the burden of personal freedom, rationalism, relativism, and affluence, all of which proved to be too much for vast herds of our progressive brethren and sistren. Thus they attempted to soothe themselves with a new system of values and ideas. The values and ideas are very wretched; but that did not restrain progressives from attempting to inflict



them on their fellow Americans. Happily, some areas of American life have remained tolerably invulnerable; but other areas—for instance, academe—have almost wholly capitulated and so gone to seed.

A fundamental cause of the New Age was the Liberals' inability to tolerate freedom. It is a matter of record that throughout the 1970s, despite all their sententious testimonials to liberation, many a vaunted absolutist for liberty called in the cops at the first sign of discomfort. Very few New Age Liberals could abide a society in which others too were free. Some could not even endure their own freedom. They had worn bikinis. Now they yearned for straitjackets.

A second cause of the New Age was the Liberals' reaction to rationalism. It is an old story: After rationalism has done its work, irrationality enters. After Socrates came the mystery religions. After our own protracted examination of all that ordinary Americans had customarily taken on faith, many were left fearful; even many so-called rationalists were shivering. On came the 1970s cults, their members for the most part coming from the ranks of the reputedly well educated. A generation before, the Liberals would have subjected the cults to the utmost scrutiny and even derision. Now, however, many stalwart Liberals were themselves cowering in rationalism's wake.

Our whole belief system, every aspect of human existence had for a century been exposed to rationalistic analysis. All those timeless arrangements, traditions, prejudices, and nods to the supernatural that comfort ordinary men and women had been rendered dubious. The certitudes of a certain morality fell into doubt. Furthermore, prodded by rationalism and relativism, the Liberals abandoned practically all standards of judgment. The ensuing chill and pitiless reality were too much for the weak-witted

children of rationalism and the free society. They mutinied against both and opted for unreason and statism. Some even accepted gods as long as they were suitably Oriental, inscrutable, and idiotic.

Yet if freedom, rationalism, and relativism were fundamental to the New Age's rise, affluence gave it its childish imbecility and unique staying power. At no other time in Western history had the flotsam and jetsam floated and jetted so comfortably. All the sages of the hour agreed that the inner life had grown painful, but material life was becoming wonderfully painless. The consequences of one's most egregious botches could be re-

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lieved or hidden away with a new purchase: The failed husband diverts himself with a new Corvette; the failed government diverts the voters with a new political giveaway. In the New Age, affluence turned large numbers of supposedly well-educated citizens into arrested adolescents, lost in idiot bliss, bereft of any sense of tragedy or even danger. They ignored history. They grew oblivious to reality. On those rare occasions when some glint of it peeped through their clouds of fantasy they became very angry. The Liberalism of the New Age had become a long, angry war with life.

The most basic casualty of Liberalism's war has been trust. By ascribing ignoble values so widely throughout our society, the Liberals gravely damaged all faith in institutions, in individuals, even in the future; and without faith societies begin to fall apart. The Liberals' problem was that they had come into the world as idealists, and in every idealist exists a cynic. Better it is to be a realist facing up to the world as it is than to fall into the stupidity of the cynic, the fool who praised gods that never were only to end up admonishing against bugaboos equally quixotic. After the New Age Liberal had had his say women did not trust the marriage bed, blacks did not trust whites, no one trusted a producer of any kind. Many doubted the arrival of tomorrow. Doctors, lawyers, businessmen, scientists—in fact, experts in almost every walk of life—saw their authority evaporate. As in decadent societies of old, morale sagged. The reward for doing right was abuse or disbelief. The smart fellow was encouraged to cut

corners. This is the legacy that the moral hams of the New Age brought into American life, and whether America could ever recover what the founding fathers called its Republican virtue would be in doubt for years to come.²

Notwithstanding all the historic reforms, no one ever said thank you. For well over a decade the American people conferred benefits on a growing mob of suffering situations, but gratitude and increased affection for the Grand Old Republic were not to be included in the transaction. Throughout the 1970s the "rage" among the beneficiaries of government programs seemed to grow apace with

beyond the wildest dreams of Franklin Delano Roosevelt had been spent on the poor and the angry, yet no one seemed to be grateful. Nor were the poor better off. In fact now they were often totally dependent on federal programs and practically everyone was indignant. America was becoming one of the most emotional nations on earth. There was more public sobbing than at an Iranian funeral; and the fist-pounding could be deafening.

No Americans were more angered by the Republic than the New Age Liberals; yet, it is a mistake to believe that their contempt issued from "Liberal guilt." It issued from a colossal egotism. One that swelled into grandiosity. One that left them seeing themselves as giants standing athwart the nation and admonishing 225 million idiots and miscreants. These braggarts made life in the Republic very uncomfortable for civilized Americans. In the most unlikely settings one of them, inflated by the grandiosity of the age, might begin boasting of his compassion, sensitivity, and worse. Self-dramatics replaced civics; at times it even replaced personal morality.

I found that dinner parties could become particularly gruesome affairs. There you would sit while the guest next to you launched into a sugary monologue the sole point of which was to display his or her personal goodness: how he or she had wept over the morning news, or been overcome while trying to empathize with some victim of misfortune, how he or she could no longer bear the suffering of a cut flower. When the bilge began to flow I would feel a premonitory queasiness. I would try diligently to get drunk in hopes of seeing the world from my dinner companion's point of view. This helped, particularly if the wine was good.

What is odd is that as the world became decidedly more unstable and parlous these self-regarding snots never smartened up. They acted as though America could continue to be diabolized and debilitated with no attendant danger to themselves. They abominated Washington, D.C., and all lesser outposts of its authority much the same as V.S. Naipaul tells us the Third Worlder rejects the West—that is to say, "within the assumption that there will always exist out there a living, creative civilization, oddly neutral, open to all to appeal to." At his first tremor of distress the New Age Liberal reflexively turns to Washington. All his schemes to save mankind have been predicated on using the power of the very country he is execrating and deauthorizing. Yet he has gone on

¹Notwithstanding all the Liberal's poesy about compassion, tolerance, and decency, his capacity for intolerance, violence, and hatred is often quite breathtaking. Time and again he and his colleagues fall upon some poor fish who is out of harmony with them politically or intellectually, and when they have finished abominating him in all their forums of influence he is a ruin, his name having been transformed into another of America's metaphors for evil. One thinks of the assault on James Watt, Ronald Reagan's first Secretary of the Interior. He may have been imprudent; he may have been a fool; but when the Liberal brethren were done with him he had been transformed into the embodiment of evil; and once they had bounced him from government they kept reviling him at every opportunity. They are colossal haters.

²Republican virtue is different from the democratic virtue of the Liberal. It calls for self-restraint, self-government, self-reliance. Democratic virtue, on the other hand, encourages aggressiveness against one's fellow citizens and reliance on government to establish "social justice" in the society.

shouting, as though that source of power would always be there "open to all to appeal to."

The derangement of the New Age Liberal grew eerily similar to the universal mental derangement of the Third World *enragés*. At American universities or wherever the Liberal brethren and sisters dwelt in large numbers one could perceive inchoate stirrings of what appeared to be The Resentment and The Confusion. As with some Oxford-educated jurist in Uganda, the seemingly well-educated New Age Liberals were slowly but perceptibly slipping back into primitivism. One saw it in their suspicion of science, the profit motive, and

that agglomeration of manners and values we call civilization. One saw it in their mode of debate wherein syllogisms had been replaced by jeers: "trickle down, trickle down," "domino theory, domino theory"; speakers out of favor with the regnant bunkum were barred from the podium amidst terms of high opprobrium: "Cold Warrior! Cold Warrior!" "fascist! fascist!" Finally, one saw it in the New Age Liberals' policy alternatives, which amounted to empty incantations: "Neo-Liberalism," "high tech," "New Industrial Policy."

There the descendants of the proud New Deal stood, five decades after the

original great doings, like members of some ever-hopeful cargo cult on a far-off atoll. At the appointed hour all would break into gibbers, weird and incomprehensible. There was nothing new about "Neo-Liberalism" whatsoever; all that had changed was that these Neo-Liberals had moved closer to socialism and appeasement. New Industrial Policy merely meant still more social and economic planning of the kind that had failed so thunderously during the heady days of the Great Society when such programs as Model Cities were established to "revitalize" our older cities. A decade later Model Cities had achieved just the opposite: Our major cities had been transformed

into decaying shells. The most vacuous incantation of all was "high tech." What could high tech possibly mean to people who had no idea of how wealth is created, no understanding of its value, no sense of personal responsibility, no reasonable expectation for life whatsoever? Aside from disturbing others, New Age Liberalism had become a pointless affair; and pointless civilizations cannot endure. By comparison even the civilization of the Marxist-Leninists on the far side of the Iron Curtain had more point to it. The Soviets were for coercion; the American Liberal was for petty mischief. Of the two, the former's prospects are more promising. □

Vladimir Bukovsky

AMERICA'S CRACK-UP

American foreign policy is an amateur's delight.

Exactly one hundred years before I was born, the great Russian writer Nikolai Gogol prophetically described Russia as a troika rushing headlong for no apparent reason or purpose, just for the joy of fast driving:

O troika, thou bird of a troika! Who was it that first thought thee up? It must have been a resourceful nation that gave thee birth in a land that brooks no nonsense, but has spread its plains, smoothly, evenly, over half of the world; and now go, count its milestones until everything is blurred before your eyes.

And no elaborate job either is this contraption of a vehicle. No iron screws hold it together. An ax and a chisel—that was all a smart Yaroslav peasant needed to make it and fit it in a jiffy. The driver wears no German top boots: he is all beard and

mitten, and he sits on—the Devil alone knows what it is he sits on. But the moment he has half-risen in his seat, has swung his whip and struck up a song, off shoot the horses like a whirlwind. . . .

. . . And thou, Russia, art not thou, too, rushing headlong like the fastest troika that is not to be outdistanced? The road smokes under thee, the bridges rumble, everything falls back and is left behind. Lost in amazement at this, God's own miracle, stands the onlooker. Is this not a flash of lightning sent down from heaven? What is the meaning of this awe-inspiring onrush? What is the mysterious force that is contained in these steeds? O ye steeds, steeds—what

steeds they are! Do whirlwinds dwell in your manes? Is every fibre of yours endowed with a quick, eager ear of its own? The moment you hear the familiar song above your heads, you strain your mighty chests of bronze, all as one, all at the same instant, and barely touching the earth with your hoofs, you become transformed into straight lines flying through the air, and the troika dashes along, all inspired by God. Russia, whither art thou speeding? Answer me! . . . She gives no answer. The jingle bells pour forth their wonderful peal, the air, torn to shreds, thunders and turns to wind. Everything on earth is flying past, and the other nations and states, eyeing her

askance, make way for her and draw aside.

The contemporaries of Gogol were at a loss at how to interpret such a strange prophecy. The Russia of their time was a fabulously immobile country; no apparent rush was in evidence, or even hinted at. But now, a century and a half later, we have no difficulty identifying even the smallest details of the picture.

Who is so blind nowadays who cannot recognize this contraption of a vehicle called "developed socialism," put together by a smart peasant in the hurry of a five-year plan out of odd bits and pieces procured from foreign lands? The Devil alone knows how the driver manages to hold on when the horses dash along, and why the unwieldy carriage does not fall apart at the first bump.

And the steeds, those steeds . . . what steeds they are! I could write a whole poem about what these steeds think when they hear above their heads the all too familiar songs of proletarian solidarity and fraternal assistance, of eternal duty and the bright future. Their only hope is that the driver will somehow tumble down and break his neck as, all as one, they strain their mighty chests.

Still, the problem remains. No one knows where the carriage is going. She



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