

March of the Zealots

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Puritanism - The haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.

H L Mencken

Every age has its dominant caste. This is the age of the zealot. Twenty years ago they were dismissed as cranks and fanatics, but now they are licensed to interfere in the every day lives of ordinary people to an unprecedented degree. When Bernard Levin first identified the new phenomenon of the SIFs (Single Issue Fanatics) many of us thought it was a bit of a joke or at most an annoyance. Now the joke is on us. In that short time they have progressed from being an ignorable nuisance to what is effectively a branch of government. They initiate legislation and prescribe taxation. They form a large and amorphous collection of groups of overlapping membership, united and defined by the objects of their hatred (industry, tobacco, alcohol, adiposity, carbon, meat, salt, chemicals in general, radio waves, field sports etc.) Their success in such a short time has been one of the most remarkable phenomena in the whole of human history.

This quotation says it all:

Imagine telling somebody twenty years ago that by 2007, it would be illegal to smoke in a pub or bus shelter or your own vehicle or that there would be £80 fines for dropping cigarette butts, or that the words "tequila slammer" would be illegal or the government would mandate what angle a drinker's head in an advertisement may be tipped at, or that it would be illegal to criticise religions or homosexuality, or rewire your own house, or that having sex after a few drinks would be classed as rape or that the State would be confiscating children for being overweight. Imagine telling them the government would be contemplating ration cards for fuel and even foods, that every citizen would be required to carry an ID card filled with private information which could be withdrawn at the state's whim. They'd have thought you a paranoid loon.

The vanguard

There is no question that tobacco haters are in the van and their unflinching, ruthless, mendacious campaign serves as an example to the rest. Their remarkable success is a spur to the others and their methods a model to be emulated. These include the gross abuse of the statistical method; the invention of numbers (particularly body counts, with no actual bodies or post-mortems) that grow mysteriously with time; the eschewal of anything approaching the scientific method; above all, the relentless, unceasing drum beat of propaganda. They never give up. Each tawdry victory strengthens the appetite for more. Having achieved the ban in public places (i.e. private property) they now seek to penetrate the home.

In order to get their ban, the activists followed the advice of Adolf Hitler (The broad mass of a nation will more easily fall victim to a big lie than to a small one). They needed to plant an arrant falsehood in the public mind, that second hand smoke was a deadly poison. The charge was led by the US EPA, who in 1994 published a so-called meta-study that was then a unique example of multiple statistical fraud and revealed the lowest standards of statistical significance ever recorded (since greatly bettered by subsequent zealots). Thereafter the campaigners did not even bother with corrupt science. They simply made pronouncements that were dutifully reproduced by their allies in the establishment media. One oft repeated one is that “there is no lower limit for damage caused by second hand smoke”, which is an example of the concentration fallacy and a contradiction of the first law of toxicology (the poison is in the dose). They pioneered the virtual body count, produced from nowhere and endowed with a remarkable capacity to grow on its own. The British zealots announced a body count of 1,000 a year (considerably greater pro rata for population than the EPA claim) which became 4,000 and then 11,000, with no evidence adduced..

It is now a matter of history that the campaign for a smoking ban was astonishingly successful. It was not only a bad day for human liberty and freedom of choice, but also defeat for science and a model for other zealots to embrace dishonesty in their crusades. At a time of threatened collapse of our society it was remarkable for its irrelevance. It offers the activists the ineffable pleasure of being able to oppress and humiliate a minority on the basis of an apparent justification. The anti-democratic EU, as always, leads in the suppression of free speech.

One of the most frequently heard pieces of propaganda is that passive smoking causes childhood asthma. Children of the fifties did more passive smoking in one visit to the cinema than modern children do in their whole lives. Childhood asthma was then virtually unknown. It has increased steadily in subsequent decades, while environmental tobacco smoke has declined. It is now a major health problem. These facts are incontrovertible. Yet to state them is to arouse wrath. The sad side-effect of the dogma is that it diverts impetus from the search for the real cause: not a unique result of zealotry.

Collateral damage

Science and its methods have been under ferocious attack for about a quarter of a century. Even its name has been appropriated by the new faithful, who despise its traditions of scepticism and openness (take for example – “The science is settled”. If it is settled it is not science). Those who call for a return to statistical rigour find themselves pilloried by a coterie of untiring Australian left-wing academics, using vulnerable vehicles such as Wikipedia. The very same people also mount attacks on other deviants, such as those who question the morality of killing millions of people by the banning of insecticides. The DDT ban was a human disaster on a horrific scale.

Opponents of the methods of the tobacco zealots were subjected to the usual ad hominem attack that they were in the pay of the tobacco industry, to such an extent that this author felt obliged to republish every remark he had ever made about that industry, none of them

complimentary. Scientists who actually report politically incorrect results are pilloried. Critics of the global warming hypothesis are labelled “evil denialists” and, of course, in the pay of the energy industry (who, ironically, have actually jumped onto the bandwagon in search of an easy dollar).

It would be difficult to overstate the effect that the decline in standards of statistical practice have had on science in general and medicine in particular. Examples abound, the valuable drug Vioxx was withdrawn on the basis of a statistical absurdity, while the multibillion dollar statins industry flourishes on, to say the least, dubious grounds. The whole drugs industry is a lottery for unprecedented prizes (and losses). Junk epidemiology can produce results to order by statistical insouciance and manipulation. The establishment is able to purchase the “evidence” it requires.

Our new onus

In this new age we are all enjoined to live as long as possible, regardless of quality of life. This is strange in a place like Blair’s Britain, where old age is something to be anticipated with dread. The lucky ones are merely neglected, while the state strips them of their property and savings. Before the coming of the zealots, people were entitled to choose their own life styles and accept the consequences. Not so now! Conformity is the keyword. Behaviour of which the new elite disapproves is artificially medicalised and the epidemiologists are on hand to “prove” that all politically incorrect activity causes mortal disease. A short life and a merry one, no more: by decree, life has to be long and grim.

Compulsory longevity was a boon to the new authoritarians. They merely had to establish a link (sometimes real, usually imaginary) between politically incorrect behaviour and increased mortality to provide a launch pad for a campaign of fearmongering and control.

Stage two is the publication of limits recommended by the Government. These are invariably plucked out of the air with no evidence of reasoning.

Next in the chain of events is the appearance of a body count. A typical example is the alcohol and breast cancer scare. A junk epidemiological survey produces a statistically insignificant result that drinking more than the official limit causes breast cancer and immediately the Government is broadcasting an imaginary 2,000 deaths a year, then spending ten million of taxpayers’ money to scare women out of one of their few remaining pleasures. The bigots complain that the Government is not doing enough to raise taxes and impose controls.

Crises and epidemics

In the world of the zealot, which is now our world, there are no simple problems. Everything is a crisis, epidemic, disaster or catastrophe. There is always the need for urgent action, which usually means taxation, authoritarian control and further loss of liberty. With typical Gorean hypocrisy, for example, the BMA called for more taxation of alcohol and a reduction of pub opening hours, while simultaneously applying for an

extension of bar hours in its own headquarters. Doctors are not worried about the rising cost of alcohol, as their militant trade union have made them rich beyond the dreams of average.

Finance ministers are only too pleased to be given an excuse to raise taxes. The disastrously incompetent 2008 UK budget is an illustration; apart from a few stealth taxes on the low paid, charities etc., it was just a raft of overtly draconian tax increases on the central mass of the people. All of them had been promoted by zealot groups, who had also driven the necessary softening up process. That underlines the change that has been brought about in such a short time; for not long ago the lobbyists were all appealing for tax reductions.

The obesity crisis

What is the new age is deemed unaesthetic. There have been times when a different view prevailed: it is all a matter of fashion, but now fat has to be condemned without trial. The overweening state, by dint of the efforts of the zealots, demands the right to determine the shape of its clients.

Zealotry is rich in paranymy. A paronym is a word used as an evasion, often in a sense that is opposite to its actual meaning: liberate for conquer, liberal for authoritarian etc. Zealots like to change the vocabulary in this way and paradox is one of their victims. Time and time again reality diverges from the dogma, so there has come to be, for example, the obesity paradox. Never mind though, for one of the first principles of zealotry is to ignore any contrary evidence. Another of their favourite techniques is to exploit the end-point fallacy. In Britain, for example, they almost invariably choose the fifties as a point of reference, a time when British women had suffered more than a decade of starvation. In America obesity rates have not changed for seven years, but are still routinely portrayed as a growing crisis. Over and over again the obesity scam is exposed, but the campaigners simply ignore the contrary evidence and march on.

Chemophobia

The EU is economically doomed. It is controlled by a bunch of green bureaucrats (anonymous, unelected, unsackable and answerable to no one) who are not obliged to take into consideration the economic consequences of their diktats. Its parliament is an impotent talking shop and gravy train. They seize upon every scare as an opportunity to mount an attack on the wealth-creating part of the community, namely industry. On the slightest of evidence they pick on some chemical, or even an element of the periodic table, and impose a continent-wide ban, without debate or advice from specialists, other than their favoured green lobbyists. A classic example was the ban on lead in solder. It was completely unjustified by available evidence yet imposed virtually without serious thought. Leadless solder is not only considerably more expensive, it is unreliable, being subject to dry joints and cracks. We are talking about people being killed here, for there are now many applications of electronics on which human lives depend, let alone livelihoods. Notably, military applications were excluded.

Even more Alice in Wonderland is the EU policy on mercury. Mercury is a non-wetting liquid of low vapour pressure, therefore relatively safe to handle. Only the vapour form is dangerous, as the mad hatters of Luton demonstrate. So what did the EU do? They banned the safe liquid form, therefore destroying minor industries such as tradition barometer manufacture; then they subsequently insisted that the whole population of the continent replace their incandescent light bulbs with inadequate substitutes operating with mercury vapour, all on the basis of the vague global warming hypothesis.

Dioxins (which are invariably and unwarrantably described in the establishment media as cancer-causing) in fact cause only one known disease, and that only at high doses, chloracne, as the would be assassins of Viktor Yushchenko discovered. Fear of dioxins is used to support the banning of incineration, which is the most sensible way to recycle garbage.

Dwarfing every other assault on European industry by means of chemophobia, however, is the REACH Directive. It requires the registration and control of some 30,000 chemicals. It was the brainchild of one Michael Meacher (a man of such monumental ignorance that, after years as an environmental spokesman and minister, he thought El Niño was a hurricane). Among the sufferers were British manufacturers of paints and plastics, who were forced to give their away secret recipes to low-cost Far East competitors. The cost of this extravaganza of pointless sacrifice is incalculable, but it is certainly in the region of hundreds of billions of Euros, and is a major contributor to the project to de-industrialise Europe.

And these are the people to whom British MPs have transferred, without permission of the electorate, the powers delegated to them. Bizarre or what?

Salt

Weirdest of all, but so typical, is the anti-salt campaign. It seems to have no other function than to keep the names of certain professors in the newspapers. The paucity of the evidence offered in contrast to the drama of the claims and the draconian nature of the demanded action is quite startling, but so characteristic of the genre.

Salt is one of the most basics essentials of human life. You can taste it in your blood, sweat and tears. Animals were able to leave the sea by taking it with them in their blood plasma. Instinct drives them to salt licks when they are short of it. Salt deficiency (hyponatraemia) can be quite serious. It is reckoned to affect, for example, about 10% of marathon runners and one died from it in the 2007 London event. The physiology of maintaining the salt balance (homeostasis) has been well understood for many years. The body can correct salt excess by the simple process of excretion, but it cannot correct salt deficiency.

Some causes are born politically incorrect, some achieve political incorrectness and some have political incorrectness thrust upon them. The humble salt tablet is one of the latter. It

was once a routine precaution for athletes and those working in tropical climates, but now is hard to come by in politically correct parts of the world, such as tropical Australia, where people are now expected to endure painful cramps and other deficiency symptoms. The salt scare has all the characteristics of a classical campaign of zealotry (see, for example, Taubes) including the complete disregard for human comfort and even life. As in the other campaigns, the battering ram is a “recommended limit”, plucked out of the air with no attempt at reasoning, but just right to add to the grimness of modern life.

Why now?

We find ourselves at what is known as a juncture. Huge changes in human society are being accelerated by speed of communication and efficiency of data storage and retrieval. World institutions such as the UN and EU are turning away from democracy and towards authoritarian bureaucracy. A new class of professional politician has emerged that is insulated from the real world of earning a living. In Britain this means taking PPE at Oxford (the bluffer’s degree), becoming a political advisor and then being granted a safe seat in Parliament. Age and experience are mocked. Because of the trend towards micromanagement by government, people who have never run anything find themselves running everything. The quality of our politicians is at a nadir, reflected in the apathy of the electorate at election time. They are lazy, ill-informed, inept and nest-feathering to an unprecedented degree. They incline to the easy route of going along with the lobbyists rather than going to the effort of forming an opinion for themselves, preferring to stay within their closed environment, isolated from the outer world of evidence and opinion. The villages of Westminster and Washington are hothouses, insulated from the rest of the human race, where politicians, journalists and lobbyists talk almost exclusively to each other.

There is a void at the heart of politics, which the zealots have rushed in to fill. Politicians have always indulged in empty rhetoric, though formerly they also held beliefs, but now the whole emphasis is on winning the next election. The sound-bite is all. Policy has been replaced by slogans. From Blair to Obama and all between the script is similar. One word “change” is used the way stage magicians use the word Abracadabra.

Blair is the archetypal 21st Century politician. His New Labour Project had the one aim of winning an election. For the new world of television and short attention spans, his team adapted the techniques of sound-bite and spin that had been developed in the USA and were phenomenally successful, but they carried those into government, with no policies for the growing problems of the new age other than throwing taxpayers’ money at them. His slogans were legendary (Tough on crime, tough of the causes of crime; education, education, education; things can only get better etc.) Things only got worse, across the whole spectrum of national life. It transpired that the catchphrases were all there were. Nevertheless, the watchword was “change”. Blair, the eternal actor, took the part of eco-theologian but in reality he was the ego-theologian.

Blair imitators, such as Cameron and Obama compete to get as many mentions of the word “change” into their speeches as they can. Of course, the word itself, tout court,

effectively has no meaning without an object. “Change your underwear” has a meaning, but the word alone is vacuous, which is the essence of its attraction to modern politicians, as the word “new” is to the advertising industry. One of Asimov’s many prophetic conceits in the Foundation Trilogy was the computer analysis of an ambassador’s long speech, which established that he had said precisely nothing. So it is with these new charismatic politicians, whose rhetoric and promises are as nebulous as the morning mist. Television has created this dominant class of politician – youthful, pretty, inexperienced and insulated from real life, plausible to the non-analytical admass and deft with the sound-bite.

Likewise journalism is at a low ebb. The more ardently they proclaim their professionalism (in contrast with those beastly bloggers) the less they evince it. Campaigning investigative journalism is dead and gone. Politicians, media and zealots live in a cosy symbiotic relationship. Politicians and journalists are indolent, while the zealots are hyperactive. It makes life easy for politicians and journalists if they are presented with ready written cases, which the zealots are only too willing to provide in their copious press releases. You can see clear examples of this by comparing newspaper coverage of a campaign. Articles appear under the by-line of one or more journalists, yet the wording is virtually identical in several newspapers. Indeed, it makes you wonder how many journalists, particularly environmental editors, justify their wages, when you look at the paucity of their original output over a week. Politicians, likewise, are only too happy to speak from a pre-digested script. They also relish the opportunity to create a diversion from the many real problems that they have failed to tackle. Consider, for example, Gordon Brown and the NHS or plastic bags. There was nothing positive he could say about the NHS, which is an unmitigated disaster, so he attacked the usual suspects by way of a diversion. Fat smokers are threatened with denial of a service for which they have been obliged to pay (in the smokers case far more than any one else). Journalists also serve by applying ratchet reporting (such as ignoring global cold weather and celebrating warm) and they possess conveniently short memories (so can, for example, report the admission by one of those involved that the ludicrous recommended alcohol limits were simply made up, then the next week headline dangerous drinking by those who marginally breach them).

Behind it all lurks the overweening bureaucracy. Overpaid, over perked and underworked, insidious and international, they build their empires and extend their tentacles of control into the very heart of the lives of ordinary people.

Research and educational policies are decided by people who think mathematics means arithmetic and have no conception of physics at all. Real research has all but come to an end, being largely replaced by populist surveys designed to catch the eye of the popular media. Mickey Mouse universities offer frivolous courses, while school children are subjected to a treadmill of continual testing between bouts of propaganda.

In short, people are being deprived of the mental equipment to make a judgment of their own on any matter of importance. So Orwellian!

Meanwhile, the activists make it their business to penetrate and seize control of the most influential institutions of society, such as the political parties, the BBC and the Royal Society. They have command of huge financial resources, pump primed by the foundations (the so-called ketchup money) and then augmented by diversion of taxpayers' and charities' money. One of the most egregious of the many corrupt practices of the EU is to give money to the activist groups to enable them to lobby itself.

This, then, is the field on which the zealots play. Their opponents are silenced by an unstated but firm censorship, all done by informal collusion. They give the establishment that valuable commodity of an excuse for displacement activity. Bans, taxes and coercion are relatively easy to implement; whereas the seriously mounting problems of a sick society are hard and uninviting.

The sins of the few shall be visited on the many

Old Tom does not come to the pub any more. For seventy five years his one great treat was to sit quietly in the corner and enjoy a harmless pipe of tobacco and a pint of ale in the inscribed silver tankard that the regulars gave him to mark his ninetieth birthday. Now the zealots have banned his pipe and taxed his pint out of reach. He does not understand why. When there is a cheap wine or spirits offer in the local co-op, it is the old-age pensioners who form the queue, striving to restore a little colour in their bleak existence. Yet the zealots urge the raising alcohol taxes and banning of special offers.

The excuse is the existence of bands of drunken youths in town centres. The bans are called for by those who are often the very people who were responsible for creating the problem of alienated feral youth in the first place, by such policies as the destruction of discipline in schools and undermining the institution of marriage. Alcohol is not the cause: it is just one means by which the disaffected young express their defiance. There are a few more fat people around, so the whole population has to be harangued into an anorexic conformity.

The big one

The common factors in these campaigns of zealotry are:

- Creation and maintenance of a myth.
- Ignoring all evidence countering the myth
- Ad hominem attacks on opponents
- Encouraging authoritarian governments to impose taxes and reduce individual freedom
- Promotion of limits and constraints that are simply invented without reason
- Collusion by the establishment media
- Damage to science and its methods
- Elimination of things that makes life bearable

- Making some people very rich while impoverishing the lives of almost everyone else.

They will not be satisfied until they have you shivering in a cave, sipping thin gruel.

The greatest of these movements, rich in all the above characteristics, is the eco-theological one, which has morphed into the anti-carbon crusade. It is a world-wide phenomenon of historically unprecedented magnitude and power. The demonisation of carbon, the very basis of all life on earth, can only be explained as a religious phenomenon. Its sheer perversity is its attraction: for faith requires an element of absurdity in its object. It requires no faith to believe that the apple will fall downwards from the tree. The carbon campaign is the pinnacle of the movement that began modestly with the earliest impositions of political correctness.

When the world thought that the New Right was in the ascendancy during the Reagan-Thatcher years, it was the New Left that was quietly gathering momentum. Like a snowball rolling down a hill it picked up mass as it went along. The membership was many and various (followers of Rachel Carson, Marxist academics, draft-dodgers, sputniks left homeless by the collapse of the Soviet Empire, idealistic youth etc.) They were characterised by the things that they hated (industry, capitalism, free markets, bourgeois complacency, open science etc.)

A significant development was the evolution of the concept of political correctness. As had been foreseen by Orwell, the control of language was the key to political power:

Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it.

It began to be applied rigorously in American universities and as it spread it came to be applied not just to vocabulary but to hypotheses (such as global warming) and objects (such as salt tablets). It became the means by which even the discussion of anything distasteful to the New Left was verboten. As the establishment media were penetrated and taken over, a rigorous, voluntary self-censorship was imposed.

The global warming hypothesis was a godsend to the New Left. It provided a means of attacking industry and capitalism through the one great essential to modern life, energy. Anyone who questioned the dogma was subject to insults and threats, including the appalling crudity and tastelessness of being likened to the holocaust deniers. All realistic proposals to develop workable sources of energy are bitterly opposed by the green network, while patently stupid ones, such as wind turbines, are sustained by regulation and subsidy, with the added bonus of bringing down the free market. There are related areas of activity, such as biofuels, which not only threaten the world with greenflation but also starvation.

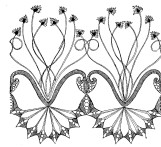
Above it all towers the figure of Al Gore, hyper-hypocrite and monster of monetary concupiscence. If just occasionally he turned up on a bike rather than his private jet (or waived the six figure fee for his repetitious diatribes, or engaged in debate rather than diktat) he might entertain some credibility among the reasoning few. It is, however, in the nature of the faithful that they turn a blind eye to the defects of their demagogues. Perhaps the one fact that restores one's faith in humanity is that the blanket coverage of the propaganda has failed to stir a majority of the populace, though in the new age majorities have no power.

Global warming has now got to the stage where it is only maintained by media self-censorship. If the general public ever got to know of the scandals surrounding the collection and processing of data, or that there has been no detectable warming for the last decade, the whole movement would be dead in the water; but they don't, so it isn't. It has become the most powerful myth in human history, sending much of the world into a downward helix of economic decline. It is a tenuous hypothesis supported by ill-found computer models and data from botched measurement, dubiously processed.

Envoi

After the above was finished and ready for posting, it was time for a pub break. The popular, recently-retired barmaid, Andrea, offered a remark that seemed to sum it all up: "We used to have such fun. Why isn't there any fun anymore?"

Welcome, Andrea, to the world of the zealot.



Source: <http://www.numberwatch.co.uk/zealots.htm>

