

THE PHILADELPHIA SOCIETY
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“AS DELIVERED”

THREE YEARS AGO THESE EX-PRESIDENTS STOOD BEFORE YOU IN PHILADELPHIA TO ADDRESS THE THEME, “WHERE IN THE WORLD ARE WE GOING?” AT THAT TIME—APRIL, 2006—THE POLITICAL FORTUNES OF THE RIGHT WERE RIDING HIGH, AT LEAST ON THE SURFACE, WITH REPUBLICANS IN CONTROL OF THE ELECTIVE BRANCHES OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND STRONG IN THE STATES. BUT BENEATH THE SURFACE THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT WAS ILL AT EASE, BUFFETED BY CENTRIFUGAL FORCES. DISAGREEMENTS CONCERNING FOREIGN POLICY THREATENED OUR HARD-WROUGHT UNITY. AND ON THE CRITICAL QUESTION OF THE SIZE OF GOVERNMENT, THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT WAS NEARLY UNANIMOUS IN ITS CONDEMNATION OF BIG SPENDING REPUBLICANS IN CONTROL OF THE WHITEHOUSE, CONGRESS, AND THE REPUBLICAN PARTY APPARATUS.

IN MY REMARKS THEN, I BRIEFLY SURVEYED OUR COMMON HISTORY AS A MOVEMENT, HIGHLIGHTING FIRST THE FLASHPOINTS OF PRINCIPLED DISAGREEMENT AMONG TRADITIONALISTS, LIBERTARIANS, AND ANTI-COMMUNISTS; BUT THEN SHOWING, AS WELL, THE INTRICATE WEB OF INTELLECTUAL COMMON GROUND THAT BROUGHT THOSE STRANDS OF AMERICAN CONSERVATISM TOGETHER. THAT SOLID GROUND SERVED AS THE BASIS FOR A MOVEMENT THAT WAS MORE THAN

A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE, MORE THAN A COALITION OF EXPEDIENCY. INDEED, THE SOLID INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATION ON WHICH WE BUILT REPRESENTED THE COMMON SENSE OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE: WHAT AMERICANS KNEW “IN THEIR HIPS,” AS WILLMOORE KENDALL PUT IT.

TODAY, THE CIRCUMSTANCES WE FACE ARE QUITE DIFFERENT. REPUBLICANS HAVE LOST CONTROL OF BOTH HOUSES OF CONGRESS, LOST THE WHITE HOUSE, AND ARE WEAKENED IN THE STATES. PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA IS THE MOST LEFT-WING PRESIDENT IN THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES, AND HE IS AT LEAST SUPERFICIALLY POPULAR AS CELEBRITY-IN-CHIEF. THE ECONOMIC CRISIS IN WHICH HE HAS COME TO OFFICE IS ARGUABLY THE MOST SEVERE SINCE THE GREAT DEPRESSION, AND HE HAS RESPONDED AS A PERFECT KEYNESIAN WITH A FANTASTICAL GROWTH OF GOVERNMENT REACH AND POWER. (I TAKE THAT BACK: HE IS NOT A PERFECT KEYNESIAN, SINCE OF COURSE, EVEN LORD KEYNES KNEW BETTER THAN TO RAISE TAX RATES IN A RECESSION.)

AT EVERY TURN, WE FACE NEWLY EMBOLDENED LIBERAL VOICES CRAFTING A NARRATIVE OF CONSERVATIVE “OVERREACH” DURING THE BUSH YEARS, SETTING THE STAGE FOR A MASSIVE SHIFT LEFTWARD OF THE AMERICAN POLITICAL AND CULTURAL SPECTRUM. EMPOWERED BY THIS NARRATIVE, THE LEFT HAS SET OUT TO OVERTURN THE WORK OF DECADES—AND NOT ONLY IN ECONOMICS, BUT IN FOREIGN POLICY AND

IN THE MORAL-CULTURAL SPHERE AS WELL. RESPONSIBLE CONSERVATIVES RECOGNIZE THAT UNDER THESE ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES, WE DO NOT HAVE THE LUXURY OF SQUABBLING AMONGST OURSELVES; WE *MUST* HANG TOGETHER.

HAPPILY, WE NOW HAVE MORE THAN MERELY PRAGMATIC REASONS FOR SEEKING UNITY. WE ARE COMPELLED TO A RENEWED UNITY BY A NEW CENTRIPETAL FORCE IN OUR MIDST: THE REVIVAL OF SOCIALISM. THE WHEEL HAS COME FULL CIRCLE.

THE FIRST STIRRINGS OF WHAT WOULD BECOME THAT AMERICAN CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT BEGAN WITH OPPOSITION TO THE NEW DEAL. THOSE EARLY “INDIVIDUALISTS” SAW CLEARLY THAT GOVERNMENT CAN NEVER BE A PRODUCER OF WEALTH, ONLY A REDISTRIBUTOR AND A CONSUMER. AS FRIEDRICH HAYEK AND LUDWIG VON MISES RECOGNIZED, STATE INTERVENTION WARPS THE PRICE MECHANISM AND CREATES POLITICAL UNCERTAINTIES ABOUT THE FUTURE WHICH BRING INVESTMENT TO A HALT. MOREOVER, A MONEY SUPPLY UNDER POLITICAL CONTROL INTRODUCES WELL-NIGH IRRESISTIBLE PRESSURES FOR INFLATIONARY POLICIES. ALL TRUE. BUT TRADITIONALISTS ALSO— LIKE RICHARD WEAVER—SAW IN SOCIALISM THE UNDERMINING OF THE VIRTUES ASSOCIATED WITH PROPERTY: THE UNDERMINING, TOO, OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES OF MEMORY AND MUTUAL AID THAT STRUCTURE OUR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN A TRULY HUMANE WAY. WHILE SOME NOW THOUGHTLESSLY CONDEMN THE SOUTHERN AGRARIANS AS ANTI-

CAPITALISTS, IT SHOULD BE REMEMBERED THAT ORIGINAL WORKING TITLE OF *I'LL TAKE MY STAND* WAS “TRACTS AGAINST COMMUNISM.” AND ANTI-COMMUNISTS LIKE JAMES BURNHAM RECOGNIZED IN SOCIALISM THE FINAL TRIUMPH OF THE MANAGERIAL REVOLUTION, AS THE BUCK STOPPED NOT WITH THE OWNER OF CAPITAL, OR WITH THE VOTER, BUT RATHER WITH THE EXPERT BUREAUCRAT, BEHOLDEN TO NO ONE AND NOTHING BUT HIS TECHNICAL EXPERTISE. THE BRIGHT PROMISE OF SOCIALISM ALWAYS HIDES THE REALITY OF SERFDOM UNDER THE TUTELAGE OF BUREAUCRATIC MASTERS. IT WAS THIS COMMON GROUND WHICH SERVED AS A BASIS FOR THE AMERICAN CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT AT ITS BIRTH. ALL THESE INSIGHTS REGARDING THE SOCIALIST TEMPTATION REMAIN TRUE, AND THEY REMAIN THE SOURCE OF THE DEEPEST WELL SPRING OF MODERN CONSERVATIVE THOUGHT AND ACTION.

THE FUTURE OF THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT, THEREFORE, WILL BE TO RECALL FOR US—AND FOR COUNTLESS OTHERS—THOSE EARLIER ARGUMENTS, WHICH ARE NO LESS POWERFUL AND RELEVANT TODAY. AS SAMUEL JOHNSON OBSERVED, “MEN MORE FREQUENTLY REQUIRE TO BE REMINDED THAN INFORMED”; CONSERVATIVES ARE THE GREAT *REMINDERS*.

RE-MINDING. LISTEN TO THE COMPONENTS OF THE WORDS. IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO CHANGE LAWS, BECAUSE THEY CAN BE CHANGED BACK.

MARGINAL TAX RATES LOWERED UNDER BUSH CAN BE RAISED UNDER OBAMA. NO—OUR TASK IS TO CHANGE MINDS.

IF THIS DOES NOT COMPLETELY ANSWER THE QUESTION WHAT IS TO BE DONE, IT DOES SUGGEST WHERE WE MUST BEGIN. WE MUST BEGIN AGAIN AT THE LEVEL OF FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS THAT MOVE THE GENERATIONS TO CHOOSE LIBERTY OVER SECURITY, TO CHOOSE CIVIC VIRTUE OVER LICENSE, TO CHOOSE THE FUNDED WISDOM OF MANKIND WE CALL TRADITION, OVER THE ARMED DOCTRINES OF IDEOLOGY.

BUT THEN, THERE IS THE LITTLE PROBLEM THAT STAN EVANS POINTED OUT IN HIS REMARKS YESTERDAY AFTERNOON. THE LEGIONS OF RED STATE YOUNG PEOPLE THAT WANT TO HELP, HAVEN'T DONE THE HOMEWORK TO BE ABLE TO HELP. THEY HAVEN'T READ THE THINKERS WE HAVE TALKED ABOUT THIS WEEKEND AND THEY ARE INNOCENT OF THE FUNDAMENTAL ARGUMENTS THEY WILL NEED IN ORDER TO PREVAIL.

AT ISI WE DEAL WITH ELITES, HELPING MIDWIFE THE INTELLECTUAL LEADERSHIP OF EACH NEW GENERATION. BUT WHAT ABOUT THE SCORES-OF-THOUSANDS OF FOOT SOLDIERS WHO WILL BE NEEDED FOR THE POLITICAL TASK AT HAND?

IN OUR OWN WAY, ISI TOO IS CHARGING TO THE SOUND OF THE GUNS. BEYOND OUR DIRECT WORK WITH YOUNG INTELLECTUALS, WE HAVE BUILT A SUITE OF INTERNET WEBSITES THAT TOGETHER WE CALL THE “AMERICAN IDEAS AND INSTITUTIONS RESOURCE CENTER.” AT THE

HEART OF THE WEBSITES ARE A SERIES OF SIX “SHORT COURSES” (AT WWW.FIRSTPRINCIPLESJOURNAL.COM) WHICH COVER THE MAJOR THEMES AND ISSUES OF THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT OVER THE PAST FIFTY YEARS:

1. WESTERN CIVILIZATION,
2. THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE,
3. FREE MARKETS & CIVIL SOCIETY,
4. AMERICAN SECURITY,
5. THE CONSERVATIVE INTELLECTUAL REVIVAL,
6. AND HIGHER EDUCATION & THE LIBERAL ARTS.

AMIDST ALL THE CHATTER AND NOISE OF THE INTERNET, THESE COURSES OFFER UP ON A SILVER PLATTER THE BEST THAT THE MOVEMENT HAS PRODUCED INTELLECTUALLY OVER THE YEARS, WITH LITERALLY HUNDREDS OF HYPERLINKS TO LEAD STUDENTS TO THE PRIMARY SOURCES. THE POWER OF OUR IDEAS REMAINS GREAT; THEIR APPEAL IS UNIVERSAL; OUR TASK IS TO WIN FOR THOSE IDEAS A NEW HEARING. THE BAD NEWS IS THAT THIS TAKES TIME. THE GOOD NEWS IS, IT’S THE ONLY THING THAT WORKS!

BEYOND WHAT WE AT ISI ARE DOING, AS WE SURVEY OUR CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION THERE ARE ALREADY SIGNS OF HOPE. TYPICAL FOR A MAN OF THE LEFT, PRESIDENT OBAMA IS NOT A SERIOUS STUDENT OF HISTORY. THUS, HE HAS INTERPRETED 2008 AS A SIMPLE REPEAT OF 1929, AND HE HAS PRESUMED FOR HIMSELF THE ROLE OF FDR

IN 1933. EVIDENTLY, IN HIS FIRST “HUNDRED DAYS,” HIS INTENTION HAS BEEN TO SET IN MOTION A WHOLESALE RESTRUCTURING OF THE AMERICAN ECONOMY AND AMERICAN SOCIETY, TO SOLIDIFY A GENERATION OR MORE OF LIBERAL ASCENDANCY. BUT CONSERVATIVES KNOW THAT A TRUE HISTORICAL SENSE MEANS MORE THAN DEALING WITH FACILE ANALOGIES—AS IF HISTORY CAN EVER AGAIN, SIMPLY, REPEAT ITSELF. A TRUE HISTORICAL SENSE ALSO MEANS MORE THAN EXTRAPOLATING CURRENT TRENDS IN A STRAIGHTLINE PATH TO THE FUTURE—AS IF HISTORY WILL NEVER OFFER UP SURPRISES AND REVERSALS. NO, THE TRUE HISTORICAL SENSE RECOGNIZES THE UNIQUENESS OF EACH MOMENT IN HISTORY, DISCERNING WITH A DEEP LEARNING BOTH THE POSSIBILITIES AND THE PITFALLS THAT CONFRONT US.

PRESIDENT OBAMA AND HIS WOULD-BE BRAIN TRUST OF NEW NEW DEALERS LACK A TRUE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION. AND SO THEY HAVE FAILED TO NOTICE THAT HIS ELECTION WAS FAR FROM A LANDSLIDE OF ROOSEVELTIAN PROPORTIONS; AND MOST OF ALL, THEY HAVE FAILED TO NOTICE THAT THE OPPOSITION THEY FACE DOES NOT CONSIST OF INARTICULATE BUSINESSMEN AND A HANDFUL OF SCATTERED INTELLECTUALS, AS WAS THE CASE IN THE 1930S. BUT RATHER CONSISTS OF THE MANY MAJOR INSTITUTIONS THAT TOGETHER CONSTITUTE A TRUE CONSERVATIVE *MOVEMENT*, EQUIPPED WITH POWERFUL ARGUMENTS AND A POWERFUL VOICE. THE WORK OF A HALF-CENTURY

CANNOT SO EASILY BE BRUSHED ASIDE: “THIS TIME,” COLLECTIVIST ANSWERS WILL NOT HAVE ROOM TO RUN THE FIELD UNOPPOSED.

AS A RESULT, WE CAN ALREADY SEE THE AMORPHOUS THIRST FOR “CHANGE” THAT PROCLAIMED IN THE ELECTION OF PRESIDENT OBAMA DRYING UP IN THE LAND. ALREADY WE CAN SEE THE DELIBERATE SENSE OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE REASSERT ITSELF. AMERICANS, IN THE END, DO NOT WANT SOCIALISM; BUT THEY DO WANT ANSWERS.

IT IS UP TO US TO SHOW THE WAY. YES WE HAVE TO DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN. BUT THE NEW ALWAYS HAVE TO DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN. IN THAT SENSE, CIVILIZATION IS NEVER MORE THAN ONE GENERATION OLD. THE DEFENCE OF FREEDOM IS PERENNIALY NECESSARY, A NECESSITY BORN OF THE HUMAN CONDITION ITSELF. IF FINAL SUCCESS WILL ALWAYS IN THAT SENSE BE JUST BEYOND OUR REACH, THEN IT’S THE REACHING THAT MATTERS. IT’S TIME TO GET OUR HANDS DIRTY. IT’S TIME TO GET TO WORK.