

Political Pollution in Washington

Wall st Jnl 10/17/74

By IRVING KRISTOL

Something seems to have gone wrong with the plumbing in Washington, D.C. The atmosphere in that political hothouse, always discomforting to a normal human being, has of late become so dank as to be unbreathable. There are those who claim it is a case of media pollution. Others attribute it to seasonal (i.e., pre-electoral emanations from a decaying legislative body. Still others say it is merely the stench of burning flesh which accompanies any vigorous witch-hunt. Whichever explanation one believes—and I believe all of them—the facts are incontrovertible: political discourse and political activity in our nation's capital have achieved depths of mindlessness and heights of irrationality that, if not unprecedented, are nevertheless remarkable.

Take the simple question—and it is a simple question—of oil. Our problem arises from the fact that the oil-producing nations, organized into a cartel, have increased the cost of that commodity to Americans by something like \$25 billion a year. There are two proximate ways of coping with this levy. (1) We can cut back on oil consumption and reduce the overall American standard of living by approximately 5%; the obvious means of accomplishing this is either to ration oil and gasoline or to impose a tax on oil and gasoline. (2) We can move rapidly to increase our own production of oil, coal, nuclear power, etc.; the obvious means of accomplishing this is to suspend those environmental regulations which now make it impossible to strip mine, to burn high-sulfur oil and coal, to drill into the offshore waters, and so on. None of these prospects is attractive, to be sure. But neither is the situation we find ourselves in.

One could understand that Congress might find it painful to make a choice between these alternatives. One could understand if it faltered, moved reluctantly, displayed signs of confusion. What is not comprehensible is the apparent determination of Congress to refuse to choose at all—indeed, to deny the necessity of choice. Instead, Congress is desperately looking for scapegoats in the oil industry or the Executive Branch or wherever.

In this exhibition of juvenile irresponsibility, Congress is much abetted by the media—which, so far as Washington is concerned, means the TV networks, The New York Times, and The Washington Post. The notion that life is hard and that painful choices are necessary runs against the very grain of the soap-opera mentality and tabloid format of TV journalism. It is also offensive to the bland, unthinking meliorism of those two major newspapers, whose basic metaphysical credo is that all good things are always compatible—and if they seem not to be, the fault must lie with some wicked, vested interests which frustrate the inherent benevolence of the universe.

So, between the moral cowardice of

Congress and the intellectual fatuousness of the media, we are doing nothing at all about the oil problem. We aren't even praying for a miracle — which, as the Times would surely be quick to point out, might be in violation of the First Amendment.

The Turkish Question

Or take the apparent determination of Congress to cut off military aid to Turkey — our most loyal NATO ally, with a liberal parliamentary regime headed by a social-democratic premier, with the largest NATO army, indeed with just about the only NATO army that might actually be counted on to resist a Soviet thrust into Europe. Why should Congress be carrying on this vendetta against Turkey?

The ostensible reason is that Congress,

in its well-known devotion to high-minded principles, disapproves of Turkish military action on Cyprus as a form of "aggression." But cutting off military aid from Turkey now will have no effect on Turkish military superiority on Cyprus or vis a vis Greece in general—and might even provoke it to assert this superiority more belligerently, while it can. Besides, it is not at all clear that Turkey has done anything morally reprehensible; its action may have been impetuous or imprudent, but it was not without justification. After all, it was the Greeks who upset the status quo by overthrowing and expelling Makarios. It is the Greeks, moreover, who have consistently refused to renounce the eventual goal of *enosis*, the union of Cyprus with Greece—a goal which no Turkish government could or will ever accept, both for strategic reasons and because of the large Turkish minority on Cyprus. So the Turkish reaction to events on Cyprus was utterly predictable.

It is now clear that the only possible solution in Cyprus is a negotiated partition of

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the island, and that if we wish to be helpful to the Greeks it can only be as a broker in these negotiations. Congress is, however, ruling out the possibility of any such constructive role. Why? Were there a large Greek vote in this country, the answer would be obvious. But the Greek vote is minuscule, so that explanation is ruled out. The only other explanation I can think of is that the Democratic majority in Congress, in collaboration with the media, is out to

"get" Henry Kissinger, in an effort to obliterate the disagreeable fact that the Nixon administration did, after all, have some positive accomplishments on its record—positive accomplishments identified with the person of Kissinger.

The merit of this hypothesis is that it does make sense of something that is, on its face, a riddle—namely, that it is many of the same people who are most critical of the policy of "detente" who are also the most vociferous in denouncing anything that resembles a "Cold War" strategy. One would think that it is unreasonable to be against *both* of these policies—unless, of course, your purpose is not to argue for one policy as against another, but rather to drive from office the man who is executing whichever policy.

How else explain the indignant uproar at the revelation of covert CIA activities in Chile? These activities may have been unwise—it is possible to think that a democracy should not engage in them at all—but they are hardly as unprecedented or as scandalous as they are now made out to be. When Senator Mondale declares that these revelations are "unbelievable," and when Senator Symington denounces them as "unsavory and unprincipled," we are witnessing an escalation in hypocrisy that is itself disturbing. Both of these gentlemen, of course, knew—*everyone* in Washington knew—about CIA activities in Chile; and Senator Symington, for one, was in a position to know it all in the fullest detail.

But what is even more disturbing than the hypocrisy itself is the *post-facto* myth about events in Chile which is in the process of being constructed to justify this artificial indignation. The American public is now being told, by the media and Congress alike, that the CIA in Chile was engaged in

overthrowing a democratic Socialist regime which represented the will of the Chilean people, in order to establish a right-wing military dictatorship. And this myth has the real purpose of ascribing to Henry Kissinger the kind of malevolence and abuse of power that was so evident in the Watergate affair.

Mr. Shannon's Comments

But the facts about CIA intervention in Chile are clear enough, and were aptly summarized by none other than William V. Shannon, of The New York Times' own editorial board, on September 28th:

"The CIA's objective was to prevent a pre-emptive takeover of power of Salvador Allende and the radical minority supporting him. Having polled less than two-fifths of the vote in a three-way race, he had no mandate for the Socialist program he was trying to put into effect. The lower house of Parliament censured him for violating the country's constitution. His own Marxist supporters intimidated the opposition press, bankrupted businessmen with strikes and plant seizures, organized themselves into paramilitary groups and were conspiring to seize total power."

To repeat: The CIA's involvement in covert efforts to thwart this left-wing coup

may have been unwise. But from a democratic point of view there was nothing *sinister* about them. Nevertheless, it is a sinister picture we are being given by various reporters who, in private conversations, make no bones of the fact that their goal is to "get" Henry Kissinger. And if, in the course of this noble enterprise, innocent men have to be burned at the stake, the media are willing to make the sacrifice. Thus, such an outstanding public servant as Edward Korry, our ambassador to Chile until 1971, is consistently referred to as "a Nixon administration official" and "a political appointee"—with no mention being made of the fact that Mr. Korry is a lib-

eral journalist who was originally appointed an ambassador by John F. Kennedy.

It is less difficult to comprehend Congress' role in all of this than that of the media. Congress, after all, is a political organism, and it is not astonishing that it is sometimes "political" in the worst sense of the term. From the point of view of Democrats in Congress, there is much to be gained by discrediting anyone and everyone associated with a Republican administration. Ordinarily, Congress will also remember that it shares the responsibility for governing the country. But these are no ordinary times in Washington, and Congressmen seem to find it more profitable to use their powers to prevent *anyone* from governing. The "profit," of course, takes the form of kudos from the media, which cares nothing for government and thrives on calamity.

Journalists today are extremely "idealistic," in the same sense that many college students in the '60s were "idealistic": they are not much interested in money, only in power. And "power," for the media, means the power to discredit and destroy—it is through such successes that they acquire visible signs of grace. After Watergate, the media are in a state of mind that can only be described as manic. They feverishly seek new victims, prominent ones if possible, obscure ones if necessary. There is the smell of blood in the air, and of fire and brimstone, too.

A vice chairman of the National Foundation for the Arts, a man of considerable wealth and unquestionable integrity, finds himself publicly maligned because he leased one of his homes, at a modest rental, to an old friend who happened to have been appointed a presidential assistant. Such acts of ordinary human generosity were common enough in previous administrations, and went unremarked. Today, they are *prima facie* evidence of corruption, as Governor Rockefeller is discovering to his astonishment and his sorrow.

Devouring Its Own

And, when everything else fails, the journalistic community will turn and devour its own. Jack Anderson won a Pulitzer Prize for publishing stolen government documents, but is now under a cloud because, it has been discovered, he had access to secret FBI files while he was a legman for Drew Pearson. His sin, one can only assume, is that he didn't steal these files and publish them.

Oh well: It won't last, of course. This frenzy, too, shall pass. The country needs to be governed and, in the end, it will decide to govern itself rather than continually "expose" itself to self-flagellation by looking for Watergates under its beds. In the meantime, however, all those who care to breathe the clean air are well advised to stay away from Washington.

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