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Meachum's raw 'raw deal'

History is never good enough for Roy Meachum so for his own purposes he improves on it, as in his mistitled "Raw deal" column, the raw deal he invited and attributed to the Democrats at the time of the Great Depression that began in 1929.

Meachum writes his column, half of which is on that subject he so little understands, without mention of Calvin Coolidge, the President whose policies were the direct cause of the Depression. He also blames it on the innocent people who suffered from it:

"However, in rage at having his self-inflicted balloon burst, the electorate ..."

He invents a new Herbert Hoover for his column, too, perhaps because if Hoover claimed to have been a quaker had to be good, and with it invents for Hoover what he did not have and offer any meaningful program "to alleviate the national agony."

Unlike Meachum, who admits he was an "infant" then, I was an adult. I knew the Jack Garner that Meachum blames slightly when he was vice president. (And his chauffeur he sent in his official car to West Virginia twice a week to bring back the moonshine corn whiskey Garner preferred, two wicker baskets of gallon jugs of it each trip. I worked for the Senate then. I even inherited the Hoover bookshelf when the rings from the jugs got to be unsightly. Garner was a real tough character.)

But FDR did not select Garner as his running mate because he was Speaker of the House. Real politics is not that simple. FDR picked Garner because as an ultra-conservative he could appeal to a part of the electorate that did not go for FDR, as just about all presidential candidates do.

Reagan picked liberal Republican Richard Weicker the first time and then George Bush who had, correctly as it happens, castigated Reagan's economic programs as "voodoo economics." JFK picked Johnson because he could appeal in the South as JFK did not.

Hoover's record abroad as a humanitarian was excellent. I can remember as a school boy, that we were taking canned food to school so he could feed "the starving Armenians."

But his domestic policies were the exact opposite. Witness his calling out the army to attack, shoot real bullets, at the veterans of World War I whose families were starving and they held a march on Washington from all over the country to get the bonus they had been promised and Hoover denied them. Yes, he had starving veterans of that war shot by the army when they were encamped on the Anacostia flats in an effort to pressure the Hoover administration to keep its obligation to give them the promised bonus they needed for their kids not to starve. And rather than "destroying" the non-existing Hoover program to bootstrap the nation, when he had a constructive program the Democrats in Congress voted for it.

The truth is the exact opposite of Meachum's excuse for inventing his "Raw Deal", "... the destruction congressional Democrats dealt the country while ruining Herbert Hoover's reputation." He had no reputation to ruin when after campaigning saying he would put two chickens in every pot he actually used the army to shoot starving American veterans who had fought for their country when they had the temerity to ask what was due them to feed their families, if only temporarily.

Hoover was not known here as "the great humanitarian," as Meachum writes. He was in fact known as the "great engineer." But as President he had no engineering at all to overcome what Republican policies had brought about, only heaving that same line. That and the lack of controls on getting rich without the money to back up the stocks bought while the market was climbing is the immediate cause of the Great Depression. Hoover had his share of responsibility for it and he hadn't the slightest idea how to work and lead the country out of it. That is what elected FDR, not any imagined Cactus Jack Garner leadership in the House.

And leading to that terrible depression, the Republicans controlled both houses of the Congress. They could have passed any legislation they wanted. The real "raw deal" is Meachum's in again rewriting our history for his own purposes: which not infrequently includes his telling us how all-knowing he is

about just about anything and everything. In this column he invented his "raw deal" to appear to be balanced in his criticism of the GOP's "flibustering to death last week a proposal to tighten registration and disclosure rules for all lobbyists and ban them from giving free meals and other gifts to congressmen."

In a single paragraph he refers to "the GOP" nabobs who did that as "Mr. Garner's spiritual successors" and as "Garner-like in their ambitions." Or Meachum justifies what they did to block the attempt to limit electoral dishonesties by comparing it with what he invented to attribute to Garner. Read, the Democrats.

This is like his blaming the average American for the Great Depression: "However, in rage at having the self-inflated balloon burst, the electorate dumped all over the president." — Hoover.

Most of the electorate in those days of Meachum's infancy could not afford butter, let alone stocks and bonds. They bought uncolored margarine, laddled off of blocks, with the coloring supplied separately, for about 10 cents a pound. Wages for most people were so low one of FDR's reforms with his National Recovery Administration was to have a minimum wage of \$14 a week. I can recall working Saturdays when I was in high school for \$2, from 8 a.m. until 10 p.m., brown-bagging for lunch and supper. For the average American, most by very far of Meachum's "electorate," buying stocks was like having pie in the sky. They did not and they could not.

Meachum says, "It may be pointless to speculate the raw deal unleashed by (Garner) ... may have destroyed whatever chance the nation had of heading off the gross tragedy" of the Great Depression. "Speculate" is hardly the word for it. This and the Democrats "ruining Herbert Hoover's reputation." Both of these and his other pontifications are ridiculous, preposterous.

The true "raw deal" is that trusting readers who did not live through these terrible years are misled and deceived into believing Meachum's justification of the GOP "nabobs" blocking electoral reform.

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