

by Samuel Francis

The Proletarian Weapon

No sooner had George W. Bush entered the White House and its previous occupants padded off to Harlem—with as much public swag as they could pack into the helicopters—than the news media suddenly began to discover “layoffs,” “downturns,” and a looming economic crisis that threatened to strip the flesh from the eight fat years that the great and wise Clinton administration bestowed upon us. Were the media trying to knife Mr. Bush in the back—even before he had a chance to throw out the beer cans and brassieres that the Clinton clan left behind? There is no question that the economy did suddenly begin to sour, but the new administration really could not be blamed for it, no matter how convenient its arrival on the eve of yet another romp around the business cycle.

If there is any concrete cause of the recent economic wobbles, it probably lies in what everyone now fondly terms “globalization,” the process by which nation after nation is stripped of its industrial plants, skills, jobs, and even native population and converted into a vast cow pasture where herds of former citizens and barely assimilated aliens calmly munch whatever fodder and slop is dumped in front of them: the mental diet stuffed down our maws by the organs of the dominant culture. Globalization may temporarily raise the living standards of those who experience it, but eventually—and the significance of the stories about layoffs earlier this year suggests that “eventually” is coming closer and closer—it will reduce the national level of affluence to one more typical of the Third World, enveloping the historic nation and its political and cultural identity in the global fog.

The potential metamorphosis of Americans into First World proletarians was brought to mind by a February 6 *Wall Street Journal* essay by neoconservative sage Charles Murray, coauthor (with the late Richard Herrnstein) of *The Bell Curve* and almost always a source of far more interesting ideas and insights than most of the neocon mediocrities, has-beens, and never-weres with whom

he associates. The subject of Mr. Murray’s article was the phenomenon of “proletarianization” itself.

Mr. Murray made use of Arnold J. Toynbee’s definition of the term “proletariat” rather than the better-known definition of Karl Marx, and he quoted Toynbee as arguing that, in periods of civilizational decline, the “dominant minority” or ruling class of a civilization will begin to emulate the proletariat it rules. The elite itself will abandon the duties of citizenship, “surrender to a sense of promiscuity,” and begin to exhibit styles of behavior that “are apt to appear first in the ranks of the proletariat and to spread from there to the ranks of the dominant minority, which succumbs to the sickness of ‘proletarianization.’” Mr. Murray noted as current signs of proletarian emulation the use of drugs, the popularity of rap music, the vulgarization of language, and the acceptance of sexual license (including illegitimacy), all of which are notoriously spreading up from the underclass. As the preeminent model for such behavior, he cited the repellent entertainer Eminem and, as the archetypal example of a member of the dominant minority who has adopted such behavior, none other than Bill Clinton himself. “Bill Clinton’s presidency,” he wrote,

in both its conduct and in reactions to that conduct, was a paradigmatic example of elites that have been infected by “the sickness of proletarianization.” The survival of our culture requires that we somehow contrive to get well.

As usual, Mr. Murray’s ideas provoke other ideas. There is no doubt that he is correct, though far from being the first to notice or write about it, that what is ordinarily regarded as moral and behavioral decline has crept up the social ladder and infected parts of American society outside the underclass. But, as I argued in this column last November, what appears as decline to the adherents of one civilization and its moral code is not necessarily reckoned a decline by adherents to what is trying to become a new and different civilization and morality. What pagan Romans regarded as morally nor-

mal or neutral (infanticide, homosexuality, gladiatorial games in which the contestants were forced to slaughter each other), early Christians thought abhorrent. One of the central confusions of our age is that we live in a society that is between civilizations—on the one hand, the old bourgeois, Western, and generally Christian civilization that rejects and condemns the “proletarian” behavior Mr. Murray and Toynbee describe, and, on the other, a new managerial, non-Western, and supposedly rationalist, secularist, universalist, and egalitarian civilization that often sees little wrong or “sick” in the new codes of behavior. That does not mean that the new civilization is “relativist” or rejects all morality; it rejects the old morality while trying to formulate a new moral code appropriate to itself. Of course, in the process of civilizational change, some people who are merely vicious may take advantage of the moral confusion for their own gain. That is where characters like Bill Clinton come in; it is precisely because of the moral and civilizational confusion of our times that he could so successfully try to talk his way out of his troubles by telling us that it depends on what you mean by “sex” and what you mean by “is.” A clearheaded civilization knows perfectly well the meaning of these and other words, but in times of confusion, enough *don’t* know (or disagree about) their meanings that knaves such as Mr. Clinton can get themselves off by exploiting the muddle.

Nevertheless, although the Toynbee-Murray model of proletarianization may apply to Bill Clinton and no small number of his political and business cronies, it is not clear that the concept is applicable to most members of the new managerial ruling class—the dominant minority—of American (and by extension, Western) civilization. Most members of the corporate elite, the political elite, and (with the exception of social deviates in the entertainment elite, like Eminem) the cultural elite (academics, scientists, journalists, authors, etc.) are not particularly notable for emulating the proletariat or underclass. They don’t rot their brains with drugs, catch venereal diseases from licentious sex, shoot each other over their basketball shoes, or riot in the streets when

one of their favorite television stars gets convicted or one of the celebrities they have decided to hate is acquitted. That is exactly how the underclass in American society and, indeed, in most societies behaves; and as corrupt, degenerate, arrogant, and narrow-minded as our ruling class is, most of its members don't behave that way.

The point that Mr. Murray seems to have missed—and, as insightful as he usually is, I would suggest his missing it comes from being a neoconservative who is, therefore, on the side of the ruling elite, whatever its flaws—is that proletarianization is not so much a behavioral pattern of the elite as it is a tactic by which the elite contrives to intensify and extend its domination over the nonelite strata of society. That brings us back to globalization, as well as to the culture of degeneracy Mr. Eminem represents.

The managerial elite typically (though not always) exercises power through manipulation rather than force, reflecting Machiavelli's foxes rather than lions. One of its instruments of manipulation is proletarianization itself, the process by which it destroys alternative centers of power and possible resistance by undermining social institutions and traditional patterns of belief. Economically, proletarianization takes the form of organizing the mass labor force into positions of dependency—as workers in mass factories and offices, members of mass unions, and consumers of mass-produced and mass-distributed goods and services. Once entwined in such dependency, few workers are able to mount much resistance to the policies and directives of the system without being vulnerable to retaliation—and most don't even want to. Globalization is merely a further intensification of economic as well as social proletarianization, reducing the labor force to further dependency on a foreign economic plant over which neither the workers nor any other American has control.

Socially, proletarianization takes the form of undermining and disciplining such social institutions as families, neighborhoods, locally autonomous communities, schools, religious bodies, and similar groups. Typically, the process is carried out by encouraging the growth in scale and size of such groups to the point that they can no longer be disciplined or administered by traditional, personal, local, and informal procedures; they become so large and complicated that they have to be governed by technically

skilled experts (managers). The same process takes place on the political level through the organization of politics in mass political parties, local governments that are larger and more powerful than most empires of the past, mass elections that are virtually meaningless, and the invasion of social and private institutions by the centralizing and public organs of the state. Once families, neighborhoods, churches, and schools have been so thoroughly enveloped and intimidated by state power, media scrutiny, and economic dependency that they are unable to mount even any thought of dissent—much less actual resistance—and the population has been converted from a civically active citizenry into a passive proletarian herd, the edifying cultural contributions of Eminem and his colleagues to the heritage of Western civilization are entirely predictable. What Mr. Murray calls the “thug code” becomes the ethic of the mass population that the dominant minority has subdued:

Take what you want, respond violently to anyone who antagonizes you, gloat when you win, despise courtesy as weakness, treat women as receptacles, take pride in cheating, deceiving, or exploiting successfully.

Obviously, you don't want to meet someone who abides by this code in a dark alley, but you need have no fear of him if you run into him on a battlefield, in a political contest, or in a cultural conflict. Thugs and those who live by their code cannot be rulers or even serious contestants for power because they lack the self-discipline required to get, use, and keep power; they are by nature slaves, and a ruling class able to induce such codes and behavior in its subject populations need worry very little about being overthrown.

Mr. Murray acknowledges that, as yet, only a “tiny minority” actually lives by the thug code, but he is entirely correct in saying that there can be no counterweight from the ruling elite—not because, as he argues, the elite has lost confidence in its own codes, but because the elite wants the thug code and proletarianization to prevail, does all it can to encourage it, and distrusts and hates and tries to destroy anyone who points this out, resists, or tries to uphold alternative traditional codes. The elite, the dominant minority, is the real enemy, and if you want to reverse proletarianization,

you must first rid society of its ruling class.

With all due respect to Mr. Murray, this is also something that he perhaps cannot bring himself to recognize. As a neoconservative, he is committed to the defense of American society as it is currently structured, with only minimal reforms on the formal governmental level. For the most part, the neoconservative movement has decidedly rejected, and even expressed abhorrence for, the paleoconservative view that American society is decadent, corrupt, and in decline. Paleoconservative political strategy has generally been willing to consider far more radical measures than those neocons support: the rejection of the New Deal, the dismantlement of the federal megastate, the withdrawal from Cold War international commitments and activism, the repeal of civil-rights legislation, the termination of immigration, etc. Paleoconservatives have espoused either an outright reactionary political strategy by which the current regime is replaced by another modeled on earlier systems, or a revolutionary (or, if you will, counterrevolutionary) strategy, by which a new but radically conservative system is constructed. Neoconservatives have no interest in (and usually considerable fear and dislike of) both paleo alternatives, and Mr. Murray's final sentence in his article—“the survival of our culture requires that we somehow contrive to get well”—is as true as it is unhelpful.

Of course we need to get well; but if the dominant minority that controls the government, the economy, and the culture is at the root of the disease, we cannot get well until we rid ourselves of the dominant minority. Neoconservatives, unwilling and unable to contemplate such radicalism of the right, are left with only a strategy of exhortation: Please, please don't be so proletarian; please don't be racially conscious; please believe in a color-blind society; please act like a good ruling class and not like the gang of tyrants and criminals that you are. Admittedly, paleoconservatives have failed to make much progress toward either reaction or counterrevolution; but at least they see and have constructed a body of social and political analysis that tries to make clear that the incumbent ruling class—and, for the most part, the neoconservatives who make it their business to defend that class and its system of rule—are not the solution, but the problem itself.

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Letter From Rockford

by Scott P. Richert

Not in Your Back Yard

"Why is the traffic stopped?"

"Is that a cop car?"

"Yeah, there must've been an accident."

"No, he's directing traffic. They're all waiting to get in the parking lot! The gym's going to be packed!"

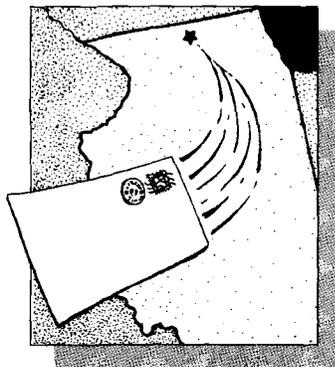
"He's not letting anyone else in," Mary says, deftly turning the minivan around in the freezing rain. She pulls off onto the shoulder, and the three of us—Mary Hitchcock, battle-weary veteran of the Rockford school wars; Mark Dahlgren, convicted tree-hugger, church organist, and unpaid mercenary in the fight for justice; and myself—dart across the road and slog through the puddles, ice, and snow in the parking lot. With each step, our little band grows; by the time we reach the door, we have to wait in line to be admitted to the ultra-modern, Columbine-style lobby of Roscoe Middle School. (A balcony overlooks a large public area with a stage at one end and only two exits; fish in a barrel, I think to myself.)

We tromp down the stairs, through the barrel, and into the hall outside the gym. After another wait to get inside, we're finally through the doors. "How many people do you think are here?" Mark asks.

"I dunno. Ask that cop what the capacity is."

The bleachers seat 900. Almost every spot is full, and schoolkids are setting up folding chairs on the edge of the court. We split up. Mark and Mary want to be close to the floor so they can wave their homemade signs; I join *Chronicles'* art director, Ward Sterett, and assistant editor, Aaron Wolf, down at the other end of the gym. A hush falls over the crowd; we take our seats as the players assemble on the court. "Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to thank you all for coming here tonight to discuss the proposed Perryville Road extension."

Back in my hometown in Michigan, only a basketball game would have made over 900 people turn out on one of the worst nights of one of the worst winters in recent memory. Here in Winnebago County, however, roads are serious business, as Tom and Jan Ditzler can attest



(see "For Keeps! A Christian Defense of Property," *Views*, May).

In the last days of December, just as the dust of the Ditzler land grab had begun to settle, Winnebago County Board Chairman Kristine O'Rourke Cohn announced that the county intended to extend Perryville Road, which currently ends at Illinois 173 just northeast of Rockford, all the way to the Wisconsin state line. The project is estimated to cost \$34 million and to take several years to complete; the county's yearly road budget, however, is only about \$3.5 million.

This discrepancy was only one of the red flags that had drawn so many people out on such a night. Every one of the five proposed routes would require the taking of at least one home, and three of them would demand the leveling of *ten* homes. (Two of those would also take a church.) Moreover, the Perryville extension would be the *fourth* major north-south road within a mile and a half, including the I-90 tollway and two Illinois highways. And, finally, considerable land along the routes is owned by large donors to local political campaigns, including William Charles Investments (parent company of local public-works contractor Rockford Blacktop) and Sunil Puri, the Bombay-born head of First Rockford Group, a major real-estate development company in Northern Illinois.

Ward, Aaron, and I are sitting behind Jan Weldon. She and her husband, Bill, live on a farm that has been in his family for over 150 years. The Perryville extension would divide it in two; the road would be only a stone's throw away from their old stone farmhouse.

Most of the meeting goes as expected: Citizens ask specific, thoughtful questions about how the construction will be

funded, what the environmental impact will be (all of the routes pass over creeks or through wetlands), and whether the county will conduct a cost-benefit analysis: county officials (with the notable exceptions of board members Pete MacKay, Polly Berg, and Larry Bauer) do their best to evade, mislead, and redirect. As Chairman Cohn explains it, the question is not *whether* Perryville will connect Rockford to Wisconsin, but *which route* it will take. She assures us that she desperately desires our input, but we have to accept the fact that the Perryville extension has been on the county's books for 40 years, and *no one* is going to stop it.

But then somebody does. As the meeting draws to a close, Tom Hawes, the supervisor of Roscoe Township (which would be divided down the middle by the Perryville extension), takes the microphone. "I've been authorized by the Township Board of Trustees to announce that Roscoe Township will not allow the Perryville extension to cross the Stone Bridge Trail." There is a scattering of applause; everyone recognizes that the township board is taking a courageous stance, though most of us assume it's a futile gesture. We only catch on as we start to leave the gym.

"Look at this map!"

"What am I supposed to see?"

"Don't you get it? *All* five of the routes cross the trail! They've stopped the road!"

We can't believe that it's all over; folks who go up against the Winnebago County government aren't used to winning their battles so easily. But out in the hall, I meet David Kurlinkus, the lawyer for Roscoe Township. He explains that the Stone Bridge Trail is protected by multiple layers of government: It was built on top of an abandoned railroad bed, so the federal government controls the railroad right-of-way; the Natural Land Institute, a Rockford-based conservation organization, owns an easement along the trail, and even if they were willing to give it up (which they aren't), they would need the permission of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the governor; and Roscoe Township owns the actual trail, and not a single trustee is willing to sell the land to the county. Most importantly, the county can only use eminent domain against private citizens, not against