the weekly Standard

APRIL 25 / MAY 2, 2011

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THE WIKILEAKS BUBBLE
JONATHAN V. LAST

UNIONSDÄMMERUNG

The tortured demise of organized labor

BY MARK HEMINGWAY

WEEKLYSTANDARD.COM

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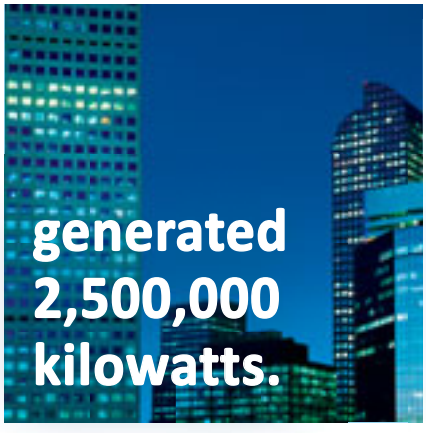

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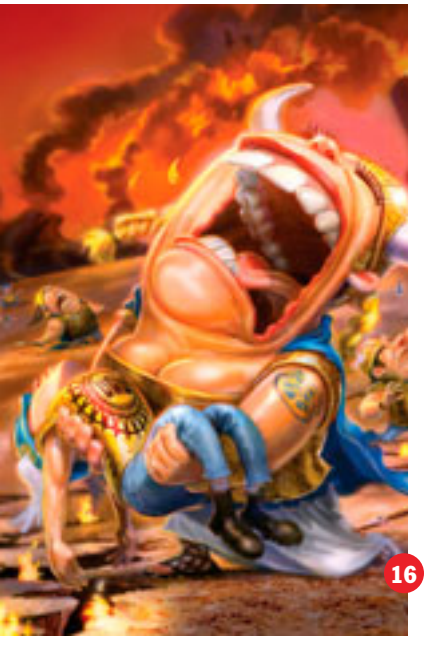

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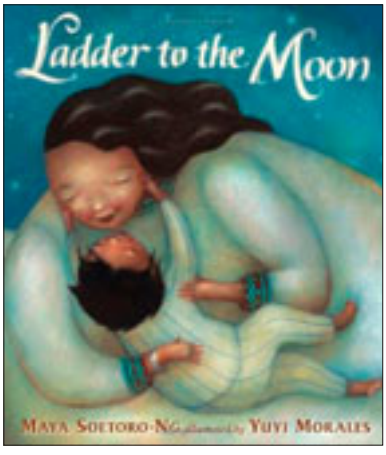
COVER BY GARY LOCKE

Of Siblings and Sycophants

The Scrapbook confesses to a certain fascination with presidential siblings. In recent decades, some have been prominent figures in their own right—Dwight Eisenhower's five brothers, the Bush and Kennedy clans—or solid citizens content to sit quietly backstage (Neil Reagan, Edward Nixon). But more than a few presidential siblings have earned the dreaded "colorful" sobriquet—evangelist Ruth Carter Stapleton, rock 'n' roller Roger Clinton—and there is also what might be called a dishonor roll of siblings who have proved embarrassing to their brothers (Donald Nixon, Billy Carter).



Barack Obama Sr. seems to have sired eight children by way of four different women, and his son the president's six surviving half-siblings have flown largely below the radar—assisted, no doubt, by the fact that most don't live in the United States. But that may soon change. The only one with anything approaching a public profile in America—maternal half-sister Maya Soetoro-Ng, who teaches in Hawaii—has just published a children's book (*Ladder to the Moon*, Candlewick, 48 pages, $16.99), based loosely on childhood experiences with Ann Dunham, the mother she shares with President Obama. Two other presidential half-siblings—Mark Obama Ndesandjo, who lives in China, and George Obama, who lives in Kenya—have lately published books as well (one novel, one memoir), although neither made much of a splash here.

Maya Soetoro-Ng seems a little more ambitious, however, than the president's far-flung half-brothers, and according to the *New York Times*, her publisher has printed a first run of 200,000 copies of *Ladder to the Moon*—not bad for a debut children's book—and has budgeted a quarter-million dollars for publicity. Soetoro-Ng is already under contract to write "a novel for young adults."

Well, The Scrapbook has some words of advice for President Obama: Hold on tight. It is possible that *Ladder to the Moon* will do well and afford Maya Soetoro-Ng a promising new career as an author of children's books. But let's not kid ourselves: It is not the quality of her work that has attracted the attention of publishers. And if *Ladder* doesn't do as well as expected, chances are better than even that its author might be gently persuaded—seven-figure advance, anyone?—to embark on a more viable commercial venture, such as a painfully honest personal memoir of the Obama family.

In that respect, The Scrapbook is reminded of our favorite presidential sibling of modern times, Sam Houston Johnson (1914-1978), Lyndon Johnson's younger brother, whose persistent drunkenness and public misbehavior in Washington prompted President Johnson to move him into the White House, where he could keep an eye on him.

Lyndon's defensive patronage was rewarded, however, the year after he left office, when Sam Houston published a ghostwritten tell-all memoir, *My Brother Lyndon*, to the ex-president's intense mortification. Interviewed on television one evening by the oleaginous David Frost, Sam Houston was asked to expand on a passage in the book where he complained about his inability to penetrate his brother's protective ring of "sycophants."

In a scene that must always serve as a cautionary tale for people whose names are put on books they haven't written, Sam Houston Johnson allowed that he couldn't readily answer Frost's question because he didn't know the meaning of the word "sycophant." ♦

The Obama Reviews

Not for the first time, The Scrapbook has suffered through an Obama speech (his discourse on the budget last week), read the press notices, and concluded that the mainstream media watch our president's orations through special "hope and change" 3-D glasses that we weren't wearing. What we saw was Obama grimacing his way through a petulant and demagogic attack on Paul Ryan's budget plan, looking like he had lunched on some rhubarb from the first lady's vegetable garden without putting enough sugar on it. The applause was infrequent, but it was tepid.

The *New York Times*, however, saw a "reinvigorated" Obama. "The man America elected president has reemerged," according to the *Times*. And the previously critical *Washington Post* editorialists described the speech as "an important and welcome contribution to the debate over deficit reduction. . . . Sorely needed presidential engagement on the nation's fiscal crisis has arrived at last."

As we say, they must have tuned in

to the speech on a special, reality-distorting Obamavision channel, which The Scrapbook does not receive as part of its basic cable package.

We were moved by these discrepant reactions to revisit the early reviews of a couple of memorable presidential speeches past. After Jimmy Carter's infamous "malaise speech," on July 15, 1979, now widely understood to have been one of the lowest points of his presidency, the *New York Times* helpfully reported the next day that "Carter Speech Scores in a Midwest TV Poll" and that "Business Praises Carter Concept But Awaits Energy Plan Details." House speaker Tip O'Neill, meanwhile, was "Confident Congress and People Will Respond" (which, of course, they did, just not the way he hoped).

Then there was President Reagan's unveiling of the Strategic Defense Initiative, the so-called "Star Wars" speech of March 23, 1983. Arguably, this speech led in a more or less straight line to victory in the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union eight years later. Herewith a sample of the alarmed *New York Times* headlines in the two days following the historic speech: "Aides Urged Reagan to Postpone Antimissile Ideas for More Study"; "Scientists Dubious over Missile Plan"; "Democrats Assert Reagan Is Using 'Star Wars' Scare to Hide Blunders"; and, The Scrapbook's favorite, "Soviet Sees a Treaty Violation in Arms Proposed by Reagan."

Clearly, when it comes to press reviews of presidential speeches, early reactions are no guarantee of future performance. ♦

Cristing in the Wind

It's hardly unusual to see a politician on YouTube—the Internet and social media are essential tools for campaigning these days. What is unusual is to see a politician groveling on YouTube, and yet, it's clear that he's secretly hoping no one is watching.

So it is with Charlie Crist, who took to YouTube last week to apologize to musician David Byrne, formerly of the Talking Heads. It seems that sometime last year Crist ran a political ad using the Talking Heads' 1985 hit "Road to Nowhere" in a campaign ad. (Presumably the song was not in reference to Crist's ill-fated campaign for the Florida Senate seat won by Marco Rubio.)

Byrne sued Crist for $1 million, but the rock icon obviously doesn't need the money. So as part of the terms of an undisclosed settlement, Crist offered up a public apology, posted on YouTube. "The use of David Byrne's song and his voice in my campaign advertisement without his permission was wrong and should not have occurred," said Crist.

USA Today helpfully notes that Crist "appears to be reading from a script," though those lucky enough to have seen the video know that's quite the understatement. The vibe is more one of a man who's being held hostage by gun-toting FARC terrorists, just off camera.

The Scrapbook owns a number of Talking Heads albums, and we can well understand why Byrne would feel compelled to stand up for his intellectual property rights. Though we would note that it's curious that musicians only seem to object when non-Democrats use their music for campaign purposes—it wasn't that long ago that Jackson Browne sued the McCain campaign for using "Running on Empty."

Still, after watching Crist's aban-

donment of the Republican party and many of the principles he once espoused in order to selfishly extend his career in a quixotic third-party campaign, we must admit we rather enjoyed watching his apology, warranted or not. If you feel the same, fire up your favorite browser and enjoy a nice tall glass of schadenfreude. If watching Charlie Crist awkwardly apologize is wrong, we don't want to be right. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

"I'm not a negotiation specialist, so I don't really know who's right here. But what's always seemed obvious . . ." (Ezra Klein, "Why didn't the Democrats include the debt ceiling in the tax deal?" Washingtonpost.com, April 12.) ♦

Satire Alert

A choice item from the April 13 edition of *The Onion*:

Obama Orders Guantánamo Prisoners Transferred To Next President: WASHINGTON—After two years of false starts and protracted legal wrangling, President Barack Obama signed an executive order Tuesday authorizing the transfer of all 172 Guantánamo detainees to the next chief executive of the United States of America. "The president's bold decision to move these enemy combatants to the subsequent administration should finally quiet critics who have accused him of inaction and impotence concerning this issue," White House press secretary Jay Carney said. . . . "This will not be an easy process by any means, but all of the detainees should be transferred by 2012, or 2016 at the very latest." ♦

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Ginger Man

As an editor, I pay a certain amount of attention to centennials, bicentennials, sesquicentennials, and the like. This year, for example, is the centennial of the birth of William Golding, Spike Jones, and Hubert Humphrey and the sesquicentennial of the firing on Fort Sumter. But I was momentarily taken aback not long ago when I realized that it is also Ginger Rogers's centennial.

Of course, Fred Astaire's dance partner is a generation older than I—for the record, I was born the week before her 39th birthday—and I never had anything remotely resembling a romantic interest in her. But I developed a youthful appreciation for Ginger Rogers, and for two distinct reasons: one perverse, one less so.

The perverse reason is that, for whatever cause, my parents strongly disapproved of Ginger Rogers—she had probably supported General Eisenhower in 1952 instead of Adlai Stevenson—and anybody on the household *librorum prohibitorum* aroused a sympathetic interest in me. The other reason is that, very nearly alone among my contemporaries in the Swinging Sixties, I had a taste for the popular culture, especially the music, of the 1930s and immersed myself in Fats Waller, old issues of *Life*, and Busby Berkeley's movie musicals. I was introduced to Ginger Rogers in *42nd Street* (1933), where she had a secondary role as the chorus girl Anytime Annie ("She only said 'no' once and then she didn't hear the question"). Blonde, wisecracking Ginger seemed to personify the spirit of the age.

Let us move forward a decade or so, and I am toiling away at *U.S. News & World Report* as an exceedingly junior reporter/editor, under the thumb of an especially disagreeable boss. There was a newspaper advertisement to the effect that Ginger Rogers (!) would be making a promotional appearance at a Washington department store the next day around lunchtime. It should be explained that, in the early 1970s, Washington was well off the beaten track for Hollywood types, and lunch hours at *U.S. News* were measured with rigorous precision. But I calculated that, splurging on taxis, I could rush to Woodward & Lothrop and back without jeopardizing my employment.

GETTY / KOBAL FOUNDATION

The next day I brought to the office some old *42nd Street* sheet music that featured a portrait of Ginger Rogers as Anytime Annie, surrounded by suitable art deco graphics, ideal for inscription. What I hadn't calculated, however, was that this was during the height of the Watergate crisis, and at the very moment Ginger was extolling the virtues of such-and-such perfume at Woodies, I was obliged to watch a minor figure in the scandal, Herbert Kalmbach, plead guilty in the federal courthouse.

So it was painful, thereafter, to play any tunes from that album of sheet music and see the picture that Ginger Rogers hadn't signed. But then, after a decade of frustration had passed, I simply mailed the picture to her ranch in Oregon, along with an explanatory letter—and was kindly rewarded with a fulsome inscription and a second signed portrait: "This extra is for your patience and persistence," she wrote.

Which ends the saga nicely—except, of course, that Ginger Rogers and I had still not met. Nor did years of living in Los Angeles lift the burden: There were one or two occasions when, once again, I missed a chance to see her around town; and I had no excuse to interview her since somebody at the *Los Angeles Times* had already drafted her advance obituary.

Indeed, it was not until I moved back to Washington in the early 1990s, and Ginger Rogers was a year or two away from death, that our paths finally crossed. It was a small luncheon in her honor at the National Press Club, and, ever the importunate fan, I brought along a copy of her recent autobiography (*Ginger: My Story*, 1991). By this time, of course, Anytime Annie was a decidedly elderly woman, and I was no longer a youthful admirer. She seemed to be immensely frail—I have a recollection of her being in a wheelchair—and her mind, shall we say, seemed slightly less acute than in years past.

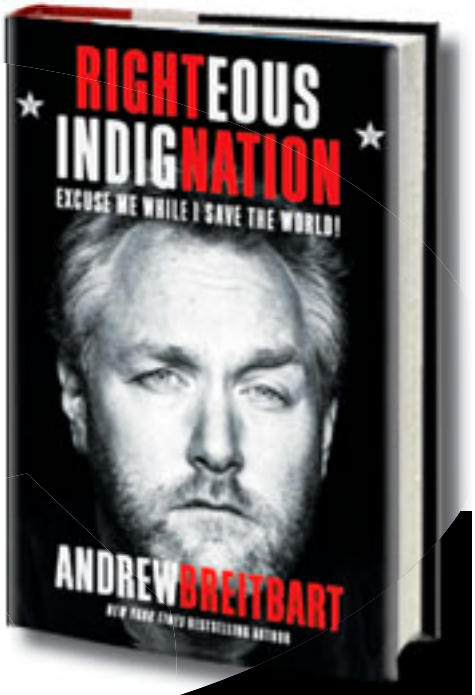
But she looked and sounded like Ginger Rogers, exuded the air of an old-fashioned movie star, and was certainly in a capacious mood. She was moved to tears by one tribute paid by an old promoter, and I was shrewd enough to sit beside her young female secretary, who soon invited me to meet her boss.

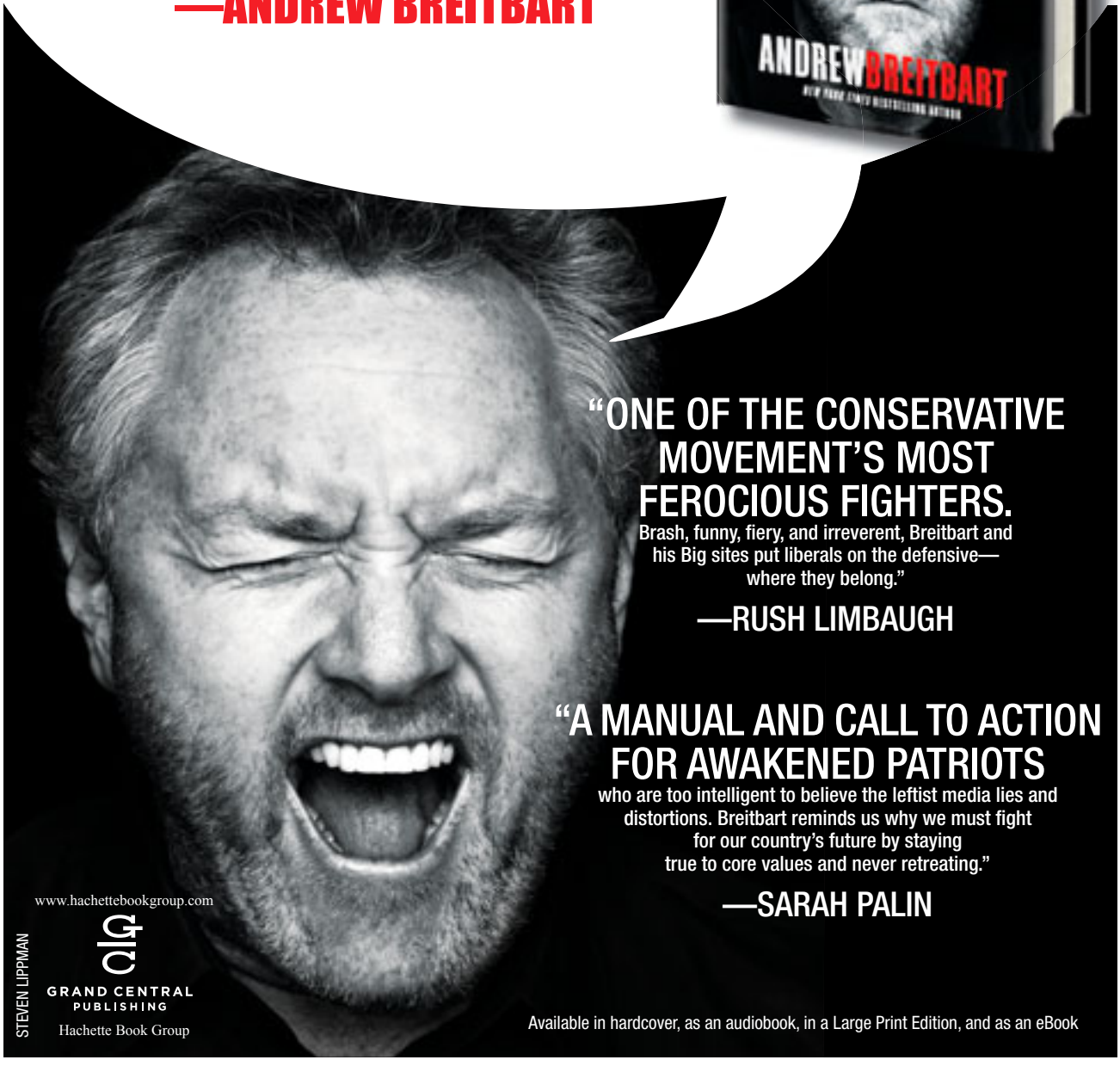
This would have been the culmination of a lifelong quest—except that I was suffering from laryngitis that day and could barely speak. Indeed, I managed to croak a few appreciative syllables, which I doubt she understood; but she did sign her memoir with a lavish inscription and smiled benignly at my gestures of thanks. She couldn't walk, and I couldn't talk, but I danced with Ginger Rogers, figuratively speaking, for a moment.

Philip Terzian

"The left made me do it! I swear!"

—ANDREW BREITBART





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the weekly Standard

Paul Ryan's America

It's a vision that says up to 50 million Americans have to lose their health insurance in order for us to reduce the deficit. Who are these 50 million Americans? Many are somebody's grandparents, maybe one of yours, who wouldn't be able afford nursing home care without Medicaid. Many are poor children. Some are middle-class families who have children with autism or Down's syndrome. Some are kids with disabilities . . . so severe that they require 24-hour care. These are the Americans we'd be telling to fend for themselves.

—President Barack Obama, April 13, 2011

Robert Bork's America is a land in which women would be forced into back-alley abortions, blacks would sit at segregated lunch counters, rogue police could break down citizens' doors in midnight raids, schoolchildren could not be taught about evolution, writers and artists would be censored at the whim of the government, and the doors of the Federal courts would be shut on the fingers of millions of citizens. . . .

—Senator Edward Kennedy, July 1, 1987

Sorcerer and apprentice

AP IMAGES

Some things never change. Take American liberalism (please!). Thirty years ago there was the sweet talk of the dream that shall never die. Two years ago there was the uplifting promise of hope and change. But when the political rubber meets the road, when there's a possibility the left will lose power, then . . . then, between the idea and the reality, falls the shadow. The shadow that reveals the truth about modern liberalism is dark. It's about nightmares, not dreams. It's about fearful clinging rather than hopeful changing. It's about pandering and slandering rather than explaining and arguing.

The fear-mongering worked in 1987. Robert Bork, one of the great lawyers of our time, playing by the then-customary rules of Supreme Court nominations, didn't feel he could defend himself, and wasn't aggressively defended by his political allies. But even though Bork's nomination was defeated, Kennedy's assault didn't work in a larger sense—George H.W. Bush won the presidency in 1988, Newt Gingrich became speaker in 1995, and conservatives did pretty well politically for most of the rest of Edward Kennedy's life.

Until 2006, that is, when for various reasons voters turned against the Bush administration and the Republican Congress. Barack Obama rode that anti-Republican wave to the presidency in 2008. But a good look at liberalism unchecked under Barack Obama has reminded Americans of the liberalism of Edward Kennedy, and sent lots of them fleeing—including in Massachusetts, in the election for Kennedy's Senate seat (or rather, the "people's seat"). What's more, in the last couple of years, Americans have taken a second look at conservatism—and they have found, for the most part, a refreshed and renewed political persuasion that is serious about our problems and eager to shape the future.

Barack Obama is as befuddled by this new conservatism as Edward Kennedy was by Ronald Reagan. So he's playing the Kennedy card, the over-the-top assault on the decency of one's political opponents, which—it's presumed—will work because . . . well, because where there's smoke there's got to be fire, correct?

Not necessarily. In this case, we suspect, it will be clear to most Americans that Barack Obama is blowing smoke. The budget numbers, the spending numbers, the deficit numbers do not lie. There's no longer a one-party media quasi-monopoly that makes it as easy to cover up reality as might have been the case 25 years ago. And Paul Ryan will defend himself in a way Robert Bork could not. Today's conservatives will counterpunch in a way the late Reagan administration was unable to.

It's going to be a heck of a battle over the next year and a half. There will be twists and turns, progress and setbacks, differences in strategy and arguments over tactics among conservatives and Republicans. But we are confident in the outcome.

Paul Ryan, the leader for now—and perhaps not just for now—of those arrayed against the forces of liberal distortion and slander, was 17 years old when Bork was denied a seat on the Supreme Court. The issues, the people, and

the circumstances of the two eras are different. But perhaps those of us who are old enough to have seen close up the character assassination of Bork, and are still young enough to want to help fight those who are attempting to repeat the exercise against Paul Ryan and others, may be allowed to express with a sense of urgency the imperative: not again. No more victories for liberal demagoguery and fear-mongering. This is no longer Edward Kennedy's America.

—William Kristol

The Incredible Shrinking Obama

Barack Obama's budget address last week ranks among the most dishonest and dishonorable presidential speeches in generations. It contained an avalanche of false and misleading statements. It was shallow and bitterly partisan. Yet the speech served a useful purpose: It provided the American people in general, and Republicans in particular, with the basic line of attack President Obama will use between now and the 2012 election.

GARY LOCKE

The White House strategy is clear: argue that Obama wants to restore fiscal balance by raising taxes on "millionaires and billionaires" while those who don't favor higher taxes on the wealthy are fundamentally unserious. As a political matter, of course, class warfare does not have a particularly successful track record. But, to keep it that way, Republicans need to provide a compelling response to the Obama strategy. Fortunately such a response exists.

Obama's argument is built on sand. A tax increase on the wealthy would fall far short of the revenues needed to reverse our fiscal trajectory. Our budget problems are significantly worse today than they were in the 1990s. There are not nearly enough wealthy people in the nation to tax in order to tame our debt. If the president wants higher taxes to improve our fiscal imbalance, he will need to embrace a massive middle-class tax increase and/or a value added tax (VAT). But Obama hasn't shown the slightest preference for that option. It's pure fiction to pretend that higher taxes on those making more than $200,000 will make much of a dent in our debt, given the size of our long-term spending problem. Obama's argument isn't with Republicans. It's with basic arithmetic.

Republicans need to unmask the philosophy guiding modern liberalism when it comes to taxes. What liberals are interested in isn't growth so much as egalitarianism and redistribution for its own sake. For many on the left, increasing taxes isn't about economics as much as morality. They believe taxing the wealthy is a virtue, to the point that they would penalize "the rich" even if that has harmful economic consequences. Recall that during a campaign debate, when asked by Charles Gibson about his support for raising capital gains taxes even if that caused a net revenue *loss* to the Treasury, Obama sided with tax increases "for purposes of fairness."

Higher taxes would keep our current welfare state in place for only a little while longer. The entitlement apparatus would remain unsustainable. Tax increases might slightly delay, but could not forestall, a fiscal crack-up. The only thing that can is reconfiguring and restructuring our entitlement programs, most especially Medicare. That is what Paul Ryan's plan does—and what President Obama's budget avoids doing.

The point cannot be made often enough: Modern liberalism, as embodied in the Obama presidency, is the defender of the status quo. And the status quo is a road to economic ruin.

It is important for Republicans to put this debate in the right frame. Left unaddressed, our crushing burden of debt will cripple the American economy. Yet the aim of conservatism isn't simply lower deficits and debt. It's also limited government and a thriving society. A leviathan state is injurious because of its effect on civic character, because it undermines self-reliance and creates dependency. And this, in turn, results in an enervation of the entrepreneurial spirit that is necessary for innovation and prosperity.

Barack Obama has amassed a dismal economic record as president. (Former senator Phil Gramm points out that if Barack Obama had matched Ronald Reagan's post-recession recovery rate, 15.7 million more Americans would have jobs.) Obama can't campaign on his record—so he's betting his reelection chances on stoking embers of anger and resentment. That's about all that's left of hope and change.

—Peter Wehner

In Defense of Defense

In his budget speech last week, Barack Obama mounted his third attack on U.S. defense spending. In 2009 the White House directed Defense Secretary Robert Gates to terminate more than $300 billion in weapons programs, including the F-22 Raptor, the world's most capable aircraft, and the Army's Future Combat Systems family of vehicles. This past year, Gates volunteered $100 billion in Pentagon "efficiencies," for which the administration rewarded him by slicing off another $78 billion. Now the president proposes to subtract an additional $400 billion from future military budgets. Defense is the one government activity that Obama has no qualms about cutting.

By every measure, the armed forces of the United States have been "doing more with less" for more than two decades. The number of Americans on active duty has been reduced by a third. Reservists have helped pick up the burden of repeated deployments. Reagan-era weapons have been refitted with new electronics, new munitions, and employed in innovative ways. A force built to blunt a Soviet thrust through the Fulda Gap on the north German plain has reinvented itself to master the requirements of persistent irregular warfare and to address the "anti-access" challenges posed by China and Iran. But a nation cannot long secure itself or its interests if its defense "planning" depends upon genius generalship, unending sacrifice by lieutenants, captains, and NCOs, and constant deployment of rapidly aging planes, ships, and vehicles. In war, you usually get what you pay for.

The path charted by the president is morally and strategically unsound. Obama argued that entitlement cuts would "[change] the basic social compact in America," and vowed to defend the status quo. Yet he is prepared to take risks with the social compact between the civilian majority and the extremely few Americans—less than one percent of us—who risk their lives and kill our enemies in our name. The basic compact of the "All-Volunteer Force" is not simply that people in uniform will be paid decently and their families cared for. It also presumes that our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines will have the wherewithal to win whatever battle they are sent to fight.

Thus far, the president has relied on the credibility of his defense secretary to soothe fears about defense cuts. In his deficit speech, Obama blithely called on Gates to "do that again," even though the White House dropped its $400 billion budget bomb on the Pentagon with only 24 hours' warning. The White House did offer Gates a bureaucratic fig leaf in the form of a "comprehensive review," but that review, like the administration's recent Quadrennial Defense Review, will be a process with one purpose: meet the budget target.

Meanwhile, congressional Republicans are struggling to balance their commitment to a strong defense with their desire to reduce the government overall. Thus Rep. Paul Ryan's deficit-reduction plan adopted what, until this week, had been Obama's defense numbers. But now the House leadership will have to decide whether to accept Obama's new proposed cuts or fight back. This is indeed a defining moment for conservatism: Is it still a Reaganite movement?

Last August, Gates confessed that his "greatest fear is that in economic tough times people will see the defense budget as the place to solve the nation's deficit problems, to find money for other parts of the government." Gates understood that there are consequences to balancing the budget on the backs of our soldiers:


Air Force F-22 Raptors

> As I look around the world and see . . . more failed and failing states, countries that are investing heavily in their militaries . . . as I look at the new kinds of threats emerging from cyber to precision ballistic and cruise missiles and so on, my greatest worry is that we will do to the defense budget what we have done four times before. And that is, slash it in an effort to find some kind of a dividend to put the money someplace else. I think that would be disastrous in the world environment we see today and what we're likely to see in the years to come.

The president Gates serves is charting a course to realize his fears and worries. The Republican party should choose a different path.

—Thomas Donnelly

Obama vs. Ryan, Round Two

The president takes the low road.

BY FRED BARNES

Paul Ryan, architect of the Republican budget for 2012, sat in the front row at George Washington University as President Obama delivered his thoughts on the deficit, debt, and Ryan's spending plan. The White House had seated him there, directly in front of the president.

Obama spoke for 43 minutes. As he turned from side to side, from one teleprompter to the other, he never made eye contact with Ryan. Nor did he speak to Ryan before or after his speech.

Yet the president devoted a significant chunk of his address to denouncing Ryan's budget as unserious and close to being un-American. It "would lead to a fundamentally different America . . . than what we've known throughout our history," Obama said. Not only that, but Ryan would let crumbling roads and collapsed bridges go unfixed and autistic and disabled kids would have "to fend for themselves."

Politics shouldn't consist of happy talk. But this was vicious and untrue. It was like forcing a parent to watch his child get tortured. Obama later played down his criticism. "It was not so much a critique," he told George Stephanopoulos of ABC News, as "it was a description of what they've proposed." True, it wasn't a critique. It was a smear.

Following the speech, an aide to Ryan contacted the budget office at the White House. The president had been vague about how he'd achieve his goals for cutting spending and reducing debt. So the Ryan staffer asked for specifics. Where did the numbers come from? What were the assumptions? What was the spending baseline? Could the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) calculate the cost of Obama's plan?

He got no answers. The Ryan aide was referred to the president's budget, released in February, a budget the speech seemed to supersede. For more information, he was told to contact the White House press office, which pointed him to a "fact sheet." It was a press release with few facts.

Where does this leave the struggle to curb spending, reform entitlements, and avert a fiscal crisis? Prospects for a grand compromise between Obama and Republicans, starting with the 2012 budget, have worsened. Obama has lurched to the left, skipping over the middle. Assuming he sticks to the line he took in his speech, coming together on a budget may be impossible.

Obama refuses to lead. He's uncomfortable with active presidential leadership, either at home or abroad. He's assigned Vice President Biden to meet with a bipartisan group of 16 congressional leaders to work out an agreement. Negotiations are to begin in early May when Congress returns from a two-week recess.

Republicans are understandably leery. The president established his own debt commission headed by Erskine Bowles and Alan Simpson and ignored its recommendations. Now a Biden Commission? Republicans will probably have to join. If they shun Biden, they'll be pilloried

DAVE MALAN

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

by Democrats and the media.

Another commission would be unnecessary had Obama revised his budget along the lines of his speech and sent it to Congress. Republicans on the Senate Budget Committee have urged Obama to do so "in a form that can be reviewed and analyzed by members of Congress and estimated by the Congressional Budget Office."

Obama, instead, has chosen to muddy the situation. The goals in his speech were put in a 12-year time frame, not the normal 10 years. Ryan's Republican budget covers 10 years and got a full CBO frisk. Obama's February budget claimed savings of $1 trillion, but CBO said it would increase the deficit by $2.3 trillion. A 12-year spending plan may confound CBO's ability to assess it. In fact, that's likely the intention behind it.

"Why don't we just do our jobs?" Ryan asked at a forum of the economic study group e21. "These are the times where you need leaders to step up and lead, not follow. These are times where, on the biggest ideas of our day, we should not be delegating decisions to other people. . . . Who knows what this Biden Commission will do."

While thrilling liberal Democrats, Obama's speech tightened Republican unity. House speaker John Boehner had trouble rallying Republicans to vote for the bipartisan budget deal he negotiated for the final months of fiscal year 2011. Fifty-nine Republicans voted no, amid media rumbles about dissatisfaction with his leadership.

The success of the Ryan budget gave a boost to Boehner. It sailed through, 235-193, with 4 Republican dissenters. "If the president won't lead, we will," Boehner said. On the debt limit, he said, "let me be clear. There will be no debt limit increase unless it is accompanied by meaningful spending cuts and budget reforms."

Ryan likes to remind folks of Obama's visit in January 2010 to the House Republican retreat in Baltimore. The president was wearing his bipartisan suit as he spoke to Ryan from the podium. Ryan was in the audience, with his wife and kids.

"We're not going to be able to do anything about any of these entitlements if what we do is characterize whatever proposals are put out there as, 'Well, you know, that's the other party being irresponsible. The other party is trying to hurt our senior citizens."

That Obama—a fake one, it turns out—would have disagreed with Ryan on entitlements without bludgeoning him. No more. Now he opposes Ryan's reform of Medicare because it "leaves seniors at the mercy of the insurance industry, with a shrinking benefit to pay for rising costs." And he's unleashed House Democrats. Nancy Pelosi said Ryan would "abolish" Medicare. Ed Markey of Massachusetts said GOP stands for "get old people." John Garamendi said Republicans would cause "the death of Medicare" and throw "senior citizens to the sharks."

Ryan refers to the president as "disinvolved." And though Obama is hiding behind Biden, there will be an Obama-Ryan debate, only indirect and from a distance. It's already on. Ryan released his budget. Obama's speech was his response. Ryan criticized the speech, then Obama took potshots at Ryan.

They agree, as Obama told Stephanopoulos, that we "are at a fork in the road here." Ryan said it better in his speech on the House floor before the budget vote. "This is our generation's defining moment," he said. "We must not leave this nation in decline. We must not be the Congress that failed to fulfill the American legacy of leaving a better nation to our children."

Ryan would accept an invitation for a one-on-one talk with Obama. "Of course I would," he told me. He's not holding his breath. "I don't think that's how it works with the White House," he says. "I just don't think they do that." Not face-to-face anyway, with eye contact and honest discussion. ♦

Budget Gamesmanship

The Republicans are winning the deficit debate.

BY TOD LINDBERG

There's a truism of budgeting that goes: The player who makes the first move always loses. That's because the player with the second move has the opportunity to focus on the drawbacks of what the first player proposed. It's one reason why some Republicans were nervous about House GOP budget chairman Paul Ryan's determination to release a detailed, long-range proposal to curb spending, including cost-cutting reforms to major entitlement programs. Here was an opening for Obama to counter—as he did last week, to the evident delight of his liberal base.

In this case, however, budgetary game theory is being wrongly applied. The Ryan proposal was not, in fact, the first move. The first move was Obama's February budget submission—the one that portrayed trillion-dollar deficits dancing toward an infinite horizon to the tune of "Don't Worry, Be Happy."

Obama ignored the fiscal predicament in which we find ourselves, and it was not just Republicans who called him on it (the *Washington Post*, for one, called him the "Punter-in-chief"). Meanwhile, on Capitol

Tod Lindberg, a research fellow at the Hoover Institution and editor of Policy Review, *is a contributing editor to* The Weekly Standard.

Hill, the GOP House was pressing for budget cuts as the price of a continuing resolution to fund the government through fiscal year 2011. Although the final result included a generous amount of the usual Washington budgetary flim-flam, when the dealing was done, just days after Ryan unveiled his proposal, Obama and Senate majority leader Harry Reid were busy praising themselves for the budget-cutters they had supposedly become. The joint statement between House speaker John Boehner and Reid announcing "an historic amount of cuts for the remainder of this fiscal year . . . $78.5 billion below the president's 2011 budget proposal" is something you are more likely to find framed on Boehner's office wall than on Reid's or Obama's.

What's remarkable is how far the left pole of the Washington budget debate has moved to the right in the past few months. The president's base may have been mollified when he came out swinging against Ryan, proffering a counterproposal short on spending cuts outside of defense and long on tax increases. But that was rhetoric, and its purpose was first and foremost to mollify a base grown very nervous, for good reason. The political reality Obama has to deal with is the budget-cutting demands not just of Republicans but of worried red-state Democrats contemplating their electoral chances in 2012.

The first indication of the rightward movement of the left pole came in December, with Obama's acquiescence to the extension of all the Bush-era tax cuts for another two years. The GOP had just won big in the midterm elections, and there was no practical way to jam through Obama's preferred policy—i.e., raising the rates for top earners. (Democrats had forfeited their chance to pass their druthers on a simple majority vote in the Senate when they failed to approve a 2011 budget resolution.)

Then again, cutting taxes, or not raising them, is fairly easy politically. It's what Republicans do when they have sufficient power, and they always bring some centrist Democrats along with them. On the flip side, when Democrats have clout, they increase spending. When the two sides have to work together, the simplest path to "compromise" is for Democrats to let the GOP have tax cuts and Republicans to give in to Democrats on spending.

That is not the current environment, which has taken a turn for the worse for Democrats. Obama has proposed high-level negotiations aimed at a "balanced" grand bargain including tax increases and spending restraint. In his budget speech, he praised previous such deals, including the 1990 agreement between George H.W. Bush and the Democratic Congress. Republicans mainly remember that as the beginning of the end of Bush 41. Obama would have to be delusional to think he can get an agreement to increase

taxes out of the current House of Representatives.

So the real purpose is other. Clearly, Obama envisions substantially higher overall taxation as the path to fiscal responsibility. That's what he means by "balanced." On this, we should take him at his word. And he has a path to get there, if he is willing to let all the Bush tax cuts expire at the end of 2012. He doesn't even need to win reelection—though if he loses, presumably the first action of the new GOP president would be to sign legislation reinstating the Bush tax rates.

So perhaps the real purpose of the budget talks now is for them to fail, thereby allowing Obama to avoid cutting spending, or as he likes to say, to protect his investments in "winning the future." In this scenario—which, interestingly, both the Democratic and GOP bases relish—what unfolds is a great debate over the fundamental purpose and scope of government. It's a debate both sides think they can win.

Except that this great debate is occurring at a time of generally acknowledged serious fiscal imbalance and economic weakness. The president has conceded his concern. He tried to be blasé about it in the first move of this year's budget game, but it didn't work out for him. He agreed in the end to accept a budget deal for this year with spending cuts. He says there are other areas that can be cut (even if he doesn't mean it or doesn't want to act on it). It will be up to Republicans to press him by putting forward spending reductions *outside* the context of a grand deal. They will have ample opportunity.

True, the result will not be entitlement reform on a Ryanesque scale. And whatever Republicans propose, Obama will deem excessive. But the president will find a "no cutting" position exceedingly difficult to defend. The most likely outcome will be an argument over how much gets cut. The terms of reference of such an argument will be a powerful indicator of how badly the liberal Democratic position has deteriorated.

That's not to say that profligacy didn't have its day. With a little help from the outgoing Bush administration, the government burned through several trillions in borrowing that might otherwise have helped cushion the Baby Boom retirement bulge. But the current political environment seems to be prohibitive for those who would like to deny the reality of the fiscal problem. Obama tried that, and it was a losing strategy. He will now have to cut more spending—while making the case for a very large tax increase that is either going nowhere or is going to land by default on everybody who enjoyed lower rates thanks to George W. Bush.

The left and right poles of the debate are well-positioned for Republicans. ♦

A Spreading Revolt in Syria

Is Assad losing his grip?

BY TONY BADRAN

AP / MUZAFFAR SALMAN

Anti-Assad demonstrators in Damascus: The protests now extend throughout the country.

With the popular uprising in Syria completing its first month, protests against Bashar al-Assad's regime have spread to encompass most Syrian regions and cities, including now the capital, Damascus. On Friday, April 15, crowds from surrounding suburbs swarmed the city, heading downtown to Abbasiyyin Square where the police fired on protesters and closed all roads and entrances leading toward the square.

Now that the protests have hit Damascus, the regime is virtually encircled. Presumably, Bashar and key officials close to him, like his brother Maher, are contemplating when, how, and where to bring enough violence to bear to crush Syria's Arab Spring.

Maybe it's already too late for the

Tony Badran is a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

regime. Some observers are wondering why Assad hasn't delivered the death blow to the uprising. After all, his father Hafez famously killed upward of 20,000 back in 1982 to quell a Sunni uprising in the city of Hama. It's worth noting that the residents of Hama have gone to the streets again this time—even though almost everything else has changed.

Three decades ago, it took several weeks before the news of Hafez's mass murder reached even Beirut. And as rumor of the violence made that short trip just over the nearby Anti-Lebanon mountain range, the massacre acquired a sort of mythical status: What mere mortals would dare take on these legendary butchers who laid waste to a whole town to prove they would do anything to remain in power?

Today it's different. The advent of cell phones with video capabilities that give virtually everyone the ability to document history makes it far riskier for any regime to fill the streets of a medium-sized Arab city with blood, lest it capture the attention of the international community. To date the Obama administration still seems to be protecting Damascus, regarding it as a central pillar in its Middle East strategy—wedging Syria away from Iran and jump-starting the peace process—but with that kind of bloodshed the White House would be forced to turn on Assad.

Perhaps even more important is the effect that YouTube has on the protesters themselves. Who could have anticipated that the bloodshed captured on video not only would fail to deter the protesters, but rather would help inspire them? Here, it seems, the new social media dovetails perfectly with traditional Arab cultural values.

The protests first erupted in the southern city of Dara, where the regime unleashed its brutality on the opposition. However, these tactics failed to quell the uprising. Indeed, subsequent Fridays brought more people to the streets—as did every funeral procession for murdered victims. Dara is in a tribal region, and each murder of one of its sons incurred another blood debt, and mobilized more of the province's people against the regime—while it also inspired solidarity rallies in other towns, near Dara and beyond.

It was when the protests broke out in cities along the Mediterranean coast that the Assad clan first knew it was in trouble. Latakia, Tartus, and Baniyas are mixed cities in the Alawite heartland, where the Assad family, also Alawite, makes its home. These towns are mixed, with heavy concentrations of Sunnis. If the bloody repression in predominantly Sunni Dara featured the Alawite-dominated security forces killing Sunnis, the uprising in the coastal region would throw into sharp relief the fact the regime can no longer claim the unquestioned support of its very own heartland. The inability to subdue what is essentially the Alawites' capital could signal that casting off Alawite dominance is a realistic possibility. For an embattled minoritarian clique, deeply paranoid of encirclement, having the protests spread to and take root in its own backyard presented a critical challenge. A line had to be drawn here, and Assad employed a full array of tactics.

After the Ministry of Interior issued a statement that there would be "no more room for leniency or tolerance," Assad ordered Baniyas surrounded with tanks, cut off all food, water, and medical supplies to the town, and unleashed his paramilitary thugs, *shabbiha*, along with the security forces, who assaulted the protesters, killing and wounding many, and rounding up many more.

At the same time, the regime's propaganda played on the sectarian anxieties of the Alawites as well as those of the Christians, another minority. The regime claimed that in Baniyas a group of Sunni Islamists had declared jihad. As state-owned television showed footage of men dressed in Islamist garb driving around and shooting, security agents posing as scared civilians called in to the station to implore the government to save the city from "terrorists" by sending in the military. The armed forces command issued an ultimatum to the "terrorists" to surrender, or else the army would use "full force." The echoes of Hama were deliberate. Syrian activists on Twitter were anticipating a major assault by the military. But nothing, no major, Hama-style assault was launched—not yet, anyway.

Maybe it's because, as some speculate, the army is having a hard time managing its own divisions, sectarian and other. There are stories emerging that army officers have been shot for refusing to fire on civilians. In any case, as the regime tailors its self-defense according to the parameters and mores of the social media age, it will have to find a midway point, both brutal and controlled, manifesting the maximum amount of terror with the minimum amount of exposure.

But what if it can't? After all, at a certain point a line was crossed, and the Syrian population not only stopped being afraid but instead drew strength and courage from each other. The Syrian uprising is no longer a regional affair, but a national one. Thus, it is driving the regime into a corner where, fighting for its life, it will have no choice but to pull out all the stops. Nonetheless, it appears that in this post-Hama moment, old-fashioned repression might not work. ♦

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Unionsdämmerung

Despite having its best friend forever in the White House, the American labor movement is in mortal crisis

By Mark Hemingway

One of the most widely circulated photographs during the Wisconsin union battle was of a protester in Madison holding up a sign that read: "Dear Barack, Please put on your comfortable shoes. Love, America."

While that sign may not have meant anything to the rest of the country, those in the labor movement were all too aware that the president hadn't lived up to one of his most explicit promises. "And understand this," he told a union audience on the campaign trail in 2007. "If American workers are being denied their right to organize and collectively bargain, when I'm in the White House I'll put on a comfortable pair of shoes myself—I'll walk on that picket line with you as president of the United States of America."

Unions understandably feel they're owed. Obama, in turn, feels indebted. In his book *The Audacity of Hope* he wrote, "So I owe these unions. When their leaders call, I do my best to call them back right away. I don't consider this corrupting in any way." And that was before Obama was handsomely rewarded for being perhaps the most openly pro-union presidential candidate since JFK.

Unions spent in excess of $400 million in the 2008 election cycle, and nearly all of that went to Democrats, especially Obama. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) alone spent over $80 million. (In January 2008, Obama told the union that he would "paint the nation purple with SEIU" as president, referring to the union's signature color.)

But if Obama doesn't consider his cozy relationship with unions corrupting, taxpayers may feel differently. Since Obama took office, his administration has rewarded unions on three major fronts.

To begin with, unions have been substantially enriched. One of Obama's first official acts as president was a February 6, 2009, executive order that in effect mandates union labor on large federal contracts through "project labor agreements" (PLAs). According to a study by the Beacon Hill Institute, PLAs make construction projects cost an average of 12 percent to 18 percent more.

Just after the executive order on PLAs, the stimulus bill was passed, which contained $188 billion in federally overseen construction projects as well as a provision applying Davis-Bacon "prevailing wage" laws to stimulus projects. This further slanted the awarding of federal contracts to the 17 percent of the construction industry that is still unionized. Heritage Foundation labor expert James Sherk estimates that the Davis-Bacon requirement alone could inflate the cost of the stimulus by as much as $17 billion.

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The auto bailout also was of primary benefit to the endangered United Auto Workers. The Obama administration infused General Motors with upwards of $50 billion, even as the UAW boasted the deal meant no reduction in "base hourly pay, no reduction in . . . health care, and no reduction in your pension"—though exorbitant worker costs are one of GM's biggest operating handicaps.

Second, the Obama administration has rolled back union transparency requirements. The Bush administration was arguably the first to require unions to make meaningful financial disclosure, and their leaders to report conflicts of interest. The change had tangible effects. An unassuming Safeway bakery clerk was elected head of a powerful Denver grocers' union in 2009 after she revealed that the union's influential leader had put two relatives on salary for six figures and was using union dues to support a lavish lifestyle that included

Mark Hemingway is online editor at The Weekly Standard.

AP PHOTO / ANDY MANIS

Demonstrators in Madison failed to stop legislation curbing the power of public sector unions.

hefty bar tabs and NFL tickets. The corrupt union boss's ouster was made possible because the Bush Labor Department for the first time had mandated itemized expenses and staff salaries on the LM-2 union financial disclosure form.

That might be the first and last union election, however, where financial transparency plays a decisive role. Since then, Obama's labor secretary Hilda Solis has rolled back Bush administration LM-2 transparency requirements and stopped enforcing the requirement that union bosses disclose on form LM-30 whether they're being paid on the side by companies doing business with the union. (In 2004, unions filed 96 LM-30 forms. In 2005, that number was 13,326, thanks to the Bush administration's enforcement efforts.) The Obama administration has also stopped requiring financial disclosure for oft-abused union trusts or strike funds.

Third, it is readily apparent that unions influence the White House's legislative and political strategies. Many journalists noted that the most frequent visitor to the White House in the first six months of the Obama administration was then-SEIU head Andy Stern. Fewer noted that by the end of the year, according to White House logs, he had been surpassed by Anna Burger, aka "the Queen of Labor," who was then the SEIU's secretary treasurer. Almost no one noticed that Obama's political affairs director—the same position once held by Karl Rove—was Patrick Gaspard, formerly a top lobbyist for the SEIU. (Had Karl Rove been the former top lobbyist for a group that had spent $80 million electing Bush, it's hard to imagine this fact being all but ignored.) Early this year, Gaspard moved on from the White House to run the Democratic National Committee.

Both Stern and Burger have been appointed t o the White House fiscal commission. No doubt, having the SEIU set up shop in the West Wing helped unions garner a significant concession in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that protects unions' generous "Cadillac" health insurance plans from being taxed until 2018. The union carve-out added about $120 billion to the bill's cost over ten years. It's also recently come to light that the $1.7 billion already spent for the health care law's Early Retiree Reinsurance Program has been a stealth bailout, with 6 of the top 10 recipients being union pension funds. In all, the administration granted 1,168 waivers covering 2,934,927 individuals, of whom 48 percent are in union health care plans.

The most direct attempt to influence the labor landscape quickly, however, might be Craig Becker's appointment to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). A former top lawyer for the AFL-CIO and SEIU, Becker was opposed vigorously by the business community, and his nomination was rejected in the Senate with bipartisan opposition. Obama placed Becker on the NLRB with a recess appointment. Within three months, the National Right to Work Foundation had

filed 13 motions noting Becker's conflicts of interest in decisions before the NLRB. Oblivious, Becker has participated in handing down rulings in at least 17 cases involving unions he represented as a lawyer. In each of those cases save one, Becker ruled in favor of the unions.

By any measure, this is a staggering display of political favoritism. Rather than causing its beneficiaries to thrive, however, all this largesse has been necessary just to keep organized labor on life support.

Unions themselves are deeply pessimistic about the future. Until last fall, when he left the SEIU, Stephen Lerner was director of the union's high-profile campaign for reform of the banking and finance industries. He's not just any other union official—according to *Washington Post* wunderkind Ezra Klein, Lerner is "considered one of the smartest organizers, if not the smartest organizer, working in the labor movement right now. . . . At a time when a lot of people in labor have become, if not resigned to their fate as a marginal force in American life, increasingly confused as to how to reverse it, Lerner has a lot of fight left in him."

So how does the labor movement's smartest organizer propose to save unions from irrelevancy? According to leaked audio of a recent closed session at Pace University, Stephen Lerner thinks the labor movement has to "destabilize" the country.

So how does the labor movement's smartest organizer propose to save unions from irrelevancy?

According to audio of Lerner speaking at a recent closed session at Pace University that was leaked on the Internet, Lerner thinks the labor movement has to "destabilize" the country. There needs to be a mass strike on paying mortgages, student loans, and, bizarrely, local government debt. (How local governments are expected to continue paying the salaries and pensions of unionized employees after defaulting on their bonds is unclear.)

Lerner expressed the hope that this would force banks into insolvency. They would then have to renegotiate all their mortgages and loans. It would also "bring down the stock market," depriving the rich of their wealth. Lerner approvingly cited the fatal and destructive riots over austerity measures in Greece and solemnly invoked the famous Cloward-Piven strategy—a theory cooked up decades ago by two leftist sociologists that urges forcing the government into a crisis so as to address economic injustice.

Finally, Lerner announced the first target of this campaign—JPMorgan Chase. Why? "So a bunch of us around the country think, 'Who would be a really good company to hate?' We decided that would be JPMorgan Chase."

Most observers on the right who have commented on Lerner's remarks have played up the sinister machinations. Perhaps what's most noteworthy, however, is how pathetic and desperate all this is. As Hot Air blogger Ed Morrissey quipped, this isn't a practical plan for unions reestablishing political dominance—this is the fantasy of someone a little too enamored with the end of the movie *Fight Club*.

So why has so dedicated and smart a union organizer as Lerner lapsed into abject despair? Few people are better positioned to evaluate the state of organized labor's finances and organizing capacity, and Lerner's assessment at Pace was brutal: "Unions are almost dead. We cannot survive doing what we do."

Unions are indeed facing existential threats. The first resides in broad economic and demographic trends that are transferring power from private sector unions to public sector unions. Public sector unions, unlike private sector unions, are actually growing. In 1954, 39 percent of the American workforce was unionized—and public sector unions did not exist in any meaningful way. Last year, 11.9 percent of the American workforce was unionized. More distressingly for Lerner, private sector union membership shrank by about 10 percent in 2009, so that for the first time public sector union workers outnumbered private sector union workers.

It may seem counterintuitive, but the continued growth of public sector unions may have negative consequences for organized labor overall. Some select public sector professions still carry political influence—such as police, firefighters, and teachers—but on the whole, government bureaucrats are far less sympathetic figures than, say, manufacturing workers. Public sector unions are also much newer, and their very existence has always been controversial. As recently as 1955, no less a figure than George Meany, then head of the AFL-CIO, believed it was "impossible to bargain collectively with the government."

For that matter, the perception is widespread that government workers have never really been able to justify collective bargaining protections. "Government workers were not exploited," Henry Farber, a labor economist at Princeton University, told the *Washington Post*. "They were

never squeezed the same way as workers in the private sector were, because they had civil service protections."

So in an era when state and local budgets are swamped by employee costs, politicians are having to choose between responding to the taxpayers and responding to public employee unions. For Republicans, few of whom get campaign cash from unions, the choice is easy.

Aside from the high-profile union battle in Wisconsin, nearly half the states have recently passed or are currently considering legislation to rein in public sector unions. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, a total of 729 bills have been introduced in 48 states since 2009. Conservative groups, such as Karl Rove's influential PAC American Crossroads, which played a major role in the GOP's 2010 landslide, are already running ads touting the links between Democrats and public sector unions, which could well become a major issue in the 2012 election.

But while the news has focused on headlines coming out of Wisconsin and the GOP's targeting of unions, less attention has been paid to the other side of the equation. There's little neutral ground in the battle between taxpayers and public employee unions, and the unions are running roughshod all over taxpayers despite America's dire fiscal situation.

Illinois provides a bracing example. Last July, in the run-up to a tough election, the state's Democratic governor Pat Quinn gave 40,000 state workers a two-year 14 percent raise, at a total cost of $1 billion in a state that is facing a $15 billion deficit and lagging $6.8 billion behind in paying its creditors. Quinn also agreed not to lay off any of the state's 50,000 unionized employees for two years. The deal was unveiled just days after Quinn received the endorsement of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

Quinn, who had assumed the governorship after the impeachment of Governor Rod Blagojevich, narrowly won election with full-throated union support. One of his first acts upon taking office was to push through a 67 percent increase in the personal income tax and a 46 percent hike in the business tax. Wisconsin and Indiana, whose Republican governors and legislatures are making the economic climate more and more employer- and taxpayer-friendly, are both within commuting distance of Chicago. Governor Scott Walker, scourge of Wisconsin unions, is publicly inviting newly burdened Illinois businesses to relocate to his state.

In large part, the battle against public sector unions is already won. They've been effectively isolated in the public's mind from the broader labor movement, and in a time of hardship, the battle has been advantageously—and correctly—framed as unions vs. taxpayers. If public sector unions still enjoy some public support, that's likely to diminish fast once the reality of major tax increases and even state bankruptcy becomes evident in heavily unionized states like Illinois.

So far the polling data are mixed, and taking on powerful public unions carries big political risks. Walker and other GOP politicians targeting public sector unions are gambling that if getting their state's fiscal house in order means unions march on the capitol today, that's better than having angry taxpayers march on the state house after things get really bad.

If there were any doubt, however, whether Walker had made a smart judgment that public sentiment was turning against public sector unions, that fear was largely laid to rest by the reelection of conservative Wisconsin state supreme court justice David Prosser on April 5. Union outrage may have been enough to make the vote close, but after a nail-biting election involving a recount, Prosser appears to have eked out a victory by a margin of about 7,000 votes. With a national union campaign against Prosser and millions pouring in from out of state, unions were unable to win an election where at least one poll had shown their candidate cruising to a 6-point victory in a purple state where public sector unions first gained the right to collectively bargain in 1959. If unions can't win in Wisconsin, there's little hope for them in the other states where they are being challenged. (By contrast, as recently as November 2008 with Obama at the top of the ticket, conservatives were able to defeat a liberal incumbent justice on the Wisconsin Supreme Court.)

What's more, if union reforms are accompanied by the long-term economic benefits their proponents foresee, their popularity will grow. Diana Furchtgott-Roth, director of the Center for Employment Policy at the Hudson Institute, has observed that patterns of labor migration reflect an increasingly negative correlation between unions and job creation. According to the 2010 Census, she writes, "nine congressional seats will move to right-to-work states from forced unionization states. Some winners are Texas, Florida, Arizona, Georgia, and South Carolina, while losers include New York, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and New Jersey."

The second existential threat to unions is the imminent pension crisis. When union pensions are discussed, invariably public sector unions get the most attention, simply because the numbers are impressively large. (California has $535 billion in unfunded state pension liabilities, or more than the annual GDP of Saudi Arabia.) There's much uncertainty as to how the shortfalls will be addressed. The options run the gamut from the

aforementioned tax increases and legislative restraints to the creation of a path for state bankruptcy, and these have been hotly debated.

What is rarely discussed is that the pension problem is actually more acute and immediate among private sector unions. This has to do with the unique nature of private sector union pension plans. There are about 1,500 "multi-employer" pension plans in the United States covering 10.1 million workers. In these plans, several unionized businesses join together to provide a single, collective retirement plan for all their employees. Unlike 401(k) s and other defined-contribution plans, which belong to the individual and so encourage labor mobility, defined-benefit plans are typically tied to the job. Multi-employer plans were created to allow for some degree of labor mobility within unionized sectors.

The catch is that multi-employer plans are governed by what's known as "last man standing" accounting rules. Here's how they work: If there are five companies in a multi-employer plan and four of them go bankrupt, the fifth has to assume the pension obligations for all of the employees from the four bankrupt companies, known as "orphans."

The pension woes of public sector unions get the most attention, simply because the numbers are so large. What is rarely discussed is that the pension problem is actually more acute among private sector unions.

Getting a handle on multi-employer pension liabilities has always been notoriously difficult, and concern about their viability has grown as American union membership has dwindled in the face of globalization and technologically driven gains in productivity. A recent Government Accountability Office report found that as of 1998 the number of union members paying into the plans was equal to the number of retirees receiving benefits. The Financial Accounting Standards Board recently noted in a press release that a "study of over 100 multi-employer plans, including the largest plans in the country (as measured by assets), indicated that in 2008 those plans were collectively underfunded by over $160 billion (approximately 44 percent of their collective plan liabilities)."

The Teamsters union plan alone has four times as many retirees drawing benefits as employees paying in. Which is why, in 2007, UPS coughed up a staggering $6.1 billion to buy its way out of the Teamsters multi-employer pension plan, figuring this was cheaper than assuming the unions' collective pension liabilities later on. (Trucking company YRC, one of the largest remaining Teamster employers, publicly asked the federal government for $1 billion in TARP funds to cover pension obligations in 2009. The company eventually withdrew the request.)

UPS's withdrawal from its multi-employer plan also highlighted the issue of transparency. Previously, it was assumed that UPS's pension liabilities were around $4 billion, and Wall Street analysts were stunned when it turned out they far exceeded that figure. Then in 2009, the Street was shocked again when the grocery chain Kroger disclosed in a footnote to its SEC filing that it had $1.2 billion in pension liabilities.

Until now, companies have been required to disclose only their contributions to multi-employer plans. But ratings agencies and financial markets have started insisting on transparency—and the Financial Accounting Standards Board, which has de facto statutory authority from the SEC, is set to enact a rule in the second quarter of this year that requires disclosure of multi-employer liabilities.

Adding these liabilities to the balance sheets of union employers could make it nearly impossible for them to get loans, lines of credit, bonding, and the kind of financial assistance that is the lifeblood of many unionized sectors such as construction.

How are unions reacting to the prospect of this new rule? "The blind panic is un-frickin'-believable," says Brett McMahon, a longtime union critic and vice president of Miller & Long Concrete Construction. The rule could well accelerate bankruptcy in many union businesses or force companies to scramble out of the yoke of unionized employment.

Regardless, the problem of bankrupt union pension plans is not going away. It's more than likely a number of big union pension plans will go bankrupt. All of a sudden, union employees who were expecting generous pension plans will be dumped onto the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, the government-sponsored enterprise that backstops pension plans. The maximum payout is just under $13,000 a year, or "dog-food money," notes McMahon.

That's when things are likely to get really ugly. Multi-employer pension plans are by law governed by boards equally divided between employer and union representatives. There's already no love lost between rank-and-file union members and the class of political consultants and executives that has come to dominate union leadership. Both of the SEIU's national pension plans issued "critical status letters" to their members in 2009—the Pension Protection Act requires such letters to be issued when funds

can cover less than 65 percent of their obligations. The SEIU, however, maintains a separate pension plan for its national officers that was funded at 98.3 percent, according to the latest data.

Expect waves of class action lawsuits over pension mismanagement aimed at recouping money from the employers and unions responsible. This could well bankrupt unions. And when union pension plans begin failing, unions will be deprived of perhaps their biggest selling point—job stability with unrivaled retirement benefits.

For some time now, big labor has been convinced that it needs a bold political solution to its existential woes—either something that radically alters labor laws to allow unfettered forced unionization or a bailout that could run into the hundreds of billions of dollars.

SEIU protesters at a Bank of America executive's home

In the hope of achieving the former under Obama, organized labor rallied around the Employee Free Choice Act, popularly known as Card Check. Despite its Orwellian formal title, this bill proposed to end the right of an employer to demand a secret ballot election of employees before the employer must recognize a union. Under Card Check, organizers could form a union by getting workers to sign cards declaring their support for unionization. This would allow unions to identify publicly workers opposed to unionization and use coercive tactics against them.

While unions hoped that Card Check would rapidly reverse the decline in their membership, the scheme was also meant to help fix their pension plans. Once companies were unionized, the power of collective bargaining could force them to join foundering multi-employer plans, shoring these up. Accordingly, the AFL-CIO declared Card Check legislation "the number one priority of America's union movement."

With Democrats controlling Congress and a labor champion in the White House, unions seemed confident Card Check would pass. The legislation was introduced in both houses of Congress in March 2009, and Obama, Vice President Biden, and Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis all made public statements in support of it.

Then . . . nothing. Card Check stalled as business interests such as the Chamber of Commerce became increasingly vocal in their opposition.

Big labor pursued other political solutions. Senator Bob Casey of Pennsylvania introduced the Create Jobs and Save Benefits Act of 2010, which was criticized as a bailout of multi-employer pension plans. It was actually worse than that. The bill would have essentially created a new entitlement by requiring taxpayers to backstop union pension plans in perpetuity. Casey's bill went nowhere—and, adding insult to injury, Representative Earl Pomeroy, the North Dakota Democrat who'd sponsored the bill in the House, was defeated last November.

As it became clear last year that a Republican takeover of the House was inevitable, some feared that Democrats would make a truly radical move in the lame duck session of Congress to save their biggest campaign donor. Just weeks before the election, Democrat Tom Harkin of Iowa and Independent Bernie Sanders of Vermont held a hearing of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) exploring Guaranteed Retirement Accounts, or GRAs. These are a union-backed plan to create a national retirement system that would in effect force Americans to stop putting their retirement savings into private 401(k) accounts and to send their money to the government instead.

But the lame duck session came and went without any bold Democratic move to save the unions. Democrats were thumped in November, and Republicans took control of the House of Representatives with a 48-seat majority. In a radio interview on March 22, Senator Sherrod Brown, a pro-union Democrat from Ohio, confirmed what many suspected. Card Check was "not going to happen now," he said. If Card Check was dead, the American labor movement's biggest reason for hope had been snuffed out.

Which brings us to a third existential threat for unions. Rather than adapt to the changing economic climate and expand their organizing efforts, unions in the past decade

focused nearly all their resources on lobbying for a political solution to their woes. After all that money and effort, they have no solution to their long-term problems.

What they do have is debt. In 2009, the AFL-CIO's $103 million in liabilities exceeded its assets by $21 million. The SEIU, which had very rapidly become the most politically influential union in the country, had financed its ascent with money it didn't have. The union's liabilities were $7.6 million in 2000. After the 2008 election, in which, again, the SEIU spent more than $80 million, the union was $102 million in debt.

It has since reduced that debt to $85 million—but union leaders are clearly worried about the state of their finances. Their solution? A very public campaign against Bank of America, organized by none other than Stephen Lerner. This may have backfired when SEIU gained a great deal of negative national publicity for sending a mob of protesters to the home of a Bank of America executive (who turned out to be a lifelong Democrat with ties to the Clintons), frightening his adolescent son who was home alone.

The SEIU claims it is protesting unfair lending practices. But it's obvious the union is really trying to intimidate its biggest creditor: The SEIU owes Bank of America more than $80 million.

For unions, last year's election may have been the death knell. For the first time, union support could be viewed as an electoral liability. Conservative grassroots groups targeted public sector unions, especially the SEIU, throughout the campaign, and Tea Party-fueled Republican candidates—including Scott Walker—explicitly campaigned on curbing union excesses. Karl Rove's American Crossroads PAC, which spent about $65 million in 2010, is already running ads designed to make public sector unions a campaign issue in 2012.

Unions also created a big messaging headache for Democrats. During the election, Democrats tried their best to make corporate influence a major issue. The White House publicly asserted that the Chamber of Commerce was trying to influence the election with foreign money, though this had been widely debunked. And congressional Democrats maintained that the *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision that upended much of the campaign finance regulatory regime was allowing corporate groups to flood the election with money.

Then Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi promised to tie the GOP to corporate campaign cash "like doggy-doo stuck on your shoe," and at one point Democrats circulated a memo claiming that outside spending groups affiliated with Republicans had outspent Democratic groups $200 million to $7 million.

The problem was that this narrative was undercut at every turn by the unions' outsized political influence. While the White House was trying to demonize the Chamber of Commerce, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the biggest donor in the 2010 election was actually the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). A single public sector union had spent $87.5 million in recycled tax dollars—supporting Democrats. AFSCME's political director even bragged to the *Wall Street Journal*, "We're the big dog."

Sure enough, thanks to unions' spending more than $200 million on Democrats, the Democrats outspent Republicans in 2010 and still were handed the worst electoral defeat in more than 60 years. "Overall, Democratic candidates in the 63 races that flipped to the GOP had $206.4 million behind them, a tally that includes candidate fundraising and spending by parties and interests," reported the *Washington Post* on November 3, the day after the midterms. "That compares to only $171.7 million for their GOP rivals."

Claiming the country is jeopardized by corporate dominance of elections, when 11 of the top 20 political donors to elections since 1989 are labor unions, has proven to be a losing message. It's also worth noting that most corporate political action committees—including those representing Wall Street—have given more money to Democrats than Republicans during the last few election cycles. *Washington Examiner* columnist Timothy Carney notes that Democrats had at least a $60 million edge in PAC contributions in last year's election.

As unions' membership continues to dwindle and their political spending increases, it's hard to argue that unions are anything other than a special interest. By the time the Wisconsin protests broke out in February, the White House initially voiced support but was afraid of appearing too pro-union. When union officials asked the White House to send Joe Biden to make an appearance at the protests, the White House declined. Union leaders then asked for labor secretary Hilda Solis. Once again, the White House declined.

It seems the Obama administration is mysteriously lacking a pair of comfortable shoes. The head of the National Nurses United union publicly accused the Obama administration of "betrayal."

Evidence of the rapid decline of the American labor movement is hard even for someone as indebted to unions as Barack Obama to ignore. The unions' political fortunes are poised to fall faster and farther than anyone anticipated, and Democrats are starting to hedge their bets. Walking the picket line these days looks more and more like walking the plank. ♦

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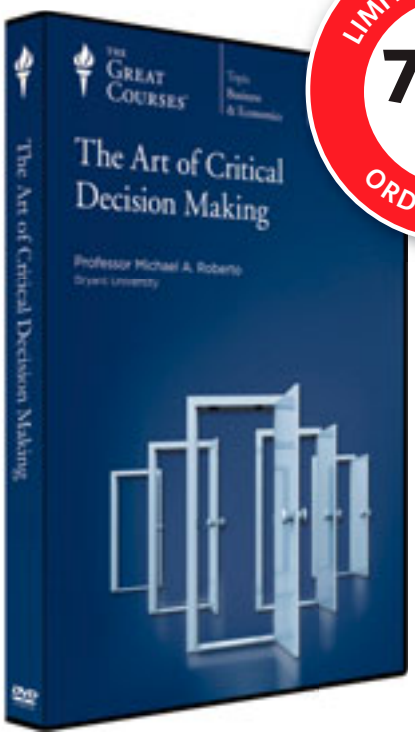

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When Daniel Met Julian

The rise and fall of WikiLeaks

By Jonathan V. Last

During a span of 22 months the website WikiLeaks.org morphed from a digital anarchist demonstration project into a semisuccessful international campaign against the American government. WikiLeaks solicited classified documents and then orchestrated a global media typhoon around them. The site—literally—gave direction to institutions such as the *New York Times*, London's *Guardian*, and *Der Spiegel*, dictating publication schedules and deciding which outlets would publish what information.

At its high-water mark in the spring and summer of 2010, WikiLeaks appeared to be a new kind of organism: part media company, part NGO, part hacker hive, part activist crusade. In retrospect, WikiLeaks more closely resembles a bubble-era tech start-up. Puffed large by a combination of exaggeration, lies, and free labor, WikiLeaks was given an absurd valuation by both the media, which reported on and courted it, and the U.S. government, which feared it.

Today the WikiLeaks bubble has burst. The site's founder, Julian Assange, is being prosecuted in Sweden for two counts of rape. Several of WikiLeaks' high-level workers have resigned. A former media partner, the *Guardian*, has turned on Assange. And the site itself is no longer accepting submissions of leaked documents, saying only that they are trying to improve security and will return in the "near future."

The hardest knock comes from Daniel Domscheit-Berg's new memoir, *Inside WikiLeaks*. Domscheit-Berg was something like employee number two at WikiLeaks. He was one of the staffers who left when the organization descended into chaos last fall. His book is a gory tell-all, and no one—neither Assange nor Domscheit-Berg—gets off clean. Yet the most serious indictments it makes are of the elite media, who threw themselves at WikiLeaks, and the American government, which did nothing to stop the campaign.

Assange and Domscheit-Berg made for a very odd couple. They met in December 2007 at the annual Chaos Communication Congress in Berlin, a gathering of computer hackers and experts sponsored by Berlin's Chaos Computer Club. At the time Domscheit-Berg worked in the IT department of an American company's German headquarters. Assange, also known as the hacker "Mendax," had recently started a website called WikiLeaks.

Assange was a strange duck. Domscheit-Berg reports that he wore multiple layers of clothing at all times—shirts under multiple jackets, two pairs of pants, and a thick roll of socks casing his feet. Only 36 years old, Assange had pure white hair. Whenever he was asked about this oddity, he told a different story of how his hair had gotten that way. Nonetheless, Assange had a compelling vision for his new website. He wanted to publish confidential documents in order to expose the hypocrisy and wrongdoing of governments and corporations.

WikiLeaks was not the first such website. In 1999, cryptome.org made a name for itself by publishing leaked lists of MI6 agents. And Assange wasn't very far along in the project. But his idea held particular appeal for Domscheit-Berg, who appreciated its anarchist potential to undermine traditional power structures. "In the world we dreamed of," Domscheit-Berg explains, "there would be no more bosses or hierarchies."

Assange brought Domscheit-Berg in to help build out the site. At least by Domscheit-Berg's accounting, he was an invaluable contributor. He helped create the backend of the website and, as time progressed, took on executive duties, handling tasks as wide-ranging as public relations, fundraising, and network security—in addition to WikiLeaks' bread-and-butter work of cleaning and posting leaked documents.

Like many anarchists, Domscheit-Berg was not a perfect employee. When he met Assange he was working for a firm

Jonathan V. Last is a senior writer at The Weekly Standard.

that handled IT accounts for American corporations, including defense companies. He refused to work on those projects. As he became more involved in WikiLeaks, he began showing up at the office less frequently, claiming to be working from home when he was actually working for Assange. When his day job intruded on his avocation, he became increasingly hostile toward the people who paid him. (He was working for Assange for free.) In his book Domscheit-Berg explains that he became so annoyed by management that he sent a combative, company-wide email constructed so that it seemed to come from the German office's boss. He then routed the email through an office printer so that its origins would be untraceable.

Crazy can only be managed for so long. Domscheit-Berg gradually came to believe that it was wrong for him to spend *any* time working for the employer who paid him because "not being able to do the work that you knew was more meaningful was a kind of prostitution." Eventually, he decided to quit. Fortunately, he was able to arrange a severance package that paid him a full year's salary—some 50,000 euros—for no longer pretending to do the work he hadn't been doing. For his former employer, this was likely a bargain.

So liberated, Domscheit-Berg threw himself into WikiLeaks. The site's chat room, he writes, became "my central channel to the outside world." He gave up on a girlfriend. On his parents. On the outdoors. Domscheit-Berg explains that he mostly stayed in his apartment, working for WikiLeaks. The one place he regularly visited was a "lefty alternative macrobiotic shop where I bought my groceries."

"I didn't have much contact anymore with the nondigital world," he says, "and the shop was one of the few places I still interacted with people face-to-face." At his alternative macrobiotic shop he was among friends. The store always had newspapers lying around, but, he notes approvingly, they weren't the mainstream mishmash. They were "small publications that wrote about the world from a queer and/or Marxist perspective."

In 2009, Domscheit-Berg's role with WikiLeaks became more vital: Assange came to live with him. Assange was a serial houseguest—he seems to have gone several years without having a permanent residence. As with many of his quirks, Assange explained his homelessness as an element of operational security; a necessary ruse to evade the sinister forces biting at his heels. But this practice may have been more of a financial, rather than a security, concern. Domscheit-Berg notes that Assange never paid for anything, or even carried any money on him, because, he claimed, he did not want the authorities to be able to trace his whereabouts.

Their time as roommates went about as well as could be expected. Which is to say that today, neither of them is in the dock for murder. Their conflicts were mercifully pedestrian. "Rarely was anything his fault," Domscheit-Berg writes. "Instead he blamed banks, airport staff, urban planners, and, failing that, the State Department. No doubt it was the State Department that was responsible for dropping the cups that got broken while he was staying with me in Wiesbaden." The creature who got the worst of the ordeal seems to have been Domscheit-Berg's cat, Mr. Schmitt. "Julian was engaged in a constant battle for dominance—even with my cat," he reports, before continuing, quite seriously, that "[Mr. Schmitt] has neurosis stemming from the time when Julian was living with me."

Julian Assange and Daniel Domscheit-Berg in Berlin, December 2009

ANDY MCGEE

The situation improved somewhat when the two escaped their German confinement. As WikiLeaks became more famous, they went abroad, giving speeches and holding press conferences. While in Iceland they hit upon the idea of turning the tiny island nation into a free-press haven where entities like WikiLeaks could operate with impunity. They took their idea of a "data haven"—think of it as offshore banking for publishing and data transfers—from a novel by the sci-fi writer Neal Stephenson. In January 2010, the pair flew back to Iceland to get the relevant legislation passed by the Icelandic parliament. They figured it would take two, or perhaps three, weeks. They became bewildered, and then frustrated, when the elected representatives of Iceland proved uninterested in the self-serving policy prescriptions of two foreigners. While on the trip, Domscheit-Berg visited a tattoo parlor and began having the WikiLeaks logo

inked onto his back. But the logo was big and the needle hurt, so he abandoned the project midway. His giant tattoo remains unfinished.

This, then, is the duo that shook the Western establishment, endangered the lives of soldiers and their local allies in Iraq and Afghanistan, plunged the diplomatic world into crisis, and prompted serious discussions about the nature of government in the digital age.

For all its buffoonery, WikiLeaks had two smart design precepts. The first was a system, eventually built by Domscheit-Berg and a programmer he identifies only as "the architect," which turned the website into a completely secure dead-drop. Leakers and whistleblowers who wanted to unload information could do so in total anonymity. The WikiLeaks site was configured in such a way that once a user reached the submission page, it was impossible for anyone—either a snooping third party or the WikiLeaks staff—to observe them. If the leaker uploaded documents to the WikiLeaks servers, the data were washed through so many interchanges and switchbacks that they became untraceable. Not even the WikiLeaks administrators had the ability to find the source of leaks.

We're lucky that WikiLeaks was run by Assange and Domscheit-Berg and not a more capable, stable group of anti-Americans.

WikiLeaks' policy for handling information was similarly clever: The site promised to publish every leak that came its way, in full, with no editing, in the order in which it arrived. This scheme encouraged leakers by assuring them that, whatever risks they incurred, their labors would at least bear fruit.

For a time, the system worked. WikiLeaks published damning documents about a shady Swiss bank and the Church of Scientology. They published 6,700 Congressional Research Service reports and documents showing that high-level executives had plundered an Icelandic bank just before it failed. (They also published items with no probative value—such as the hacked contents of Sarah Palin's personal email account.) Assange and Domscheit-Berg were fêted by the hacker community and techno-utopians of the kind who idolize anarchist-philosopher Pierre-Joseph ("Property is theft!") Proudhon. (Domscheit-Berg calls Proudhon's *What Is Property?* "the most important book ever written.")

But in 2010, the organizational focus of WikiLeaks changed. In April, the site published gun-camera video of a July 2007 American airstrike in Iraq that killed 18 people, including two journalists. It marked a significant departure from protocol. First, the video was pushed to the front of the queue and published ahead of other leaked material. Second, WikiLeaks manipulated the footage, editing it down, adding subtitles, giving it a sensational title, and even putting an antigovernment quotation from George Orwell at the beginning of the film. And finally, it marked the beginning of WikiLeaks' partnership with the traditional media.

WikiLeaks debuted the video, which they titled "Collateral Murder," in Washington, D.C., at the National Press Club. Reporters flocked to the story, and to WikiLeaks. Networks paid for the "rights" to air it. Four months later, when WikiLeaks received 91,000 leaked documents from U.S. Central Command in Afghanistan, the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and *Der Spiegel* jumped at the chance to get exclusive access. In October, WikiLeaks published a similar cache of documents about the Iraq war. And in November, they published a mass of diplomatic cables. In each case, a harem of large media outlets—eventually *Le Monde* and Al Jazeera joined—eagerly disseminated the material, on terms dictated by WikiLeaks.

The media's complicity in WikiLeaks' agenda was astonishing. At one point, WikiLeaks ran into trouble with PayPal, which froze the organization's assets. (WikiLeaks had registered with PayPal as a nonprofit, even though they were not.) Domscheit-Berg asked a *New York Times* reporter to intercede on their behalf. The reporter called PayPal and bullied the company, demanding to know why the assets of "a project being supported by the *New York Times*" were frozen. PayPal released the account immediately.

Throughout WikiLeaks' *aestas mirabilis* the site was unmolested by Western governments, even as it sought to wreck American foreign policy and put soldiers in harm's way. In 2010, Assange went so far as to change WikiLeaks' mission statement. Where the site once labeled itself "the most aggressive press organization in the world," Assange now called it "an insurgent operation." His choice of words was not an accident.

Yet no one tried to put a halt to this insurgency. A handful of American companies, including PayPal, Amazon, Visa, and MasterCard, stopped doing business with WikiLeaks. France's minister of industry demanded that a French Internet service provider drop WikiLeaks as a customer. (A French judge prevented the company from doing so.) And that was that. The prevailing belief was that the Internet bestowed magical powers and nothing could be done to stop Assange and his confederates. With thousands of anonymous volunteers and a secret, dispersed network of servers, WikiLeaks was bulletproof.

Only, WikiLeaks wasn't quite as advertised. For starters, Domscheit-Berg admits that the website was far from impregnable. Early on, leakers submitting material were completely exposed to outside eyes. When a German tech writer pointed this out, Assange released a statement saying—untruthfully—"The article currently being spun about WikiLeaks source protection is false." After the first story appeared pointing to their security holes, Assange and Domscheit-Berg conspired to mislead reporters about their operation. "To create the impression of unassailability to the outside world, you only had to make the context as complicated and confusing as possible," Domscheit-Berg explains. "To that end, I would make my explanations of technical issues to journalists as complex as I could." Prior to early 2010, Domscheit-Berg says, the entire site could have been taken down easily by an outsider.

Similarly, WikiLeaks' human resources were vastly exaggerated. They had a single attorney who had offered them services pro bono, yet they pretended to have an army of lawyers. They accomplished this subterfuge by employing dozens of fake email addresses, which they used to communicate with the outside world. (Domscheit-Berg's favorite alter ego was "Daniel Schmitt," the name of his traumatized cat.)

How many sock-puppet emails did Assange and Domscheit-Berg use? Lots. "When 'Thomas Bellman' or 'Leon from the tech department' answered an email and promised to forward a request on to our legal services, it was usually just me," Domscheit-Berg writes. "Julian, too, used a host of pseudonyms. . . . [E]ven today I don't know whether some of the names are real people or alter egos of Julian Assange. 'Jay Lim,' for instance, is responsible for legal questions. Jay Lim? Someone Chinese, maybe? I've never met him. Nor did I ever have any contact with Chinese dissidents who, as rumor had it, were involved in setting up WikiLeaks."

And not just the legal department:

> The official number of volunteers we had was also, to put it mildly, grotesquely exaggerated. Even in the early days, we claimed that several thousand volunteers and hundreds of assistants supported us. This wasn't perhaps a direct falsehood, but that number included everyone who had signed up for our mailing list. . . . But they didn't do anything at all. They were just names. Not even names, really, just numbers.

And not just the volunteers, either:

> The advisory board was a daring construction that had been set up before my time. Only one of the eight people listed as belonging to our advisory board publicly acknowledged a link to us.

When the other seven "board members" were eventually tracked down, they all denied having anything to do with WikiLeaks.

The organization's first big story concerned a Swiss bank that was helping the super wealthy dodge taxes. WikiLeaks published a list of these tax dodgers. The leaker, however, had made a small mistake: One of the names was slightly transposed so that an innocent bystander in Germany was "outed" as a corrupt, tax-dodging plutocrat. The poor fellow contacted WikiLeaks begging them to make a correction. They did, sort of, adding the following note to the documents: "According to three independent sources, this document, the summary and some of the commentary are false or misleading. WikiLeaks is investigating the matter."

It was gracious of them, except for one thing: "Three independent sources?" Domscheit-Berg explains: "That sounded good. Unfortunately it was made up."

Domscheit-Berg claims that this was the only error in the history of WikiLeaks. If so, that's an act of Providence because there was almost no verification of incoming documents. WikiLeaks publicly claimed that they conducted rigorous "authenticity checks" on all submissions to insure they were genuine. This was another half-truth. Domscheit-Berg says these authenticity checks were

> a deceit I had forced myself to practice in hundreds of interviews. Until late 2009, no one except Julian and I checked the vast majority of documents that had been submitted. Strictly speaking, we weren't lying when we said we had a pool of around eight hundred volunteer experts at our disposal. But we neglected to mention that we had no mechanism in place for integrating them into our workflow. None of them were able to access the material we received. Instead, Julian and I usually checked whether documents had been manipulated technologically and did a few Google searches to see whether they struck us as genuine. We could only hope that things would turn out all right.

And it wasn't as though there weren't signals that Assange and WikiLeaks might be working with unclean hands. When WikiLeaks approached the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and *Der Spiegel* about publishing excerpts of the Afghan war diaries, the only condition the papers put on the agreement was that names be redacted to protect Afghan civilians on the ground. Assange objected, telling the assembled editors, "Well, they're informants. So, if they get killed, they've got it coming to them. They deserve it." Eventually Assange relented, and his media partners forged ahead. But the week before the documents were to be published, the papers discovered that Assange had not done any redacting at all.

He was trying to snooker them. Assange's plan was to postpone the redacting, get the big papers to run their stories, and then renege on his deal by publishing the full, unexpurgated documents. By chance, the papers discovered this double-dealing at the last minute, and forced him to scrub the documents. Despite Assange's gambit, they continued their partnership.

There are, perhaps, ideological reasons why the media were so eager to join forces with WikiLeaks that they ignored all the signs that they were in league with bad actors. But there is no good explanation why the American government was so cowed by WikiLeaks as to be paralyzed. Even once WikiLeaks' security apparatus was built, it would have been an easy matter to bring down the operation: Simply submit reams of fake—or even old and useless—documents. Such a flood would have paralyzed WikiLeaks' meager human resources and, because of the protocols of anonymity, would have been impossible to trace.

We're lucky that WikiLeaks was run by Julian Assange and Daniel Domscheit-Berg and not a more capable, stable group of anti-Americans. After a series of personal slights, Assange and Domscheit-Berg broke up on August 26, 2010. In an intense chat-room session, Assange suspended his former number two for "disloyalty, insubordination, and destabilization in a time of crisis." Domscheit-Berg quit the group shortly thereafter. The architect went with him. When the pair left WikiLeaks, they returned control of the main server to Assange, but dismantled the security system they had built and reinstituted the primitive version that had existed before they came on board. History is written by the nerd with the superadmin access.

At the end of the day, it's not even clear how much of WikiLeaks' anti-Americanism had to do with America. At one point in his book, Domscheit-Berg visits Russia and is amazed at what a terrible, corrupt country it is. "You can say what you like about many people's number-one enemy, the United States," he writes, "but in Moscow the situation was also acute."

So why didn't WikiLeaks go after Vladimir Putin? Or perhaps China's regime, with its litany of human rights violations? Or Iran, even, with its persecution of women, gays, and student protesters? In the most telling passage of *Inside WikiLeaks*, Domscheit-Berg admits that one of the big reasons "why we focused on the United States was the language barrier. None of us spoke Hebrew or Korean. It wasn't easy to gauge the significance of a document even when it was written in English."

The people who built WikiLeaks can be excused for their stupidity. But the people who enabled them and their assault on America should have known better. ♦

Will They Be Devoured?

The children of Egypt's revolution versus the military establishment in Cairo

By Lee Smith

Cairo

It's more than two months since the fall of the man who ruled Egypt for thirty years, and there are still demonstrators out at Tahrir Square, ground zero of Egypt's latest revolution. Yet it's unclear whether these young activists, galvanized by social media, are pressing a demand for accountability and democratic reform or pushing Egypt in a different, more dangerous, direction.

Tahrir turned violent again on April 8 when two demonstrators were killed during protests calling for the country's interim government, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, to bring former president Hosni Mubarak and others to justice on charges of corruption. Last week Mubarak released a statement promising to prove his innocence. Nonetheless, to mollify the demonstrators and avoid further bloodshed, the army detained an ailing Mubarak in his hospital room in Sharm el Sheikh and put his two sons, Gamal, 47, and Alaa, 49, in jail.

Police guard the courthouse where Mubarak's sons are being questioned.

So who is ruling Egypt? If the army is moving to placate the activists, how far will it go? As it turns out, the January 25 revolution raised more questions than it answered: With the authoritarian ruler gone, will Egypt turn into a genuine democracy or tilt toward populism? Will the Muslim Brotherhood come to power? Will the peace treaty with Israel survive? And what's the lesson for American policymakers? In short, what has the revolution sown and what will it reap?

Right now, all I know for sure is that my friend Hala Mustafa is radiant. She's sitting in a coffee shop smoking a water pipe and smiling broadly. "This is a great time for us, for Egypt," she says. Mubarak's regime made life miserable for her. The editor of *Democracy*, a quarterly journal published by the government-affiliated Al Ahram Center, Mustafa suffered constant harassment from the old regime. Last year, when she met with the Israeli ambassador to Egypt, she was reprimanded by the press syndicate—even though regime officials and her own colleagues had also met with him, and Egypt has had diplomatic relations with Israel for three decades. Like the millions of Egyptians who exulted at Mubarak's exit on February 11, she couldn't be happier to see his regime pass into history. Particularly unlamented are the younger set, the businessmen and financiers associated with Mubarak's hand-picked successor, his younger son, Gamal, a former banker in London.

Like all those demanding that the pillars of the late regime face their accusers, Mustafa is unimpressed with the supposed economic reformers around Gamal. After it adopted measures to open the economy in 2004, the Mubarak government got high marks from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, but Mustafa argues that the wealth created by the technocrats stayed in their hands and did not trickle down. After all, 40 percent of the country still lives on less than $2 a day. "The regime practiced a distorted form of capitalism," Mustafa tells me. "It was an oligarchy at the top of the ruling party that was stealing land, while the president

AP / AMR NABIL

Lee Smith is a senior editor at The Weekly Standard *and the author of* The Strong Horse: Power, Politics, and the Clash of Arab Civilizations.

himself was getting commissions from foreign companies."

My own impression is different. I was struck immediately upon touching down in Cairo by how much things have changed since my last visit in 2005. Perhaps to keep up with the influx of foreign investors who came looking for business opportunities in recent years, the airport has acquired several new terminals, as well as a large shopping mall and food courts, bringing hundreds of jobs for middle-class Egyptians.

In 2007, Egypt came in first in the World Bank Group survey "Doing Business," which evaluates business-friendly reforms. Since 2004, explains Egyptian economics researcher Karim Badr, "Cairo has consistently won high praise from the World Bank and IMF for the better investment climate. A supply-side change in the tax law reduced the tax rate from 40 percent to 20 percent and increased tax revenues." Badr recites a list of accomplishments bringing international recognition: "There's the increase in foreign direct investment, the surge in exports, an increase in tourism revenues, higher economic growth, a decline in debts, more room for the private sector, banking restructuring, productivity growth, a lower budget deficit, property registration, and better basic services like water and sanitation."

Gamal Mubarak in 2006

Mustafa thinks the economy will stay safely on track once the political situation becomes clearer, and a recent poll shows that 82 percent of Egyptians want their government to continue to liberalize the economy. Still, in the near term, the economy may be in for hard times.

The stock market has fluctuated since it reopened in late March. Some analysts suspect that the foreign money that once made up 15 percent of the market has fled, while the government quietly bought up stocks to stabilize the situation. Tourism, one of Egypt's staples, is suffering but should quickly rebound, as it did after Islamists slaughtered 58 foreigners at Luxor in 1997. Food is another matter. Egypt is the world's largest importer of wheat. If China, afflicted with drought, has to buy the wheat it can't grow, that might price Cairo out of the market, bringing misery to millions who already have a hard time putting food on the table.

Who, then, I ask Mustafa, is going to govern Egypt? She thinks Amr Moussa will win the presidential election this fall; recent polls suggest the same. As secretary general of the Arab League, Moussa, 74, has name recognition. And as Mubarak's former foreign minister, says Mustafa, "Moussa is the favorite of the state establishment." The liberals, she explains, don't have a chance right now because they're in disarray. "They've been excluded from the political system for decades and manipulated by the regime. They're fragmented, and there's personal competition."

A liberal herself, Mustafa says the liberals need more time to organize. But the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces seeks a rapid transition; it wants to relinquish overt control of the government. The landslide "yes" vote in the March 19 referendum was a rebuff to the demonstrators but grants the military its wish: Egypt will move promptly to parliamentary and then presidential elections without stopping to write a new constitution—and without giving the young activists who drove the revolution or the older, established liberals a chance to win grassroots support.

The Muslim Brotherhood lined up alongside the armed forces in seeking the "yes" vote—in part because the Brotherhood understood that as the country's best organized political party it had most to gain from moving quickly to elections, even as it promised to contest only 30 percent of the seats. Standing by the army also means that the Brotherhood can expect more political patronage than it enjoyed from the Mubarak regime.

Effectively shut out of the parliamentary process that they wanted reformed, the young activists, paradoxically, can exert more power by maintaining a presence in Tahrir and making demands on the army than they could ever hope to exercise through parliament. For now, their continued protests seem to be pushing the political system in a populist direction rather than a liberal democratic one.

So where is the democratic change that the revolution seemed to herald, I ask Mustafa. "The change," she says, drawing languidly on her water pipe, "is limited."

It is still difficult to figure out exactly what happened during Egypt's revolution. Unlike the 1919 revolution led by Saad Zaghloul or the 1952 coup led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, the January 25 uprising produced no obvious leader. No single figure owns the narrative describing the events that toppled Mubarak. As for the two existing power centers that can be said to have emerged from the revolution stronger, both the Egyptian Army and the Muslim Brotherhood are extremely conservative outfits that are happier keeping a low profile. Neither is likely to volunteer its version of events.

The revolution, meanwhile, has knocked another

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

established player off the board: Mubarak's National Democratic party no longer exists as such. It is perhaps most useful to think of the former ruling party as the umbrella under which clustered a countrywide network of local powerbrokers, businessmen, village sheikhs, and mayors, all of whose patronage systems served the Mubarak regime. These networks aren't going anywhere—they are the core of the country's political organization, and in rural areas they're its social organization as well. But they are no longer unified under the NDP. Whoever wants the support of, say, some clan in a Delta village has a free shot at it, if he can afford to take it.

More important, the NDP was essentially the dummy corporation that Mubarak set up to front for a regime run by the military since 1952. That civilian façade permitted the army to profit handsomely from its many business ventures without too many questions asked. With the uprising exposing the army to unprecedented and unwanted attention—such as a *New York Times* profile of army chief of staff Sami Enan—senior military officers, like the man who is now the de facto ruler of Egypt, Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, are eager to recede once again into the background.

The military regime's civilian camouflage also explains the apparent contradiction at the heart of the uprising: If the demonstrators were protesting corruption, how did the army—the richest and, therefore, by the protesters' own lights, the most corrupt institution in all of Egypt—escape their contempt and instead win their affection?

The army is loved—unlike the internal security forces, which are a constant and feared presence in Egyptian life. The army occupies a privileged place in the national imagination, admired for its self-proclaimed triumph in the 1973 war with Israel (a war Egypt actually lost). Some Egyptians, including the Tahrir revolutionaries, are becoming uncomfortable with the military's governing role. Even so, the corruption trials announced so far will target only the upper echelons of the NDP. It is partly because the military is untouchable that the demonstrators, like most of Egypt, have chosen to ignore the reality that they are ruled by the army and to believe, rather, that their problems stemmed solely from a cabal of self-interested businessmen.

The peculiar thing is that somewhere along the way, the NDP became more than just a mask for the regime. It took on a life of its own, thanks to the businessmen and financiers associated with Gamal Mubarak. There was Egypt's most despised billionaire, Ahmed Ezz, the NDP's secretary for organizational affairs. Less conspicuous but perhaps equally influential was former finance minister Youssef Boutros-Ghali, nephew of the former U.N. secretary general, who seems to have been responsible for most of the highly praised economic reforms. These figures and other pillars of the NDP were almost certainly corrupt. But corruption is structural in a country with a bureaucratic tradition 5,000 years old. Nothing gets done here without connections, or *wasta*.

The young technocrats fought turf wars with the NDP's old guard. Much more dangerously, they challenged the military's exclusive right to rule and make money. When Mubarak—or, as rumor has it, his wife Suzanne—put forth Gamal as his successor, the army balked. The problem was that Gamal and his set represented an affront to the military's privilege. When the protesters filled the streets this winter, they and the army worked in tandem to dismantle an upstart political dynasty they both resented.

There were broad hints all along as to who really ran Egypt, but even the intelligentsia ignored them. For instance, according to Egyptian journalists with the independent media, the official redlines regulating what it was possible to say in the press had greatly weakened over the last few years, so that it was even possible to criticize President Mubarak by name. The only redline that remained absolute was the one protecting the military and its budget, available to anyone who reads the U.S. press but censored in Egypt on grounds of national security. Now, activists are angry that the army is using military courts to put bloggers in jail for criticizing the interim rulers. Some of them may be starting to get wise.

And yet it is this same Egyptian kabuki show—the pretense of a civilian republic—that allowed the military to step in as an "impartial" institution and assume control of the country in a relatively peaceful manner in the second week of February. But if the military tires of meeting the demonstrators' demands, the January 25 revolution may move into a more violent phase. It will become evident that the people and the army are not really, as the banners in Tahrir read, hand in hand.

Not all of Egypt's middle-class youth were won over by the revolution. I'm sitting on a balcony overlooking downtown—Tahrir is in the near distance—talking with Amr Bargisi, senior partner in a local NGO, the Egyptian Union for Liberal Youth (EULY). "If you're not with the revolution, you're not a man," Bargisi says friends told him. The EULY offices must comprise the highest concentration of Egyptians of the social-media generation who were not seduced by the cause. Bargisi, 27, and his colleagues, none of them over 30, were ostracized. "Some of us got de-friended on Facebook," he says, relishing the idea that a revolutionary movement driven partly by social media would use

the same means to shut out dissenting voices. He had his own criticisms of the Mubarak regime; he just didn't think that the protesters' rallying cries had much merit. "The referendum," Bargisi explains, "was about the legitimacy of the revolution. The demonstrators called for a 'no' vote, but 77 percent of Egyptians voted 'yes.' Which means that the demonstrators did not speak for all of Egypt, as they claimed."

Bargisi grew up in a small town in the Nile delta, where he taught himself English and wound up studying abroad, at the University of Chicago with Leon Kass. It was his love for his homeland and admiration for the United States that drew him back to Egypt two years ago to promote political and economic liberalism. His concern is that Egypt has no liberal roots. As a result, the revolution may turn the country over to forces that are even more illiberal than the late regime. Bargisi's views make him part of a tiny minority, one that saw merit in Mubarak's economic opening.

"People say that the corruption at the top prevented the wealth from reaching the lower rungs," says Bargisi. "But I can tell you from anecdotal evidence that if it reached the village where my mother was raised, it hit everyone. In my mother's village the houses went from mud-brick to stone, and everyone has cell phones. The country's inequality index stayed the same while the economy grew steadily at 7 percent, which means that everyone's situation improved at the same time, rich and poor alike."

It is true that poverty did not diminish, says Karim Badr, the economics researcher. "It was reshuffled. This is what happens in transitional economies." But for many of the protesters, the issue was precisely the yawning disparity between rich and poor denoted in the phrase "social justice." A leftwing slogan with Islamist overtones (Muslim Brotherhood theorist Sayyid Qutb published *Social Justice in Islam* in 1949), this is also a populist rallying cry, and given Egypt's modern history, populism is a more likely and immediate concern than an Islamist regime dominated by the Brotherhood.

To be sure, the Muslim Brotherhood is bound to play a role in post-Mubarak Egypt. But it will bide its time. It has little to gain by claiming ownership of the country's daunting economic problems. Those who do want to become Egypt's rulers, meanwhile, are already playing the populist card. Mohamed ElBaradei, former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency and a likely contender for president, says that if the Israelis attack Gaza, Egypt will declare war on Jerusalem—a warning that Iran might very well read as an invitation to accomplish a longstanding strategic goal by trashing the Camp David accords. Recent calls for the U.N. to impose a no-fly zone over Gaza were spearheaded by Amr Moussa, the front-runner for president.

Many press accounts reported that there was precious little anti-Israel sentiment in Tahrir Square. The fact remains, however, that Egyptian officials know this is a powerful card they can play to win support. And the issue is not simply opposition to Zionism or Israeli policies. It's anti-Semitism. This is the subject of much of Bargisi's work with EULY. He considers anti-Semitism the telltale sign of an illiberal society. His own grandfather, Bargisi explains, had a business partner who was Jewish, and his father remembered him as a good man. His father "didn't like all this hatred of Jews, and he despised Nasserism."

Mubarak was the picture of stasis—his timidity and mediocrity were the premise of much Egyptian humor during his reign—but it was under his rule that Egyptians enjoyed the relatively dynamic economy of the last few years.

It was Nasser's dynamic style, his interference in regional affairs, and his desire to strut on the world stage that Mubarak veered away from, soberly maintaining the peace treaty that Sadat had signed. It may be that the Egyptian Army has no stomach for another war with Israel—and polls show that Egyptians don't want another war—but the decisions of Egypt's rulers are only one factor among many that will determine the country's regional profile. There are international dynamics, such as possible competition with Iran and Turkey, that may shape its new foreign policy. More significant are the domestic dynamics embodied in the young activists, who are already pushing the army in uncomfortable directions, forcing it to detain its former commander in chief. Populism and pan-Arabist demagoguery are recurrent in modern Egyptian history, furies manipulated by rulers who finally cannot control them.

The strange thing is that while Mubarak was the picture of stasis—his timidity and mediocrity were the premise of much Egyptian humor during his reign—it was under his rule that Egyptians enjoyed the relatively dynamic economy of the last few years. Bargisi and his colleagues blame the government for failing to explain the economic reforms so as to get the middle class on board. But rising expectations often precede political upheaval—which is to say that human beings seldom fit the mold of *homo economicus* and often act against what seems to be their rational self-interest.

Politics is based on sentiment as often as reason, and one of the driving emotions of the January revolution was anger: anger at a regime that kept in place an emergency law adopted in 1967; that tortured prisoners and imprisoned opposition leaders, bloggers, and journalists; that flaunted its wealth and cornered too many businesses, especially the business of politics; anger at a ruler who overstayed his welcome. The regime could no longer sustain its legitimacy, founded on the myth of victory in the 1973 war. Mubarak, who commanded the air force in that war, became increasingly vulnerable as fewer and fewer Egyptians remembered it. His chosen heir had no legitimacy at all, either with the Egyptian people or with the constituency he needed most, the army.

In Tahrir Square, all that anger, combined with the freedom to express it, unleashed violence that caught both Egyptians and outsiders by surprise. Though Egypt's revolution is sometimes said to have been peaceful, it left at least 365 dead. "If this was a white revolution," says Bargisi, "I don't want to see what a black one looks like."

Most of the violence was attributed to people paid by the regime, either plainclothes security officers or freelancers. A Western NGO executive who works on democracy promotion in the Middle East told me that the men on camels and horses who laid siege to Tahrir were sent by a businessman who owns all the stables at the Pyramids. "Maybe," says Bargisi, "but that doesn't make their anger any less genuine. People may want to dismiss them as *baltageya*, street thugs, but we're talking about 20 percent to 30 percent of urban Egyptians. They're not bad guys—they're day laborers who do odd jobs, sometimes plumbing or carpentry, and sometimes they carry a knife for pay. The demonstrations virtually shut down Egypt. These guys couldn't put food on their table. They wanted the demonstrations to stop and the country to go back to normal, so they took matters into their own hands."

All of a sudden, the same street toughs who'd battled the police the first few nights of the revolution turned on the protesters. They harassed anyone they saw who looked like a protester, calling them agents of Israel and the United States or stooges of Hamas and Qatar. They beat some demonstrators. "One night these two guys escorted one of the girls from our group back to our apartment from Tahrir, and we offered them some tea," says Bargisi. "One guy's standing there with a big knife in his hands, which is not a nice thing in a small apartment, and he's explaining that he doesn't want to mug people, but he has no money."

When the camels and horses came to Tahrir, it wasn't the army that protected the protesters but the Muslim Brotherhood. The notion that the Brotherhood had little to do with the revolution runs counter to the evidence of modern-day Egyptian political activism. The Brotherhood has a showing at almost every political protest in Egypt; if they were not conspicuous in Tahrir, it is because they have been around long enough to know when to keep their heads down and their beards shaven and to watch as events take their course—but also when to step in. Islam Hassan, a 25-year-old colleague of Bargisi's, explains that he was in Tahrir every day filming events and saw the Brotherhood at work.

"They brought in the food, the blankets, they took care of people," says Hassan. "When night came, it was the Brotherhood who camped out at Tahrir, not the young middle-class activists. At first they denied that the Brotherhood was there, but then after the camels, it became impossible to deny. The Brotherhood protected the activists, and they got a lot of credit for it. And all of a sudden the rhetoric changed. Now it was okay that the Muslim Brotherhood was there, so long as they served the same objectives, even though the young activists had no sense of how they'd deal with the Brotherhood after the revolution."

U.S. policymakers worry about the Brotherhood's increasing role in Egyptian politics, especially its implications for the peace treaty with Israel. "The West is obsessed with the Islamists," says Bargisi. "For the West everything bad is about Islamism, and all that's good is about democracy." But the main problems and promises of the January 25 revolution are not about the Islamists or Israel.

Around the region, Mubarak's successors and peers have drawn their own lesson from the Egyptian revolution. To wit: When the Americans tell you to reform, tell them to jump off a cliff, because regardless of your standing with the World Bank, the White House will abandon you when your own people rise up. Accordingly, a month after Mubarak resigned, the Bahrainis rejected the Obama administration's demands for reform and national dialogue and instead invited in a Gulf Cooperation Council Force to quell their Shiite population. The Saudis turned a deaf ear to calls for reform and simply bribed their population with $93 billion in pay raises, subsidies, housing benefits, and so on. As it happens, that medieval monarchy can afford the bribe; pity the Syrians, whose cash-strapped regime can barely pay for the bullets it uses to shoot its own protesters in the street—reform Damascus-style.

That some of the hopes born in Tahrir Square have faded is only natural. Three turbulent weeks that brought down a pharaoh may prove in the long run to be only a shift in the breeze. Yet the revolution has brought to the fore a force that's long been dormant in Egypt, a rising generation—its young activists as well as its liberal skeptics, both of whom want something better for their country. What they and their countrymen will be able to achieve, given the pathologies of Egyptian political culture, remains to be seen. ♦

The Firm of Art

McKim, Mead, White and America's design

BY EDWARD SHORT

Washington Square Arch (built 1892)

STOCK CONNECTION WORLDWIDE / NEWSCOM

Trying to imagine New York without the architecture of McKim, Mead, and White is like trying to imagine Paris without the architecture of Baron Haussmann. Of course, a good deal of that architecture is gone. We no longer have the wonderful old Pennsylvania Station that McKim modeled after the baths of Caracalla, or the Madison Square Garden that White based on the Cathedral of Seville, or the whimsical Herald Building that White modeled after the Loggia del Consiglio in Verona. But we do have the Metropolitan Club, the University Club, the Post Office, the Villard Houses, the Municipal Building, the Metropolitan Museum, and Washington Square Arch, to name only some of the firm's New York buildings. Without these, New York might still have some modest claim to architectural distinction, but it would have lost its greatest monuments to that acquisitive swagger that defined the Gilded Age.

In *Triumvirate: McKim, Mead and White: Art, Architecture, Scandal and*

Triumvirate
McKim, Mead and White: Art, Architecture, Scandal and Class in America's Gilded Age
by Mosette Broderick
Knopf, 608 pp., $40

Edward Short is the author of Newman and his Contemporaries.

Class in America's Gilded Age, Mosette Broderick revisits the three distinctly different personalities that founded the firm to show how their complementary strengths transformed architecture not only in New York but in all America at a time when the country was ripe for an aesthetic reawakening.

Charles Follen McKim (1847-1909) was born and raised a Quaker in southeastern Pennsylvania, the son of an abolitionist. If McKim *père* dedicated his life to freeing the slaves, McKim *fils* dedicated his to giving his compatriots an architecture that would at once appropriate and renew European architecture. A scholarly, exacting, discriminating man, McKim lived in Europe for three years, where he studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris after attending Harvard's Lawrence Scientific School. On his return, he worked in the offices of Henry Hobson Richardson, the premier architect of the day, where he not only tapped his Harvard connections to obtain commissions but met White.

Stanford White (1853-1906) was the son of an impecunious Shakespeare scholar whose literary ambitions would never be realized. Still, it was from his Anglophile dandy of a father that he acquired his passion for art. Although poorly educated, White was a quick study and brimming with talent. He was also an inspired draughtsman. For Richardson, who made the lively autodidact his personal assistant, White's contribution to the famous firm was indisputable. He was also a consummate collector, whose avidity for furniture, rugs, hangings, plates, paintings, and antiques of all descriptions fed his flair for interior decoration. That some of these acquisitions were spurious never bothered White: They helped form his highly intuitive taste, and since it was his taste that brought in many of the firm's commissions, he learned to treat the impostures of dealers as simply another cost of doing business.

Unfortunately, he also had a passion for showgirls, and Broderick vividly describes his murder at the roof garden of Madison Square Garden by Harry Thaw, the jealous husband of Evelyn Nesbit. Interestingly enough, the murder occurred while one Harry Short was singing a popular tune of the day, "I Could Love a Thousand Girls," which might have been White's theme song. Yet as Broderick notes, "The autopsy results shocked [White's] family almost as much as the murder. . . . White was in terrible health. Indeed, he was dying of kidney disease. Thaw never needed to shoot White. He would have died naturally in a few months' time." In all events, after pleading insanity, Thaw went scot-free.

William Rutherford Mead (1846-1928) was the down-to-earth engineer of the firm who, unlike his partners, was happily married. If McKim was given to immobilizing depression and White to ringing the midnight bell, Mead was the reliable office man who, as Broderick notes, "ensured the completion of the projects and stability in the small, dark spaces of lower Broadway." He saw to it, moreover, that the often-ambitious ideas of his partners were translated into structures that were as functional as they were beautiful. Taught his trade by the successful architect George Fletcher Babb in the offices of Russell Sturgis, Mead had no illusions about his own capabilities and deferred to the more original talents of his partners. Nevertheless, when he traveled to Florence as a young man, he was disappointed by the architecture, which he considered too derivative, a criticism which the tribe of Le Corbusier would often level at the work of Mead and his confreres in the 20th century.

What is striking about the borrowings of McKim, Mead, and White is how they prefigure what T. S. Eliot had to say about the relationship between the artist and the past in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919). There, he spoke of "the historical sense," the "perception" (as he defined it) "not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence," which makes the artist "most acutely conscious of his place in time," as well as "his contemporaneity." In modeling their public buildings on past designs, McKim, Mead, and White were not merely paying homage to the past: They were staking out claims for the present, which readjusted both past and present in precisely the way Eliot thought good traditional art must.

> The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order *must* be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order . . . will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.

McKim's appropriations of classical models in his designs for Pennsylvania Station brilliantly illustrate Eliot's understanding of the vitality of tradition. Eliot would also have enjoyed White's impish parody of White's Club in London, which James Wyatt designed in 1787-88, for his design of the Century Club, about which Broderick is nicely observant.

> Both have a rusticated base, pilaster strips that double on either side of the center of the building, five bays each, round ornament in four of the upper-story bays, and a crowning balustrade. Lost at the Century was White's famous 1811 bow window [behind which Beau Brummell entertained his louche associates]. Instead, the Century has a tall central arched entrance. Above the entry at the Century was an open, Italianate loggia formed by a great Palladian window. The resemblance is amazingly close, but the details vary, as do the materials.

One can see the same innovative use of models in the charming summer houses that the firm built in New Jersey and Rhode Island, which were inspired by the work of the English architect Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912) and the Queen Anne Movement. Growing up around Elberon, New Jersey, where the firm built so many cottages in the shingle style, I vividly recall these breezy, capacious, ramshackle houses, with their wraparound porches and witch-

hat roofs. The book's photographs recapture the now-vanished seaside of my childhood.

Although cosmopolitan, McKim, Mead, and White always remained distinctly American—a trait they shared with Henry James. In *Sweetness and Light: The Queen Anne Movement: 1860-1900* (1977), the architectural historian Mark Girouard notes how White's design for the Watts-Sherman house in Newport is

> a brilliantly individual version of Shaw's "Old English" manner—chimneys, sunflowers, oriels, overhanging gables, irregularity, and all. But "Old English" tile-hanging is replaced by a lavish use of its American equivalent, wooden shingles, and the windows, instead of being glazed with leaded lights in the Old English manner, have a close grid of wooden glazing bars.

Moreover, White and his partners treated space differently because, as Girouard notes, "in America the social system which in England worked to separate men from women, grown-ups from children, and family from servants was less constrictive; spaces could open into each other without causing social embarrassment."

The loveliest of these shingle houses is the Robert Goelet House, which still stands in Newport. Goelet was the son of an old New Yorker of Huguenot stock who kept peacocks in his garden at East 19th Street and Broadway. The house that White built for him is of a prodigious beauty. To appreciate that beauty, one has to keep in mind how unusual it was in most American residential architecture. H. L. Mencken is amusing on this score.

> On a winter day, not long ago, coming out of Pittsburgh on one of the swift, luxurious expresses of the eminent Pennsylvania Railroad, I rolled eastward for an hour through the coal and steel towns of Westmoreland County. It was familiar ground; boy and man, I had been through it often before. But somehow I had never quite sensed its appalling desolation. Here was the very heart of industrial America, the center of its most lucrative and characteristic activity, the boast and pride of the richest and grandest nation ever seen on earth—and here was a scene so dreadfully hideous, so intolerably bleak and forlorn that it reduced the whole aspiration of man to a macabre and depressing joke. Here was wealth beyond computation, almost beyond imagination—and here were human habitations so abominable that they would have disgraced a race of alley cats.

Stanford White (1895)

McKim, Mead, and White were not unfamiliar with such noisome districts. When the firm built the Percy Rivington Pyne House on East 68th Street and Park Avenue, the neighborhood had only recently been transformed from a shantytown where locomotives made their fuliginous way to Grand Central. Broderick speaks of her subjects, so many of whom came from abolitionist backgrounds, as turning "the fervor of their parents' abolitionist zeal into the cause for beauty, carrying the banner of art forward as their parents had done with that of the freedom for the slaves." This is what made the firm great. McKim, Mead, and White (and their junior associate Joe Wells) did zealously work to dissuade Americans from sating what Mencken called the "libido for the ugly" by introducing a new beauty into American architecture.

Broderick's command of the professional lives of the trio is admirably thorough. Indeed, she has made this material so much her own that she presents her narrative with few inclusions of secondary or primary sources. The absence of the former might be welcome; after all, she is writing for the general reader, not the academy. But the absence of primary sources—letters, memoranda, diary entries, news accounts, contemporary criticism—weakens her otherwise seamless narrative. The Gilded Age was neither a reticent nor a dull age: Broderick might have occasionally allowed it to speak for itself.

Nevertheless, anyone interested in architecture, history, New York, Newport, or that amusing thing, class, will want to get hold of this engaging book. On that last item, Broderick is insightful—as here, where she speaks of McKim after his triumphant completion of the Boston Public Library.

> McKim could see himself now as a mature master, fostering the education of a future generation of American architects. He had joined those he had felt were his natural companions. In marrying into the Brahmin class, McKim had joined the Episcopal Church and let his family heritage of politically based idealism go. Indeed, when he was courting Julia [his second wife] and the family of William Lloyd Garrison had asked McKim to design the base for a monument to the great abolitionist, he declined the job. He instead gave it over to Joe Wells. ♦

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

B&A

Puritan in Verse

The poet-politician of the English Civil War gets his due. **BY BARTON SWAIM**

When Andrew Marvell died in 1678, he wasn't thought of as a great poet, or indeed a poet of any caliber at all. He was known as an industrious member of Parliament and as a talented pamphleteer—author, among other works, of *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, a witheringly funny attack on the Erastian and anti-Puritan cleric Samuel Parker, and *An Account of the Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government in England*, a work that generated precisely the kind of alarm its author thought the times warranted. Most of Marvell's poems were not published until 1681, three years after his death, when his housekeeper, Mary Palmer, brought out a collection titled *Miscellaneous Poems* in which she described herself as having been Marvell's wife, a claim that remains unrefuted but highly doubtful. Eighteenth-century Whigs revered him as a defender of political liberty, but only appreciated him as a poet. In fact, well over two centuries would pass before Marvell would become anything more than an interesting second-tier lyricist.

His reputation rose steadily throughout the 19th century, but it wasn't until 1921, when T.S. Eliot published an essay celebrating the tercentenary of the poet's birth, that Marvell began to acquire his present reputation as one of the language's greatest minor poets. (Eliot described Marvell's poetry as cutting a middle path between Milton's magniloquence and Dryden's wit, which seems about right.) Yet Marvell is still, even now, underrepresented in the field of biography. There has been no comprehensive Life of Marvell since Pierre Legouis's critical biography of 1928; Nigel Smith, professor of English at Princeton and an excellent scholar of 17th-century literature, has now filled that void with this authoritative Life. Smith's writing is clear and bereft of scholarly jargon—but alas, his book has no narrative thrust whatever. The first thing a nonspecialist reader of Marvell's life wants to know about "To His Coy Mistress" isn't that "the poem is an example (almost to a self-parodic degree) of the *carpe diem* motif" or that it "alludes to the contemporary millenarian sense that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent." He wants to know what this technically perfect and endlessly searchable poem may reveal about the author's character and circumstances—and of that we get almost nothing.

Andrew Marvell
The Chameleon
by Nigel Smith
Yale, 416 pp., $45

In Smith's defense, Marvell's must be a difficult life to write. It would take a special talent to create a narrative out of a biography in which there are so many gaps. In some instances the only evidence we have of his existence is a stray comment or two by some brief acquaintance. He was not one to cultivate many close friendships—*Two paradises 'twere in one / To live in paradise alone*, he wrote in one of his finest poems, "The Garden"—and so there are only a few recorded recollections of the man extant.

Andrew Marvell was born in Hull, Yorkshire, the son of a learned and highly capable clergyman, also named Andrew. He was given a classical education at Hull Grammar School and matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge, when he was 12. At Trinity he endured a regime designed to give students a mastery, if not complete dominion, over classical and biblical writings. In his seventh year at Trinity, however—the first four to attain a BA degree, the following three toward his MA—Marvell, along with four other scholars, lost his scholarship and was asked to leave. The college's reasons are not known: one of many maddening question marks about Marvell's life. A year later both his parents were dead, their son trying to make his way as a clerk for a London bookseller; and it's from this time that his earliest English poetry dates.

Already his verse had that elusive perfection we associate with his more famous poems. There is this, for instance, from "The Unfortunate Lover," with its evocation of orphanhood:

> *No day he saw but that which breaks*
> *Through frighted clouds in forkèd streaks,*
> *While round the rattling thunder hurled,*
> *As at the funeral of the world.*

At some point during the following year, Marvell left England for a tour of Europe in which (as is thought) he served as governor to a young nobleman on a Grand Tour. In any case, he missed the entire first Civil War. In the winter of 1652-53 we find him trying to get a job in the government of the new republic, and although he didn't get one, he did ingratiate himself sufficiently to become governor to Cromwell's nephew and spent the next several years in further European travels. In September 1657 he became Milton's assistant in the great man's role as secretary for foreign or Latin tongues. From this point his career took an upward trajectory. Later, Marvell would downplay his role in Cromwell's government, but he must have been an asset to the Commonwealth. In 1659 he became MP for Hull, a seat he held (discounting a single year) until his death almost 20 years later.

Marvell's associations with Cromwell do not seem to have hurt him

Barton Swaim is the author of Scottish Men of Letters and the New Public Sphere: 1802-1834.

much during the Restoration. Apart from intermittent outbursts of irritation, he was a quiet, unassuming man, with a talent for knowing who not to provoke: a valuable skill in political life. "He was in his conversation very modest, and of very few words," one friend remembered, and he only drank to excess when alone, "to refresh his spirits, and exalt his muse."

I wonder, though, whether Smith or an editor chose the subtitle's vaguely pejorative descriptor, "the chameleon." It's true that Marvell's political writings resist easy categorization. The famous "Horatian Ode" to Cromwell, ostensibly a panegyric, gives some of its best lines in praise of the posthumously beheaded monarch (*Nor called the Gods with vulgar spite / To vindicate his helpless Right, / But bowed his comely Head, / Down as upon a Bed*). And in "Tom May's Death," written at almost the same time, Marvell ridiculed a former royalist for, among other things, switching sides and turning pro-republican (*Apostatizing from our Arts and us, / To turn the Chronicler to* Spartacus—"Spartacus" being Cromwell). Yet as Smith's own analysis suggests, none of this is evidence of inconstancy or opportunism, and Marvell's conduct after the fall of the Protectorate was as consistent and principled as one has a right to expect of any politician. He repeatedly risked his own career to defend his friend Milton from the court party's reprisals, at one point intervening to get the old Puritan released from prison. Nor did he ever abandon his concern for the plight of Nonconformists. On that subject, indeed, he once provoked a fellow MP, Thomas Clifford of Chudleigh, a hardheaded Tory and furtive Roman Catholic, into striking him. (Both men were obliged to apologize to the other in the presence of the full House of Commons.)

And whatever may have happened in the 1630s, when Marvell is thought to have considered becoming a Jesuit, there is no reason to doubt the authenticity and consistency of his religious commitments. The exquisitely beautiful lines of "Bermudas," probably written during Marvell's acquaintance with John Oxenbridge, a Nonconformist minister who had fled to Bermuda during the persecutions of the 1640s, defies every modern attempt to make them ironic. The poem ends,

Thus sung they, in the English boat,
An holy and a cheerful note;
And all the way, to guide their chime,
With falling oars they kept the time.

Why did Marvell's reputation as a poet climb so dramatically during the 20th century? Several answers come to mind. The Metaphysical poets (Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Marvell, and a few others) appealed to the Modernists, chief among them Eliot, for evident reasons: Their meanings tend to be tightly compressed, they are preoccupied with intellectual problems, and their solutions to those problems are frequently contingent rather than final. Some of Marvell's best lyrics, while never engaging in the kind of esotericism in which the 20th-century Modernists indulged, do not yield their meanings easily. Here, for example, is one of his less well-known poems, "On a Drop of Dew," in which the dewdrop serves as a metaphor for the human soul: pure, barely clinging to the thing to which it's temporarily attached, and destined to return to its provenance soon enough. It's a passage of exquisite beauty, and yet the fullness of its meaning lies just beyond one's grasp.

In how coy a Figure wound,
Every way it turns away:
So the World-excluding round
Yet receiving in the Day.
Dark beneath, but bright above:
Here disdaining, there in Love.
How loose and easie hence to go:
How girt and ready to ascend.
Moving but on a point below,
It all about does upwards bend.

Andrew Marvell

Marvell's ability to compress large theological and philosophical meanings into short lines doesn't always make his verse difficult, though. These lines, taken from "An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland"—to my mind his greatest work—express a profound and profoundly complicated truth in eight graceful lines:

Though Justice against Fate complain
And plead the ancient rights in vain:
But those do hold or break
As men are strong or weak.

Nature that hateth emptiness,
Allows of penetration less,
And therefore must make room
Where greater spirits come.

Marvell does not say that the "ancient rights" of monarchical succession are imaginary or even dead; indeed, Justice itself pleads in their favor. But abstract "rights" mean nothing in the absence of strength, and when strength fails, "greater spirits" move into the vacuum. (Note the ambiguity of the word "greater." Marvell does not say "nobler" or even "better," though the meter would have permitted it.)

One finishes this biography without feeling one has seen the essence of Marvell's character. The biographer's not to blame for that. The available evidence is too scarce, and Marvell himself was too unforthcoming to yield a satisfying life portrait. What remains is the poetry, in all its sparing beauty. ♦

POPPERFOTO / GETTY IMAGES

B&A

Red Puppeteer

The hidden life, in plain sight, of a Communist spymaster. **BY HARVEY KLEHR**

Red Conspirator
J. Peters and the American Communist Underground
by Thomas Sakmyster
Illinois, 280 pp., $50

Readers might react to news of yet another biography of a Communist involved in the Hiss-Chambers spy case with a tired shrug and dismissive comment about how, surely, we have learned everything there is to know.

That would be a mistake, as Thomas Sakmyster's fascinating account of the remarkable life of Sandor Goldberger, better known in the United States as József (or J.) Peters makes clear. Most biographies of American Communist *apparatchiks* have been accounts of the lives of party leaders like Earl Browder, William Foster, Eugene Dennis, or stories of rank-and-file figures. There are a handful of biographies of party cadres like Steve Nelson or Hosea Hudson—but most of their activities took place outside of New York and party headquarters, and both were mostly involved in mass activities, not internal party machinations. And unlike Whittaker Chambers, his onetime friend and comrade in the underground, Peters remained, to the end of his long life, a devoted Communist, intent on taking his secrets to the grave.

Based on careful and extensive digging in American and foreign archives, particularly in Hungary, *Red Conspirator* is both a lively and well-written book, and the best life story yet published in English of a particular Communist type: the professional revolutionary who lived virtually his entire life in the shadowy netherworld where legality shaded into illegality and loyalty to Moscow and the world revolution trumped national identity. That its protagonist was a central figure in the most explosive American espionage case in the 20th century only adds spice to the mix.

J. Peters (1948)

J. Peters was the most common of the many names Goldberger used. He figures in many books dealing with the history of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), a shadowy personage who emerged from the obscure and balkanized world of the foreign-language federations that enrolled the bulk of the party's membership in the 1920s to become an important figure in the CPUSA's organizational department in the 1930s. His most lasting literary achievement, *A Manual on Organization*, was hailed as a classic statement of Bolshevik organization when it was published in 1935; it enjoyed a much longer afterlife as the prize exhibit for anti-Communists of the rigidly Stalinist and anti-democratic nature of the CPUSA.

Known for much of his life only within the confines of the CPUSA—and even then only to those focused on inner-party life—Peters became a public figure after Whittaker Chambers testified in 1948 that he was an important cog in the machine connecting the CPUSA with Soviet espionage. Chambers identified Peters as the supervisor of a group of government employees in Washington called the Ware Group that had included Alger Hiss and had served as a training ground for espionage. After taking the Fifth Amendment in response to all pertinent questions about his activities, Peters voluntarily accepted deportation to Hungary, where he dropped out of sight, emerging only briefly in the 1980s to deny vehemently any involvement in "secret work." He died in obscurity in 1990, having survived long enough to witness the collapse of the Communist dream to which he had dedicated his life.

Born into a poor Jewish family in a Hungarian town in Ruthenia in 1894, Sandor Goldberger had completed three semesters of law school when World War I broke out and he was drafted into the Austro-Hungarian Army; with some higher education he became a lieutenant in the infantry and served honorably in Italy for four years. Returning home, he quickly became radicalized after learning from friends about the Russian Revolution; his life was likely spared because his hometown was ceded to Czechoslovakia by the peace treaties and he missed the White Terror that decimated the ranks of Hungarian Communists in

Harvey Klehr is the Andrew W. Mellon professor of politics and history at Emory and the author, with John Earl Haynes and Alexander Vassiliev, of Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America.

1920. Along with his family, he emigrated to the United States in 1924. Sakmyster speculates, not unreasonably, that Goldberger had concluded that he would never escape identification as a Jew in Europe; for not the last time, he lied to obtain his visa, hiding his Jewish identity and claiming to be a physician.

Quickly joining the Hungarian Federation of the CPUSA, he dropped his Jewish-sounding name for József Péter, and within a year had been dispatched to the Midwest to organize Hungarian-American workers. Better educated than many of his comrades, and possessed of a quiet competence, he was tapped by the party leadership to run the federation in 1926; his biggest triumph was to disrupt the dedication of a New York statue to the Hungarian national hero Lajos Kossuth on the grounds that it was a propaganda ploy of the Horthy regime. More significantly, his use of federation funds to solve the financial problems afflicting the *Daily Worker* earned the plaudits of the CPUSA leadership, and he was soon hobnobbing with them on national committees and being selected to attend meetings in Moscow. When the Communist International denounced his patrons as revisionists in 1929, Péter immediately turned on them and proclaimed his fervent support for the new party leaders, earning promotion to organizational secretary of the New York district and leaving the insular, ethnic world of the Hungarians behind.

In his new post, Péter demonstrated the talents that would endear him to Soviet intelligence agencies. He enforced party discipline on recalcitrant or treacherous members, recalling in one private memoir that he ordered "spies" to be beaten up. He was also responsible for organizing groups who disrupted meetings of Socialists and other party enemies, and was assigned the task of setting up an illegal apparatus, for which task he traveled to Moscow on a false passport in 1931. In the Soviet Union he worked at Comintern headquarters, helping to supervise Americans in the country and receiving training in *konspiratsia*. He returned to the United States in mid-1932, now using J. Peters as his name and assumed his new role; as he told one comrade, the open CPUSA was like a periscope, but below the surface was the most important part of the organization, the one he directed. As confirmation of his status, he became a member-at-large of the three most important legal committees of the CPUSA, even while supervising the party's preparation for illegal work, ferreting out spies and traitors in its ranks, and serving as liaison with Soviet intelligence agencies.

Sakmyster's discussion of Peters's supervision of the illegal apparatus is the most detailed portrait yet written about this little-known but key aspect of party life. One of Peters's most ingenious operations was an effort to obtain false passports for Soviet intelligence agents, Comintern emissaries, and Americans traveling to fight in the Spanish Civil War. A team of Communist women pored over vital records in the New York Public Library to find children who had died soon after their births and then requested copies of their birth certificates. Trusted Communists would then apply for passports, accompanied by witnesses who would vouch that they had known the applicant the required five years.

In a pinch, Peters used contacts in local governments in New York and Atlantic City to enter false information in municipal records. He obtained several thousand fake passports over the years, selling many of them to Soviet military intelligence for money used to support the CPUSA's illegal apparatus. Peters also recruited scores of CPUSA members and sympathizers to cooperate with both the KGB and GRU. In addition to Chambers, he enlisted such diverse figures as Ted Fitzgerald, later a member of the Silvermaster group of spies, Frederick Vanderbilt Field, scion of one of the wealthiest families in America, Hideo Noda, a Japanese-American painter sent on a spy mission to Japan, and Joseph Losey, a future Hollywood director who worked as a courier between the United States and Europe. Sakmyster provides a detailed picture of Peters's espionage ring, carefully explaining how it was set up, why it sometimes malfunctioned, and what kinds of information it provided to the Soviets.

Over the years, Peters moved back and forth between the legal CPUSA and its more shadowy auxiliary. Following Chambers's defection in 1938, fearing exposure, Peters stepped down as head of the secret apparatus and resumed work in the open CPUSA. But in 1939 the indictment of a number of people involved in his fake passport scheme convinced him that he had to once again disappear from sight. He assumed a new identity, Alexander Stevens, severed his ties with the open party, and tried to avoid any open Communist activity that might bring him to the attention of authorities. Ironically, a secret mission as liaison to a clandestine Communist group in Hollywood brought Stevens onto the FBI's radar screen. But while the FBI had futilely been searching for J. Peters since the late 1930s, it was not until 1943 that it figured out that he was Stevens. By the time it began a far-ranging investigation, he had resumed open party work under yet another alias, Steve Miller. When his old comrade from the underground, Louis Budenz, named him in public testimony, Peters once again went into hiding in 1947.

Arrested by the Immigration and Naturalization Service in late 1947, Peters spent one night in detention—the only imprisonment he ever suffered in America—before being released on bail. Despite hopes that he might be induced to cooperate with the government, when summoned by the House Un-American Activities Committee, he took the Fifth on almost all questions. Indisputably guilty of traveling on a false passport, linking the CPUSA and Soviet intelligence agencies, and trying to infiltrate the armed services, he blandly denied in public statements that he was anything more than an advocate for workers and a devoted anti-fascist, insisting that he was the victim of persecution and lies told by those who wanted to "trample upon the Constitution." But he was deeply worried about the escalating Hiss-Chambers case and con-

sulted to no avail with comrades about how to pressure Chambers to keep quiet about his old Washington networks. Although he very much wanted to fight his deportation to Hungary, high-ranking Communist officials feared that, if he remained in America, he would only give the government more ammunition with which to pummel the CPUSA as a foreign conspiracy. After 25 years, Peters left the United States in 1949.

Lucky in America, Peters was just as lucky in Hungary. He arrived just as the purge trials in Eastern Europe were decimating the Communist movement. And except for his longtime cooperation with Soviet intelligence, he might well have been put in the dock with other Jews and returning émigrés who had lived abroad. Another black mark on his record was his close friendship in the CPUSA with John Lautner, another Hungarian American who, after being falsely accused of being an American agent by the Hungarian regime, was kidnapped, interrogated, and then expelled by the CPUSA—at which point he *did* become a government informant. Peters avoided arrest and was given a job in a state publishing house, enabling him to live a quiet and comfortable life until his death in 1990, not long after the cause to which he had devoted his life imploded.

Thomas Sakmyster not only unearths many of the remarkable details of that long life lived in the shadows, but exposes the credulity and stupidity of those who closed their eyes to Peters's long crusade to undermine the United States and aid its enemies. From those who naïvely believed that the CPUSA was mostly about labor organizing and combating racism and fascism, to the writers from the *Nation* who visited him in Hungary and innocently accepted his bland denials of having anything to do with underground or espionage activities, they determinedly averted their eyes from what J. Peters knew was the heart of the Communist movement. Thomas Sakmyster thoroughly details the fact that people like Whittaker Chambers told the truth. It is a story well worth reading. ♦

B&A

Artist in Exile

Paul Gauguin in search of paradise.

BY DEBORAH DIETSCH

'Vision After the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)' (1888)

Paul Gauguin is best known as the stockbroker-turned-artist who left his family and native France for Polynesia. His work of the 1880s and '90s is typically judged as being as unconventional as his life. Starting out as an Impressionist, he progressed to create more dissonant art through depictions of Breton fields and Tahitian beaches in boldly contrasting colors.

Gauguin: Maker of Myth
National Gallery of Art
Through June 5

Departing from this standard viewpoint, "Gauguin: Maker of Myth" reveals a more conservative side of the artist. Co-organized with London's Tate Modern, this thought-provoking exhibition focuses on the thematic content of Gauguin's painting, printmaking, and sculpture rather than on the development of his style and technique. Evident throughout the show are the artist's old-fashioned interests in biblical allegory, religious rituals, and cultural myths.

Like the great masters before him, Gauguin saw art as a didactic tool to impart truths about the human condition. He abandoned the what-you-see-is-what-you-get approach of Impressionism's naturalism to reinvest his art with symbolic meaning. This shift bucked the modern trend to erase narrative content from art and move toward abstraction. For Gauguin, story, fable, and tradition remained significant. Starting out as a Sunday painter and art collector during his years in the financial world, he spent a lifetime referencing art

Deborah Dietsch is the former art critic of the Washington Times.

works of the past. Self-taught, he cast his gaze backward to draw inspiration from artists as diverse as Botticelli and Courbet, as well as folkloric and Eastern art.

The weary figure set within a landscape of drooping olive trees in "Christ in the Garden of Olives" (1889) was based on a similar painting by Delacroix. Scholar and curator Belinda Thomson, in her excellent catalogue essay, goes so far as to suggest Gauguin modeled his career on Delacroix's, emulating his interests in literary and exotic subjects.

A few years after deciding to pursue art full-time—a career move prompted by the stock market crash of 1882—Gauguin sought a cheaper alternative to Paris and temporarily settled in Brittany. He became enamored of the rustic locals and their rituals, as vividly portrayed in the "Vision After the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)." A tree trunk divides the canvas into the real world of praying Breton women and the imagined vision of the biblical struggle, while uniting them through a brilliant red ground.

In 1887, Gauguin journeyed to Martinique and, once back in Paris, visited the World's Fair, where he encountered displays of art from faraway lands such as Java, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The desire to experience such "primitive" civilizations, untainted by Western decadence, led him to sail for Tahiti in 1891. Once ashore, he realized that the unsullied civilization of his dreams did not exist: French colonialism had corrupted and erased the island's ancient culture. Rather than paint a modern view of Tahitian life, Gauguin adopted an idealized, traditional perspective, painting bare-breasted women and fertile landscapes to capture a bygone era. He depicted such "pure" native life as sacred by combining Old Testament and Polynesian imagery into vivid scenes: In "Parau na te Varua ino (Words of the Devil)," he depicts the temptation of Eve, substituting a sinister hooded figure for the snake.

Some of his most arresting Tahitian works reprise paintings by other artists. The reclining nude of "Manao tupapau (The Spirit of the Dead Keeps Watch)" is a face-down variation on Manet's "Olympia" with an evil specter replacing the maid in Manet's picture. The gold-saturated "Tahitian Pastoral" pays homage to the Symbolism of Gauguin's contemporary Puvis de Chavannes, who cofounded France's National Society of Fine Arts, the dominant art salon of the 1890s. In re-creating Polynesia's lost culture, Gauguin often resorted to copying native artifacts from other places and inserting them into his paintings to invent religious idolatry. The imposing sculpture in "Parahi Te Marae" may be based on photographs of the Easter Island carvings while the ornate fence was inspired by an ear ornament. Carved tikis and associated rituals populating some of his canvases and wooden sculptures are inspired by 1837 writings on Polynesia by the Belgian ethnographer Jacques-Antoine Moerenhout—or simply sprout from Gauguin's imagination. One of the more interesting sections of the exhibit is devoted to Oviri, a savage deity conceived by the artist in Paris between stays in Tahiti.

'Christ in the Garden of Olives' (1889)

Aside from this two-year hiatus in France, Gauguin spent the rest of his career in Polynesia, re-creating its idyllic past. In 1901 he moved to the remote Marquesas Islands, where he would die of syphilis at age 54 less than two years later. (His home, called the House of Pleasure, was entered through a doorway framed by sculpted wooden panels inspired by Maori carvings that are among the standouts in the exhibit.) By the end of his life, Gauguin wanted to return to France, but friends talked him out of it: He had become so identified with the South Seas that to change direction would have meant losing sales and reputation. So he clung to the past, enriching his myths with strong shapes of pinks, oranges, and purples that would influence modernists such as Matisse and Picasso.

This exhibit doesn't concentrate on that formal beauty but on the figurative narratives that set Gauguin apart from the avant garde. In doing so, it may disappoint some visitors seeking to feast their eyes on his lighter, more colorful paintings. (Several such loans from Russia didn't make it into the show.) But for those interested in learning more about this celebrated artist, the National Gallery's exhibit satisfies by illuminating the less obvious corners of Gauguin's mythmaking in the bright light of paradise. ♦

The Real Thing

Sidney Lumet, 1924-2011

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

The death of Sidney Lumet April 9 is a striking reminder of how little the American motion-picture industry today has in common with Hollywood in the 1960s and 1970s—which were his heyday and, arguably, the heyday of the movies themselves. Lumet was unquestionably the most consistent and productive of the star filmmakers of his time. He averaged a movie a year from 1964 until 1982, and eight of them are either classics or near classics (*Fail-Safe*, *Serpico*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Network*, *Just Tell Me What You Want*, *Prince of the City*, and *The Verdict*).

Vivid and powerful, direct and explosive, a good Lumet movie takes the entirely artificial world of the movie set and makes it seem more real than real life, as though you are watching something dramatic happening right next door, right down the block. Lumet's specialty was taking high melodrama and giving it a documentary feel—a feat far more difficult than making either a conventional melodrama or a conventional documentary, because he had to combine high artifice with techniques designed to mask every trace of artifice.

Take *Dog Day Afternoon*, the astounding 1975 movie based on a true story about a botched Brooklyn bank robbery. You can practically feel the heat of the summer's day sizzling off the sidewalk. Lumet told the movie critic Glenn Kenny that in "a movie like *Dog Day Afternoon*, your first obligation is to put across the idea that, 'Hey folks, this really happened.' This picture is nothing if it's an invented picture. It's only interesting, and true, because of the reality of it. Well, we were killing ourselves trying to get film to look real. Because film color is not real."

The Verdict, his morality play starring Paul Newman as a drunk attorney who refuses to settle a tort case, gets its power from its literal darkness, which seems intended to evoke the inside of a dive bar: "The color palette in *The Verdict* is wonderful and so carefully worked out. You know the color blue appears only once in that movie? I couldn't get the sky out of the shot. And I looked for a way to change the lens, but I needed that lens for another reason."

Steven Hill in 'Running on Empty' (1988)

Among major American directors, only the MGM stalwart George Cukor had a better way with actors or a cannier sense of how to match a performer to a part. There are dazzling scenes and actor's moments in Lumet movies that burn in your memory decades later. He pulled off casting feats without peer, as when he gave the comedian Alan King his only starring role as a Donald Trump type in 1980's wonderfully cynical romantic comedy *Just Tell Me What You Want*. King reciprocated with a lead performance as glorious and underrated as the movie itself.

Even more stunning was a seven-minute interchange in *Running on Empty*—an otherwise disgraceful romanticization of the Bill Ayers-Bernardine Dohrn story—in which a fugitive terrorist played by Christine Lahti meets her bourgeois father in a restaurant opposite Lincoln Center to ask him to look out for her teenage son. The father is played by Steven Hill, later one of the DAs on *Law and Order* (and notable for being the only serious American actor who is also an ultra-Orthodox Jew).

Hill, who barely moves anything but his eyes as he conjures up 15 years of pain and sorrow and shame and anger, gives what I believe is the greatest single-scene performance in film history—and it was both Lumet's brilliance in casting him and trust in letting Hill contain himself so unforgettably that allowed the scene to transcend its rotten surroundings and stand apart for the ages. (The scene—http://goo.gl/OPnIm—is on YouTube.)

What's interesting about Lumet is that, while he was considered extraordinarily successful commercially throughout the 1970s, none of the films that made his reputation and are likely to endure would be made for the big screen today. They might, perhaps, find a home on HBO, especially since most of Lumet's movies were explicitly political and frankly left-wing in a way that characterizes many HBO movies—and is rarely true of multiplex fare.

Politics in present-day Hollywood is far more likely to find expression in the promotion of left-liberal cultural notions and prejudices about the relations between men and women, homosexuality, and the like. Lumet wasn't really interested in that. He was an old-fashioned Commie who loved to romanticize lawbreaking radicals and trash the cops. At his and their best, Lumet's movies—like many of the great American films of the time—somehow managed to transcend those stupid and offensive ideas. The multiplex fare that has replaced them is mostly stupid and offensive—and doesn't even try to be anything but. ♦

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

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