

RUINOUSLY BAD SHOW

by
Willard Thurston

December 8, 1987, was one of the charter-house moments for the Vancouver Sun. It featured on its editorial page a warning by a cool observer entitled, ‘Conservative Decade (the Eighties) Ruinously Bad Show for Western Nations.’

— And no picnic either for the busy plutocrats then in Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Benin, Bulgaria, Burkino Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde Island, Central African Republic, Chad, Mainland China, Comoros, Congo, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia...et cetera.* It really was a long list if you began at the ‘A’s. The largely tribal and Marxist alphabet soup, of lean but meritorious and/or soulful nourishment. The ‘nobility’ of drudgery, plebian uniformity and precocious suspicion.

What the author of the above headline may have overlooked, however solemnly, is the steady ongoing slide to the Left of political aspirants. Both Conservatives and Liberals have been gradually shifting so over the decades, often tripping over one another to keep up. Socialists have roundly redefined ‘Left’ with each generation. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper recently wound up a casualty of his own long standing and, one must assume, outdated convictions. And Harper would have been an oddity to earlier Prime Ministers like Alexander Mackenzie, John A. Macdonald, even Arthur Meighen.

Put another way: Would your average Western unionized wage earner, a civic employee say, happily pay another from his own pocket for the equivalent of what he accomplished that week? That is, see *another* person paid his wage out of his wages for the work *he* actually did.

A mere thought experiment, of course. The candid answer in a lively afterwork pub session might be something like — ‘God no way!’ — suggesting that we’ve possibly been living very well, or simply demeaned coping, or found a starring role in the bellyache chorus line. Indeed, the inflation rate may be as much the mean average of the discrepancy between the asked for payment and the the actual accomplishment achieved for the current payment — as any other single economic yardstick. The modern self-appraisal is by-and-large a flattering one. Thus inflation could well be a colloquial measure of entropy, the essential slide to apathy and complaint — now a style of address — the ever widening objection to the undue exaction and exertion expected in the workplace. Too many demands, too many hours, too much stolid reliance on exams and testing and comparison. The tyranny of the hierarchy. Often ascribed to a colonial/capitalist mentality — the day’s *bête noire*. Essentially, the touted accumulated atrocities perpetrated by the white European male — beginning with the Crusades — if the topical opprobrium surrounding them *is* the new gospel. Without the crusaders, we would all likely be living as Muslims, not as well off as the Saudis maybe (who claim their good fortune was willed by Allāh Himself) but as content. Yes? The stark flags of the burqa and niqib the new *haut couturier’s* exaltation. Yes? Stoning as the local coffee klatch colloquy of the faithless woman? The Wahabis and their followers the lone ‘conservatives’ waiting in the wings for a resurgence in saintliness and purity? Arabia has a turbulent past. See the Legacy of Jihad, edited by Andrew G. Boston. Or The Middle East by Bernard Lewis. In assessing the result of the crusades, was Magna Carta simply then a fluke of nature — or the first legislated repeal of slavery an accident, for slavery flourished then world wide and continued long after William Wilberforce decided to demure.

One of the grosser clues about the inadvertent 'slide' into the era of inactivity (the leisure to blog?), appears to be the fussy physiques of many Canadian children, which the CBC has noted on and off, beginning in 1982 to the best of my recollection: too many children overweight, taking in too many seductive calories, begging the question of physical activity and the growing susceptibility to things like diabetes and emphysema. It is highly problematic today to acknowledge that physical ease for a growing number of human beings (one measure of progress) might itself be deleterious. So disposed, the value of effort itself assumes a Wagnerian (Fascist) leitmotiv.

Hence another round of immigration empathically drawn from lean non-Western players who take up the many jobs dwindling home grown Canadians tend to shun — in the service and foundry industries, in senior care nursing and agriculture harvesting. The jobs only the lean and hungry take up? The many carrier jobs in the Post Office that go begging, one measure of the new 'self-regard' — when most arduous historic achievement is divorced from 'beneficial' endeavour?

*Oxford Encyclopedia of World History 1998.