

The Prairie Light Review

Volume 1 | Number 3

Article 55

Spring 6-7-1982

Untitled

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Recommended Citation

Sladek, Gene (1982) "Untitled," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 1 : No. 3 , Article 55.
Available at: <https://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol1/iss3/55>

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Panta Rhei

by John Van Lonkhuyzen

"I gazed upon the whirlpool of public life and saw the incessant movement of shifting currents, at last felt dizzy . . . and finally saw clearly in regard to all states now existing that without exception their system of government is bad."

— Plato

Though written by the sage philosopher nearly twenty-four centuries ago, these words might more appropriately be uttered by some modern navigator as he seeks to chart the world's course among the political cross currents of the future. Much certainty has changed through those centuries. However, the events of the present time force us once again to consider our situation; whether we shall drift aimlessly or whether we shall hoist the sail of resolve, catch the winds of change, and fix our course to meet the flux of the future. Having sailed like Odysseus from the lotus land of tribal slave and freeman, and having fled the polyphemic grasp of feudal principalities, are we now to succumb to the sirens of the Sovereign State with its scylla of militarism and its charybdis of impoverishment? Whether its form be Marxist communism, centralistic federalism, or military dictatorship, before our very eyes in daily headlines and on media newscasts, the bankruptcy of the sixteenth century vestigo is continually displayed for those who will see it.

Polish workers who, in Solidarity, united to throw off the chains of their oppression met instead Soviet stooges little different in kind than the tsarist generals who confronted the Decemberists in the Senate Square of St. Petersburg. Predicted long before even the First International, by such prescient thinkers as M. Bakunin, J. P. Proudhon, and Benjamin Tucker, the utter vacuity of Marxist communism is at best blatantly obvious to all. Tucker framed it thusly: "Whatever, then, the State Socialists may claim or disclaim, their system, if adopted, is doomed to end in a State religion, at the expense of which all must contribute and at the altar of which all must kneel . . . such is the ideal of the logical State Socialist, such the goal which lies at the end of the road that Karl Marx took." For the individual Pole, Afghan, Hungarian or Czech, there is no substantial difference between the tyranny of the elitist aristocratic oligarchy and elitist party oligarchy which has replaced it.

However, the Marxist communists are not the only ones with red stained hands. The proclamation of Dean Acheson, sometimes called the father of federal postwar foreign policy, that the federal goal is the creation of an environment in which free societies could exist and flourish" certainly sounds quite noble. But when one realizes, as Richard J. Barnett points out in the very excellent *Roots of War*, that since 1945 this government engaged in a major military or paramilitary operation on an average of once every eighteen months, the words begin to lose their credibility. Notice the cozy alliance between the federal state and the "friendly, authoritarian" governments, as Jean Kirkpatrick likes to term them, of Pakistan, South Korea, the Phillipines, or South America and the term "free societies" begins to sound as hollow as did the terms "relocation-labor camp" and "delousing showers" on the lips of Auschwitz guards.

Certainly, the utter bankruptcy of the Sovereign State has reached its apogee in the absurdist drama now being played out on the center state of world diplomacy. There is nothing more anachronistic than the spectacle of Argentina and Great Britain sailing off to war over the Falkland/Malvinas Islands and concomitantly threatening to engulf us all in their wake. The tawdriness of such nationalism was only underscored by the sight of Galtieri parading in full regalia and Gov. Robert Hunt departing for London in full ceremonial uniform and plumed hat. One may be forgiven or wonder whether a road show of Gilbert and Sullivan's "H.M.S. Pinnafore" might not have sufficed. John Reed reputed to have said that "grand things are ahead, worth living and dying for." True perhaps, but this petrous piece of pasture in the South Atlantic, hardly qualifies as one of them.

In the face of these considerations, we may well want to affirm with Henry David Thoreau that "government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient." But if we deny the validity of this vestige, the Sovereign State, with what shall replace it? Thoreau preceeded these sentiments with a remark which is their logical extension. Ascerbically noting the Jeffersonian dictum "that government is best which governs least," he went on to point out that this "finally amounts to that, which I also believe, — "that government is best which governs not at all; when men (sic) are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have." The time has come for anarchy.

— Skotelnos —

