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Article

The Rise of Political Correctness

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*“Comrade, your statement is factually incorrect.”*

*“Yes, it is. But it is politically correct.”*

The notion of political correctness came into use among Communists in the 1930s as a semi-humorous reminder that *the Party’s interest is to be treated as a reality that ranks above reality itself*. Because all progressives, Communists included, claim to be about creating new human realities, they are perpetually at war against nature’s laws and limits. But since reality does not yield, progressives end up pretending that they themselves *embody* those new realities. Hence, any progressive movement’s nominal goal eventually ends up being subordinated to the urgent, all-important question of the movement’s own power. Because that power is insecure as long as others are able to question the truth of what the progressives say about themselves and the world, progressive movements end up struggling not so much to create the promised new realities as to force people to speak and act as if these were real: as if what is correct politically—i.e., what thoughts serve the party’s interest—were correct factually.

Communist states furnish only the most prominent examples of such attempted groupthink. Progressive parties everywhere have sought to monopolize educational and cultural institutions in order to force those under their thumbs to sing their tunes or to shut up. But having brought about the opposite of the prosperity, health, wisdom, or happiness that their ideology advertised, they have been unable to force folks to ignore the *gap* between political correctness and reality.

Especially since the Soviet Empire’s implosion, leftists have argued that Communism failed to create utopia not because of any shortage of military or economic power but rather because it could not overcome this gap. Is the lesson for today’s progressives, therefore, to push P.C. even harder, to place even harsher penalties on dissenters? Many of today’s more discerning European and American progressives, in possession of government’s and society’s commanding heights, knowing that they cannot wield Soviet-style repression and yet intent on beating down increasing popular resistance to their projects, look for another approach to crushing cultural resistance. Increasingly they cite the name of Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), a brilliant Communist theoretician for whom “cultural hegemony” is the very purpose of the struggle as well as its principal instrument. His writings envisage a totalitarianism that eliminates the very possibility of cultural resistance to progressivism. But owing more to Machiavelli than to Marx or Lenin, they are more than a little complex about the means and are far from identical with the raw sort of power over culture enforced by the Soviet Empire or, for that matter, that is rife among us today.

My purpose here is to explain how progressives have understood and conducted their cultural war from the days of Lenin, and how Gramsci’s own ambiguous writings illustrate the choices they face in conducting that war in our time and circumstances—especially with regard to political correctness in our present culture war.

### Culture Wars

Every form of progressivism bases itself on the claim of a special, “scientific,” knowledge of what is wrong with humanity and how to fix it. The formula is straightforward: the world is not as it should be because society’s basic, “structural” feature is ordered badly. Everything else is “superstructural,” meaning that it

merely reflects society's fundamental feature. For Marx and his followers that feature is conflict over the means of production in "present-day society." From the dawn of time, this class warfare has led to "contradictions": between types of work, town and country, oppressors or oppressed, and so on. The proletariat's victory in that conflict will establish a new reality by crushing all contradictions out of existence. Other branches of progressivism point to a different structural problem. For Freudians it's sexual maladjustment, for followers of Rousseau it's social constraint, for positivists it is the insufficient application of scientific method, for others it is oppression of one race by another. Once control of society passes exclusively into the hands of the proper set of progressives, each sect's contradictions must disappear as the basic structural problem is straightened out.

But wherever progressives have gained power, all manner of contradictions have remained and new ones have arisen. Progressive movements have reacted to this failure by becoming their own reason for being. Theoretically, the Revolution is about the power and necessity to recreate mankind. In practice, for almost all progressive movements it is about gaining power for the revolutionaries and making war on those who stand in their way. For example, transcending private property, the division of labor, and political oppression was never Marxism-Leninism's core motive any more than worker/peasant proletarians were ever its core protagonists. In fact, *Communism is an ideology by, of, and for ideologues, that ends up empowering and celebrating those very ideologues*. This is as true of progressivism's other branches as it is of Marxism.

Lenin's seminal contribution was explicitly to recognize the revolutionary party's paramount primacy, and to turn the party's power and prestige from a means to revolution into the Revolution's candid end. Lenin's writings, like Marx's, contain no positive description of future economic arrangements. The Soviet economy, for all its inefficiencies, functioned with Swiss precision as an engine of privilege for some and of murderous deprivation for others. The Communist Party had transcended communism. The key to understanding what progressive parties in power do is the insight, emphasized by "elite theorists" like Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, that any organization's practical objectives turn out to be what serves the interests and proclivities of its leaders.

What serves progressive revolutionaries' interests is not in doubt. Although each of progressivism's branches differs in how it defines society's "structural" fault, in its own name for the human reality that it seeks to overcome, and in the means by which to achieve its ends, progressives from the 19th century to our time are well nigh identical in their personal predilections—in what and whom they hate even more than in what they love. They see the culture of what Marxists call "bourgeois morality" as the negation of their identity and authority. That identity, their identity, is to be promoted, endlessly, by endless warfare against that culture. That is why the cultural campaigns of otherwise dissimilar progressives have been so similar. Leninist Russia no less than various Western democrats have tried to eradicate religion, to make it difficult for men, women, and children to exist as families, and to demand that their subjects join them in celebrating the new order that reflects their identity. Note well: cultural warfare's substantive goal is less important than the affirmation of the warriors' own identity. This is what explains the animus with which progressives have waged their culture wars.

Yet, notwithstanding progressivism's premise that individual minds merely reflect society's basic structure and hence are incapable of reasoning independently about true and false, better and worse, *reality* forces *progressives* to admit that individuals often choose how they think or act despite lacking the "structural" basis for doing so, or that they act contrary to the economic, social, or racial "classes" into which progressive theories divide mankind. They call this freedom of the human mind "false consciousness."

Fighting against false consciousness is one reason why Communists and other progressives end up treating cultural matters supposedly "superstructural" as if they were structural and basic. They do so by pressuring people constantly to validate progressivism's theories, to concelebrate victories over those on the "wrong" side of history by exerting control over who says what to whom.

## **The Soviet Model**

The Soviet regime aimed at the forcible transcendence of “bourgeois culture” by using its totalitarian power to the maximum. By destroying nearly all churches, killing nearly all priests, punishing even the hint of dissent, as well as by making rejection of bourgeois culture a condition for ascending to the ruling class, it succeeded in pushing the old culture to near-destruction. But, rather than establishing a new and better culture, much less the final and best, this step turned out instead to destroy the very basis of Soviet power.

Progressive regimes demand that persons who express themselves in public (even in private) affirm any and all things that pertain to the regime’s identity lest they lose access to jobs or privileges, and be exposed to the shunning or ire of regime supporters—if not treated as criminals. But even totalitarian regimes can reward or punish only a few people at a time. Tacit collaboration by millions who bite their lip is even more essential than lip service by thousands of favor seekers. Hence, to stimulate at least passive cooperation, the party strives to give the impression that “everybody” is already on its side.

But why then did the Communist Party always spare a few churches? Why report criticisms of itself from abroad? Why, from time to time, did the party publicize dissidents from its ranks? Whenever the party would mount a campaign on behalf of one of its cultural-political causes, it would designate a few persons to personify the opposition, and direct all socially acceptable organs and spokespersons to unload their worst upon them. Why, from the Soviet Union to China to Cuba, would the party school its young cadres by taking them to observe and mock church services attended by poor, old, socially repulsive outcasts? In part, because each smiting of cultural enemies reinforced the cadre’s identity. It made them feel better about themselves, and more powerful. Had there been no remnants of the old society, or dissidents, the party might have manufactured them.

But continued efforts to force people to celebrate the party’s ersatz reality, to affirm things that they know are not true and to deny others they know to be true—to live by lies—requires breaking them, reducing them to a sense of fearful isolation, destroying their self-esteem and their capacity to trust others. George Orwell’s novel *1984* dramatized this culture war’s ends and means: nothing less than the substitution of the party’s authority for the reality conveyed by human senses and reason. Big Brother’s agent, having berated the hapless Winston for preferring his own views to society’s dictates, finished breaking his spirit by holding up four fingers and demanding that Winston acknowledge seeing five.

Thus did the Soviet regime create dysfunctional, cynical, and resentful subjects. Because Communism confused destruction of “bourgeois culture” with cultural conquest, it won all the cultural battles while losing its culture war long before it collapsed politically. As Communists identified themselves in people’s minds with falsehood and fraud, people came to identify truth with anything other than the officials and their doctrines. Inevitably, they also identified them with corruption and privation. And so it was that, whenever the authorities announced that the harvest had been good, the people hoarded potatoes; and that more and more people who knew nothing of Christianity except that the authorities had anathematized it, started wearing crosses.

## **The Road Not Taken**

Few progressives have been humble enough to understand the Soviet experience and hence to search for a better path to replacing “bourgeois” culture with their own. Antonio Gramsci blazed such a trail, but, given its ambiguities, progressives have followed it in very different directions.

Gramsci started from mixed philosophical premises. First, orthodox Marxism: “There is no such thing as ‘human nature,’ fixed and immutable,” he wrote. Rather, “human nature is the sum of historically determined social relationships.” The modern prince’s job is to change it. Wholly unorthodox, however, was his scorn for Marxism’s insistence that economic factors are fundamental while all else is superstructural. No, “stuff like that is for common folk,” a “little formula” for “half-baked intellectuals who don’t want to work their brains.” For Gramsci, economic relations were just one part of social reality, the chief parts of which were intellectual and moral. He retained Aristotelian roots. For him, physical science is “the reflection of an unchanging reality” in which “teleology” and “final causality” exist. But orthodox

Marxism and Aristotle come together in what he calls “the dialectic,” the point of which is to create a new reality out of the old.

Gramsci co-founded Italy’s Communist Party in 1921. In 1926, Mussolini jailed him. By the time he died eleven years later, he had composed twelve “prison notebooks.” In private correspondence, he criticized Stalin’s literary judgment and deemed his attacks on Leon Trotsky “irresponsible and dangerous.” But publicly, he supported every turn of the Soviet Party line—even giving his party boss, Palmiro Togliatti, authority to modify his writings. Imprisoned and in failing health, he was intellectually freer and physically safer than if he had been exposed to the intra-Communist purges that killed so many of his comrades.

Gramsci’s concept of “cultural hegemony” also swung both ways. Its emphasis on transforming the enemy rather than killing him outright was at odds with the Communist Party’s brute-force approach. His focus on cultural matters, reversing as it did the standard distinction between structure and superstructure, suggested belief in the mind’s autonomy. On the other hand, the very idea of persuading minds not through reasoning on what is true and false, good and bad, according to nature, but rather by creating a new historical reality, is precisely what he shares with Marx and other progressives—indeed with the fountainhead of modern thought, Niccolò Machiavelli.

Gramsci turned to Machiavelli more than to Marx to discover how best to replace the existing order and to secure that replacement. Chapter V of Machiavelli’s *The Prince* stated that “the only secure way” to control a people who had been accustomed to live under its own laws is to destroy it. But Machiavelli’s objective was to conquer people though their minds, not to destroy them. In Chapter VI of *The Prince* he wrote that nothing is more difficult than to establish “new modes and orders,” that this requires “persuading” peoples of certain things, that it is necessary “when they no longer believe to make them believe by force,” and that this is especially difficult for “unarmed prophets.” But Machiavelli also wrote that, if such prophets succeed in inculcating a new set of beliefs, they can count on being “powerful, secure, honored and happy.” He clarified this insight in *Discourses on Livy* Book II, chapter 5: “when it happens that the founders of the new religion speak a different language, the destruction of the old religion is easily effected.” The Machiavellian revolutionary, then, must inculcate new ways of thinking and speaking that amount to a new language. In the *Discourse Upon Our Language*, Machiavelli had compared using one’s own language to infiltrate the enemy’s thoughts with Rome’s use of its own troops to control allied armies. This is the template that Gramsci superimposed on the problems of the Communist revolution—a template made by one “unarmed prophet” for use by others.

Machiavelli is the point of departure in a section of Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* that describes how the party is to rule as “the modern prince.” But the modern prince’s task is so big that it can be undertaken seriously only by a party (in some 50 references he leaves out the word “Communist”), which he defines as “an organism; a complex, collective element of society which has already begun to crystallize as a collective will that has become conscious of itself through action.” This prince, this party, has to be “the organizer and the active expression of moral and intellectual reform...that cannot be tied to an economic program.” Rather, when economic reform grows out of moral and intellectual reform, from “germs of collective will that tend to become universal and total,” then it can become the basis of the secularization of all life and custom.

The party-prince accomplishes this by being Jacobin “in the historic and conceptual sense.” Gramsci writes: “that is what Machiavelli meant by reform of the militia, which the Jacobins did in the French Revolution.” The party must gather consensus from each of society’s discrete parts by persuading—inducing—people who had never thought of such things to join in ways of life radically different from their own. The party develops “its organized force” by a “minutely careful, molecular, capillary process manifested in an endless quantity of books and pamphlets, of articles in magazines and newspapers, and by personal debates repeated infinitely and which, in their gigantic altogether, comprise the work out of which arises a collective will with a certain homogeneity.” But note well that the Jacobins used no little coercion to achieve their “nation in arms.”

Which is it then for Gramsci? Does the party inspire or perhaps cajole consensus—or does it force it? His answer is ambiguous: “Machiavelli affirms rather clearly that the state is to be run by fixed principles by which virtuous citizens can live secure against arbitrary treatment. Justly, however, Machiavelli reduces all to politics, to the art of governing men, of assuring their permanent consensus.” The matter, he writes, must be regarded from the “‘double perspective’ ...[that] corresponds to the double nature of Machiavelli’s centaur, beastly and human, of force and consensus, of authority and hegemony...of tactics and strategy.” Indeed that is Machiavelli’s point: whatever it takes.

The key to Gramsci’s generalities and subtleties is to be found in his gingerly discussion of the relationship between the party and Christianity. “Although other political parties may no longer exist, there will always exist *de facto* parties or tendencies...in such parties, cultural matters predominate...hence, political controversies take on cultural forms and, as such, tend to become irresolvable.” Translation: the progressive party-state (the party acting as a government, the government acting as a party) cannot escape the role of authoritative—perhaps forceful—mediator of societal conflicts having to do with cultural matters and must see to it that they are resolved its way.

Specifically: as Gramsci was writing, Mussolini’s 1929 Concordat with the Vatican was proving to be his most successful political maneuver. By removing the formal enmity between the Church and the post-French-Revolution state, making Catholicism the state religion and paying its hierarchy, Mussolini had turned Italy’s most pervasive cultural institution from an enemy to a friendly vassal. Thousands of priests and millions of their flock would bend thoughts, words, and deeds to fit the party-state’s definition of good citizenship. Gramsci described the post-Concordat Church as having “become an integral part of the State, of political society monopolized by a certain privileged group that aggregated the Church unto itself the better to sustain its monopoly with the support of that part of civil society represented by the Church.” A morally and intellectually compromised Church in the fascist state’s hands, Mussolini hoped and Gramsci feared, would redefine its teachings and its social presence to fascist specifications. The alternative to this subversion—denigrating and restricting the Church in the name of fascism—would have pushed many Catholics to embrace their doctrine’s fundamentals ever more tightly in opposition to the party. The Concordat was the effective template for the rest of what Mussolini called the corporate state.

Gramsci called the same phenomenon a “*blocco storico*,” historic bloc, that aggregates society’s various sectors under the party-state’s direction. The intellectuals, said Gramsci, are the *blocco*’s leading element. In any given epoch they weld workers, peasants, the church, and other groups into a unit in which the people live and move and have their being, and from within which it is difficult if not impossible to imagine alternatives. Power, used judiciously, acts on people the way the sun acts on sunflowers. Within this bloc, ideas may retain their names while changing in substance, while a new language grows organically. As Gramsci noted, Machiavelli had argued that language is the key to the mastery of consciousness—a mastery more secure than anything that force alone can achieve. But note that Machiavelli’s metaphors on linguistic warfare all refer to violence. How much force does it take to make this historic bloc cohere and to keep recalcitrants in it? Gramsci’s silence seems to say; “whatever may be needed.” After all, Mussolini used as much as he thought *he* needed.

In sum, Mussolini, not Stalin; forceful seduction, not rape, is Gramsci’s practical advice regarding “cultural hegemony.” He imputes this preference to Machiavelli, who “wants to create new relationships among forces and must occupy himself with that which should be.” But this is not “an arbitrary choice, nor is it merely desire, love with the clouds.” A political man such as Machiavelli is a creator and inciter “who does not create from nothingness, nor does he move in the empty whirl of his desires and dreams. He grounds himself on the effectual truth...a relationship of forces in constant movement and equilibrium.” Gramsci means to replace Western culture by subverting it, by doing what it takes to compel it to redefine itself, rather than by picking fights with it.

### **Gramsci’s Choice**

The Gramscian vision of hegemony over culture is not a panacea. In practice, today’s progressive intellectuals are in the same fix as Marx, Lenin, or Mussolini: society’s socioeconomic forces are not

beating down the doors to join any Gramscian “historic bloc,” any more than “the workers” had rushed to be the Marxist revolution’s battering ram. Today’s progressive intellectuals, deeply engaged in cultural warfare, face the same choices as Lenin or Mussolini: weld together society’s disparate cultural sectors authoritatively and judiciously, or destroy them. The choice is basically between Mussolinian seduction or Leninist rape.

This difference in preference is, roughly, what divides continental European Gramscians from Anglo-American ones.

By the 1970s, socialist parties in Europe had achieved something like monopolies of political power. But the “working classes” came to resent the cultural preferences that the socialists imposed, in addition to their unsatisfactory government. In our time, socialist parties in Europe poll in the teens or single digits. Some progressive politicians have sought the reason and the remedy for this by reference to Gramsci—primarily to the Mussolinian version of Gramscian politics. The French socialist Gael Brustier in his book, *A Demain Gramsci (Bye-Bye Gramsci)*, 2015) is prototypical.

“The Left,” writes Brustier, “is no longer in a position of cultural hegemony” because it lost its grip on “what Gramsci called ‘the common sense,’ the complex of ideas and beliefs that people take for granted.” It lost that grip because it mistook the positions of power that it had conquered for power itself. Hence, while the Left “nourished illusions about itself,” the Right was “winning a vigorous cultural war” by “profiting from collective anguish provoked by decline and loss of class status” among ordinary people. While the Left was winning power, “the Right was winning minds.” Brustier concludes by asking “What is to be done with power in which no one believes any longer?”

That slap in his comrades’ faces is factually mistaken only in that it confuses the Right with the de-cultured masses of Europeans who reject the formal or informal “uniparty” coalitions that are the legacy of the Left’s cultural-political hegemony. In fact, as in former Soviet lands, progressive hegemony in Europe produced people who believe in nothing. Nevertheless, these people inhabit a world very different from that in which leftist intellectuals live. Progressives, Brustier warns, must not attribute this cultural difference to “false consciousness.” He recalls that Gramsci taught: “the people are neither blind nor stupid nor slaves.” Gramsci’s whole point, Brustier reminds his comrades, was to lead classes who really are different from the intellectuals to adhere to them. “Therefore, fighting over values is, in itself, a negation of cultural hegemony.” He complains, that his colleagues make themselves feel good by singing “The Internationale.” But by way of answering to the problems of today, they offer only “submission.” Behaving this way is counterproductive.

Brustier cites “the disdain in which the Socialist Party has held the Catholic world” as a typical error, spoiling any chance of cultural hegemony. This should have been clear to the Left, he declares, well before a million Frenchmen demonstrated in the streets of Paris against the socialist government’s extension of marriage to homosexuals in 2013 and 2014. By promulgating that law, the Left had insulted “the way in which that world makes sense of its members’ daily experiences.” By calling hundreds of thousands of young people “old bigots,” it made enemies of people who had not been enemies before. What sense does it make, he wonders, to pick fights with people whom we cannot coerce? That law made the socialists feel good. But what did championing it do to advance the socialist revolution? By this Gramscian standard, the law is stupid.

But, by that standard, writes Brustier, the American comrades are even more stupid. Following the advice of such as Noam Chomsky, American Leftists had gone so far as to “recognize a number of enemies of ‘the empire’ (the United States) as potential allies...this certainly does not correspond with the feelings of the American people’s majority.” By doing such things, argues Brustier, the U.S. Left is making itself a “political fringe.”

American progressive intellectuals, however, see themselves as the soul of the Democratic Party, which is at the head of America’s ruling class. Not yet having experienced the kind of rejection that their European counterparts have, they revel in their success in changing American culture over the past half-century, and

look to Gramscian notions of cultural hegemony as confirming their practice of forcing their own cultural identities onto America. The Democratic Party's constituencies already endorse its intellectuals' aim not to convince the rest of society, but to subdue it. For them, this is the Revolution. They have chosen the Leninist rather than the Mussolinian alternative.

They reason that America's socio-political order is founded on racism, patriarchy, genocidal imperialism, as well as economic exploitation. Gramsci's "historic bloc" can come about through the joint pursuit of racial justice, gender justice, economic justice, and anti-imperialism. The Revolution is all about the oppressed classes uniting to inflict upon the oppressors the retribution that each of the oppressed yearns for. This intersubjective community includes the several groups whose identity negates a piece of American culture—religious, racial, sexual, economic. Together, they negate it all.

Regardless of what Gramsci wrote or meant about using the party-state's power over cultural institutions to subvert and transform the rest of society, for the American Left cultural hegemony means using this power to suffocate Judeo-Christian civilization in its several cradles; to allow in public discourse only such thoughts as serve the identity of the party's constituent groups; and to denigrate, delegitimize, and possibly outlaw all others. In short, it means political correctness as we know it.

### **Political Correctness**

For most Americans who have heard of Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, it signifies P.C.'s suffocating purpose. But because P.C. consists precisely of what Gramsci condemned as picking fights with the common sense of people whom it cannot wholly control, the American Left's understanding of cultural hegemony suggests that its culture war will not end as it intends.

Beginning in the 1960s, from Boston to Berkeley, the teachers of America's teachers absorbed and taught a new, CliffsNotes-style sacred history: America was born tainted by Western Civilization's original sins—racism, sexism, greed, genocide against natives and the environment, all wrapped in religious obscurantism, and on the basis of hypocritical promises of freedom and equality. Secular saints from Herbert Croly and Woodrow Wilson to Franklin Roosevelt and Barack Obama have been redeeming those promises, placing America on the path of greater justice in the face of resistance from the mass of Americans who are racist, sexist, but above all stupid. To consider such persons on the same basis as their betters would be, as President Obama has called it, "false equivalence."

Thus credentialed, molded, and opinionated, a uniform class now presides over nearly all federal, and state, government bureaucracies, over the media, the educational establishment, and major corporations. Like a fraternity, it requires speaking the "in" language signifying that one is on the right side, and joins to bring grief upon "outsider" Americans who run afoul of its members. Video the illegal trafficking in aborted babies' body parts by government-financed Planned Parenthood, as did David Daleiden and Sandra Merritt, and you end up indicted for a felony as the ruling class media tells the world that the video really does not show what it shows.

No more than its European counterparts does America's progressive ruling class offer any vision of truth, goodness, beauty, or advantage to attract the rest of society to itself. Like its European kin, all that American progressivism offers is obedience to the ruling class, enforced by political correctness. Nor is there any endpoint to what is politically correct, any more than there ever was to Communism. Here and now, as everywhere and always, it comes down to glorifying the party and humbling the rest.

If cultural hegemony merely meant achieving the progressive ruling class's near monopoly of America's cultural institutions, the conflict ended a generation ago: the rulers won. But because the ruling class acts as if the old culture's recalcitrant remnants merit ever more intensive efforts to crush them, cultural hegemony by P.C. means an endless cycle of insult and resentment, guaranteeing the conflict's permanence. By contrast, Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony (following Machiavelli), sought a definitive victory: the transformation and synthesis of society's several cultural strains into something that so transcends them that no one could possibly look backward—e.g., as Christianity obviated the gods of Rome and of the

barbarians alike. Most important, Machiavelli, followed by Gramsci, sought cultural hegemony's seal on power as a means to a greater end: for Machiavelli, that meant political grandeur like that of Rome (or maybe Renaissance Spain). For Gramsci, it meant achieving the Marxist utopia.

Why does the American Left demand ever-new P.C. obeisances? In 2012 no one would have thought that defining marriage between one man and one woman, as enshrined in U.S. law, would brand those who do so as motivated by a culpable psychopathology called "homophobia," subject to fines and near-outlaw status. Not until 2015-16 did it occur to anyone that requiring persons with male personal plumbing to use public bathrooms reserved for men was a sign of the same pathology. Why had not these become part of the P.C. demands previously? Why is there no canon of P.C. that, once filled, would require no further additions?

Because *the point of P.C. is not and has never been merely about any of the items that it imposes, but about the imposition itself*. Much less is it about creating a definable common culture or achieving some definable good. On the retail level, it is about the American's ruling class's felt need to squeeze the last drops of voter participation out of the Democratic Party's habitual constituencies. On the wholesale level, it is a war on civilization waged to indulge identity politics.

### **How Does This Movie End?**

The imposition of P.C. has no logical end because feeling better about one's self by confessing other people's sins, humiliating and hurting them, is an addictive pleasure the appetite for which grows with each satisfaction. The more fault I find in thee, the holier (or, at least, the trendier) I am than thou. The worse you are, the better I am and the more power I should have over you. America's ruling class seems to have adopted the view that the rest of America should be treated as inmates in reeducation camps. As Harvard Law School Professor Mark Tushnet argued earlier this year in a blog post, this means not "trying to accommodate the losers, who—remember—defended, and are defending, positions that liberals regard as having no normative pull at all. Trying to be nice to the losers didn't work well after the Civil War."

This vicarious yearning for the power of victors in civil war, however, has nothing to do with Gramsci, never mind with Machiavelli, who thought in terms of *subverting* the enemies one does not kill, rather than of reveling in breaking their spirit by inflicting indignities. People, he wrote, "are to be caressed or extinguished." Insulting people who are not permanently disempowered is fun—but of the expensive and dangerous kind, because it engenders at least as much sullenness and revolt as submission.

The question that Gael Brustier asked of the French Socialist Party can be asked of America's ruling class: what do you think you are doing? By demanding ever more insulting conditions of potential allies, you jeopardize a campaign of subversion that is going very well for you. Why issue calls to arms to your enemies?

Consider the main enemy: religion. America's mainline Protestant denominations have long since delivered their (diminishing) flocks to the ruling class's progressive priorities. Pope Francis advertises his refusal to judge attacks on Western civilization, including the murder of priests. His commitment of the Catholic Church to the building of "a new humanity," as he put it at July's World Youth Day in Krakow, opens the Catholic Church to redefining Christianity to progressive missions in progressive terms, a mission already accomplished at Georgetown University, Notre Dame, and other former bastions of American Catholicism now turned into bastions of American progressivism. Evangelical leaders seem eager not to be left behind. Gramsci would have advised that enlisting America's religious establishments in the service of the ruling class's larger priorities need not have cost nearly as much as Mussolini paid in 1929. Refraining from frontal challenges to essentials would be enough.

Instead, America's progressives add insult to injury by imposing same-sex marriage, homosexuality, "global warming," and other fashions because they really have no priorities beyond themselves. America's progressive rulers, like France's, act less as politicians gathering support than as conquerors who enjoy punishing captives without worry that the tables may turn.



But as the turning point against progressive cultural hegemony came to other lands, it seems to be coming to America as well. Gramsci had written of Machiavelli's prince and of his own "new prince" that his realm would be one in which all good citizens could feel secure from arbitrariness. But arbitrariness is precisely what our masters of P.C. have fastened onto the American political system.

Consider our ruling class's very latest demand: Americans must agree that someone with a penis can be a woman, while someone else with a vagina can be a man. Complying with such arbitrariness is beyond human capacity. In Orwell's *1984*, as noted, Big Brother's agent demanded that Winston acknowledge seeing five fingers while he was holding up four. But that is small stuff next to what the U.S. ruling class is demanding of a free people. Because courts and agencies just impose their diktats, without bothering to try to persuade, millions of precisely the kind of citizens who prize stability have become willing to take a wrecking ball to what little remains of the American republic, not caring so much what happens next.

It is surprising that, in 2015-16, our ruling class was surprised by Donald Trump. Though he remained obedient to most of P.C.'s specific demands and remained largely a liberal Democrat, it sufficed for him to disdain P.C. in general, and to insult its purveyors, for Trump to become liberalism's Public Enemy Number One. William Galston's column in the *Wall Street Journal* barely begins to get a sense of how his class's Leninist seizure of America's culture has miscarried.

[Trump's] campaign has ruthlessly exposed the illusions of well-educated middle-class professionals—people like me. We believed that changes in law and public norms had gradually brought about changes in private attitudes across partisan and ideological lines....

Mr. Trump has proved us wrong. His critique of political correctness has destroyed many taboos and has given his followers license to say what they really think. Beliefs we mocked now command a majority in one of the world's oldest political parties, and sometimes in the electorate as a whole.

The point is not Trump, but the fact that though the ruling class pushed Western civilization aside, it did not replace it with any cultural hegemony in the Gramscian-Machiavellian sense. Rather, by pushing P.C. defined as inflicting indignities, the progressives destroyed the legitimacy of any and all authority, foremost their own.

My 2010 article for the *American Spectator*, "The Ruling Class and the Perils of Revolution," argued that "some two-thirds of Americans—a few Democratic voters, most Republican voters, and all independents—lack a vehicle in electoral politics." Resentment of the patent disregard for the Constitution and statutes with which the ruling class has permeated American life, along with its cultural war enforced by P.C., meant that "Sooner or later, well or badly, that majority's demand for representation will be filled." I noted: "Unfortunately, it is easier for anyone who dislikes a court's or an official's unlawful act to counter it with another unlawful one than to draw all parties back to the foundation of truth."

That is because a majority of Americans—realizing that the Constitution and the laws have ceased to protect them from unending injuries to their way of life; aggravated by being insulted as "irredeemable" and "deplorable" racists, sexists, etc.; eager for relief and, yes, for payback with interest; knowing that the ruling class is closed to argument from those it considers its inferiors—have no option but to turn the tables in the hope that, suffering the same kind of insulting oppression, the ruling class might learn the value of treating others as they themselves like to be treated. More likely, doing this would be one more turn in the spiral of reprisals typical of revolutions. And yet, there seems no way of avoiding this.

*What is to be done with a political system in which no one any longer believes?* This is a revolutionary question because America's ruling class largely destroyed, along with its own credibility, the respect for truth, and the culture of restraint that had made the American people unique stewards of freedom and prosperity. Willful masses alienated from civilization turn all too naturally to revolutions' natural leaders. Donald Trump only foreshadows the implacable men who, Abraham Lincoln warned, belong to the "family of the lion and the tribe of the eagle."

In short, the P.C. “changes in law and public norms” (to quote Galston again) that the ruling class imposed on the rest of America, rather than having “gradually brought about changes in private attitudes across partisan and ideological lines” as the ruling class imagined (and as Gramsci would have approved) have set off a revolution—of which we can be sure only that it won’t be pretty.

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