

The Harbour League



OBAMA'S IDEOLOGICAL FATHER

by Herbert I. London

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President Obama invariably asserts that he is seeking solutions for what ails the nation. He claims to be a pragmatist, a position confirmed by members of the press corps. But whether he realizes it or not, he has an ideological forebearer who has set the stage for this administration's agenda: Antonio Gramsci.

Gramsci, while still in his twenties, organized the Italian Communist party in 1921 with his colleague Togliotti. Since this was four years after the Russian Revolution, Gramsci assumed Italians would welcome a Bolshevik convulsion of their own. But it didn't happen.

In reviewing the political landscape, Gramsci sought to explain why what seemed to him inevitable had not yet occurred. He found three explanations: Christianity, nationalism and charity. As he explains in his writing, the way to set the stage for a Marxist revolution was in coming to grips with these three conditions.

As a consequence, Gramsci converted Marxist economic theory into a cultural battle -- as he saw it, a march through conventional and normative institutions. The first stratagem was the assault on Christianity by arguing religion should not inform or be employed in public discourse. Gramsci realized that if religion were confined to private worship, its hold on Italians would dissipate. Hence his arguments relied on science (more accurately scientism) and material claims devoid of references to the Church and its historic antecedents.

Second, Italians took great pride in their newly constituted nation fifty years old in the 1920s. Gramsci contended Italians were part of a grand global mission, merely one story in the narrative of mankind. He therefore cleverly attempted to transform national loyalty into an abstract identification with human rights by describing patriotism as an anachronistic and childish fetish.

And last, Gramsci engaged in efforts to persuade Italians that the way, the only way, to express humanitarian concern for the poor or those left behind as the detritus of capitalism is through a government that can be benevolent and beneficent. For him, big government wasn't a temptation for tyranny but rather the adjudicator for life's unfairness.

Whether recognized by President Obama or not, the parallels are striking. Although devoted to his own faith, President Obama through court decisions and his opposition to charitable trust programs has suggested overtly and tacitly that religion should be a matter relegated to private worship outside the confines of public life.

Secondly, the appointment of Anne Marie Slaughter to the Policy Planning Group and Susan Rice as Ambassador to the U.N. argue persuasively that the president is committed to a transnational agenda, one that deemphasizes America's global role and subordinates multinational, institutions, such as the U.N., as the primary channel of American foreign policy. Here is the John Kerry "global approval" position with a vengeance.

And last, through his proposal to deny tax deductions for charitable gifts, government is being converted into the only public charity. Moreover, the transfer of wealth in the stimulus package and the increased tax burden on the most productive element of society will inevitably decrease incentives and expand the size and influence of government.

History may repeat itself, but never exactly. My suspicion is most politicians have never heard of Gramsci. I suspect as well that they would reject out of hand any parallel between a communist leader and an American president. But what cannot be rejected is that President Obama is a product of American culture -- an elite American culture cultivated by ideas at Harvard, Columbia and University of Chicago. And that culture has been dramatically affected by the Gramscian march through our institutions.

The progeny of Gramsci are alive and well and now reside in the White House. They believe in big government, one worldism, distrust of religion, and a denial of American exceptionalism. Our leaders may not identify themselves as Gramscians and may even mock the designation, but make no mistake: Gramsci's DNA is in their bloodstream.

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