

The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



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SILLY SEASON IS UPON US

Back in 1855, the British Tory Sir Alexander Beresford Hope (1820-1887) founded *The Saturday Review of politics, literature, science and art*. During its estimable 83-year run, *Review* contributors included such literary, artistic and political heavyweights as [Anthony Trollope](#), [H.G. Wells](#), [George Bernard Shaw](#), [Max Beerbohm](#), [Walter Bagehot](#), [Dante Gabriel Rossetti](#), [Oscar Wilde](#), and the future British P.M. [Lord Salisbury](#). The *Review* was both literate and futuristic, politically conservative and, on occasion, wonderfully snarky.



On July 13, 1861, the *Review* ran an essay entitled "The Silly Season." Written somewhat tongue-in-cheek, the anonymous piece declared "*the period of the year when Parliament and the Law Courts are not sitting*" [roughly August and September] "*is the Silly Season.*" Ever since then, the term -- also called "the slow news season" in America, תנוע מינופפלמה (pronounced *Onat Ha'melafefonim*, meaning "Cucumber Season") in Israel and *la morte saison* ("The dead season") in France -- has

come to be shorthand for a period typified by the emergence of frivolous news stories. A prime example would be items about the Loch Ness Monster, which historically appeared with far greater frequency during the months when Parliament was not in session. One side effect of stirring up the public with "Silly Season" items and issues comes when an authentic story is dismissed as a prank, or when a superfluous story is taken to be legitimate.

Today, with so many thousands upon thousands of print, broadcast, cable and Internet mouths to feed, and so many billions of dollars in advertising fees at stake, "Silly Season"-- along with its frivolous news stories and ethically-challenged reportage -- has seemingly been extended from January 1 to December 31 of each and every year.



Here in America, this 365-day "Silly Season," also goes by the name "campaign season." For today, like it or not, much of what passes for political reportage is about as meaningful and mature as a story one might glance at while standing in a supermarket checkout line. Candidates and their campaign mouthpieces spend far more time blathering on about the past sins, frailties and weaknesses -- whether real or purely fictional -- of everyone *else* in the field than they do presenting a positive pitch which would help citizens see the world through their eyes. Then too, in the constant challenge to cop a headline and make a buck, that which collectively passes for "the press" will run, rerun, print, post and air mountains of *merde* -- even if it possesses less than a soupçon of authenticity.

And now that former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has just made her candidacy official, silly season is about to become even more vacuous and asinine. What we are about to hear from Senators Paul, Cruz and Rubio -- and everyone else warming up in the Republican bullpen -- like Bush, Jindal, Huckabee, Perry, Walker and Christie -- is the precise same mantra: "Anyone is better than Hillary."

For the next year-and-a-half the ad nauseam brushstroke will be used to paint a portrait of Secretary Clinton as the most left-wing, elitist, dishonest, America-hating, terrorist-loving, irreligious, criminally liable politician in all American history. Then too, the Silly Season portrait will undoubtedly be the same even if, for some unforeseen reason, the Democratic candidate turns out to be Martin O'Malley, Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Jim Webb or Lincoln Chafee. For the simple fact is that *anyone* with (D) following their name will inevitably be tarred by the same brush using precisely the same brushstrokes.

Need proof that Silly Season is already ramping into high gear? How's about the National Rifle Association's national convention which just concluded? This year's convention had as its slogan "IF THEY CAN BAN ONE THEY CAN BAN THEM ALL." According to NRA leader Wayne LaPierre, "Hillary Rodham

Clinton will bring a permanent darkness of deceit and despair forced upon the American people to endure." He also managed to get the name "Vince Foster" into his speech. (*Foster, a former colleague of Hillary Clinton at the Rose Law firm in Little Rock, Arkansas, became Deputy White House Counsel during the first months of the Clinton Administration. A troubled, clinically depressed man, he committed suicide at age 48 in July 1993. Despite three official investigations, all of which concluded that Foster committed suicide, conspiracy theorists have persisted in claiming that he was murdered by none other than Hillary Clinton.*) I would imagine that there's going to be a whole hell of a lot of Googling the name "Vince Foster" going on in the next couple of days among young 30-somethings. Otherwise, they'll be missing out on one whale of a conspiracy . . .

Back at the NRA national convention, former Florida Governor Jeb Bush decried the "liberal, progressive worldview of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton and Eric Holder, and all of the other people who want to take the guns out of the hands of the good guys." Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal drew laughter when he said he expects Clinton's campaign slogan won't be "four more years." "The reality is the 2016 campaign is going to be between elitism and populism," Jindal said, while accusing her of being "leader of the vast left-wing conspiracy." "Hillary Clinton has already made it clear she'll be on the side of elitism."

Now while it is undoubtedly true that neither Clinton has ever particularly shied away from Wall Street, it is equally true that neither has *any* major presidential aspirant on either side of the aisle. About the only major American politician who has a rep for being Anti-Wall Street is Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren . . . who is not running for president. If Republicans are going to charge that a major component of elitism is one's affinity for Wall Street and big business -- and that elitism is bad -- they'd better put on hip boots and watch where they step. Or perhaps they're using the term "elitism" as a strange new synonym for "liberal," which, as we all know, is also synonymous with "Communism," "atheism" and "anti-Americanism."

For Republicans to suggest that *they* are the populists while Secretary Clinton and the Democrats are the elitists is to stand reality on its head. Mrs. Clinton has long favored gender pay equality, paid family and medical leave, a higher minimum wage and access to affordable child care -- none of which folks like Cruz, Bush, Rubio, Paul, Walker or the rest support.

At this early juncture, when Republicans are just beginning to heat up and discover new identities for 2016, I would urge them to spend more energy on issues and less on personalities; more time on reality, and less on fantasy. And above all, to remember that what they are seeking is nomination, not beatification.

But hey, if you want to run for sainthood, go ahead; see how far it gets you.

Make my day.

After all, this is Silly Season, right?

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