

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

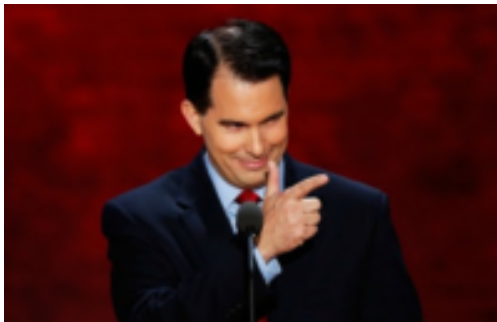
(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



February 15, 2015

## THE PUNTER

"England and America," the Irish writer George Bernard Shaw supposedly quipped, "*are two countries separated by the same language.*" Note the qualification *supposedly*; some attribute the *bon mot* to Winston Churchill, and others to Oscar Wilde. In point of fact, no one is really certain who the father of this jibe was, although Dorothy Parker America's greatest wit, once wrote:



Wis. Gov. Scott Walker

*If with the literate I am  
Impelled to try an epigram,  
I never seek to take the credit;  
We all assume that Oscar said it.*

Regardless of who is responsible for this bit of jocularitry, it is absolutely true; British and American English can seem like two different tongues -- in matter of spelling (*theatre* for the Brits versus *theater* for us Yanks) pronunciation (*weekend* for our British cousins versus *weekend* here at home) and, of course vocabulary. Consider that:

- In England one wears a *poloneck*; in America it's a *turtleneck*.
- A British baby wears a *nappy*; her American counterpart a *diaper*.
- Brits live in *flats*; Americans reside in *apartments*.
- Brits love their *chips*; we Americans our *French fries*.
- Brits write letters to an *agony aunt*; Americans to an *advice columnist*.
- Brits are *gaga* over football; in America it's called *soccer*.

And on and on and on. . .

Regardless of any and all linguistic, gastric (anyone for *aubergine*?) or systemic differences between America and Great Britain, there still exists -- particularly for nascent presidential candidates -- a tug or lure for the "Land of Hope and Glory" akin to being beamed back aboard the Mother Ship. Just ask governors Christie, Jindal and Walker.

Recently, these three Republican presidential hopefuls ventured across the pond in an effort to bolster their overseas and foreign policy *bona fides* and be photographed shaking a few Tory hands. All three wound up being adjudged guilty of what Prince Phillip once termed *dontopedalogy*, herein defined as "the art of opening one's mouth and putting one's foot in it." Call it "The Curse of London."

- Whilst he was in London last month, Louisiana Governor Jindal - who spent two years in England as a Rhodes Scholar back in the 1990s -- made news by claiming that there are Muslim-dominated 'no-go zones' in England where police don't keep law and order. When later asked by CNN to provide specific examples, Jindal declined. He later added that some Muslim immigrants are trying to "colonize" cities in Europe and "overtake the culture," and that it could happen next in the U.S. London [Mayor Boris Johnson](#) termed Jindal's claim "complete nonsense," adding that he thought Jindal could benefit from a "gentle education" on the topic.
- While *he* was in London earlier this month, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie chowed down on a snack of metatarsals and phalanges when asked whether he thought parents should vaccinate their children against measles. Christie's response was a model of adroit vacillation: while acknowledging that he and his wife had vaccinated their children, he also said "It's more important what you think as a parent than what you think as a public official. I also understand that parents need to have some measure of choice in things as well . . . that's the balance that the government has to decide." After many negative takes on the governor's "I-do-not-wish-to-offend-anyone" fence straddling, his New Jersey office [walked back](#) his original comment, stating there is "no question that children should be vaccinated" for the measles virus.
- As for Wisconsin Governor Walker he seemed at first to have learned a bit from the disastrous missteps of his colleagues, and decided that while in England, he would carefully avoid the media. And yet, he managed to make a muck of things when informally asked questions about where he stood on foreign policy issues as well as the theory of evolution. "I'm going to punt on that one as well," he told a reporter for BBC 4.

"I just think for me, commenting on foreign policy, or in this case economic policy, in a country where you're a visitor is not the politest" thing to do, Walker said when one reporter asked for his thoughts on whether Britain should leave the European Union. And when presented with several other foreign policy questions, including whether he believes the U.K. should take a tougher stance against ISIS or if the U.S. should arm Ukrainian rebels, Walker insisted on deferring to President Barack Obama. It might be "old-fashioned," Walker quipped, but "I just don't think it's wise to undermine the president of your own country" when traveling abroad.

When asked by BBC 4 presenter Justin Webb "Are you comfortable with the idea of evolution, do you believe in it, do you accept it?" Walker, taking a page from the Chris Christie's "I-do-not-want-to-offend-anyone" playbook said, "For me, I'm going to punt on that one as well." He then quickly added that evolution was an issue "a politician shouldn't be involved with one way or the other." The governor's "punt," drawing more negative attention than a potential presidential candidate might wish, had his office send out a clarifying email which had him state "Both science and my faith dictate my belief that we are created by God," he said. "I believe faith and science are compatible, and go hand in hand."

Glad we cleared that one up.

Governor Walker is by no means the only Republican presidential hopeful who has punted on the question of evolution-versus creationism. During his last run for the White House, former Texas Gov. Rick Perry called evolution "a theory that's out there," adding that it has "got some gaps in it." Former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum, who has long championed bringing intelligent design and creationism into public schools has argued, "I think there are a lot of problems with the theory of evolution, and do believe that it is used to promote a worldview that is anti-theist, that is atheist." When *he* was asked where he stood on the issue of evolution-versus-creationism, Governor Christie, simply replied "It's none of your business!"

"Punting" on such a relatively straightforward question not only betrays a woeful lack of spine; it puts on display a craven "lead-from-behind" strategy that is the last thing one wants in a president. I for one would greatly prefer -- although never vote for -- a candidate who says "I believe in the Biblical version of creation" or "I think Darwin is a tool of the Devil" than one who is a "punter." Those who pander to the political fringe during presidential gestation are bound to "walk it back" during pregnancy, thus proving that there is nothing not up for grabs when it comes to securing a nomination. To me, these "punters" are no better than political whores.

And, irony of ironies: anyone care to guess what a "punter" is in British English?

It is London slang for one who frequents whorehouses . . . as well as how prostitutes refer to their clients. . . .

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