

The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



June 03, 2013

THEY MAY NOT BE LONDON BRIDGES, BUT THEY SURE AS HELL ARE FALLING DOWN

Who among us doesn't remember the old nursery rhyme/singing game "London Bridge is Falling Down?" It has around for a long, long time -- likely since the mid-17th century, when the then nearly 600-year-old bridge began showing signs of deterioration. Originally built way back in 1176, the medieval London Bridge, severely damaged in the fires of 1633 and 1666, was widened and upgraded in



the early 1760s, and finally replaced by a new structure in 1831. This engineering marvel -- called "New London Bridge" -- spanned the Thames until 1972, when it was torn down and moved to Lake Havasu City, Arizona. Doing the math, the medieval London Bridge was in use for 655 years; "New London Bridge" was operational for 141 years; and its latest and most technologically advanced incarnation (it has the A-

3's five lanes) has been up and running a mere 41 years.

One marvels that 12th-century engineers and builders were able to erect a structure that was both esthetically pleasing to the eye and functionally utile for the ages; after all, the original -- medieval -- London Bridge was in daily use for

more than six-and-one-half-centuries. Even the early 19th-century engineers and builders had it all over their modern counterparts; their structure, originally built for horse-drawn carriages, hansoms and dog-carts, was ultimately able to withstand Daimlers, Humbers, Austins, and Churchill Tanks. Only time will tell how long the newest incarnation will stand. (**Note:** the Third London Bridge, was built at a cost of £4 million -- the equivalent of £42.1 million in 2013 -- all of which came from the "Bridge House Estates Charity" -- *not* from public funds.)

Here in the United States, we could use a combination of British engineering know-how and European -- or Chinese -- resolve in dealing with our bridges . . . and roads, dams, water purification plants, etc. (**N.B.:** *The United States invests a paltry 2.4% of GDP on infrastructure, as opposed to nearly 5% in E.U. countries and slightly more than 9% of GDP in China.*) America's infrastructure is, to put it mildly, on the verge of becoming one big London Bridge: falling down. The recent collapse of the I-5 Bridge in Washington State is just the tip of the iceberg. Experts estimate that there are nearly 67,000 bridges across the nation deemed structurally deficient. Believe it or not, the I-5 wasn't even on this list: it was on an even more ominous list: the one containing structures deemed "functionally obsolete." According to Barry LePatner, author of [*Too Big to Fall: America's Failing Infrastructure and the Way Forward*](#), for a bridge or road to be considered "functionally obsolete" it must have been "designed to meet old engineering standards . . . [have] traffic lanes narrower than current requirements and overhead clearance lower." Many structures -- like the I-5 Bridge -- are also "fracture critical," meaning designed with no backup supports in case of structural failure. According to LePatner, the American Road and Transportation Builders Association and the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study, the diagnosis for America's infrastructure is beyond critical. Our bridges are corrosive deathtraps; our roads, dams, canals and levees are in need of serious upgrades and repair -- if not replacement.



Last year, spending -- by all levels of government on bridges totaled \$28 billion, according to the [American Road and Transportation Builders Association](#). The Federal Highway Administration estimates that it will take a minimum of \$20 billion a year over the next 16 to 20 years to bring all the nation's bridges up to standard. Moreover, the [National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission](#) recently reported that \$225 billion is needed *annually for the*

next fifty years to upgrade our surface transportation system to a state of good repair and create a more advanced system.

The problems are obvious. Since its formation during the Eisenhower years, the Interstate Highway System -- comprising 47,182 miles of high-speed roadway -- has been aging, moldering and growing increasingly obsolete. We are decades away -- if ever -- from achieving the same sort of connective high-speed rail systems found in virtually every other industrialized country in the world.

We must face facts. America's infrastructure -- like London Bridge -- is falling down. Rebuilding and upgrading our roads, retrofitting and modernizing our bridges, dams, municipal sewer systems and levees is absolutely essential for the nation's future. The proper repair and maintenance of our roads, bridges, airports and rails are an investment in our economic future; even Chinese, Malaysian, Thai, Vietnamese and Guatemalan imports have to be transported to market via truck, cargo plane or rail. Cities with late-19th, early-20th century sewer systems are simply not able to meet the needs of its citizens. Levees built during the Great Depression are incapable of protecting population centers from the storms surges which now regularly occur in our age of global warming.

And on and on.

Now, the arguments generally attaching themselves to any debate over the many and varied crises facing America's infrastructure are equally obvious:

- "We simply cannot afford it."
- "In order to accomplish any of these projects would require raising taxes, which the American public simply will not accept."
- "We were told that the 'Obama Stimulus Package' was supposed to create millions of 'shovel ready' jobs; turns out, it was a massive boondoggle."
- "A better solution will be the privatizing of roads, bridges and dams."

And on and on.

President Obama has called for spending \$50 billion to pay for bridge and road construction, as well as setting up a national infrastructure bank — an idea which, not surprisingly, has gained little if any traction in Congress. All four of the above enumerated gripes and complaints have come into play, essentially making the president's proposal Dead On Arrival. Los Angeles-area



Representative Janice Hahn has made this her big issue, arguing that infrastructure spending provides a good return on investment. "We know that this will create jobs [and] we know it will put people to work," Hahn says. "It will improve the efficiency of our nation's transportation system and it's going to be worth the investment." Hahn has called for hearings on the Washington bridge collapse as a way to raise awareness of the infrastructure problem. Unfortunately, in order for hearings to take place, it has to get the approval of Speaker John Boehner.

Lots of luck . . .

But damn it, this is an issue that should be well beyond partisan political crapola -- if you will pardon my French. Let me ask you: if the 30-year old roof on your 30-year old home was leaking badly, and three reputable roofers told you it was beyond patching up -- and that one mammoth storm could easily cause it to collapse -- what would you do? Say you couldn't afford it and learn to live with puddles in the kitchen? Pray that you would win the lottery? Abandon the house altogether? Or do anything/everything in your power to save your investment such as taking out a loan, putting it on a credit card, getting the local, county or state government to help, or a combination of all three? That's the situation with America's infrastructure. Except here, we can use the taxes/loans and grants to additionally create hundreds of thousands -- if not millions -- of jobs, employing people who will take their newfound paychecks and buy clothes, groceries, consumer goods, new tires for the car . . . and the million-and-one things that can help stimulate a consumer-driven economy.

Is it unthinkable for Congress to for once agree on something? Like America's infrastructure fiasco is, in reality, a serious national security issue calling for legislation absolutely devoid of pork or payoffs? Can they for once act like practical adults and address a solvable problem? Or will they, as has become their ingrained habit, retreat to their partisan corners and merely snarl at one another?

I know that my more fiscally-conservative readers are going to clobber me, expressing, for the umpteenth time how little I understand about economics or the "real world"; how as a "committed Communist/Socialist/Fascist/Dumber-Than-Dirt-and-Equally-Naive-Idealist" (yes, I have been called all those things) that I should leave the solution to the professionals of the corporate world. That all we need are lower taxes and less regulation. (Sounds like the old tag line "Tastes great, less filling!") In short, I should get back to studying the Bible or performing *b'nai/b'not mitzvah* . . . anything but competing with "the adults."

Yes, I know that spending tens, if not hundreds of billions on infrastructure repair will raise our deficit; so be it. But putting lots of people to work can also lower unemployment and go a long way toward rebuilding America from the inside out.

It is a good, sound investment for the future.

And it just might keep London Bridge from falling down . . .

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June 04, 2013

FRANK LAUTENBERG: HORATIO ALGER WRIT LARGE

New Jersey Senator Frank Lautenberg passed away yesterday at age 89. He was the last remaining World War II veteran in Congress. Although not nearly as well-known as many of his colleagues, he was a man of many, many accomplishments. Most of what follows is excerpted from my 2011 book *The Jews of Capitol Hill*. . . .

Except for one small fact, New Jersey Senator Frank Lautenberg's life story could be called the Horatio Alger myth writ large; the "single fact" being that in most cases, Alger's urchins rose from rags to respectability, not riches. In Lautenberg's case, his rise was all the way from want to wealth. And yet from all appearances, the Senator never forgot his humble roots. Once, during his first campaign for the Senate in 1982, he pointed to the gap between his front teeth and said: "If my parents had money, I wouldn't have this. I keep it as a badge of my roots."

The Senator's parents, Samuel and Mollie [Bergen] Lautenberg, "arrived in the U.S. as infants from Poland and Russia." The Lautenbergs lived in Paterson, New Jersey, where Sam worked in a silk mill, sold coal, farmed and for a brief spell ran a tavern in nearby Paramus until the Depression put him out of business. In order to make ends meet, Mollie opened a lunch counter in Belleville, worked in a women's clothing store, and sold insurance. Despite all their efforts, the Lautenbergs remained poor. Years later, the senator recalled, "I saw my father opening a store at 6 a.m. and staying till 11 p.m. and my mother washing dishes behind a counter. My parents never quit, even in their

poverty.” And yet, they always reminded their son that “There are people who are worse off than we are.”

Frank Raleigh Lautenberg, was born in Paterson on January 23, 1924. When asked about his early Jewish memories, he recalled “There was a traditional little *pushke* (collection box) – my grandmother’s pride and joy – that symbolized for me the Jewish belief that the value of life is to help others whenever we can.” Ironically, Lautenberg, who would one day become a major Jewish philanthropist and travel to Israel more than 80 times, did not have a Jewish education and never became *bar mitzvah*. “We were not able to join a synagogue because we were constantly moving. I went to more than 12 different schools during my 12 years of elementary and high school.” Indeed, the family did move more than a dozen times, and at one point they lived in a “cramped apartment above a tavern in a racially mixed neighborhood” in Paterson.



When Frank was ten, his father took him to a silk mill in order “to teach him a lesson he never forgot.” Walking through the mill, holding his son by the hand, Sam said, “Do you see how dark and awful it is in here? Never let yourself be put in a position where you have to do work like this!” Sam Lautenberg died at age forty-three from intestinal cancer. The loss

haunted Frank for years. In the early 1970s, when he had become a multimillionaire, he established the Lautenberg Center for General and Tumor Immunology at the Medical School of the Hebrew University.

Following his graduation from Nutley High School in 1941, the eighteen year old, Frank Lautenberg entered the Army Signal Corps. Assigned to the 3185th Signal Battalion, he was sent to Europe. At war's end, he entered Columbia University on the G.I. Bill, graduating with a degree in economics in 1949. Lautenberg has long said that “getting an education [I] could not otherwise afford, thanks to the G.I. Bill, was a seminal influence on the formation of [my] liberal political philosophy.” Following graduation, Frank Lautenberg worked as a salesman for the Prudential Insurance Company in Paterson. In 1952, he stumbled upon the opportunity that would ultimately be the basis for his great fortune.

That year, the twenty-eight-year-old Lautenberg approached an accountant named Henry Taub, whose “fledgling . . . firm was preparing the payrolls of a handful of companies in the Paterson area.” Lautenberg persuaded Taub that in order to expand, he would have to “aggressively go after business.” Lautenberg sold himself to Taub as an individual who had the requisite marketing skills for the job. Taub (1927-) then hired Lautenberg as the fifth employee – and only salesman – at the firm that would

eventually become Automatic Data Processing. ADP grew to be the largest data-processing firm in the world. By 1961, Lautenberg was the firm's vice-president in charge of administration. Eight years later he became ADP's president. In this capacity, Lautenberg "embarked on an ambitious acquisition program, buying up many smaller firms, including the Electronic Data Service in Chicago, Payroll Specialists in Cleveland . . . and the First National City Bank of New York." He also rewarded ADP's workers by creating an employee stock-ownership plan. The employees – more than 30,000 by the mid-1990s – in turn rewarded their leader by "consistently refusing to unionize." By 1975, Lautenberg had risen to become chairman of the board and chief executive officer. When the Clothing and Textile Workers Union tried to unionize the Clifton office of ADP, "not a single worker responded positively."

At the time of Frank Lautenberg's election to the United States Senate in 1982, ADP was preparing payrolls for "more than 100,000 companies involving more than five million workers" – ten percent of all private sector jobs in the United States. In September 2008, *Roll Call* rated Lautenberg the seventh-wealthiest member of Congress, with a net worth of estimated at \$55.33 million. No wonder Lautenberg has said that "ADP really means American Dream Personified."

While amassing his fortune, Frank Lautenberg was also becoming active in community organizations and a bit of politics. Always a donor to good causes – he served as president of the American Friends of Hebrew University and as national chair of the United Jewish Appeal from 1975 to 1977 – Lautenberg started his political career by making a \$90,000 contribution to Senator George McGovern's 1972 presidential campaign. That contribution earned him a spot on Richard Nixon's infamous "Enemies List." Four years later, he helped finance Jimmy Carter's successful presidential race, and was often sought out by the Georgian for his views on Israel and the Middle East.

As he became more and more involved in Democratic politics – lending support to the likes of Senators Birch Bayh, Ted Kennedy, Gary Hart, and John Glenn – Lautenberg began thinking: ". . . if I'm willing to support them, why shouldn't I support myself?" As the 1970s turned into the 1980s, Lautenberg began giving serious consideration to launching his own political career.

In 1978, "in recognition of his contributions to the Democratic party of New Jersey," Governor Brendan T. Byrne named Lautenberg a commissioner of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. In 1980, Lautenberg once again lent strong financial assistance to Jimmy Carter, hoping that he might receive a cabinet position in a second Carter administration. Those hopes were of course dashed when Ronald Reagan defeated the man from Plains. Lautenberg remained on the Port Authority, awaiting his chance. He did not have long to wait.

In March, 1982, four-term Senator Harrison Williams, Jr. [1919-2001] resigned from the upper chamber following his conviction on corruption charges involving the Abscam sting operation. (*This FBI operation involved a fictitious entity called "Abdul Enterprises, Ltd," which operated out of a house on D.C.'s W Street and a yacht. In the sting, FBI agents posing as Middle Eastern businessmen videotaped meetings in which government officials – including Senator Williams and 5 members of the House – accepted money in return for "favors" for a non-existent sheikh.*)

Republican Governor Thomas H. Kean (1935-) then appointed banker Nicholas F. Brady as a "caretaker" Senator. Brady (1930-), who would later become Secretary of the Treasury in the George H. W. Bush administration, served in the Senate for precisely eight months and one week. He did not seek election to a full six-year term. Lautenberg, sensing that the time was right, quickly announced his candidacy for the Democratic nomination. Putting more than \$1 million of his own money into the primary race, Lautenberg "managed to come from behind in the polls to top a crowded field of ten Democrats." The final tally gave the ADP chairman 26% to 23% for former Congressman Andy Maguire and 20% for one-term Congressman Joseph A. LeFante. Coming in a distant fourth at 11% was Princeton Mayor Barbara Boggs Sigmund, the daughter of the late House Majority Leader Hale Boggs and his wife, Representative Lindy Boggs, and the sister of Washington power broker Tommy Boggs and ABC reporter Cokie Roberts.

In the general election, Lautenberg squared off against Republican Representative Millicent Fenwick, who became the early favorite. A member of the GOP's moderate wing, the "eccentric" pipe-smoking Fenwick was known far and wide as the model for the Lacey Davenport character in Garry Trudeau's topical cartoon strip *Doonesbury*. With less than three weeks left to go in the campaign, Lautenberg was lagging far behind, showing poll ratings of no more than 18%. He then added more than \$3 million of his own money, blanketing New Jersey with commercials "that portrayed the seventy-two year old congresswoman as being out of touch with the concerns of a state that was suffering from the worst recession since the Depression." Ironically, 20 year later, when Lautenberg was looking to return to the senate, he was 78, and "feeling as young as ever."

Lautenberg's numbers began to rise. Aided by a last-minute endorsement from the National Organization for Women (and a better than two-to-one edge in spending), Lautenberg wound up winning 51%-48%. All told, Lautenberg spent \$6,596,088, of which \$5,142,812 – 78% – came from his own deep pockets.

Assigned to the Committees on Banking and Commerce, Frank Lautenberg spent his first eighteen months in the Senate in "quiet obscurity." He did not even make his maiden speech until June 7, 1983, a full six months after his swearing-in. In his first

speech, the junior Senator from New Jersey, warning of “a growing gap in computer literacy,” called for more computers in inner-city classrooms.

Lautenberg's first significant legislative achievement did not come until the next year; the enactment of an anti-drunk driving bill that “forced states to raise the legal drinking age to twenty-one or face a cut in federal highway funds.” Faced with the daunting prospect of getting his bill past the powerful liquor lobby, Lautenberg began buttonholing his colleagues, refusing to take no for an answer. In the end, he pulled off an upset; his bill passed 81-16. After his first two years in the Senate, Lautenberg transferred to the Committees on Appropriations, Budget and Environment and Public Works.

Throughout much of his first go-round in the Senate, Lautenberg was frequently overshadowed by his senior colleague from New Jersey, former NBA great Bill Bradley. A slow, deliberate thinker, Bradley came to be known as one of the Senate's intellectual giants. Lautenberg, by comparison, spent most of his career looking to the needs of his home state. The 1991 edition of *Current Biography* noted that “[Lautenberg's] workmanlike performance on behalf of the citizens of New Jersey has been pretty dull stuff” when compared to the issues on Bradley's political pallet. A man with a well-developed sense of self, Lautenberg bristled at invidious comparisons between him and Bradley: “The things I work on are the things that affect everyday life. Things for New Jersey. Would I like to craft legislation that gets featured in every newspaper and on every television station? Of course I would. But I'm not a grandstander; I never have been.”

Indeed, where Bill Bradley was often dealing with “big picture issues,” Frank Lautenberg made a career out of focusing on what he calls “things that affect everyday life.” As chairman and ranking Democrat on the Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee during his first stint in the senate, Lautenberg – a former two-pack-a-day smoker got Congress to pass legislation “to ban smoking first on two-hour flights, then on all domestic flights.” When he suggested that tobacco farmers “grow soybeans or something,” he incurred the wrath of North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms and other tobacco Senators, who complained that he had “bypassed their committees” by attaching the ban to an appropriations bill. [Note: The Senate, unlike the House, does not require that amendments be germane.] Lautenberg responded to Helms' angry charge by snapping, “The committee system is safe. The flying public is not.” In 2006, Lautenberg got the sale of all tobacco products banned in the Senate complex.

In 1990, Lautenberg authored the “Ryan White Act,” which provides services to AIDS patients. He is also author of the 1996 law that “bars those convicted of domestic abuse from possessing firearms.” Although known officially as “Domestic Violence Offender Gun Ban,” groups like the National Rifle Association and Gun Owners of America

generally refer to it as either the "Lautenberg Amendment" or the simply "Lautenberg Gun Ban."

In 1988 Senator Lautenberg was challenged for reelection by former Heisman Trophy winner-Rhodes Scholar-turned banker Pete Dawkins. When asked his thoughts about running against an American icon, Lautenberg replied, "What the Republicans did was to go to central casting and pick out a candidate to run against me. He thinks he can just wash up on the Jersey shore, announce, and walk away with his next trophy." Dawkins (1938-) began the campaign by excoriating Lautenberg for his liberal record, especially his opposition to the death penalty for drug-related murders. Despite a huge campaign war chest, Dawkins quickly got into the political mire by attempting to "dress up his already impressive resume."

Sensing Dawkins's political weakness, Lautenberg accused him of being a carpetbagger who had only chosen to settle in New Jersey "after considering other states in which to launch a political career." Dawkins further imperiled his chances of victory when he was quoted as saying he would "blow his brains out" if he had to live in a small town. Running a series of commercials with the words "Be real, Pete" over Dawkins's pronouncements, Lautenberg coasted to a 54%-46% percent victory. The two candidates spent nearly \$15 million between them. In this, his first race for reelection, Lautenberg provided "a mere" \$300,000 from his own pocket.

In 1994 Lautenberg squared off against the Speaker of New Jersey's House of Representatives, Garabed "Chuck" Haytaian. Haytaian came out for a flat tax, and raised millions of dollars from his fellow Armenian-Americans. Lautenberg, campaigning on his record, noted that while he had supported the Brady handgun-control bill, Haytaian had opposed Governor Jim Florio's ban on assault weapons. Throughout the campaign, Lautenberg hammered away at Haytaian's more conservative record. Haytaian's campaign fell apart after he made an appearance on the Bob Grant radio talk show. Shortly before going on the show, host Grant (Robert Ciro Gigante), a pioneer of the "angry" or "confrontational" talk radio format, had been accused of making racist remarks on the air. In the public mind, Haytaian was now tied to Grant. Frank Lautenberg was reelected for a third six-year term by a 50%-47% margin.

Senator Lautenberg voted against the use of military force in the Persian Gulf. At war's end, he garnered considerable press for lambasting the governments of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for "their failure to honor their financial commitments to the United States." Lecturing then-Secretary of State James A. Baker III, Lautenberg said: "It is a significant frustration of mine that we seem to have gotten nothing from Saudi Arabia or Kuwait or the other countries whose sovereignty we saved, whose assets we saved. They sent out a 911. We responded as no emergency team has ever responded in

history. And what do we get? We don't even get payment on the pledges that they made to help us through the financial crisis."

In 1999, Frank Lautenberg announced that he would not run for reelection. In 2000 his seat was taken over by former Goldman Sachs Chairman and co-CEO John Corzine (1947-) who put \$62 million of his own money into his winning campaign. With Corzine's election Robert Toricelli became New Jersey's senior senator. Toricelli (1951-), nicknamed "the Torch," was first elected to the Senate in 1996, when he defeated former Representative *Dick Zimmer* 57%-43%. (Prior to his election to the Senate, Toricelli had represented New Jersey's 9th C.D. for 7 terms. His seat was taken over by *Steve Rothman*.) During the three years (1997-2000) they served together in the United States Senate, Frank Lautenberg and Robert Toricelli had a relationship the writers of *The Almanac of American Politics* described as "probably more hostile than any since 1859, when California Senator David Broderick was killed in a duel with his colleague William Gwinn's best friend." It was thus duly noted that "One thing [Lautenberg] surely did not miss was dealing with . . . Bob Toricelli." In January 2001, it looked as if Frank Lautenberg was heading into a long retirement. But such was not to be the case.

Gearing up for his 2002 reelection campaign, Toricelli was a prohibitive favorite. Then a scandal broke in which Toricelli, by then chairman of the Senate Democrat's campaign committee, was accused of working to advance the business interests of a Korean businessman named David Chang. It was alleged that Chang had given Toricelli "lavish gifts and cash." While Toricelli admitted having given assistance to Chang, he denied receiving gifts - "He said he reimbursed Chang." As a result, Toricelli's polling numbers took a nosedive. In late September of 2002, with a little more than a month to go until the election, Toricelli announced that he was withdrawing from the race. In a mad scramble to find a well-known candidate to run in his stead, New Jersey Democratic leaders eventually turned to Frank Lautenberg who later admitted that "Almost as soon as I announced my retirement I had pangs of regret. There's an old Irish saying: 'To rest is to rot.'"

In Lautenberg, they had a candidate who was well-known and "capable of self financing." And they would need his money; for not only would Toricelli "not send over a dime from his \$5 million campaign treasury," but Lautenberg's opponent, Douglas Forrester was easily as wealthy as he. The multi-millionaire founder of "BeneCard Services, Inc," a "pharmacy benefits management firm," Doug Forester (1953-) was worth at least \$50 million. Suddenly, the Forrester campaign had to scrap its anti-Toricelli strategy and convince New Jersey voters that Frank Lautenberg was "too old, too liberal and too out of touch." They painted the 78-year old Lautenberg as being soft on defense and terrorism, repeatedly bringing up his 1991 vote against the Gulf War. Putting \$1.2 million of his own money into the race (as opposed to Forster, who spent more than 6 times that amount), Lautenberg scored a convincing victory, defeating the Republican 54%-44%. Ironically, in this, his shortest campaign by far (less

than two months), Lautenberg had his biggest margin of victory. After two years, Frank Lautenberg was back in the United States Senate.

Upon his return, Lautenberg was disappointed to learn that he was not being given “credit for all his seniority.” His 18 years of service in the Senate “only entitled him to seniority over other freshmen.” Nonetheless, he dove back in, becoming a critic of the Iraq War and introducing numerous amendments “aimed at halting government contracts” with Halliburton. He also sponsored legislation that would permit the media to “photograph the arrival in the United States of coffins of slain military personnel.” When it went down to defeat in June 2004, Lautenberg issued a statement that “A majority of the Senate are now working on behalf of the president to conceal from the American people the true costs of war.” Shortly after Barack Obama’s election, Secretary of Defense William Gates reversed the ban.

In June 2005, Frank Lautenberg cast his 7,000th vote, something which only two other New Jersey senators had ever done. In January 2006, he introduced Judge Samuel Alito, a New Jersey native, to the Senate Judiciary Committee for his Supreme Court confirmation hearings. He later voted against him. Lautenberg made it known early on that he would run for reelection in 2008 – despite the fact if reelected, his term would continue through his 90th birthday. Speaking of that fact, Lautenberg – the man who had accused of Millicent Fenwick of being “two old” at age 72 said, “The age is not a factor. The question is effectiveness.” In 2008 84-year old Frank Lautenberg defeated 64-year old *Dick Zimmer* 56%-42%, thereby becoming the only person in New Jersey history to be elected to five Senate terms. No longer the quietly unassertive man he was when he was first elected in 1982, Lautenberg has become what New Jersey Governor John Corzine referred to as “less risk-averse.”

In February 2009, the senator’s son Josh and daughter Ellen, on behalf of the Lautenberg Family Foundation filed a lawsuit against the brother of disgraced financier Bernard Madoff. The Foundation invested “more than \$7 million” with Peter Madoff, “chief compliance officer and second-highest ranking official” at Bernard L. Madoff Investment Securities. The Lautenberg Family Foundation, which annually disperses more than \$750,000, was seeking the return of its money.

In 1957, Frank Lautenberg married the former Lois Levenson. The Lautenbergs separated in 1988, after thirty-one years of marriage. They had four children and eleven grandchildren. In January 2004, Frank Lautenberg married Bonnie S. Englehardt, his companion of 16 years. When asked why it had taken so long for the two to wed, Lautenberg responded, “You know it takes a long time for us politicians to make up our minds.” The senator’s son Joshua, a resident of Edwards, Colorado, served as best man. For years, Senator and Mrs. Lautenberg resided in Cliffside, New Jersey. Earlier this year, Senator Lautenberg announced that he would not stand for reelection in 2014. Then his health began to decline. Despite being quite ill, he did return to the senate for

one last vote: a measure seeking to institute universal background checks for the purchase of guns. The bill failed.

Frank Lautenberg passed away on June 3, 2013. His was a career worthy of Horatio Alger . . .

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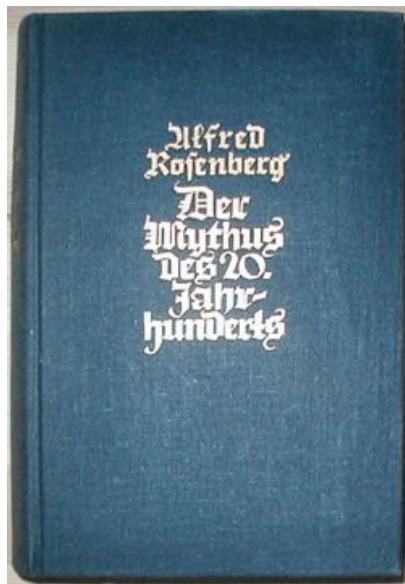


June 12, 2013

ONE FELLA'S FACT IS ANOTHER FOOL'S FABLE

The first section of this morning's Ft. Lauderdale *News Sun Sentinel* contained two chilling, attention-grabbing stories. The first, on page 5A carried the headline, *Report: Planet likely to be too hot by end of century*; the second, on page 8A offered *Nazi leader's long-lost diary offers new insights*.

We'll get to the first story in a couple of paragraphs. For the nonce, the article about the "Nazi leader's long-lost diary" shall occupy our attention. The diary in question is the



work of Alfred Rosenberg (1894-1946), who played a pivotal role in the extermination of millions of Jews, Romani and other people during World War II. Rosenberg who, despite his last name was *not* Jewish, served as one of the Nazi Party leaders during Hitler's imprisonment following the failed 1923 "Beer Hall Putsch." While the future Führer was writing *Mein Kampf*, in his jail cell, Rosenberg was hard at work on his "masterpiece," a rambling racial diatribe entitled "[The Myth of the Twentieth Century](#)" (*Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts*). Rosenberg would go on to become editor of *Völkischer Beobachter*, the official Nazi paper, and Leader of the Foreign Policy Office from 1933-1945. He was captured at the end of the war, tried at Nuremberg, and found guilty of conspiracy to commit crimes against humanity; planning initiating and waging wars of

aggression, and war crimes. He was sentenced to death and executed on October 16, 1946.

According to a preliminary U.S. government assessment, Rosenberg's diary "could offer new insight into meetings he had with Hitler and other top Nazi leaders, including

Heinrich Himmler and Herman Goering." According to one historian who has seen the diary, ". . . it will be an important source of information to historians that complements, and in part contradicts already known documentation. . . .It is of considerable importance for the study of the Nazi era, including the history of the Holocaust."

Not that anyone with an ounce of sanity or humanity requires any additional proof of the utterly unfathomable evil perpetrated by the Third Reich. Nazi psychopathy was so unspeakably twisted that they truly believed the wind of history was at their back. As such, they documented virtually every move, every stratagem, every breath they ever took; it's all there for us to read, to view and to hear. And yet, as anyone with internet access knows, there are hundreds of websites devoted to Holocaust denial. How, one wonders, can anyone be so blinded by racial and ethnic hatred as to deny that the most meticulously-documented abomination in all human history never occurred; to steadfastly affirm and avow that each and every document, each and every historic 'fact' has been created by the very people who claimed to be its victims? I guess I'm just a tad too lucid and rational to grasp such lunacy. To me, there *are* such things as incontrovertible historic facts.

Which brings us to the article on page 5A -- the one about "Planet likely to be too hot by end of century." According to a new report issued by the [International Energy Agency](#), ". . . emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases are growing so fast that the world will likely exceed a safe limit in average global temperatures by the end of the century." According to their report, carbon dioxide emissions grew at a rate of 1.4% in 2012, reaching a record high of 31.6 gigatons released into the atmosphere. Unless seriously reversed, IEA scientists conclude, the world's average temperatures are on track to increase between 6.5 and 9.5 degrees Fahrenheit by the year 2099. Soaring temperatures, of course, would have profound implications for everything from water supplies and electricity production to agriculture and public health.

There *are* some bright signs on the horizon: of late, emissions of greenhouse gases have been falling in the U.S. to levels not seen since the mid-1990s -- thanks largely to a natural gas boom. Also, just the other day President Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to phase out hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) -- a potent heat-trapping chemical used in appliances as a refrigerant. Still, reducing HFCs addresses only a tiny element of climate change. So much has to be done by the countries of the world. The scientific facts are overwhelming; unless we act smartly -- and as one planet -- we are going to burn up.

But just as there are millions of people who willfully blind themselves to *historic* facts and deny the reality of the Holocaust, so too are there millions upon millions who -- willfully or not -- blind themselves to *scientific* facts by denying the reality of Global Warming. And I truly regret to report that more than 100 of them are elected members of the United States Congress. Unbelievably, there are nearly 90 representatives and 22

senators who simply deny (or at best, "just aren't convinced") that man-made global warming is real or that carbon dioxide is harmful. The [list includes](#) such well-known members of the House as Speaker John Boehner, Louie Gohmert (R-TX), Steve King (R-IA), Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) and Paul Ryan (R-WI) and Senators such as Tom Coburn (R-OK), Ted Cruz (R-TX), Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Rand Paul (R-KY) and Marco Rubio (R-FL). And lest anyone think we are singling out Republicans for partisan effect, we are not; there simply isn't a single Democrat on the list of Congressional climate deniers . . .

Please don't get the idea that I am equating those who deny man-made global warming with those who deny the reality of the Holocaust; such is not the case. Those who deny the Holocaust inhabit a truly perverse parallel universe in which reality's puppet-strings are always being manipulated by a conspiratorial cabal of omnipotent, indescribably malevolent Jews and Zionists. Indeed, if one spends even an hour glancing through some of deniers' websites, one is forced to conclude that if God, in Co's (meaning "His or Hers") infinite wisdom had not created the Jews, anti-Semites, in their infinite insanity, would have. These are truly sick, evil people.

Global warming deniers -- from Bachmann and Boehner to Portman and Paul -- are neither sick nor evil. What they *are* is willfully self-deluded. And unlike Holocaust denying, the mere mention of which would cause any political career to die aborning (except, perhaps in Paraguay or a number of authoritarian Muslim countries) questioning or denying global warming can act as a positive political "dog whistle" -- a notification to the far-right that like them, they too disdain the dictates of effete pointy-headed intellectuals who think they know more than so-called "real" people. Holocaust deniers see conspiracies of Jews and Zionists; with those who deny global warming its liberals, progressives and intellectuals.

If this "blessed plot, this earth, this realm . . ." is to survive, we, its inhabitants are going to have to get our act together and recognize our mutual stewardship. If this revolutionary change is to occur, it will of course take the leadership of the United States. And if the United States is to lead, it will require those who deny the reality of science get the hell out of the way.

At this late date, fables are for fools . . .

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The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")

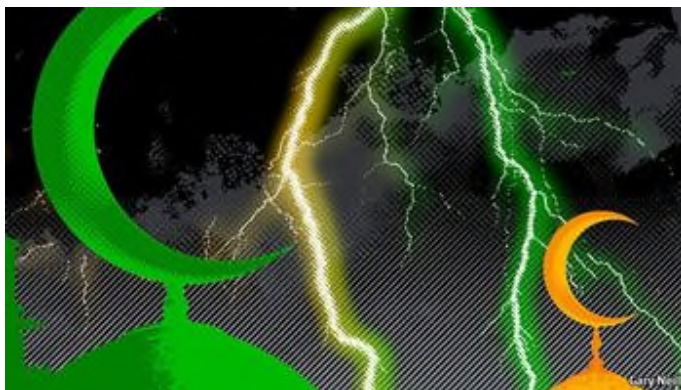


June 23, 2013

THE 9TH CENTURY COMES 'A CALLING

As I write this essay, two unnerving elements in the now more than year-old Syrian civil war have come to light; one of recent vintage, and one going back more than 1,400 years. First, the recent development:

An article published in yesterday's Los Angeles *Times* revealed that CIA operatives and U.S. special operations troops have been secretly training Syrian rebels with anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons since late last year -- months before President Obama approved plans to begin directly arming them. The information comes from both U.S. officials and rebel commanders. This covert training operation has raised hopes among the Syrian opposition that in addition to the arms and ammunition already promised by President Obama, the U.S. will ultimately provide heavier weapons as well. Only time will tell. To be certain, there are inherent risks in arming and training opposition forces in any Middle Eastern conflict. We don't really know who they are or what philosophical principles undergird their efforts. Additionally, if experience teaches anything, it is that that old saw about the "enemy of my enemy is my friend" cannot be the basis for a relationship, let alone a policy; it is an absolute chimera. The "friendly" rebels we arm and train today are likely to become our well-armed enemies tomorrow.



The second development is far more eerie and troubling, and has its roots

not in events transpiring over the past year, but rather in the 7th, 8th and 9th centuries. For the first time in modern history, Shiites are crossing borders to fight against the "evil ones," meaning Sunnis. In the past, it was the Sunnis -- not the Shiites -- who were on the march; they traveled to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets in the 1980s and to Iraq to fight the Americans. These days, the draw is Syria, but the cause is not a foreign invader; it is a rival Muslim sect. The Shiite invaders' purpose is not merely to topple a

murderous, autocratic regime or to fight for the rights of an enslaved people; it's about fulfilling a thousand-year old prophecy. As Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah has openly admitted, his men are leading battles in Syria, and Iraqi fighters are streaming in to join them. Shiites back at home say all the signs in Syria point to the appearance of a messianic era -- an era predicted by the 9th-century Imam Mahdi. (In Muslim eschatology, *Mahdi*, "the guided one," is the prophesied redeemer of Islam who will rule for seven, nine or nineteen years before the Day of Judgment and will rid the world of evil.)

Syria's war didn't start as a sectarian one. It started as an uprising of the people against their government. But the majority of those people are Sunni. The Assad government is Alawite, which has roots in Shiite Islam. The arrival of sectarian fighters is a huge historic development; one that does not bode well for the future of Syria -- let alone the rest of the Middle East.

"How in the world," the westerner asks "can a 9th-century sectarian schism motivate people to fight and even die in the twenty-first century?" Although a perfectly fair and honest question, it nonetheless betrays a relative lack of knowledge about the very nature of Islam. More and more, I find that many of the so-called "experts" who talk up the nature and danger of Islam really don't know all that much about their subject; they are like park rangers who lead tours of a primeval forest without knowing that there's a difference between a Redwood and a Giant Sequoia.

Please note well that Islam is a highly fragmented faith with two major sects, numerous sub-sects, and doctrinal disputes that have been festering since the beginning of time. Understanding Islam without a "scorecard" or grounding in its history is rather like trying to grasp the difference between, say, Methodists, Presbyterians and Northern Baptists without first having studied the history of Protestantism.

Those whose knowledge of civil war begins and ends with the American "War Between the States" as it is still referred to in the old South, must acknowledge that there are generally two well-defined sides to a civil conflict, both of which hold fast to a set of political, economic, or even moral beliefs. In America's case, of course, the simple version has it that the Northern states opposed slavery, while the states of the Deep South overwhelmingly favored retaining their "peculiar institution." Never mind that this is a rather simplistic, middle-school version of history; never mind that this war had as much to do with Federalism-versus-States'-Rights as it did with slavery. That's a matter for another day and another article. History does accurately record that the regional antagonism, which eventually led to the firing on Fort Sumter, had been simmering, smoldering and sparking for nearly a hundred years before the first shots were ever fired.

In the current civil war going on in Syria, the sides are fairly distinct, though they certainly do not represent clear-cut geographic regions. Their conflict isn't so much about ideology as it is about theology and religious history. And whereas the American Civil War's gestation was about a century, the Syrian conflict has been bubbling and boiling over for more than a thousand years.

In order to understand just how serious and unique the current "invasion" of Shiite fighters into Sunni-led Syria is, one must know something about Sunni-Shiite schism. One should know at the outset that of the hundreds upon hundreds of millions of Muslims in the world, approximately 85% are Sunni, and 15% Shiite. Shiites form a majority in but four countries: Iraq, Iran, Bahrain and Azerbaijan.

The differences between the Sunni and Shiite sects are rooted in disagreements over the succession to the Prophet Muhammad, who departed this mortal coil in the year 632 C.E. -- that's A.D. to non-Jews. The disagreement also extends to the nature of political leadership within the Muslim community. The historic and often lethal debate between Sunnis and Shiites originally centered on whether to award leadership to a qualified and pious individual who would lead by following the customs of the Prophet, or to preserve the leadership exclusively through the Prophet's bloodline. Its sort of like saying: *"We declare that only the most pious, the most learned and most charitable can become Chief Rabbi; you declare that there is but a single qualification . . . being the son of the former Chief Rabbi."*

Shortly after Muhammad's death, community leaders elected one **Abu Bakr**, a close companion of the Prophet, to become the first *Caliph* [Arabic for "successor"]. Although a clear majority of Muslims accepted this decision, there were those who supported the candidacy of one **Ali ibn Abi Talib**, who was both Mohammed's cousin and son-in-law -- he being married to the Prophet's daughter, Fatima. Although obviously closely allied with Muhammad, there were those who sincerely believed that Ali lacked seniority within the Arabian tribal system. As such, he was bypassed as the immediate successor.

As one might expect, many of Ali's followers considered Abu Bakr and the two Caliphs who succeeded him to be illegitimate interlopers. This faction firmly believed that the Prophet Muhammad himself had named Ali as his successor, and that the status quo -- i.e. the elevation of Abu Bakr -- was both a corruption and a violation of the Divine order.

Those who supported Ali's ascendancy became known as *Shi'a* a word stemming from the term *shi'at Ali*, meaning "supporters of Ali." There were many others who respected and accepted the legitimacy of his caliphate, but opposed political succession based on mere genetics -- being one of the Prophet's blood relatives. This group, which

constituted a vast majority of Muslims, came to be known as "Sunni," meaning "followers of [the Prophet's] customs -- *sunna*."

This is precisely where the schism began and, to a great extent, it has remained ever since. Theologically, there are a few interesting differences between the two sects. Most deal with the nature and interpretation of Islamic law [*shari'a*]. There are no codified laws in either Sunni or Shiite Islam. Rather, there are sources for the interpretation of law, which both groups share. Generally speaking, Shiite legal interpretation, in contrast to that of the Sunnis, allows quite a bit more space for human reasoning.

Shiite religious practice centers around the remembrance of Ali's younger son [the ironically named *Hussein*], who was martyred near the town of Karbala in Iraq by Sunni forces in 680. Each year, his death is commemorated on the tenth day of the Islamic month of Muharram in a somber and sometimes violent ritualistic remembrance known as *Ashura*, which is marked among some Shiites by the ritual of self-flagellation.

Sunnis reject the Shiite belief that the *imams* [religious leaders who are blood relatives of the Prophet Muhammad] are divinely inspired beings who should be revered. Sunni Muslims do not bestow upon human beings the exalted status given only to prophets in the *Quran*. By contrast, the Shiites' veneration of their *imams* -- the most exalted of whom are called *ayatollahs* -- approaches a level of infallibility that the Sunnis find repugnant.

There are, of course, sub-sects within the sects.

Within Shiite Islam one finds:

- *Twelvers*: the most common form of Shiism; "twelvers" accept a line of twelve infallible *imams* descended from Ali.
- *Ismali* or *Seveners*: the second largest Shiite sect, which recognizes only the first seven imams.
- *Zaydis*: a minority sect that only recognizes the first five imams, and
- *Alawite*: a tiny subset found predominantly in Syria and Lebanon; they interpret the 5 Pillars -- duties -- of Islam as symbolic rather than applied, and celebrate an eclectic group of Christian and Islamic holidays. (The Assad family and the Syrian ruling elite are Alawites).

The Sunnis have one major sectarian subdivision called *Wahhabi*. They are, arguably, the most pervasive revivalist movement in the Islamic world. Unlike other Islamic sects, they tend to apply the Quran and *Haddith* [sayings of the Prophet and his companions] in a literal way. They occupy a position roughly equivalent to the ultra-orthodox *haridim* in Judaism. It should be noted that there is an extremely close relationship between the Saudi ruling family and the Wahhabi religious establishment.

The most conservative interpretations of Wahhabi Islam view Shiites and other non-Wahhabi Muslims as dissident heretics. Outside of Saudi Arabia, this sect often goes by the name *Salafi* -- Arabic for "predecessors" or "ancestors."

One must also give a shout-out to the *Sufi*, the mystical branch of Islam. Historically, their influence was felt far more in Africa and Asia. Indeed, the tomb of one of the most revered Sufi saints, Khoja Afā, is in Kashgar, China.

So how in the world is it that these two groups [and their various sub groups] could be killing, fighting, and dying over something that happened nearly 1,400 years ago? Ah, there's the great distinction or difference between Western and Eastern history. Some people live and plan for their collective future by giving the past a vote but not a veto; others take marching orders strictly from their collective past. Sunnis and Shiites have been going at it for hundreds and hundreds of years, as if the issues upon which they so violently disagree -- prophetic succession and legal interpretation -- occurred last Thursday. To be sure, the rise of secular ideologies in the first half of the 20th century -- Nationalism, Communism, Baathism -- did manage to temporarily mute or deflect tensions between the sects. But as Bill Cosby once quipped about Novocain, "It doesn't cure pain; it merely postpones it."

It is all reminiscent of a story Grandpa Doc like to tell:

A Jewish man is stranded on a desert island. After many years, his presence on the island is discovered by a passing ship. He greets his rescuers with dignity, grace and a cup of tea. They ask him how he has survived all these years. He then begins to proudly show them around his self-made paradise: his orchard, his garden and his pasture. Then, he tells them, "*Ve go to 'da other side of 'da island, and I show ya 'da piece 'da resistance.*" They follow him to the leeward side of the isle where he proudly points to two finely-crafted grass huts. "What are these?" his rescuers ask. "*Meina two shuls,*" he answers. "Your what?" they ask. "*Meina two shuls -- meina two synagogues.*" "But why do you need two?" they ask. "Ah," he says, pointing to one, "*Dats 'da vun I go to religiously every day. And dat vun,*" he says, pointing to the other, "*Dats the vun I'd never step foot in!*"

This new sectarian dimension -- Shiites going to war against Sunnis in order to hasten *yawm al-qiyamah* ("The Day of Resurrection") -- makes Western (read: American) involvement in Syria all the more problematic. Goodness knows taking sides in a civil war is difficult enough even without the added apocalyptic ambit. This chilling addition should force all sides, all potential players, to think long and hard; to consider every possible move and counter-move on the strategic chessboard. For when the 9th century comes 'a calling it's a whole new game; one whose rules, though older than time, possess an immediacy that is likely beyond our understanding.

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