
Book Reviews

Senator Moynihan's curious flirtation with Hell

by Mark Burdman

Pandaemonium: Ethnicity in International Politics

by Daniel Patrick Moynihan
Oxford University Press, New York, 1994
240 pages, paperbound, \$8.95

Pandaemonium: Ethnicity in International Politics is a book-length version of a lecture delivered by the senior U.S. senator from New York, Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D), at England's Oxford University in November 1991. In it, Moynihan expresses a legitimate concern. He depicts a world entering an epoch in which ethnic conflicts, based on a militant assertion of ethnicity, threaten to spread like an epidemic, with whole nations disintegrating, the powers-that-be left without any effective response, and the touted "new world order" reduced to anarchy and chaos. Using historical examples and a heavy dose of irony, he addresses the dangers posed by the recent decades' careless and frivolous support by various leaders, East and West, for the notion of "self-determination," ever since U.S. President Woodrow Wilson let that cat out of the bag after World War I.

The image in the title, is taken from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, "Pandaemonium" being Milton's name for the high capital of Satan and his demons, where Satan sat "High on a throne of royal state," "exalted" and elevated to the state of "bad eminence" by they who "but now seem'd/ In bigness to surpass Earth's Giant Sons/Now less than smallest Dwarfs, in narrow room/Throng numberless. . . ." As in Milton's image, so with "ethnicity": human beings, in words Moynihan adapts from one U.S. academic, "make themselves smaller" and associate themselves with what can only be described as a satanic course of irrationality.

These are doubtless real concerns that should be shared by any sane human being. From the evidence presented by

Moynihan himself, however, he is, to a significant extent, more part of the problem than the solution. It is one thing to say that ethnic conflicts are spreading, and that this must somehow be contained or controlled. It is another thing to say, as the senator does, that ethnicity, regrettably or not, is expressive of man's "primordial" impulses, and therefore must be treated as a central, fundamental fact of life. Similarly, it is one thing to say that the policy institutions of the United States and other western countries have dismally failed in forecasting the likely turn of events in the former Soviet Union and elsewhere. But it is quite something else to recommend as a cure, as the senator does in essence, that the axioms and postulates of the past years be replaced with the "anthropological" methods, the primary focus on tribes and ethnic groups over nation-states, that one would have associated with the British Colonial Office of former times. And, it is one thing to say that Marxism has been thoroughly discredited. It is another thing to say, as the senator does, that focus on Karl Marx should be replaced by greater credence given to the ideas of Sigmund Freud. That latter is a bit like expressing preference for syphilis over a bad case of pneumonia.

Curriculum vitae

In reviewing Moynihan's diagnoses and prescriptions, it must be kept in mind that he is a figure of some considerable importance, both within the United States and internationally. Even given his reputation for liking things alcoholic (and in *Pandaemonium*, he cannot refrain from anecdotal accounts of pubs and bartenders), he should hardly be dismissed as a tipsy Irish-American oddity. In recent years, Moynihan has increasingly put himself forward, and has been perceived by some, as one of the United States' more outspoken elder statesmen. At least one publication, the London *Economist*, touted him some months back as its favorite candidate for the next American President. Currently, he is chairman of the powerful U.S. Senate Finance Committee. Earlier, he served both as ambassador to India

and as ambassador to the United Nations.

In an earlier incarnation, one which Moynihan obviously identifies with strongly to the present day, he was a Professor of Government at Harvard University, whence he put forward a number of controversial ideas. In the present book, he identifies himself as one of the earliest proponents, in American 1960s academia, of the concepts of the “post-industrial society” and “ethnicity,” which he argues are closely linked. In such projects, he worked together with “post-industrial” theorists Daniel Bell and Nathan Glazer, for whom he has great praise.

He is unquestionably intelligent, well-educated, witty, and shrewd, but unfortunately has utilized these talents to promote the very ideas and concepts whose destructive consequences he now presumes to bemoan.

It need also be recalled that Moynihan emerged at quite an early stage as one of the most outspoken and bitter opponents of Lyndon LaRouche, using his 1982 senatorial reelection campaign and other forums to launch hysterical attacks on LaRouche and his associates. This is hardly surprising, nor is it irrelevant to the content of this book, since LaRouche has devoted his political career to rolling back the insanities represented by the post-industrial society cult, and to restoring the historical American commitment to scientific and technological progress. This has led to some gargantuan battles with the friends of Moynihan in the U.S. social democracy.

The cult of the post-industrial

In his book, Moynihan makes quite a big deal of the fact that he was one of the first in the American policy establishment, already back in 1979, to forecast the breakup of the Soviet Union. He insisted, then, that the U.S.S.R. would be torn to pieces by ethnic conflicts. From his triumphant “I told you so” attitude, Moynihan takes the high ground today, to argue that the policy analysis institutions of the United States, as well as the body of international law mandated through the United Nations, be significantly revised, to place discussion of “ethnicity” onto the center stage.

Moynihan’s argument doesn’t stand up to his own evidence, however. As he recounts, he was first led to hypothesize a process of Soviet breakup when he received convincing evidence that the U.S.S.R. economy was in much worse shape than CIA analysts were saying, not because he was given a briefing on the complex ethnic mosaic of the Soviet Union. Among several of his earlier writings, which he quotes in *Pandaemonium*, we find Moynihan advising, in December 1986, that “we have paid far too much attention to geopolitics and far too little attention to questions of political economy.” That is precisely the point; it is only unfortunate that Senator Moynihan does not seem to have adequately grasped it. It is noteworthy in this light that he never mentions the role played by the American Strategic

Defense Initiative program—architected by LaRouche—and the Soviet rejection of the technology-sharing aspects put forward by President Reagan in his March 23, 1983 speech announcing the SDI, in bringing about the collapse of the U.S.S.R.

In a similar way, Moynihan glibly classifies the war in former Yugoslavia as an “ethnic” conflict. Of course, it has taken on many of the features of that. But the origins of the conflict lie in the destruction to the Yugoslav economy caused by International Monetary Fund “shock therapy” measures, as well as in the decisions taken by the highest echelons of the Serbian leadership in Belgrade, already in the early to mid-1980s, to launch a “Greater Serbian” war of aggression against the other republics of Yugoslavia. It would be banal, if not absurd, to classify a racially motivated war of aggression, one backed for “geopolitical” reasons by the leadership of Great Britain and the then-Soviet Union, as an outburst of “ethnicity,” in the same way as it would be an act of triviality to classify the post-Soviet adaptation by the Russian *nomenklatura* to a “Third Rome” historical-ideological reflex as simply an “ethnic” affair.

All of this calls into question what Moynihan meant with his early 1990s proposal for dismantling the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. Whatever the manifold faults (some would say crimes) of the CIA, Moynihan’s insistence on superseding previous policy approaches by now upgrading focus on “ethnicity” as a primary invariant of human behavior would only make things worse.

In any case, there is no doubt that the CIA and other intelligence agencies are already up to their ears in promoting and deploying “ethnic specialists” who are setting off “ethnic conflicts” in various parts of the world, either out of classical British imperialist divide-and-rule motives, or out of a desire to destroy the institution of the sovereign nation-state, or both. The “Zapatista uprising” in Chiapas, Mexico is emblematic of this: A destabilization instigated and sponsored from outside, utilizing narco-terrorist networks in place, is portrayed around the world as an “ethnic indigenous” uprising.

How Moynihan’s mind works is most evident in how he looks at the United States. He recounts that, as far back as the 1950s, he was asked by Nathan Glazer to join in a study of ethnic groups in New York City, published in 1963 as *Beyond the Melting Pot*. Writes Moynihan: “We got to a large proposition, which was that ethnicity was very much a force in the polity, possibly stronger than it had been, such that it might even qualify as a *new* social aggregate, which would come to be known as post-industrial.” Soon thereafter, he quotes one of his heroes, Harold R. Isaacs, from a speech given at a 1972 conference on ethnicity at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the which conference was sponsored by Glazer and Moynihan: “We have entered the post-industrial age before two-thirds of the world has barely

begun to emerge from the pre-industrial era.”

Stripped of the academic language, Moynihan is pointing to the self-evident fact that if you remove the impulse favoring industrial and technological progress in American society and replace it with a “post-industrialism,” which is really a form of neo-feudalism in content, you destroy that factor of the “common good” which has brought Americans of all backgrounds together since before the creation of the republic. Remove industrial technological progress, and the “melting pot” is replaced by a “boiling pot” of brawling ethnic groups, each desperately reverting to “primordial” attachments in order to get whatever this or that group can get out of a shrinking economy. That, indeed, very much defines a crucial dynamic in U.S. social life, since the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the hegemony of such ideas as the utopian, post-industrial “Triple Revolution” thesis promoted by the Ford Foundation and related institutions. Moynihan must share some of the responsibility for having brought this unpleasant situation about.

It is worth emphasizing, in passing, that in Germany today, many academic specialists are extremely nervous about the use of the word “ethnicity” (*Ethnizität*) in German political and social discourse. They see this as an import from an American academic political debate that has developed since the 1970s, an import which is having the effect in Germany of reviving the more unfortunate discussions and ideas of the Hitler period, when matters of “ethnicity” were made a central aspect of political and social life. Moynihan indirectly refers to this issue, when he notes the curious fact that the edition of the 1933 *Oxford English Dictionary* defined “ethnicity” simply as “heathendom, heathen superstition.”

‘Biological disposition to ethnocentrism’

Moynihan, then, is committed to a notion of “primordial impulses,” which has actually nothing to do with *human* behavior and motivations, but is more akin to animal behavior. One of his heroes is the late sociologist John Dollard, described by Moynihan as “the first Freudian in American social science.” In his book *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, Dollard wrote: “I see man also as Freud saw him. . . . Freud sees him as the ambitious beast, shivering in the high wind of culture. Seen close, he smokes.” Another Freudian and Moynihan hero is sociologist Daniel Bell, who believed that “Freud would ever prevail over Marx.” Bell wrote in 1947: “Of what we know of human frustration and displacement, aggression rather than love is likely to be the course. . . . Freud once remarked that we pass from group psychology to individual psychology. The former is prior not only in historical but in psychological time as well. . . . In political terms, the first unit was the tribe, because it was built on the basis of family. . . . Nationalism is potent because it recapitulates psychologically the family structure.”

Then, Moynihan quotes the Freudian Erik Erikson, and finally Freud himself, the latter writing that his sense of “identity” as a Jew resulted from “many obscure emotional forces which were the most powerful the less they could be expressed in words.” Some paragraphs later, Moynihan himself is writing of a “low-level biological disposition to ethnocentrism that varies in intensity by individuals and social circumstances, and is exacerbated by class or caste structures that keep groups apart.”

And so on.

This shows us the “footprints” of Moynihan’s problem: The historical fact is that there is really not such a big difference between Freud and Marx; Freud could be said to have been the nasty little brother of Marx, both of them having had the same mother. “Marxism” and the ideas of Freud both emerge out of the operations of the British crowd of the 19th century’s Lord Palmerston, through such of Palmerston’s agents as Giuseppe Mazzini. Mazzini, with his friends in the romantic movements of the European continent and the Americas, created or sponsored a wide range of blood-and-soil “ethnic” movements, with names like “Young Italy,” “Young Germany,” “Young America,” etc. The nominally “Jewish” branch of this was the freemasonic B’nai B’rith group. In its own literature, B’nai B’rith boasts about having been the first important sponsor of Sigmund Freud in Europe, giving him a forum to discuss his ideas of “obscure emotional forces.”

This is the origin of the field of “ethnicity.” In more recent years, this brief has been taken over by the Royal Anthropological Society and Tavistock Institute in London. The former and certain of its spokesmen, such as Prof. Ernest Gellner of Oxford, have been arguing in recent months that anthropologists and “ethnic specialists” should now be given a prominent role in determining policies of governments, in the post-Cold War world. Gellner is funded by the ubiquitous financial speculator George Soros, who also funds the French irrationalist Jacques Derrida and his movement of “deconstructionism.” Moynihan takes pride in such trends, pointing favorably to the recent inauguration of a magazine called *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, edited by the London School of Economics. And well he might be proud: Moynihan himself studied there.

So Moynihan is, by professional and conceptual loyalties, a Mazzinian and a certain kind of deconstructionist, at least in the analyses and diagnoses presented in this book. He seems to be having a bout of conscience about what this is all leading to, but if he is serious about wanting to prevent the world from descending into Hell, he should drop all the glib Freudian verbiage and his pride in past years’ misdemeanors, and seek effective solutions for rebuilding the destroyed world economy. This would strengthen the human impulse toward scientific and technological progress that is expressed in such “primordial” works as the Book of Genesis in the Bible.