

Dogma

Dogma: system of doctrines proclaimed by religious authorities to be true. Religion is indeed dogmatic. But politics is worse, with less excuse (and when it is not dogmatic it is corrupt).

Obama is the new Super Hero. Rave reviews of his Cairo speech. Though did you notice glum silence when he spoke about anti-Semitism or rights for Jews or recognizing Israel but applause for everything else? We hear what we want to and we block out what we don't. That's human nature.

Words are fine. What about actions? People forget that Obama rose up through the ranks of the Democratic Party of the United States and, as I predicted, is more or less enslaved to it. The Democratic Party, not unlike the old British Labor Party of Hugh Gaitskell and Michael Foot, is wedded to ideological positions that not only make no sense but are often damaging.

The Democrats are opposed in principle to school vouchers. They like to claim they are in favor of giving people choice, and so they are on issues such as abortion. But when choice conflicts with doctrine they suddenly become dogmatic and prescriptive. The school voucher system, where State schools are manifestly failing, would give parents funds—less than the cost of educating a child in the state system, but enough to pay for a better private education. All the evidence shows that disadvantaged children do better academically this way than if they stay in poor state schools.

But powerful teachers unions, who contribute massively to Democrat funds and have their lackeys in significant positions in the party, refuse to countenance the idea because they are dogmatically wedded to state schools no matter how awful they are. The teachers unions have been in the forefront of preventing schools from sacking poor teachers, removing failing principals, or paying more to teachers who work harder and achieve superior results.

They remind me of everything regressive and destructive in UK Trades Unionism that Margaret Thatcher almost succeeded in sweeping away entirely. The only remnants are the same teachers unions in the UK who, with their political pawns, are responsible for the pathetic state of English public education today. Heaven forefend free enterprise should be allowed to do it better if it can (otherwise, if it fails, it closes and that's an end to it). Obama is supposedly in favor of choice. So why has he thrown his weight behind this decision of the Democratic congress to withdraw vouchers in Washington from children who have been shown to have done better when they were given choice?

True the voucher system was supported by Bush and the Republicans so that it itself is sufficient grounds to condemn it in the eyes of his opponents, regardless of whether it works or not. What is more, many private schools are religious schools. So here too is an offense against Democratic Nostra that must be punished.

The cost of private education in the USA is astronomical, particularly for

those of us brought up on state subsidized schooling in the UK. A child in a Jewish school in New York costs its parents around \$30,000 a year. And you pay that after having paid close to 50% of your income in taxes in some States. If you had four children you would need to earn \$240,000 a year just to pay for education alone. So it is hardly surprising that Orthodox Jews and Catholics, wedded to the values of religious education, and with large families, campaign for vouchers, whereas others line up with those who oppose anything that smacks of state support for religion.

Still the main issue is dogma. I have lived through the destruction of the English education system by socialist dogma. Selective grammar schools that gave poor, able children the chance to rise to the top were scrapped. Secondary modern schools that provided sound, basic vocational training and skills for industry were scrapped. It is true that there were strong social arguments against selective education, streaming children at 11 in ways that greatly influenced their futures. But, with a few notable exceptions, the "comprehensive schools" that replaced them met the needs of neither group.

Throwing everyone together, able with remedial, motivated with antisocial, refusing to remove disruptive elements, led to the values-less, education-less chaos that characterizes most of the state system in the UK today. It was precisely this that led to the explosion in Jewish schools that offered some semblance of discipline, cohesion, and pro-educational motivation. My father attended a simple state school nearly a hundred years ago that served him brilliantly and inspired him. That was why the vast majority of Anglo-Jewish parents were content to send their children to non-Jewish schools. Until dogma ruined them.

For all the billions that have been poured into state education, the results in the Western World are very disappointing. Graduates of the old Russian system, which was selective and authoritarian, have enriched the countries that have absorbed them since the collapse of the USSR, notably Israel and the USA. Both of which had state systems that once were envied and now are derided.

This doctrinaire approach to education, instead of an open-market innovative approach, is the result not only of vested interests but of a quasi religious fundamentalist belief that defies logic and experience. I am not saying Saint Obama is a bad President; on the contrary. But I am saying that he, a politician, is as hampered by dogma as any ecclesiastic.

And what is true of home affairs is also true of foreign affairs. By all means talk the talk. That is what I have been arguing Israel needs to do, for ages. But only invest in what actually works. Wishing is not enough. Until the USA gets involved with actions, not words, putting peace keepers on the ground, not wishing leopards change spots, wishing a hostile world to like him more will achieve nothing more than feel good.

I have no truck with those who build outposts in the West Bank for provocative or messianic reasons. I cannot trust a state system that forbids illegal settlements with one voice and encourages with another. But equally, I have no truck for appeasement and the craven desire to be loved. Push

Israel towards peace indeed, but Obama still needs to read Machiavelli. And that goes for schools and states.