

# A Word from London

## Herbert London

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### Campus Language Police

**T**he once idyllic setting at universities where the free exchange of opinion was promoted is over, a casualty of political correctness.

At a recent State University of New York (SUNY) Albany student picnic to honor Jackie Robinson's breaking of the major league baseball color barrier in 1947, campus fury erupted. A bizarre debate emerged when forty students at the university objected to the event being called a "picnic"—a term these students incorrectly alleged emanated from racial lynchings. (Actually the word is derived from the French term *piquenique*, a social event where attendees bring the food.)

Despite the wrongfully placed angst, SUNY Albany student leaders forbade the occasion from being publicized as a picnic. But the problem did not end there.

When the organizers considered calling the event an "outing," a gay student leader objected, noting the term's use to describe the public attribution of homosexuality. Eventually the event was publicized without a title.

SUNY Albany's Student Assembly Affirmative Action Director Zuheer Mustafa told the *Albany Times Union*, "My job is to make sure people from underrepresented groups are heard. Whether the claims are true or not, the point is the word offended."

Now this is a curious standard. Presumably if a word offends—whether or not the word is offensive—there is an obligation to prevent its use. I am reminded of a recent incident in which the word "niggardly" could not be employed because it offended black students who mistook it as an insult.

Self-appointed campus police are sensitized to any offense even when none is intended. What is emerging are affirmative action administrators whose job it is to ferret out insults—intended or not—to designated minorities.

America's campus Red Guard don't force perpetrators of language infractions to wear pointy hats, they just bring the "guilty" up on charges. insensitivity being the one infraction for which there isn't any defense.

Try calling a female student a "girl" or a well-built male a "stud" and the campus police will descend. In order to stay on the straight and narrow students require orientation sessions that prescribe existentially acceptable speech.

Use of the correct terminology of course doesn't guarantee acceptance. Terms change. Who would have guessed that "picnic" would offend a group on campus?

There was a time when colleges issued a behavioral guide to students. Alcoholism was discouraged. At the moment almost any behavior is tolerated, but

colleges impose a form of thought control. Certain words cannot be used.

Moreover, anyone offended by a statement is *ipso facto* the judge and jury of the person who made the statement. Therefore ordinary rules of fair play are meaningless. The explanation that “I didn’t mean to offend anyone” no longer applies. If someone is offended, you are culpable—evidence is irrelevant.

Social interaction is best engaged in with either an attorney or a member of the Red Guard who enforces prevailing campus norms. “Would you like to go out?” is not a question a young man may ask a female student. Like President Bill Clinton the semiotician, the female will ask what do you mean by “like”? What is the intent of “go out”? The young man who cannot answer these questions satisfactorily could be in hot water.

Seduction is a nonexistent campus phenomenon; it has been transmogrified into rape even when both parties consent. The reason for this is the implicit power one party may have over the other, even if unstated.

“No” once meant “maybe” and “maybe” meant “yes.” Now of course words mean only what the interpreters say they mean. “I may have agreed, but in retrospect I disagree” is a position welcome among postmodern dissemblers who determine justice on campus.

How then does one engage in discussion on campus today? The answer is very carefully. The wise student is he who keeps his mouth shut.

This is a curious time to be a student. Understanding cues on campus is critical. Knowing what to say and how to express it becomes the litmus test for social success and even academic success.

I know a student who failed a composition because he refused to write “he or she” throughout the paper. One can’t trifle with the campus Red Guard.

This spring don’t ask fellow students to join you at a picnic. Don’t ask a young lady out. And under no circumstances should you say anything that might offend someone on campus.

### **Enrollment at the University of California in the Post-Proposition 209 Era**

When Proposition 209 was passed in California three years ago eliminating affirmative action procedures in the state’s public universities and other institutions, detractors argued that this vote would lead to resegregation, a loss of opportunities for minorities and a “whitening” of the California university system. Ward Connerly, the regent who led the campaign against racial preference, was excoriated on most of the state’s editorial pages.

Yet now that the dust has cleared and enrollment figures can be examined, a different picture is starting to emerge. The recent numbers indicate that minority enrollment has rebounded significantly at the University of California and is larger today than in 1999, despite the ban on preferential admissions policies.

While the flagship campuses at Berkeley, San Diego and Santa Barbara show a decrease in minority enrollment from a height of 18.7 percent in 1997 to the present 17.6 percent—a point unnecessarily emphasized in a *New York Times* article, April 6, 2000—over all, the enrollment of minority freshmen will rise.

Critics unwilling to recognize good news, even when it slams them between the eyes, contend that “reverse ghettos” have been created in the state. Presumably the 1.1 percent reduction at the flagship colleges represents a reverse ghetto.

What should be acknowledged is that an absence of racial preference did not have the predicted effect on minority enrollment. Moreover, the shift of minorities to all the colleges in the state university system reflects a “redistribution of students to where they should be,” a point made emphatically by Ward Connerly.

Admittedly redistribution does mean that some minority students were shifted to less competitive campuses, which based on grades and SAT scores is consistent with their academic background. But that in no way deprives students of a first-rate education, unless, of course, elitists argue a first-rate education can be obtained only at the Berkeley campus of the University of California. So far, no one has made that argument.

It should also be noted that the university has moved to recruit students from high schools populated largely by minority students and has instituted a policy guaranteeing the top four percent of high school graduates a place at the University of California. These initiatives, in my judgment, are exemplary and, it should be recalled, were precipitated by the decision for color-blind admission criteria.

As Thomas Wood, executive director of the California Association of Scholars and coauthor of Proposition 209, the proposition “is not an exclusionary measure, either on its face and application, or in its effect.”

Steve Balch, the president of the National Association of Scholars, said,

We are pleased to see that the numbers are rebounding in the absence of preferences. Preferences are indefensible in any case, and these numbers just drive another nail into their coffin.

What this evidence means is that the props which uphold affirmative action decisions at American universities are probably unnecessary. As the California University system, suggests minority students are capable of holding their own without the artificial boost of a racial standard for admission.

Surely rabble-rousers will be unhappy with the evidence. Good news is never greeted well by those who have a stake in promoting bad news. Yet there are many in this scenario who deserve congratulations: those who led the charge for Proposition 209; the administrators at the university who regarded the voters’ decision as a challenge; those who instituted outreach programs; and perhaps, most significant, the minority students themselves who demonstrated they could succeed without a crutch.

If there is some truth in the metaphorical claim that the country is on a tilt with California on the high end, inertia should push West Coast initiatives east. Perhaps that will happen with Proposition 209.

For now the evidence is in and it is encouraging. Despite the spin critics will apply, there is little doubt that minorities have not been denied opportunities at the University of California state system; in fact, the claim can easily be made that there are more opportunities for minorities than was ever the case before.

**Pulling Apart: A Report on Economic Deception**

Recently two think tanks, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the Economic Policy Institute, issued a report on the state of the American economy. Their joint report found that the rich are growing richer and the gap between rich and poor is “widening markedly,” with incomes for the lowest fifth of families rising about one percent, while the top fifth increased by fifteen percent.

Here in unvarnished form is a quasi-Marxist report that obscures economic realities and uses statistical measures for its own propagandistic purposes.

A federal reserve survey confirms that the rich are getting richer—hardly a revelatory finding—but it also found that this condition hasn’t hurt the poor, despite the allegation in the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the Economic Policy Institute report.

Between 1995 and 1998 the number of families with incomes under \$10,000 declined by 15 percent. In addition, more poor families seem to have financial assets. Perhaps of greatest importance is the mobility of people out of poverty. In 1989, 15.1 percent of American families were mired in poverty (incomes under \$10,000); in 1999 that number declined to about 12 percent.

Moreover, the movement upwards was not merely to the next quartile. As many poor people joined the ranks of the richest quartile as stayed poor.

Nonetheless, the report emphasizes the least significant dimension of the American economy: income disparity. Even a rudimentary understanding of statistics demonstrates why this is the case.

If someone’s income improves so that he leaves the bottom quartile, the bottom quartile is unchanged. It may be smaller by one, but it is still the bottom quartile. On the other hand, if someone in the top quartile increases his income by \$10,000 he remains in the top quartile and he raises by some level the aggregate income of those in that status.

The consequence of this condition is that the bottom quartile always represents those earning under \$10,000, while the top quartile is invariably an upwardly moving average. What this means is that a growing income disparity is not only likely, it proves very little.

Of far greater significance is upward and downward mobility, particularly those leaving the bottom quartile for a higher income level. This is what should be emphasized. What it would show is that the rich grow richer and the poor grow richer at a relative pace greater than that of the rich.

The obvious purpose of the report is indicated in its title, “Pulling Apart.” Presumably the authors believe that income disparity can be rectified through redistribution in the form of higher taxes imposed on the rich and taxpayer benefits for those on the bottom.

However, this strategy cannot have any statistical effect. If someone leaves the bottom quartile due to government beneficence, the bottom quartile remains unaffected and conversely, if someone is forced out of the top quartile because of high taxes, the top quartile remains unaffected.

Lamenting income disparity, which will always exist in a free society, is a little

like complaining about the weather. Some leveling, of course, could occur, but that would only mean quartiles would exaggerate insignificant income differences. Similarly, those who live in Los Angeles, for example, where the temperature is usually above 70 degrees, exaggerate the importance of a few days when the temperature is at 40 degrees.

Since there will always be a bottom and top quartile, the question is why two so-called think tanks would engage in statistical legerdemain in their much politicized report.

The answer—I suspect—lies in propagandistic goals and the belief that when it comes to statistical questions it's easy to pull the wool over the public mind.

"Pulling Apart" is ostensibly an exercise in class warfare and the statistical method employed in it takes advantage of the media's ignorance of mathematics. For those who care about what is happening in the American economy, this report offers almost no insight.

What does matter is that this society is getting wealthier than it has ever been and poor and rich are benefiting from the bounty. Any other consideration is beside the point.

### **Revealing the Truth of the Middle East in Southern Lebanon**

For the Peace Now types and the denizens of Israeli appeasement an answer to their claims is available for the world to see.

With the unilateral Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon—an occupation referred to by critics as "the Israeli imperium"—a rout of major proportions has occurred, leaving in its wake a betrayed ally, an endangered civilian population, hundreds of casualties and a band of Hezbollah thugs who have come to dominate the region.

For two decades critics of Israeli occupation have argued that territorial concessions by the government would yield dividends in security and stability. It turns out that just the opposite is true.

President Clinton and Secretary of State Albright have made similar arguments, all the while crossing their fingers in the hope their fondest claims would be realized.

Now the evidence is in on two fronts. The West Bank has had a seizure of violence once the Barak government relinquished control of three Jerusalem suburbs to the Palestinian authorities. And, not coincidentally, Syria has grown more intractable once Barak vowed to withdraw from southern Lebanon.

While asylum in Israel will be granted to those put at risk by the pullout, the United States is sitting on its hands despite the fact the State Department had steadfastly foisted Syria's President Assad [now deceased] down the throat of the Israeli government as its negotiating partner. That Prime Minister Barak had accepted this condition leaves him vulnerable to political rivals. Moreover, it would appear that Barak has been further humiliated by a U.S. government unwilling to pressure Syria into restraining the Hezbollah forces it subsidizes.

President Clinton's desire for a Nobel Peace Prize based on his efforts in

the Middle East can now be put on permanent hold. He too will have to face Jewish supporters in the United States who are appropriately disillusioned by recent events.

Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, has proposed an increase in the number of UN peacekeepers stationed in the area. At least he has suggested the need to do something in this war-torn region. But given the UN's track record in Sierra Leone, it is hard to muster much enthusiasm for this gesture.

The violence in southern Lebanon offers several important lessons. First the Clinton administration's attempt to establish a timetable for peace is counter-productive. Second, creating a military vacuum is dangerous. Third, from the Palestinian, Hezbollah and Syrian point of view Israel's major transgression is its existence. The overarching goal is therefore eradication. All the negotiations in the world have not changed that perception.

Despite the understandable war weariness among Israelis, it is time they faced an ugly reality: there isn't peace or even stability in the near term. Recent events point to a condition somewhere between all-out war and partial conflagration. Whatever emotional strength can be summoned among the Israeli people must be brought to the fore for national survival. A new test of will has commenced.

As far as the U.S. is concerned, its meddlesome attitude has paid dividends only for the Palestinian cause. Notwithstanding claims of even-handedness, one can envision only ham-handedness. Should the U.S. place demands on Israel at this point it will have to back them up with defense guarantees—a condition Clinton has been unwilling to concede.

Since Israel was recognized as a state in 1948 it has been in a constant struggle for survival. That struggle continues even as the people eagerly hope for peace. It is hard to tell a people who so eagerly want tranquility that they must be prepared to fight. Yet recent events in southern Lebanon indicate there isn't any other way.

### **The Coming Test of the Euro**

The great experiment with a European currency—the euro—may be nearing a crisis point. European Central Bank (ECB) president Wim Duisenberg said that the euro's weakness (now well below the value of the dollar) poses a risk of inflation and heightens fears of an interest rate increase.

Additionally, the drop in currency could threaten the Maastricht accord target of keeping euro zone inflation under two percent. "A continuous weakness of the external value of the euro would pose a risk to our objective of maintaining international price stability," Mr. Duisenberg noted.

This comment is a significant departure from the past. When the euro's weakness first became evident, it wasn't deemed a threat to price stability since economic fundamentals, it was said, are sound. In fact, the eleven euro finance ministers continue to assert the euro's potential for appreciation based on sustained growth.

Others in the banking community are persuaded the ECB will raise interest rates in order to prevent a deeper descent of the euro. While there is some logic in

this strategy, an interest rate increase will undoubtedly forestall economic growth at the very moment European industries appear to be crawling out of lethargy. This is a Hobbesian choice.

There is no doubt inflationary pressure exists. Compounding the issue of a plummeting euro are rising oil prices which are already reflected in import price increases and the current account balance.

Once the Federal Reserve raised interest rates in the U.S. to mitigate the effect of inflationary pressure, the ECB was obliged to do so likewise. On February 3 the ECB raised interest rates a quarter of a percent just as the Federal Reserve had done. The currency immediately rose to 99.04 cents on the international trading market, even though the ministers regard this interest rate as a setback to economic recovery.

Although the euro is still in its infancy, its survival is not assured. Members nations of ECB are already grappling with national pressures that challenge continental union.

Germany hopes to unleash economic activity with tax cuts. And France has proposed tax cuts to spur growth as well. But this is a position not universally shared within the European union.

Managing economic harmony across the continent is a task for an army of Solomons, not an eleven member group of green eye shade accountants. Yet this is the story of the moment.

Despite the best of intentions, the euro will either be given life support as it was recently or will decline further vis-a-vis the dollar. There aren't any other alternatives.

How can eleven nations with different economic programs, labor policies, inflationary pressures and social concerns unite around a common currency?

How will the attempt to curb inflation affect economic recovery? Will Europeans permit currency stability at the price of economic slowdown?

These questions are not merely economic; they are as much political as economic and will be decided by voters. As I see it, the euro will most probably not succeed because the benefits derived from it are neither as visible nor as well understood as the constraints currency stability imposes.

Feudalism left its mark on the continent in ways that are only now apparent. The idea that you can engineer unity through collective bureaucratic will is being challenged each day by tribal allegiance and national sovereignty.

Lip service is often given at the moment to "trans-national" sentiment. But in the end just as one defines himself through family, citizens define themselves through nation states. And one manifestation of the nation state is the currency. To forego its control is to forego policy options.

Whatever the advantages for mergers and financial activity the euro infers, it pales in significance to the loss of sovereign action.

That is the dilemma that is now at the forefront of economic policy. And no matter what ECB leaders may wish for, this knotty problem won't go away.  $\Omega$