

Left Behind: Notes from the Internationale

4:20 pm

Stockholm International rises from the tundra like an enormous Nike swoosh, a glowing boomerang of a monument to the triumph of Swedish socialism.¹ As the plane banks for final approach I see the lights of the city, a “glittering jewel set beside the frigid waters of the Baltic.”² Ahead of me stretches a week of infiltration and observation, rubbing elbows and trading gibes with the left cadre of the New World Order, as Sweden hosts this year’s Internationale.^{3 4}

While I have little interest in the nuances of Sweden’s two-tier tariff structure, the possibility of fulfilling a long held dream compels my attendance. The grand old man of the left, Fidel Castro, will be here, and I can’t pass up the opportunity to see one of history’s last larger-than-life figures. “The Beard,” “El Diablo,” “El Senor de la Carne”—call him what you will, there’s no denying that Castro—like Churchill, Stalin, and FDR—is the kind of individual that we, the vision-impaired products of the postmodern political tradition, simply can’t comprehend. What must it be like for one’s words and actions to express an ideology, a monolithic viewpoint, a coherent worldview? Don’t get me wrong, I hate Castro’s Cuba as much as the next guy, but there’s no denying that the Great Leader will be appearing in textbooks for generations to come. He has throw weight, in the poli-sci sense, and he’s managed one of the most astounding transformations of the modern age, parlaying his old school, hard ass, power-to-the-people sensibility into celebrity status. Given all the grief he’s taken over the years, I sometimes wonder why he doesn’t just declare the game over and himself winner for having successfully tweaked American’s nose for half a century, and then retire to a resort in Southern France, maybe the same one Idi Amin commutes to from his place in Saudi Arabia.

4:52

I’m sitting in international terminal three, waiting for the guide who will ensure that I am transported to my hotel.

¹ Or a giant concrete gull’s wing on the frozen Swedish plain; or a massive, distended V for Victory sign, the victory being atheistic socialism’s conquest of the harsh Swedish environ—take your pick.

² “High Flier”; v. 7, n. 4, p. 32; publ. by American Airlines.

³ My editor tells me there’s a good chance only three readers, David Horowitz among them, will know what an Internationale is, so for those not up on such things: the Internationale is the big get-together of communists, socialists and fellow travelers, a combination NASCAR race/gun show for the left-lib scene.

⁴ Your surprise at learning of my attendance doesn’t come close to matching my own incredulity at being invited. Of course, my invite didn’t come directly from the organizers, but rather through the machinations of the editor of the (in my opinion) sometimes a bit too full of itself but still all-in-all a decent read of a journal you hold in your hands, his contacts stretching like tentacles into every cultural context you can imagine. On several occasions during the conference—and from hereon in I’m going to call it a conference, because Internationale sounds just a bit too twee—representatives from the most obscure sounding groups (e.g. “The Sarajevo League for Democratic Reform”)(I’m not making that up) introduced themselves as close friends of the editor.

5:14

Still waiting. The lines of travelers stretch for blocks—just like in the U.S., post-9/11. I assume they're all bureaucrats, since apparatchiks are the only citizens in socialist societies who can afford the many permits, licenses, and stamped signatures required to travel. I am surrounded by vectors, contagious entities infected with a poisonous belief system, an anti-entrepreneurial philosophy which, if left unchecked, will bring about the ruin of the West. They are a dagger pointed at the heart of... what? Certainly not that bastion of internationalism, the EU.

A fact known to world travelers: the individuals who populate non-American airports are one-third to one-half the size of the persons you see at home. While some read this as an indictment of our lifestyle, I see it otherwise: oversized Americans are the best advertisement for America as the land of plenty. Idea: I wonder if America's bulging waistline is simply an indicator of a culture in transition, something that must inevitably accompany the first few generations of near-universal prosperity. If this is true, fifty years from now the rest of the world—enjoying a standard of living pulled inexorably upward by the locomotive of the American economy—will be obese, and Americans, all of whom will be rich enough to afford private trainers and plastic surgery, will be slim and beautiful. Prediction: in order to fill the swelling global middle class's desire to be entertained, much of this now svelte American population will be employed as TV stars.

5:28

It appears the entire airport staff is Turkish.⁵

5:43

I'm tired and irritated and sick of looking at blonde people.⁶

6:30

Turns out I was in the wrong terminal.⁷ I'm now sitting on the bus, a tour-class behemoth made by Volvo. Being the last to board, I've got the seat next to the lavatory, and I'm disappointed to learn that Swedish socialism, for all its supposed advantages, has not found a way to disguise the PortaPotty scent. Back when I was considering grad school in economics—thank God that never came to be—I thought it might be worthwhile to contrast the different means by which capitalist and socialist economies process human waste. I expected the free market to provide numerous profitable means of utilizing it, while socialist systems, lacking entrepreneurial incentives, would stick with the time-tested 'twice dumped' method. Anecdotal

⁵ More on this later.

⁶ This is just me being moody, because upon reflection I have to agree with a Swedish pal I once asked, "Do Swedish guys ever get tired of all the women looking the same?" He replied, "You mean the fact that they're are tall, thin, and beautiful? [Thoughtful pause] No, we never get tired of it."

⁷ My handwritten 3 and 12 look similar—it's partial dyslexia, aggravated by left-handedness.

Left Behind

evidence suggests this hunch was correct. Throughout the capitalist world, novel uses continue to be found for sewage; Mexico, for instance, uses human waste as a cheap, readily available fertilizer on cropland feeding the NAFTA marketplace, while red states like Sweden simply process and discard it. Say what you will about our homeless problem, you have to admire an economic system that can commodify feces!

Speaking of such things, sitting beside me is the editor of the most widely read leftist journal in America.⁸ In the interest of completeness, I'll include our exchange:

She: Oh. Hello.

Me: Fancy meeting you here!

She: Yes, what a surprise. [Turns to stare out window]⁹

7:40

I'm in the lobby of the Stockholm Four Seasons. Actually, lobby isn't the right word—try atrium, maybe. It's an enormous space, twenty stories tall, and shaped like a right triangle. Along the vertical side are rows of balconies, and the hypotenuse is composed of a miracle substance that allows a stunning view of the Northern Lights but never seems to collect snow. While I'm on the subject of snow, I should note that it has been snowing since the moment I arrived, fat, lazy flakes that fall so slowly they appear to be suspended in midair.

The central floorspace is a bar, and the tables and couches are arranged so you know, without asking, whether you're sitting in a spot served by the wait staff. I am, unfortunately, in the self-service section. My chair is the archetypical piece of Scandinavian furniture; I'm positive every piece of Scandinavian furniture I've ever seen was descended, in a design sense, from this original pattern. Q: given the link between body and mind, can furniture be used to advance an ideology? Rather than simply reflecting the spirit of the times, did the upright furnishings of the Victorian era encourage a mindset conducive to middle-class aspirations and a Protestant work ethic? More immediately, could this seat be chiropractically indoctrinating me, fostering sympathy for the welfare state, affirmative action, and non-competitive games?

A line of delegates snakes through the atrium, but no one looks upset about the wait; queuing up is something they've grown accustomed to, back home in their collectivist utopias. There are lots of fezzes and tams¹⁰, colorful robes, and climate inappropriate footwear. Wait! I think I just witnessed my

⁸ Legal reasons prevent me from naming the publication; suffice to say it is distributed around the nation.

⁹ A position she kept for the remainder of the forty-five minute trip.

¹⁰ Note for those readers who attended college pre-1985: tams are the knitted hats worn by black reggae musicians and their white fans.

first multicultural incident. Two men—Americans, judging by their size—walked by holding hands. While they might be gay, their stiff manner makes me think this wasn't a commonplace activity for the two of them, which I'm guessing it would be, if they were gay. My best guess: coverage of the war on terrorism, in particular the footage from Arab states, has upped the ante for male liberals in the Western world. It isn't enough to simply exchange hugs upon meeting and parting, a willingness to walk hand in hand is now a must, if one is to be regarded as tolerant and open-minded.¹¹

7:55

It appears the entire hotel staff is Turkish.

8:30

In my room. There is a wet bar. It is stocked.

Day 1

I know it's a mainstay of travel pieces, so I'll describe the hotel room.¹² It reminds me of one of those Japanese sleep cells, the kind you used to read about in *Popular Science*: 3 feet wide, 4 feet tall, 7 feet deep,¹³ a small TV in the ceiling, and a windowed entry hatch that provides a view of row upon row of similar tubes stacked as high as the eye can see.^{14 15} The decor is international business class with a Scandinavian twist—Ikea does Hyatt. Come to think of it, the last Hyatt I stayed in had Ikea furnishings, so maybe a better way of putting it is: the décor is Ikea, the good Ikea that never makes it to the U.S., the stuff they pre-assemble at the factory.

The hotel is one of the tallest buildings in Stockholm, and I'm on the twenty-third of forty floors. My view faces west, and across the city I see the housing estates our bus passed on the trip from the airport. While they appear, both from near and afar, a heck of a lot nicer than Cabrini Green, I can't look

¹¹ Personal aside: my fling with the left failed for a couple of reasons, some of them ideological/philosophical, but the more immediate and damning were personal/social. For example, I could never get into the whole marching and chanting thing; I always felt sheep-like whenever I tried to merge my body and voice into a crowd.

¹² A travel writer pal told me that stories without a description of the hotel room sell less often, sell for less, and elicit a less positive response from the reader. Weird. Of course, we're talking about American readers, so I can't say whether this is a human phenomenon or simply an American cultural quirk. The latter would make sense since Americans, more than any other race (substitute "people" if that offends you), love to have suspicions of their own superiority confirmed, even in realms as mundane as hotel accommodations. Hey, if being the greatest power the world has ever known doesn't allow this kind of idle ego-stroking, what good are all the tanks?

¹³ Take these and any other measurements I offer with a big heap of skepticism, as I have notoriously bad depth perception.

¹⁴ As a kid I had terrifying nightmares about those little tubes, dreams in which I'd find myself locked inside one, with my struggle to escape broadcast on Japanese television for the titillation of millions.

¹⁵ Alright, it may not be a torpedo tube—it's, like, 20'x20'—but it feels claustrophobic.

at them without getting the same vibe: these things are people warehouses, human containment structures built to house dark skinned people.^{16 17}

In transit

Stockholm sits atop six hundred miles of tunnels. Trains connect all major destinations, and computer-guided carts carry travelers to less popular sites. During the winter months, many residents go weeks without setting foot outdoors.¹⁸

[19]²⁰

¹⁶ I promise this will be the last “Sweden and the Race Thing” teaser.

¹⁷ I really did catch myself thinking some variation on this theme just about every time I looked out the window.^{17.1}

^{17.1} Yes, I am between girlfriends.

¹⁸ Ibid on the airline magazine cited earlier.

¹⁹ I’m in the underground. The trains resemble the ones at Dallas International, and the air is pine scented. Event: a golf cart just deposited a delegate—I’m assuming he’s from Brussels, based on the EU logo on the identity card hanging around his neck—right in front of me.

[...]

I’m in the cart. There are instructions on the dashboard, but they’re all in Swedish. Fact one: Swedish is one of those languages that use the English alphabet as a base, and then add to it a few dozen symbols drawn from local mythology. Fact two for the linguistically inclined: modern Swedish, the form most Swedes speak—as opposed to the classical Swedish spoken in rural Sweden (think Swedish Chef)(honest)—came into being after World War I, when every shell-shocked European intellectual was advancing a scheme to prevent another bloodbath like the one just witnessed. This new language never caught on outside of Sweden; version 2.0, better known as Esperanto, has had slightly better success, though I’ve been told Klingon now has more speakers. The cart also boasts a video screen showing a map of the underground system; this display lacks any of the graffiti you’d find on such a device back in the U.S.

[...]

The cart is guided by an invisible force, maybe magnetism, but it could just as well be magic, for all I know. Interesting point: this really is a golf cart, or something very similar, and if I wanted I could easily arrange to fall out of it which, given the decent pace (I’m guessing 20 mph, but it’s hard to tell since I’m moving along fluorescent lit tunnels, and in addition to my previously mentioned depth perception troubles I’m a little weak on the night vision thing, too) would be a show stopper. There’s another one of those telling cultural differences: socialism produces fewer individuals willing to take advantage of opportunities like this. Back in the states, this system would have been bankrupted within a month of opening as Democrats arranged for their spouses and kids to meet tragic, financially rewarding endings.

[...]

I’m in a convoy! A woman and her kid (son? daughter? It’s still too young to tell) are in the car ahead of me; the kid is twisted around in the seat, beaming a toothless smile and waving. I’m working hard not to crack a smile in response, but it’s hard to maintain one’s dignity while playing caboose in a golf cart train.

[...]

She hasn’t turned around. Sigh. I’m notorious for the ease with which I fall in love—

Opening ceremony

There are at least ten thousand people packed in the Great Hall, and the place has the electric buzz that results when you put this many individuals with the same concerns and interests into one place.²¹ The balconies are filled with school kids, and the conference attendees form a multi-hued sea on the main floor.

There's a commotion to the rear. People are turning to see what's going on...a parade of flag-toting marchers just entered the hall. There's a lot of them, it looks like all 214 (give or take) nations are represented, and I can see the flags of a couple of NGOs, as well. The enormous video screens flanking the stage are showing a montage of smiling faces from the crowd—Hey! I just saw myself on TV! And music is being piped in: my program tells me it's "Fanfare for a New Age," a work commissioned especially for this event.

An enormous UN logo is descending from the rafters as the marchers, wielding their flags in choreographed patterns, make their way onto the stage and occupy the elevated tiers. I believe this is called a spectacle.²² The crowd is on its feet, screaming and clapping, and while my natural disdain for group expressions of any sort is only amplified by the awareness that these are leftists, the enemy, I can't help but get caught up in the occasion. My heart

can a conservative admit such a thing? For much of the rightwing, emotions are something to be disdained, pesky things to be overcome, so maybe I'm stepping off the plantation when I confess: a glimpse of a face in a passing bus window can set my heart musing for days.

[...]

The cart sounds a sharp beep and begins to slow. We enter a station and a few vehicles, mine among them, break off onto a sidetrack, but my blonde goddess, my pale V, continues on her way.

²⁰ This is one of those extended, personal asides that reveal more about the narrator than the subject matter of the piece.

²¹ You find it at religious gatherings, as well. My mother is Pentecostal, so revival meetings were standard summer fare during my childhood. Image: an overcast summer day, traffic zooming by on a two-lane rural highway, a big tent erected in the overflow lot of an auto dealership, and a preacher with some kind of heart-stopping disability, like a face horribly disfigured in the war, or the mangled remnants of arms torn off by a piece of farm machinery. He's bellowing brimstone, and I'm entranced by the pressed blouse and too-white stockings of the woman sitting next to me. Like many, my first encounter with altered states of consciousness was at the dentist office under the influence of nitrous oxide, and the experience was so pleasurable, so wonderfully, memorably pleasurable, that I still have a thing for any gal who resembles my dental hygienist.

²² It reminds me of the time I was in North Korea with Albright's delegation and we watched a sports stadium come alive with colored panels. At an invisible signal (an electric current passing through the seats?) a red dragon appeared at the east side of the stadium, and an eagle to the west. The two then battled it out in an obvious allegory for Sino-American relations until, from the seats behind me, the North Korean bear appeared. The dragon and eagle dissolved and were replaced by a sea of green and a blue horizon, and the North Koreans shouted themselves silly as the bear made its way onto (what I assume was) the field of world history.

is pounding, and sweat is dripping down my neck despite the enormous HVAC units high in the rafters above. I'm looking around and trying to scribble notes at the same time... what's most striking is the joy, even ecstasy, on their faces, these people feel a real connection to each other, it's the same expression/sensation I witnessed/felt at the revival meetings. Unlike the participants at conservative gatherings, nobody is scowling at me for jotting down notes and behaving like a journalist; these are leftists, they know they control the media.²³ This is what being a true believer is all about, this sense of shared aspirations and values. Note the contrast: conservatives—libertarians, in particular—arrive at their beliefs through the application of cold logic, a process which ensures a movement of individualists, all of whom would rather argue than lock arms and shout slogans. Liberalism, lacking a basis in reason, is dependent upon pep rallies to keep morale up. It's easier to be wrong—logically, self-evidently wrong—if others are publicly wrong, as well.

The cheering, the flags, the celebrities walking out on stage—I recognize David Hasselhoff—this may be a new experience for the non-Americans present, but I've felt it before: I'm back in high school, the big game is tonight, and it's a sure thing, like we're playing the football team from the math and science academy.

The Paradox of Good Health²⁴

Sweden's population exhibits the same paradoxical behavior found in every socialist healthcare system, scoring near the top on every indicator of health and well being—until they get sick! Swedes cultivate a fanatically healthy lifestyle because the cost of doing otherwise is lethal, for once illness strikes, the consequences of putting bureaucrats in charge of medicine become apparent, and the result is a shockingly high mortality rate among the afflicted. I'll try to have one of the editorial assistants crunch the actual numbers, but for now here are some ballpark figures:²⁵

State of health	Mortality rate
Healthy	2%
Sick	43%

A population desperate to avoid contact with the health care system isn't the only sign of a socialized medical system; the ready adoption of 'alternative', 'non-corporate', 'non-traditional' medical treatments is another common practice under Red regimes. Cuba is the best example of this: if reports are

²³ I'll refrain from offering my opinion in re: the supposedly right-wing Fox news, except to note that I believe Murdoch's globalism is the most significant long-term threat to both the Republican party and American sovereignty.

²⁴ Most of today's seminars focus on Swedish culture/economics/society/policy/&c, a "Get Acquainted with the Northern Paradise" theme to kickoff the conference.

²⁵ These numbers are based on a statistically sound sample drawn from prime time television shows set in hospitals.

to be believed, there are three MDs on the whole island, and the remainder of the health care providers are acupuncturists, herbalists, orgone therapy advocates, and pure Oxygen devotees, a catalog of twentieth century quackery. In fact, I've got a pal at Cato who uses the number of alternative treatments which insurance companies are mandated to cover as an indicator of the decline of the American healthcare system. The total has been steadily climbing since the 1960s, which were the high water mark for medicine in the U.S. and, not coincidentally, the years during which the AMA was most effective at suppressing non-mainstream treatments.

...And I'm not surprised when these salient points fail to impress the attendees at the "Health Care in Sweden" discussion. Instead, I'm denounced as a patsy for the medical-industrial complex, a paid hack in the pocket of Roche.²⁶

Later:

I'm thinking I'll spend the remainder of the day window-shopping:

-These people take the Olympics seriously. More than once I hear the Games referred to as a good example of a multinational undertaking that isn't completely dominated by Western governments and interests. I'm guessing this is because the structure of the Olympic organization allows representatives from small nations to hold up decisions until they've been paid off. Seriously, if the Olympics are the best example of successful internationalism you can come up with, it's clear the nation-state model has a lot of life left in it.

-I'm not seeing nearly as many hairy feminist types as I expected. In fact, the women from First World (i.e. Western)(i.e. developed)(i.e. civilized) nations are fairly clean and tidy, though there seems to be a disproportionate number of bib-overalls present. I'm not talking the kind worn by Iowa farm kids as they scramble atop wagonloads of corn; these overalls are of a style and cut much nicer than anything I've seen before; they are, and I never knew such a thing existed, formal wear bib-overalls.

-Palestinian observers always have the most to say, and their rants inevitably includes a condemnation of "fascist colonial Zionism." Additional fashion note: I'm noticing that the preference for khaffirs, the colored scarves worn by members of the Intifada, a trend that was big among leftists back in my day, is over. Speculation: maybe the scarves made it too easy to be picked out by JDL members?

²⁶ If only it were so! I'd trade any principles I possess for the lifestyle of the pharma exec depicted in what I consider to be one of the most brilliant documentaries ever shot, "Brain Candy" (1995).

-One of the few non-Sweden seminars occurring today is, "North Korea: Looking Forward," a video presentation by the North Korean tourism bureau.²⁷ Apparently there's a big market for tours catering to leftists wanting to observe conditions "on the ground." We see hard working North Koreans walking on rustic trails alongside stunning mountain vistas, and sturdy looking schools filled with smiling children. Each classroom scene is shot so you can see a map of the Korean peninsula on the back wall, and the map always shows the peninsula as one unified nation. If the video is any guide, North Korea is a land with more than its fair share of obese individuals. There's a job: just imagine the North Koreans who appear in propaganda films as a symbol of the nation's bounty. They earn extra rations, obviously, and who knows what other perks—medical treatment, access to advanced skin care products, maybe even a personal trainer? I'm guessing it's a position typically filled by members of the ruling family, or the offspring of well-connected military types.

-Every Cuban I encounter is pissed off about the US embargo. No matter the topic under discussion, the conversation always comes back to the "unilateral," "illegal under international law," "dangerously provocative," "immoral" ban on trade between the two nations. I've never understood this. Cuba trades freely with the rest of the world: Canada, Europe, Russia—they've all got interests on and with the island—so why should it matter whether we trade with Cuba? After all, these other nations are populated by rational actors, meaning any opportunities that would have been pursued by US firms are instead taken up by Canadians (for instance), meaning Cuba's development has not been impacted to any great degree by the US embargo, meaning Cuba's economic problems are the result of an irrational economic system imposed by a band of atheistic dreamers. Once again, the slippery slope of logic carries a smiling conservative to a thoughtful conclusion.

-Unlike their Third World brethren, Western lefties have gotten a lot smarter with their rhetoric. They no longer (publicly) denounce the U.S. as the great Satan, the First Mover of all things bad and unjust in the world. Instead, geopolitical issues are now described in structural terms. Frameworks and relationships are the preferred vocabulary, and (as the argument always runs) it just so happens that the US sits atop these structures, benefiting from things-as-they-are. Greedy American capitalists are out; blame is now placed on the IMF/World Bank/Davos crowd.

Hotel lounge

I'm sipping gin and thinking about the many ways in which technology has changed daily life. There are good things, like CDs, countertop breadmakers, and painless Brazilian waxes. And bad things, like the adoption of shot measuring devices by bars and restaurants, a practice that eliminates the

²⁷ The fellow leading it—who gave every sign of being a true believer—defected to Norway on the last day of the conference, confirming again that the seed of freedom can germinate in the direst conditions. Of course, one can only assume that any fami-

benefits to be gained from schmoozing the staff. What's the point in treating them like human beings if they can't top off your glass with an extra hit and charge it to spillage? Unfortunately, in another instance of Taylorism gone mad, Sweden requires that all alcoholic beverages be dispensed by machine.

Thankfully, some cause for hope still exists. For example, the prostitutes in the bar only reaffirm one's faith in humanity. All of them, and I mean ALL, are tall, blonde, and leggy, with the kind of figure you typically see in transvestite bars.²⁸ It's an army of Ru Pauls, and they tower over the Third World delegates, all of whom are attempting to check out the merchandise in a not-too-obvious manner. I read somewhere that Swedish prostitutes have a union, a fact which reminds me of the old conservative saw: in a socialist system, you might very well see your daughter grow up to be a prostitute, but you will never have to worry about whether her medical care is covered.

Day 2

Maid service is a strikingly attractive²⁹ olive-skinned gal who speaks English with only the trace of an accent. Morning romps with the help being one of the perks of international travel, I do my best to coax her between the sheets, but to no avail. Put this down as another problem with the socialist model: when the underclass is guaranteed the necessities of life, they have less incentive to indulge the whims of the privileged. Instead, while she moves efficiently about the room, I'll take this opportunity to deal with the race thing:³⁰

Sweden and Turkey share a history dating back to the fourteenth century, when Swedish traders first made contact with the Ottoman Empire, which then controlled territory as far north as Warsaw. Relations between the two sovereignties were good, and while the rest of Europe was defending Christianity at the gates of Vienna, the Swedes were happily trading cannon-

ly members he left behind in North Korea were ground up and fed to the starving masses.

²⁸ Yeah, I have been to a transvestite bar, a couple of them, in fact. What's it to you?^{28.1}

^{28.1} I was researching an article for National Review, something like, "Conservatives who dress like girls and the conservatives who love them." No, you can't dig it up; WFB had a fit when he heard about it, and the piece was killed shortly before publication.^{28.2}

^{28.2} No, there isn't anyone at NR who can confirm this story, so just drop it.

²⁹ Or 'unsettlingly attractive', or even 'irritatingly attractive'.

³⁰ Pretty much all of the history that follows is taken from the "High Flier" piece cited earlier.

making technology for spices, carpets, and slaves.³¹

Fast forward to the post WWII boom: the shortage of workers was making it difficult to rebuild, so Western Europe brought in foreign labor under (you know what's coming) temporary worker programs.³² The French brought Algerians, the Swedes imported Turks, and the British used Indians, Pakistanis, and Jamaicans. Everything was (more or less) fine until the oil crisis of 1973 ended the expansion, and now the unemployed offspring of those immigrants spend their time rioting, supporting the visiting football team, and practicing tribal religions.³³ This is true everywhere except Sweden, which has avoided the now routine eruptions of racial tension that plague the rest of Europe. Q: what did the Swedes do right?

Setting aside the self-congratulatory rhetoric of Swedish exceptionalism, it's clear the Swedes owe their success to policies that dulled the Turkish community's ability to maintain a separate and meaningful cultural identity. But rather than attempting to force the immigrants to adopt the host country's culture—an approach which, as the French experience shows, produces a backlash in the form of even greater allegiance to the foreign traditions—the Swedes sought to transform the immigrant culture and render it compatible with Swedish society. At the heart of this process was the education system: recognizing that Turks are an Oriental people (i.e. prone to substance abuse and governed by their sexual appetites), the schools adopted an immigrant specific curriculum that catered—pandered, even—to exactly these traits. Turkish parents struggled to impart their values, but the hedonistic lifestyle, presented under the guise of traditional Turkish culture, proved too attractive, and the immigrant children were assimilated into a culture of pleasure and self-centeredness. They became neither Turk nor Swede; they became consumers.

Sweden still has problems with its Turks, but these are the problems all Western nations face with their underclass, equivalent to America's troubles with its black population. What Sweden does not have is the militant, burning-down-the-police-station immigrant problem that Britain, France, Italy, Netherlands, &c. are all grappling with. For this reason, it's my belief that the Swedish assimilation strategy should be studied as a possible model to be adopted by American schools.

Convention Floor

The hall is filled with delegates from Third World hellholes,³⁴ trust fund anar-

³¹ The Swedes vehemently deny that last bit, suggesting a case of "they doth protest too much."

³² For those not in the know, "temporary worker program," is the punch line to countless econ jokes, since there has never been a temporary worker program that turned out to be, in practice, temporary.

³³ Yes, Islam is a tribal religion.

³⁴ Third World hellholes': that's Control-Shift-T for users of the National Review/Microsoft Word macro toolset for pundits.

chists from Eugene, and bearded (what I assume are) NAMBLA members. It's a Star Trek convention,³⁵ but without the need to suspend one's disbelief, as the smell attests to the authenticity of the participants. Aside: that last point plays off a realization I'm sure most Star trek fans have had, that the best thing about watching the series rather than being right there in the action is the fact that the stench of the twenty-third century must be unbearable. I know there are some who contend the reason we never see the crew reacting to the God-awful stench of other species is because they (the crew) are wearing nasal implant nanodevices that capture the noxious particles before they hit the scent organs, but this doesn't explain how all of the non-Federation species manage to get along so (relatively) well, unless they're also using these nanodevices, which seems unlikely given the technological backwardness many of them display. And, to be honest, I have my doubts about the whole nanotech line of reasoning with respect to the Federation, because no other element of the show reflects such an advanced technology.³⁶ This is one of those irritating details that both undermines my ability to fully project myself into the Trek multiverse, and highlights the difficulties faced by an interstellar empire.

Networking is an important element of get-togethers like this, and in this respect the conference resembles the annual MLA meeting, but with lefties from outside of the American academy represented, as well. Greenpeace, Amnesty, the UN—all of the big NGOs are here, and at this level of the game they want plodding, ideologically safe individuals, not rock-the-boat rabble rousers. While the troublemakers disrupting whale hunts get all the press, the truly effective lefties (in the view of those present) are the legions of clerks who never set sail aboard the Rainbow Warrior, but instead pass their days undermining the free market system with eco-pacts, labor agreements, and conventions on child labor. Those present regard their activist comrades as little more than colorful content for mountains of direct mail solicitations. Interesting but not all that surprising fact: like myself, you may have wondered about the disproportionate representation of Swedes in the NGO community; it seems like half the NGO reps I see on the talk shows are Swedes. It turns out the government subsidizes the salaries of Swedes who serve overseas with NGOs, believing this diaspora allows relatively insignificant (in a geopolitical sense) Sweden to exert influence far above its fighting weight.

Evening entertainment

I'm sitting in the cold—no, frigid—night air with several thousand other dele-

³⁵ I'm not knocking Star Trek; in fact, given the current atmosphere of self confession, where everyone under the age of 35 is rushing to tell how they, too, played D&D and were molested as a child, I should admit that pretty much all of the fiction I read or watched during my adolescence took place somewhere in the Star Trek multiverse (yes, that's the word for it).

³⁶ Two points: Alright, the food replicators are pretty advanced, but all hardcore fans agree that the replicators are basically a magic box (i.e. way out of place) in terms of the rest of the show's technology, which raises the second point, that the issues I'm raising here apply only to the one true series, the original (Shatner, Nimoy, etc).

gates, watching two of Sweden's best hockey teams crash each other into the boards. From up here in the bleachers I've got an unobstructed view of both the crowd and the game; there's no wind, and my frosty exhalations trace a line as straight as the tall, spindly support posts which look much too thin to hold the arena lights atop them. Sound travels well through the Arctic air, and I can hear every grunt down on the ice. It's good hockey; these guys are pros.³⁷

The crowd is into it, and the dark skinned reps, in particular, are enjoying themselves. A few rows in front of me one of the African delegations—Egypt, maybe—is cheering on their adopted team with what sound like traditional war cries. The shouting, coupled with their noteworthy dress—ski parkas over their robes, and (I assume) long underwear beneath—makes me wish I had a video camera. Point of interest: this is the first time I've ever watched black people watching white people engage in an athletic contest.³⁸

[...]

While the Zamboni—I'm positive the driver didn't learn to drive one back in Istanbul—makes its way around the rink, I'd like to make a point about the Swedes' relation to hockey. While it is a team sport, hockey is all about the muscular domination of your opponents, crushing them into the glass and forcing the symbolic representation of your potency between the splayed legs of their sprawling goalie,³⁹ an activity which differs in kind from your typical socialist "bounce the ball on the parachute" group activity. In this respect, it may seem an unlikely national sport for a socialist state, but it's important to remember that the Swedish love affair with the puck predates the imposition of totalitarianism. Hockey is hardwired into the average Swede's cultural/historical makeup, and there's simply no way it could be social engineered out of him, so the party cadre have come to tolerate the game. I suspect any irritation Sweden's rulers feel is eased by the reality of hard currency: ex-pat hockey players annually repatriate hundreds of millions of dollars back to Sweden.

³⁷ And I know good hockey when I see it. I begged my parents to let me play Peewee league, but for eyesight/coordination/muscle-mass reasons I was channeled into activities more suited to my phenotype, like lawn darts.

³⁸ American hockey is still dominated by white guys, so in theory you could find yourself surrounded by a black crowd at an NHL game, but let's be honest: hockey isn't a major draw to the urban demographic and I don't see it ever becoming one, even if there's an influx of goalies from Nigeria. Some sports are just, well, white, and I'm not sure that's ever going to change. Recall the hype surrounding the emergence of Tiger Woods; the media wanted us to believe we'd soon see legions of inner-city youths descending on golf courses, their brash style and free-for-all competitiveness allowing them, in a Caddyshack sort of way, to overcome the short-driving, shaky-putting old white guard. It hasn't happened, and the golf course building boom driven by hopes of providing tee-times for all of these wunderkinds has given way to an industry wide recession that is exploring deeper troughs than the economy as a whole.

³⁹ Heh, sorry about that.

The game has resumed, and I've noticed something interesting about the giant digital scoreboard at the end of the rink. I assumed the Xs and Os flying around on it were the equivalent of the PacMan and Ghosts that inhabit scoreboards in the U.S., a distraction provided as a service to side bettors, but I see now that they're actually mirroring the game on the ice, meaning each player must be carrying some sort of signaling device. It's like John Madden's magic playbook on Sunday afternoons, except in real time. Idea: could these devices be the next step in reality TV? It's clear that one consequence of the war on terrorism will be video cameras monitoring all public space, so why not make these cameras profit centers? Presto: there's no longer a need to confine the individuals on Big Brother type shows to a camera-wired house; instead, we inject a chip into their ass and use the anti-terrorism camera network to follow them around. We'll still need to get the consent of everyone they encounter, but that's not an insurmountable problem. I'm sure one of the senators from Disney will gladly take up this issue.⁴⁰

I leave the game early and return to my room, unable to shake the image of the all-seeing eye on the back of the one-dollar bill. Thankfully, the remainder of the evening is reserved for a research project that should prove most distracting.

Late evening entertainment

I've always been baffled by the way people talk about the sexual revolution. Everyone makes it sound like the post '60s era has been one long orgy, with ordinary people banging each other's brains out. While it is true that, for the socially adept and physically attractive portion of the population, there's never been a better time to hookup, for the rest of us the situation isn't nearly as pleasant. Like all other markets, the sexual marketplace can be understood as a system of rationing, and in this case there are way too many people you would never be willing to have sex with chasing too few attractive individuals.

This situation has been further exasperated by the explicitly pornographic turn which advertising has taken over the past generation. We are bombarded 24/7 with images of attractive individuals doing fun things, and the result of this brainwashing—and it is brainwashing, whether or not there was an intentional plan on anyone's part to produce this outcome—is a culture in which most people—that is, everyone falling into the continuum stretching from 'unattractive' to 'average'—are in a constant state of sexual frustration. They want to be in bed, but their training prevents them from sleeping with a partner who isn't beautiful. Sure, many people eventually compromise and settle for a less attractive partner, but in my experience, judging by the

⁴⁰ Software might also provide a solution to the consent problem. Facial recognition tech could be cross-referenced with a database of consent forms (maybe we give people the opportunity to give consent when they get a driver's license)(or better yet, we make it opt out), and non-consenters would have a blue circle superimposed on their face, and their voice would be garbled so it sounds like a cartoon character—Porky Pig, I hope.

divorces I've watched, that's just a recipe for a different kind of misery. Settling for less might get the small 'o' orgasm of release, but our conditioning makes the big 'O' transcendent climax dependent upon a partner who is, in most cases, far more attractive than oneself, and out of reach because of it.⁴¹

I'm just as guilty of this as the next person. I mean, I'm no Garrison Keillor, but I'm well aware that I'm not a Hollywood star, either; yet I still find myself compelled to pursue gals who look like they stepped out of a magazine, in my case the kind who populate upscale alcoholic beverage ads. I feel terrible about this. I know that appearances are only skin deep, and any kind of meaningful relationship must be built on something more substantive, but I can't help myself; I've been programmed to want beauty, to see it as a prize, and I really can't be faulted too much (I hope) for being genetically predisposed to accept such an imprinting. And it should come as no surprise that, in the absence of physically attractive people in my life, people who look the way I've been conditioned to desire, I instead seek alternate means of getting my beauty fix.

Or maybe this is nothing more than an attempt to justify my thing for porn. I know conservatives aren't supposed to admit to this, but given everything else I've confessed, I don't see how this is going to soil my reputation any further. It's an interest that began in college when one of my fraternity brothers introduced me to Hentai, the animated porn from Japan. These aren't cartoony depictions of 'typical' hetero sex; rather, hentai is characterized by the deviancy of the acts depicted: there's the alien sex genre, where large breasted, small-waisted gals couple with tentacled aliens; the demon sex genre, where large breasted, small-waisted gals couple with tentacled demons; and the always popular schoolgirl genre, where large breasted, small-waisted gals do the sorts of things that only take place at all-girl schools in Switzerland, the kind of place Sylvester Stallone worked before he took up acting.

I eventually grew tired of the hentai thing and moved on to the offerings of other nations.⁴² Here's a summary of what I've learned over the past few years of research:

⁴¹ There are a few individuals (we're talking a minuscule percentage of the population) who manage to overcome this conditioning, and many of them make a decent living putting on tantric seminars through the New College system, day long courses where students learn how to have the great sex they've come to expect with partners who don't turn them on all that much.

⁴² This is where I lucked out. Most American males never graze beyond the relatively straightforward offerings that come out of Los Angeles, your typical tits-and-ass-banging videos, but I had an expert guide, a fellow who spent his adolescence poring over an older brother's porn collection, a world-class sampling of exotic materials amassed during a four year stint in the Navy.

Nationality	Gross Generalization About Porn Produced There
Scandinavian	
Swedish	Beautiful, blonde, well-scrubbed individuals doing naughty things
Dutch ⁴³	Beautiful blonde individuals doing naughty—and some times upsetting—things
Other	Beautiful tall individuals doing naughty things
Japanese	Knots, ropes, school girls, and things you don't want to know
German	You probably don't want to know
American	You've seen it
Everybody else	You don't want to know: includes animals, children, and things even the Germans won't try ⁴⁴

Day 3:

Stockholm is powered by a pair of enormous geothermal plants located just outside the city. Curiously, socialists have always bested capitalists at keeping the heat flowing; evidence: there were far fewer freezing deaths in Moscow prior to the collapse of Communism. Now, a few cases of hypothermia are a small price to pay for freedom, but we should still give credit where it's due.

Speaking of credit, as in trade credits, I've got the duty free list here in front of me. Sweden maintains preferential trade agreements with every other anti-American regime in the world, providing the Swedes with access to goods you just can't find back home: Cuban cigars, Iranian pistachios, Sudanese slaves⁴⁵, and North Korean body organs⁴⁶, to name a few. This gets me thinking about socialist countries and their emphasis on low skill industries like mining and industrial manufacturing. Q: is socialism compatible with the knowledge-based economy? Second wave production was organized around groups of semi-skilled laborers who often spent their entire working lives together. The third wave's "New Cooperation,"⁴⁷ however, is dependent upon teams with an inherently short lifespan, project groups that coalesce to produce the next piece of software or design the next consumer product (which will be assembled in Asia), and then dissolve back into the contractor pool. One would expect that the top-down, centrally planned style of industrial socialism would be at a disadvantage in this new environment, and the data supports such a conclusion. None of the countries riding the third wave are socialist: Singapore, Taiwan, the United States—all are champions of freedom, at least in an economic sense. I'm still thinking this through when our bus arrives at Volvo plant 1. It's enor-

⁴³ The reasons for including the Dutch in with the Scandinavians are too convoluted to cover here.

⁴⁴ England could probably have its own category, come to think of it: "spanking, large breasted women, pony play, and Nazi uniforms."

⁴⁵ Just kidding.

⁴⁶ Just kidding, sort of.

⁴⁷ I just made the term up, but it sounds like something you'd find in Drucker, et. all.

mous, dwarfing even the River Rouge complex outside of Detroit. A line of trucks wait to offload at the delivery docks, and a second line waits to scoop up cars headed for far off places; it seems just-in-time manufacturing is a must, even in a planned economy. All of the world's Volvos are built at this site, apart from a few assembled in China, where the law requires that a fraction of local sales be offset by local production. Shrewd Chinese consumers, recognizing the difference in quality, stick to the imported vehicles, and the Chinese-made Volvos are exported to Vietnam and Libya.

Given the post-'73 misery of the American auto industry, it's fair to ask how Volvo survives, confined as it is by regulations far more intrusive than anything Ford or GM faces. While the company does receive a hefty subsidy, no amount of state intervention can force consumers (at least those not living in Sweden) to purchase Volvo cars. Instead, Volvo's continued success is due to the company's top-notch marketing, an approach summed up in a statement I could have lifted from a graduate textbook in consumer choice theory, if I'd bothered to go find one: Volvo is more than a brand, it's an ideological construct. Consider the qualities consumers associate with these cars:

A sturdy, boxy design, with the distinctive grillwork suggesting the Roman fasces;⁴⁸

Safety—exemplified in the Volvo station wagon, a car that screams collectivism;

Hard working and dependable—Volvo trucks are square-jawed vehicles built to move heavy pieces of equipment or, as some of the company's ads in the African market show, squads of lightly armed irregular forces.

This explicitly political branding accounts for Volvo's popularity with the college educated, upper income brackets. While these individuals were long ago integrated into the capitalist workplace, they often retain a lingering desire to stick it to the man, and what better way to do so than by driving a vehicle whose brand identity is a thumb in Detroit's eye, a rejection of the sleek, sexy lines which characterize other autos and consumer culture in general?

The line⁴⁹

The assembly line is staffed by you-know-whos, and the P.R. types buzzing around are making clear that we're looking at a model of humane conditions. Weirdness: the workers appear to be enjoying themselves, which is creepy

⁴⁸ You know, the bundle of sticks, "from the many, one," the root of fascism, that sort of thing.

⁴⁹ Local color: The nature of discovery is such that at least a dozen nations claim to have been the birthplace of any world-changing device you can name, and each contends that the generally accepted inventor—always an American—is merely the beneficiary of Yanqui propaganda meant to convince the world that all good things come from a garage in Palo Alto. But this isn't the case with the radiator; everyone agrees that Volvo invented the radiator, the first example of which sits in the plant's lobby. I can't explain it.

since individuals aren't supposed to enjoy this kind of thing. Remember back in the early '90s when Ford was running commercials showing smiling workers attaching impressive looking thingies to a half-assembled chassis? Ever wonder why those ads were pulled so quickly? It turns out sales dropped—plummeted, actually—when they ran. The postmortem concluded that consumers take it as a given that factory work is miserable, so images of happy workers provoked two reactions:

This is bullshit. There's no way those people are happy, since nobody could be happy working on an assembly line; if their expressions do reflect their emotional state, it's because they're getting away with something. Either they're screwing around while assembling the vehicles, or they're on drugs.

The result, predictably, was a move by rational consumers away from Ford products.

Could this be a Potemkin line intended to deceive the already sympathetic media? As much as I want to believe otherwise, my instincts tell me that the workers are actually happy. If this is true, it may have something to do with the way industrial production is organized in Sweden. It's Henry Ford's vision of the company town made real: the workers live in Volvo subsidized housing located a short bus ride from work, and the plant also boasts an onsite K-12 school and a skilled trade apprentice program for graduates who aren't going on to college.⁵⁰

...And now we're being shown the employee cafeteria, two football fields of tables, salad bars, and strategically placed hamlets dispersing an assortment of tasty victuals. Q: why do authoritarian regimes always insist on a tour of the cafeteria? I remember a visit to one of the DeBeer's diamond mines back in the day. Conditions in the production facilities were—I won't say Dickensian because I didn't see any feral children snatching wallets, but they were certainly dreadful. In contrast, the mine's cafeteria was a well-scrubbed marvel of modern hygienic practices, able to seat 500 at a time.⁵¹

Q&A session:

Here's a chance for the All Star team of progressive journalism to ask some tough questions.

⁵⁰ This raises another point dear to me. In America, collectivist visions are expressed through the deployment of private capital: think of the utopian communities of the 19th century, most of which were funded by tobacco or shipping fortunes. Given this history, it's clear that Edison (through innovative school management), McDonald's (with its model science curriculum), and Disney (which has generously allowed its copyrighted materials to be used in diversity training programs) are just the most recent instances of a longstanding American tradition, and don't deserve the criticism they receive because of their activities in the schools.

⁵¹ I learned later that only the white managers were allowed to dine there; the blacks ate at wooden tables beside the mercury-tainted leaching ponds.

Q: How do you keep the snow from collapsing the roof?

A: An armada of computer-controlled snow blowers ensures that the roof is kept clean in the safest, most efficient manner possible.

Q: Where's the test track? (This one elicits an approving murmur from the press; I'm guessing many of them hope to take a car for a spin on one of those winding mountain roads you see in the commercials. Given the average salary of journalists in general—and journalists for left-leaning publications, in particular—it's safe to assume that a test drive is the closest most of them will ever come to one of the high end models.)

A: The all weather track is in Italy (unhappy sighs) and a smaller indoor track is right here on site (happy squeals).⁵²

Q: How long can Volvo go it alone? Can you give us any idea about your future plans?

A: "Volvo is committed to continuing as an independent entity, but is always willing to investigate strategic relationships that will both enhance shareholder value and advance the fundamental principles shared by all Swedes, shareholders and non-shareholders alike."

⁵² They eventually let a few lucky winners of an impromptu seeming but obviously-had-to-be planned lottery take a spin on the test track. Not being among the elect, I see no reason to dwell upon the details except to note:

The space-age composite used in the construction of indoor auto tracks produces fumes which, when not fully vented, leave the inhaler feeling giddy after a few minutes exposure;

Small pieces of this space-age composite are thrown for surprising distances when an auto is abruptly accelerated from a standing position;

Of all the skills involved in auto-track driving, braking is the most difficult to master.

Even the pros screw up and hit the pits too fast, so it's no surprise when a novice, unaccustomed to the performance specs of the car and feeling an understandable desire to impress his peers, breaks too late, and then overcompensate by braking too hard;

A mistake of this sort will only produce a fishtail, as the anti-lock brake system will take over and make things right;

The worst course of action, from both a tactical and strategic point of view, is to let up on the brake and attempt to steer out of the fishtail;

Even this situation is salvageable, provided you didn't panic and (as your colleagues later conclude) confuse the gas and brake pedals;

If this kind of systemic breakdown should ever occur, a guaranteed method of halting your forward motion involves altering your path so that it intersects with another vehicle, preferably a stationary one.

Additional notes:

When the aforementioned fumes from the indoor track are mixed with the scent of fire extinguisher discharge the result is, by some trick of the olfactory nerves, a smell indistinguishable from that of the shoe polish your father used every Sunday when touching up his work shoes;

Two minutes is a long time when you're waiting for an ambulance to arrive and transport an individual to the on-site hospital;

And two minutes is time enough for a group of nervous PR. types to confer among themselves, and then break into relieved smiles when a signed waiver of liability is produced.

Yep, hard hitting journalism.

...We're on our way back to the hotel now, and the passing scenery causes me to wonder: "What if the UN had mandated a Jewish homeland here, instead of in Palestine?" Imagine: Sweden as a Zionist paradise carved out of the tundra by a chosen people. How would Israel have developed, had there been no Arabs lobbing mortar rounds across the border? Would Golda Meier have joined the bikini team? Would we have watched Netanyahu in the crease and Barak in goal?⁵³

Press dinner

Any gathering large enough to attract journalists will host a press dinner, usually on the next-to-last night of the event. There are a couple of reasons for this:

Journalists are notoriously venal, and a press dinner shifts attention back to where the journalists believe it belongs—on them;

Journalists are gluttons. The rate of heart disease, emphysema, &c. among journalists is comparable to that of black lung among Kentucky coal miners, and this holds true despite the field's transition from a skilled trade to a profession, with all of the bourgeois health practices such a shift entails;

There's no better way to get the fourth estate off your back than to throw a party with free booze and shiny plaques earmarked for the most acquiescent among them. It's no surprise that most backroom deals are finalized on the night of the press dinner.⁵⁴

I'm sharing a table with a delegation of student activists from Hungary, a seating arrangement that reflects my standing within this community. Like everyone else present, the Hungarians speak English better than many of my relatives—hell, even better than me: more than once my midwestern nasalness⁵⁵ has made my speech indecipherable to New York editors.

Introductions are made, and the pecking order quickly becomes apparent. Leading the group is a guy whose name I never quite get, so I'll call him Ivor.

⁵³ I'm thinking this whole riff might be some sort of blood sugar issue.

⁵⁴ While Hollywood comes in a close second, the journalism community retains the title for most industry awards shows. Any member of the American Journalism Guild^{54.1} can confirm that a week rarely passes without an invite to another get-together—and those are just the national galas, the ones focusing on big picture issues like civil rights, feminism, and the homosexual agenda.^{54.2} There are an uncountable number of local banquets, including the "Wyoming Sportswriters Dinner" and the annual presentation of the Missouri Press Association's "Religious Freedom Awards."^{54.3}

^{54.1} #593326, member in good standing since 1984.

^{54.2} See a pattern?

^{54.3} Look it up! I'm guessing religious freedom in Missouri means the right to choose which Southern Baptist church you'll be attending three times a week.

⁵⁵ And my stereotypical speech patterns, as well, 'probably' ->'pry' being the sure giveaway of my roots.

Without asking, I can tell Ivor is the captain of his school's sailing team—if they have sailing there. It occurs to me that Hungary may be land locked, so think of some other physically taxing sport, like maybe 'crab walking'. I picture rows of Hungarian youths crab walking across the very fields that ran red with revolutionary blood in '56, while beefy coaches threaten them with exile to a Ghoulash Archipelago if they fail to win the next intercollegiate competition.⁵⁶ Ivor is the kind of smooth talking, good-looking guy who succeeds in any socio-political context, and I immediately hate him because of it, a sentiment further enflamed by the cheerful manner in which he corrects my pronunciation of 'Budapest'.

Day 4:

It's...late. It turns out Ivor is a bit of a revisionist, and the only way to settle the question: "Did the U.S. win the Cold War, or did Russia simply lose it first?" was a drinking contest. I think I'll skip the morning sessions.

Castro⁵⁷

I once read a story—or maybe I wrote it—positing that Castro's beard is an alien being, a symbiotic lifeform whose foodstuff is psychic energy, especially adoration. By chance this creature hit upon the perfect host, and while the story never makes clear exactly what Castro gets out of the relationship, you're left assuming the creature provides him with extremely advanced words of wisdom with respect to political matters, and maybe even gives him a heads-up anytime there's an incoming invasion or assassination attempt. The story speculates that Eisenhower was made aware of the beard's significance during his meeting with the saucer people in 1954, the first contact incident in Florida that was (in)famously presented to the public as Ike's trip to the dentist. This is all background for the author's main point, that such a scenario explains the otherwise baffling effort by U.S. agencies to de-beard Castro. An alphabet soup of defense and intelligence operations spent millions during the '50s and '60s trying to strip Castro of his beard, an expenditure which only makes sense if the government understood that, like Sampson's locks, the beard was more than just a babe magnet.

No matter the source of his power—ET beard or pact with the devil—Castro has spent a half-century as a Bizarro clone of the U.S. political establishment. Our leaders have engaged in a weird mirror dance with the guy, each participant looking to the other for cues as to how not to act, and because he's been leading much of the time this has allowed Castro to play puppeteer to the rag doll of American foreign policy. Think of the many absurd causes we've supported, solely because Castro was funding the other side. And any American leader foolish enough to point out the predictable conse-

⁵⁶ That's a technique known to all cult leaders: the combination of ideological indoctrination and repetitive physical activity is a powerful brew, one that can overcome all but the most solid of psychic defenses. Recall that the collapse of civic spirit among America's youth occurred at the same time physical education was taken out of the schools.

⁵⁷ I'm feeling a bit more Happy Bunny Hopabout now. Space permitting, I'll include my mother's hangover cure in an endnote.

quences of this relationship has been attacked by the exile community in Miami, a group whose chief aim is to see the U.S. military used as debt collectors, with green berets deployed to force the Cuban government to provide monetary settlements for the casinos and beach houses confiscated during the revolution.

I'm back in the Great Hall, which is again filled to capacity. The program I was handed indicates this will be one of Fidel's shorter speeches—we're told to expect two to three hours of dialectical discourse—and anyone with health problems or small children in tow should sit near an exit.⁵⁸ You can spot the ones who've done this before, they've brought extra munchies and bottles of water, while the first-timers are easily identified by their nervous excitement. For all of them, it's a life-changing event: Castro is the equivalent of the Pope, Mick Jagger, and FDR all rolled into one.

Pandemonium. It's a delicious three-dollar word with numerous classical connotations, all of which have been forgotten in this era of compulsory public education. It's also the best description for what happens when Castro steps onto the stage. Little old ladies from Dubuque, in tennis shoes and Che Guevera t-shirts, burst into rapturous tears. A delegation from Oxfam sings a paean to the Cuban revolution (it sounds like a Gilbert&Sullivan tune). And those who aren't swooning or crooning are clapping and cheering: the applause is enormous, booming, it's echoing around the hall and will undoubtedly leave all of us with a case of tinnitus for days to come.

...And the applause continues. It's been going on for five minutes now and shows no sign of letting up. Castro is standing at the podium, nodding and smiling, occasionally giving a perfunctory little wave of his hand, a half-hearted signal to knock it off and let him start speaking. He—and the beard—are delighted. Note: it has long been rumored that Castro suffers from some sort of Lou Gehrig type illness, but nothing about his comportment suggests a neuromuscular disorder. He moves a bit slow, but nothing unexpected given the years spent as a revolutionary (each one worth seven bourgeois years), and the half-lifetime as an all-powerful dictator free to indulge his every whim (and those trade for, like, ten 'little guy' years each). It's surprising how good he looks, and the neatly pressed (and likely custom tailored) jungle camouflage outfit only flatters his tall, lean figure.

⁵⁸ This really is one of his shorter presentations. Each year on his birthday Castro gives an all-night performance just to show he's still got it, and all Cuban TV and radio stations carry it (voluntarily, of course). Last year, Miami public access rebroadcast Fidel's speech in real time, with a running commentary from a couple of émigré comics ala Mystery Science Theater 3k. The ratings were good, and the exercise will be repeated next time around.

Left Behind

...Seven minutes and still going strong. A growing minority shows signs of weariness, but no one wants to be the first to stop clapping, so they continue.

...Nine minutes now, and many faces are looking pained.

...At ten minutes and thirty seconds, the applause continuing but the beard sated, Castro begins his speech, the first few sentences of which are drowned out by the sound of thousands of individuals being seated.

He's speaking in Spanish with occasional slips into English to emphasize a point of special concern to the Americans in the audience ("There will be NO reversal of the revolution, and the Miami Cubans WILL someday come crawling back to kiss my ass"). The speech veers between the practical details of, for instance, increasing sugar cane production ("We must adopt a three field system of rotation, for only then can the sweetness of the revolution make its way into the mouths of the workers.") and dense philosophical musings—there's lots of Hegel, whom he quotes in German. Because my Spanish is weak and my German non-existent, I'm relying on the English subtitles snaking across the bottom of the enormous video displays flanking the stage.

...Castro just began the meat of his presentation—a PowerPoint outline with nine bulleted items just appeared—and my attention is starting to wander. Curious: there is a sizable security presence—lots of big guys at the edge of the auditorium—but I wasn't searched for weapons when entering, and there are no metal detectors, either. I could have smuggled a gun in and...what? Why is it that left-wingers are willing to give up their lives in solitary suicide missions, but right-wingers never work in anything smaller than a death squad? Imagine: the speech is over and Castro is receiving well-wishers at the edge of the stage, when I step from the crowd and let him have it, plugging the old man in the same place what's-his-name shot McKinley. How would the world react? Would I get a statue in Miami? Would Gabriel Garcia Marquez pen an editorial accusing me of killing humanity's last best hope, or even better, would he include a thinly veiled caricature of me in his next book? There's no doubt my name would become a pseudonym used in conservative chatrooms and online forums.

And what about the trial? Would I be charged in Sweden or extradited to Cuba? Knowing the way globalists think, I'd be sent to The Hague to stand trial before the World Court, which wouldn't be a bad thing, as they couldn't give me the death sentence. After being found guilty I'd spend my days in a cushy Dutch prison, earning PhDs in various fields, translating Homer, and discussing nineteenth century parliamentary politics with my well-read jailers (most of them interns from LSE) while we played bridge every evening.

...Castro speaks a money line and there's lots of cheering in response. I glance up at the screen but miss it. He's a fantastic speaker, no matter which

language he's in, and the emotion that comes across most clearly is 'certainty'. Castro has a way of stating things that leaves no question in the listener's mind—well, in the naïve listener's mind—as to whether or not what he's saying is true. This certainty of the rightness of their cause is typical of the left, from Carville's "We're Right and They're Wrong," all the way to the pronunciations of Pol Pot.

ZZZ.⁵⁹

Final party

Castro ran long but no one seemed to care. The applause at the end of his speech lasted longer than the opening uproar, and the old man left the stage beaming with pleasure. I assume the beard was pleased, as well.

I've found a safe spot in the lobby where I can sip gin and watch the delegates at play. For anyone raised in America, the sight of persons with different skin colors socializing is always a novelty, no matter how much you've traveled outside our borders. And since we're on the subject of race again, here's an interesting but tangential point: if you believe racism is the main reason for the chasm between wealthy North and poor South, your prayers will soon be answered. All of the demographic projections show that within a hundred years there won't be any white people left—alright, there will be some, but they simply aren't reproducing at any kind of self-sustaining rate, meaning the world is inevitably going to grow darker in complexion. I wonder if the third world participants at this gathering realize this: if they can just hold on, within a few generations their children will inherit London, Paris, and Oklahoma City.

The fireworks have started, but it's hard to distinguish them from the natural flamboyance of the Northern Lights. There's a steady stream of people passing through the atrium, and the free-flowing booze is keeping everyone happy.

...but my mood is growing darker. This has all the makings of a first-class party, but I'm having a hard time getting into it. Maybe it's the triumphant tone surrounding me. I wonder: is this what all of history was leading up to, a beer bash above the Arctic circle with government subsidized prostitutes servicing appreciative tourists beneath the rocket's red glare? I know I'm getting a bit Nietzschean here, but to quote Peggy Lee, "Is that all there is?"

...I couldn't take anymore of the party, so I've made my way back to the convention center. The maintenance staff is sweeping, cleaning, and scrubbing in preparation for the Scandinavian Semiconductor Manufacturers Association meeting that begins tomorrow. Castro won't be speaking, but there will be a Cuban trade delegation pitching the benefits of building a chip fab on the island. Note: it's been awhile since I watched a large-scale janitorial undertaking, and I'm not surprised to learn that technology has also

59 This is where last night's revelry caught up with me.

Left Behind

transformed this business. Brooms and mops are out, at least for cleaning the hallways; in their place is a crash helmet wearing worker sitting atop a lawn tractor fitted with a collection of cleaning devices. He nods when he passes and shows no interest in my coffee cup filled with gin and tonic, an obvious flaunting of the "No food or drink" sign on the wall.

...I've traveled beyond the rooms where, over the past few days, I've attended seminars and argued (fruitlessly) with misguided advocates of collectivism. The staff hasn't tried to stop me; in fact, with their smiles and nods, I feel as if they're encouraging me on my journey.

...I come across a meeting. A few dozen maintenances types are listening to an exuberant fellow addressing what must be a matter of great importance. The Spirit is moving him, and his presentation is frequently interrupted by equally enthusiastic outbursts from his listeners. No one seems to mind when I take a seat at the back. Despite my intoxicated state and the language barrier, I quickly catch the rhythm of the room. I've been here before, and it's a reassuring feeling: I've found a community of believers, followers of a tradition stretching back for centuries, from the early Church fathers, through my mother and her Pentecostal preachers, and now to me. My understanding is visceral, and I am content to sit and share the experience.

The meeting wraps up, and hugs and handshakes are exchanged. I'm getting lots of smiles directed at me, and I gladly return them, grateful for the acknowledgment. The speaker is making his way around the room, passing out literature and, I'm guessing, priming people for the collection plate that will soon make an appearance. He reaches me and presents a colorful brochure that I happily take, and I attempt to pass him a ten-dollar bill in return. He brushes my hand away, leaving me confused, a confusion that grows as I leaf through the pamphlet. Instead of Bible verses and images of Hell, I find Excel generated charts and pictures of smiling families. Are they Mormons? Have I stumbled upon a little slice of Utah in the middle of Stockholm? Bewildered, I turn to the final page, and then I begin laughing, laughing so hard my fellow believers stare at me, and I wish I spoke Swedish because I want to share my discovery, I want to tell them there's no reason to fear the future, that our side is going to win, and the proof is in the Amway brochure I hold in my hands.