

A Waste of Energy

By Theodore Dalrymple

Electoral politics, particularly in Western Europe, is a toxic amalgam of power-madness, low cunning, and moral grandiosity. Of these, as St. Paul said of charity, moral grandiosity is the greatest: that is to say, not the best or most important in this particular context, but the most harmful.



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atural for a man or woman who has been legitimately elected—according to preestablished rules—to suppose that he or she is not only popular but entitled to direct affairs according to his or her own brilliant conceptions. Unfortunately, in Britain we are beginning to see the truth of this fact of human nature.

The man newly in charge of Britain's energy supplies, by the name of Ed Miliband, had decided that exploration and licensing of gas and oil reserves in the North Sea will

henceforth not be permitted. At the same time, thousands of acres of productive farmland will be given over to wind farms and solar panels, though Britain often produces more electricity by wind than it can use—or, more importantly, store. Moreover, the wind does not always blow and the sun does not always shine very brightly, as visitors to its shores have often remarked, so that Britain would need at least four times as many solar panels as sunnier climes to produce any given amount of electricity other than the most minimal.

There is absolutely no prospect that it can do entirely without gas and oil in the near future, so it will have to continue to import them. It already has some of the most expensive energy in the world, putting its industry (such as remains) at a disadvantage. Furthermore, the effect on global climate change, assuming the theory of greenhouse gases being responsible for it is a hundred percent correct, would be negligible even if, *per impossibile*, Britain abandoned all use of fossil fuel, because the country emits only 1 percent of global greenhouse gases anyway. The *annual increase alone* in emissions of countries such as China and India is far greater than the British total.

So what is Mr. Miliband playing at? To use farmland in a very overcrowded country to erect thousands of unsightly windmills bespeaks a kind of Marxist hatred of the countryside, and of the rural idiocy to which Marx referred. Unsightliness is of no concern to environmentalists, who perceive notional emissions of carbon dioxide more vividly than what they see with their eyes. Miliband's father was a Marxist professor who lived at a time when smokestacks were still a symbol of progress in Soviet iconography; they have been replaced by windmills in current "progressive" ideological iconography.

Mr. Miliband, a British minister, has, I surmise, his mind firmly focused on the whole world and its ecosphere, which he wants to save, rather than on the small corner of it for which he carries important responsibilities. It is too boring for

him, not sufficiently interesting, merely to ensure that old ladies can afford to heat their homes in the dead of winter. Who needs old ladies anyway? They have had their time, in which they probably kept themselves warm for years by burning coal. It is payback time: Let them shiver, so long as moral perfection is achieved and the planet is saved. But the idea that China is going to alter its conduct because of the magnificently self-sacrificing policies of Britain could occur only to a man in the grip of self-importance rising to the level of megalomania, the occupational disease of professional politicians.

But of course, Mr. Miliband is not the only one of his type. Preening petty politicians are by no means uncommon. They have only to hear of a bad idea to alight on it like a fly on ordure. Moral grandiosity is to them what honey is to bears.

Take the case of Sweden. It is not very long ago that much of the Swedish intelligentsia prided itself on Sweden being what it called "a moral superpower." Perhaps Swedes hadn't fully recovered from the Battle of Poltava in 1709, which ended Sweden's status as a great European power forever, when Peter the Great defeated Charles XII. Rich, equal, and peaceful, Sweden was a beacon to the world, or thought that it was. It aided Africa generously, including by funding Julius Nyerere, who had what so many intellectuals thought was the bright idea of herding Tanzanian peasants from where they were living into collectivized villages. What generosity (except that it was an economic disaster)!

Not contented with being merely a peaceful, prosperous, egalitarian country, a beacon to the world in its own estimate and that of many others, it began to turn some of itself into a refugee camp. Surely when refugees saw the wonders of Swedish social democracy, thought the bien-pensant Swedes, they would soon convert to it? Alas, this seems not to have happened to any great extent; on the contrary, Sweden is now a crime-ridden country to an extent not previously imaginable.

It has more gang killings, and more violent youths, than any other country in Western Europe—and Britain is no slacker in this regard.

It has to be emphasized that Sweden was under no moral obligation to accept refugees or migrants. It did so merely from an abstract wish to maintain its philosophically kitschy status as a moral superpower. Now it has a problem to which there may be no solution, though of course no one can predict the future with exactitude.

Nearly 7 percent of the population of Sweden—30 percent of Malmo—was born in Islamic countries, and given the higher fecundity of Muslims, the percentage of Muslims in the population is bound to increase even without further immigration. Of course, there is some integration, and a large proportion of the immigrant population gives no problem; but that is not the same as saying that this mass immigration has brought any benefit to the Swedish population to balance its disadvantages, other than a more diverse cuisine, which is often mistaken for multiculturalism by those who do not have to take the consequences of what they preach.

Of course, in a welfare state the number of dependents has constantly to be refreshed, under the morally grandiose guise of universal compassion for the unfortunate—of whom, unfortunately, there are some billions.

Theodore Dalrymple's latest book is *Ramses: A Memoir*, published by New English Review.

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