

The Word's Eye View

The Word's Eye View is a newspaper column written by
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Tea Party... Past and Present (Article 43)

On April 15th thousands of fellow citizens participated in rallies that were generally labeled as modern tea parties. It is difficult to know exactly how many of these protests took place, but some estimates have exceeded 2300. One reason for lack of precise information is that these were truly grass root endeavors which resulted from spontaneous organization. The primary objection is the massive government spending that has either been legislated or is pending approval. People of common sense understand that the ultimate effect of these efforts will be huge tax increases no matter how cleverly they may be disguised as they are instituted.

These peaceful assemblies did not precipitate one report of blocked traffic, broken windows, overturned cars, politicians burned in effigy or desecrated American flags. Had any of those conditions existed, the major media would have rocketed to locations to report on the “right wins extremists.” As it was, the media moguls did all they could to ignore the event which was genuinely national in scope. That evening the lead story on ABC’s Nightline was a University of Washington program for 13 year old geniuses. The tea parties were given cursory treatment at the tail end of the program. The obvious implication was that they were social warts that needed dermatological removal. With the exception of Fox News all of the other networks followed suit. When President Obama was asked about the demonstrations, he replied, “I haven’t heard about them.” And Nancy Pelosi simply referred to them as “astro turf” not grass roots. The contempt the Washington elite displayed could be compared to the disdain King George III held for the colonists. There are some interesting parallels from that day to the present.

The administration of George III decided on a policy with regard to America more in harmony with English ideas and objectives than with wisdom and justice. This policy was an assertion by parliament of the right to tax the colonies by a body in which they were not represented. During the 1760’s a variety of duties and tariffs were imposed which included the Sugar Act, the Navigation Act and the Stamp Act. Delegates were sent to England to protest and to plead for equal representation, but it all proved of no avail. Some of these acts that were about to expire were renewed and made more obnoxious, and other duties were imposed. By 1765 the American mind was occupied with profound questions of government, natural rights and constitutional law. As the discussions went on in public meetings, the press and general assemblies, the people became divided in sentiment. The opponents of the measures of the administration were termed Whigs, Patriots and Sons of Liberty; the supporters of the English bureaucracy were called Loyalists, Tories and Friends of Government. Both sides claimed to act under the British Constitution and to be loyal to the crown.

“The Whigs, traced by the lineage of principles had an ancestry in Buchanan and Languet, in Milton, Locke and Sidney, or the political school whose utterances are inspired and imbued with the Christian idea of man.” (Rise of the Republic, 1890, Richard Frothingham) Their platform was summed up in the Declaration of Independence which became the American theory of government. The Tories maintained that the prerogative power of the State was supreme and strongly advocated continual dependence on England. This was commonly referred to as “the pagan idea of man.”

In 1767 the Townshend Revenue Acts which imposed duties on glass, paper, painter's colors and tea were instituted. A growing number of colonists concluded that these new taxes were not imposed on commercial grounds, but for political reasons, not to regulate trade, but to assert British sovereignty. As tensions rose, popular leaders encouraged the people to avoid mobs, confusions and disorder but rather to find appropriate means of outrage.

For several years the political pot of discontent continued to simmer with public opinion turning more to the side of the Whigs. Americans discontinued purchasing tea shipped from England and chose instead importations which came in freely from Holland. The English countered with a plan of government subsidy for the East-Indian Company which would allow them to beat the competition. The gamble was that the Colonists were not principled enough to resist lower prices, and the love of money would win the day. English ships filled with tea were moored in harbors but not allowed to unload the cargo. Emotions were climaxed when a group of men dressed like Indians and whooping like a war party went on board these vessels in Boston, warning their officers to keep out of the way. They hoisted the chests of tea to the deck, cut them open, and heaved the tea overboard. No other property was injured, no person was harmed, no tea was allowed to be carried away. Principle was winning over expediency.

To the amazement of many, the pulpits of colonial America were some of the most fervent voices for freedom and liberty. Today, it appears that the majority of pulpits have cowered into submission to the crown. Samuel Adams chaired a committee that produced a paper considered radical. It gave to principles which had been held as abstractions, a practical significance. It considered the relations of man not only as a citizen, but as a Christian, and claimed for him that equality which is the cardinal principle of Christianity. That entire concept was extracted from the Bible.

Washington is busy devising subsidies to pacify the populace, but tea party mentality is on the rise. The salient question is: Is there enough principle left in America?