



BY EDWARD H. CRANE

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President’s Message

Actually, We Are *Not* All in This Together

Having attended UC-Berkeley in the sixties, I have a certain nostalgia for the wacko hippie leftist crowd. I agreed with them on the Vietnam War back then, and not much else. So I’m always curious as to what today’s equivalent, MoveOn.org, is up to. A recent fundraising letter they sent to their members (trust me, I’m not one) included this statement: “As progressives, we share a core belief that we’re all in this together.”

It is a small victory, I suppose, that leftists feel compelled to refer to themselves as progressives these days. But MoveOn is certainly correct that the collectivist notion of “all in this together” is central to the leftist worldview. One is reminded that the slogan of the totalitarians running the dystopia depicted in the dark, futuristic movie *Brazil*, was “We’re all in this together.” Here is Robert Reich, noted progressive and professor of public policy at my old alma mater, advising President Obama on how he should respond to Republican Rep. Paul Ryan’s budget plan: “Obama must show America that the basic choice is between two fundamental views of this nation. Either we’re all in this together, or we’re a bunch of individuals who happen to live within these borders and are mainly on their own.”

Set aside the false dichotomy. The choice is hardly between in-this-together sheep and atomistic individuals. Tocqueville was astounded at the many ways Americans loved to work together. Granges, churches, business associations, volunteer fire departments—the list was pretty much endless. That said, these associations were voluntary and the government had nothing to do with them. If there is one thing that identifies American exceptionalism, it is a fierce individualism. Americans don’t like to be told what to do—especially by bureaucrats.

But that is what the left is all about. Hillary Clinton lamented to MSNBC during her failed presidential bid, “You know, when I ask people, ‘What do you think the goals of America are today?’ people don’t have any idea. We don’t know what we’re trying to achieve. And I think that in a life or in a country you’ve got to have some goals.” After all, “winning the future” is the Obama administration’s theme these days, and without

national “goals,” how can we tell if we’ve won or not? Indeed, President Obama took Prof. Reich’s advice during his speech on the deficit, citing “a belief that we are all connected; and that there are some things [many, as it turned out] we can only do together, as a nation.”

It has been duly noted by scholars that the two great totalitarian philosophies of the 20th century, communism and fascism, had similar methodologies and similar goals, so to speak. Certainly, denigrating the importance of the individual and subsuming his or her personal interests to the greater goals of the national movement were integral to both those horrific philosophies. Yet this underlying anti-individualist, collectivist theme continues—not just on the left—in today’s political environment.

Neoconservative superstar David Brooks wrote in the *New York Times* just this past March, “Citizenship, after all, is built on an awareness that we are not all that special but are, instead, enmeshed in a common enterprise. Our lives are given meaning by the service we supply to the nation. I wonder if Americans are unwilling to support the sacrifices that will be required to avert fiscal catastrophe in part because they are less conscious of themselves as components of a national project.”

And I wonder if it has ever dawned on Mr. Brooks that the “fiscal catastrophe” we Americans face is a direct result of national projects called Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Oh yes, and the national project to make every American a homeowner. Not to put too fine a point on it, but there would be no \$20 trillion unfunded liability in Social Security had we allowed *individual* accounts. There would be huge surpluses. And limiting house purchases to *individuals who could afford them* would have avoided the multi-trillion-dollar disaster that national project created.

It’s enough to make you want to go out and see *Atlas Shrugged*. Again.