

Second Thoughts?

BY MARNI SOUPCOFF

WE ALL HAVE OUR FANTASY WORLDS. Mine involves dinner with Winston Churchill and seas made of milk chocolate. But what if my dreams came true and it turned out that Churchill chews with his mouth open and chocolate oceans make for lousy shipping routes? How unpleasant it would be to get what you wanted and find it wanting. Yet that is happening to those of us libertarians who were keen to see George W. Bush defeat Al Gore and then John Kerry.

Sure, much of our Bush support was built on a base curiosity about what Michael Moore and company might look like after spontaneously combusting from moral outrage. (Ugh, would someone please wipe that bit of Noam Chomsky off the ceiling?) But underneath, I think, many of us also expected good things from unpretentious Dubya, even if “good” only meant being left alone. After all, how much harm could this man, who seemed to prefer Scottish terriers to people and pretzel-eating to policy-making, possibly do?

Quite a lot, as it turns out. The president of my dreams has proven to be, if not a nightmare, then at least a pretty lousy night’s sleep. This isn’t how I thought it would be.

The unrestrained spending under the guise of homeland security ought to have been my first clue that the two-term Republican presidency I had longed for could prove a sight different from the libertarian utopia I had imagined. But I’m a fairly forgiving type, and while the idea of the government blowing wads of tax dollars was not a happy one, it did seem happier than the idea of terrorists blowing up crowds of taxpayers.

But then came Hurricane Katrina and the president’s pledge to spend “whatever it takes” to rebuild New Orleans. Whatever it takes? Even if it would be cheaper to buy every former New Orleans resident a Hummer and set him up in a penthouse in SoHo? Not only was this shameless pandering on the part of the president, it didn’t even make sense. I felt like smacking my fairy godmother.

Speaking of fairy godmothers, Supreme Court nominee Harriet Miers must be more than a little bit miffed at hers. Did she have to go and take Harriet literally when the White House Counsel mused wistfully to herself about becoming the best-est, most important lawyer in the whole wide world? Granting wishes is one thing, but putting people in situations they are not ready or qualified for is quite another. Yet there Miers was, set out before the world as Bush’s Supreme Court nominee with nary a piece of stellar legal scholarship to recommend her. How embarrassing for Miers, an underwhelming affirmative action hire if ever there

Marni Soupcoff is a member of the *National Post* editorial board and a Toronto-based journalist. She is a former staff attorney for the Institute for Justice.



was one. And how clumsy of Bush, who may have become the first politician in history to alienate both *MoveOn.org* and the Federalist Society with a single nomination.

What good is cronyism to conservatives if it is going to reward mere personal proximity above the wearing of Madison ties and the worship of Adam Smith? We might as well have elected a President Gore or President Kerry or even President Hillary Clinton for all the progress the Miers nomination made in advancing the causes of freedom and merit-based hiring.

Maybe the woeful Bush performance is to be a comeuppance for my hubris. During the Clinton years, I imagined that with a Republican as president again, all would be well: small children would dance in the streets, their pudgy little hands clutching liberating school vouchers. The tax code would be slashed to a single, elegant page and government spending would be reduced to such a spare minimalism that it would make Bill Murray’s acting look exaggerated by comparison.

Instead, the Bush administration is federalizing education. Taxes are still high and the rules surrounding them remain completely incomprehensible to mere mortals. And the only people dancing in the streets are the federal politicians who managed to secure obscene amounts of pork for their constituents through the recent highway bill. Maybe this is what it feels like to win the lottery and discover that being extremely rich means having to spend one’s days vetoing loan requests from long-lost junior high prom dates. It sounded good in theory, but in practice you could live without it.

In some ways, libertarians would probably have been better off with a Democrat in power because at least then we would have maintained appropriately low expectations and been more keenly on our guard than we have been with Bush. Instead, we are left with the burden of disillusionment on top of lighter wallets. But there is nothing to be done about it now, save to learn a lesson for the future:

Be careful what you wish for. Not only might it come true—it might end up bearing a disturbing resemblance to Hillary Clinton.

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KEVIN TUMA