

Crunchy Con Talk

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March 16, 2006

Radley Balko goes after the Crunchy Cons, but just winds up making himself look bad:

One last little irony in this whole crunchy con business: There are a few billion people on this planet still in danger of starving to death. They're in desperate need of modernity, technology, and all those crass, crude, unsightly accoutrements of emerging markets (see environmental pollution, "sweatshop" labor, etc.). Dreher can lament the Internet age, access to world markets, our abundance of choice, and mass globalization all he likes. Unfortunately, most of the rest of humanity hasn't yet made it to the "lamenting our prosperity" stage of economic development. Dreher pooh-poohs the tools the very poor need to get to where we are (globalization and world markets, technology, GMOs) because he, Rod Dreher, yearns for a simpler lifestyle.

No, here's your "little irony": Balko and Dreher are mirror-imaging. Despite the fact that one uses "free market" as a god-term and the other as a devil-term, both apparently understand it to be pretty much the same thing. For example: Dreher, at CrunchyCon blog, quotes the food chapter from his book:

We are told that small-scale farming is inefficient — this is true — and that because our factory farms feed the masses, and do so cheaply, we should be satisfied... I understand the free-market reasons why Americans do this. But I don't understand why it is called conservative.

Ironically, this comes immediately after another statement by the same author:

...At first I thought of this small-scale organic farming as a sort of boutique thing — pleasant to have, liek artisanal microbrewed beers, but only that. Then I started looking into how the government regulates the meat industry. It was shocking to see how agribusiness had gamed the system to keep small meat producers marginalized. Our regulatory system is designed to favor industrialized meat production...

Not that all Crunchy Cons are this clueless. Mitch Muncy, a Crunchista who apparently has a tad more critical thinking ability than either Balko or Dreher, writes:

What some Crunchy Cons identify as the free market run amok looks to me more like factions using the government to pervert the free market. I wonder if Crunchy Conservatism wouldn't flourish under a market even freer than the one we have.

Caleb Stegall, in the same vein, adds:

...it is "big government" in all its guises that makes most of what Rod complains about possible in the first place. The cult of corporate centralization, universalization, and efficiency depends on big government for its existence. Why do you think our government keeps getting bigger and more intrusive? It ain't all (or even primarily) the fault of the bleeding heart lefties.

Although Balko dismisses the Crunchy Cons as "pretty darned self-indulgent," he's one to talk. It's hard to imagine anything more self-indulgent than the Stosselite womb he's encased himself in, which bears so little relation to factual reality it might as well be in its own self-contained space-time continuum.

A lot of those starving people in the Third World want, not to "get where we are," but where they *were*: namely, *back on their own land* that was stolen from them by authoritarian governments in cahoots with landed oligarchies and Western agribusiness interests. I've written before on just how little Third World starvation has to do with any alleged crying need for GMOs ("The So-Called Green Revolution") or sweatshops ("Vulgar Libertarianism Watch, Part I"). As a matter of fact, as I said in the Green Revolution post, those GMOs are specifically geared to be most efficient in the kind of state-subsidized, high-input production model the landed oligarchs engage in on their stolen land, with lots of irrigation water and chemicals. GMOs and other Green Revolution seeds are vulnerable to drought, and otherwise far less efficient than locally improved varieties, when it comes the kind of soil- and labor-intensive production that peasant subsistence farmers would use to feed themselves.

It is a myth that Third World hunger results mainly from primitive farming techniques, or that the solution is a technocratic fix. Hunger results from the fact that land once used to grow staple foods for the people working it is now used to grow cash crops for urban elites or for the export markets, while the former peasant proprietors are without a livelihood.

What's more, those GMOs wouldn't have a snowball's chance in hell in a free market, if it weren't for government R&D money, government patents, government food libel laws, government labelling restrictions that violate the right to commercial free speech, and Monsanto thugs hauling farmers into court for being downwind of their GM pollen.

Finally, the sweatshop laborers in the Third World, like the workers in the Dark Satanic Mills of our own industrial era, had to be driven off their land by force before they'd willingly work under such conditions. To the extent that sweatshops offer the "best available alternative" to landless peasants, it's a case of breaking someone's leg and then offering him a crutch.

No matter how much he wraps it up in "free market" rhetoric, Balko's polemic is just an apology for the boot stamping on a human face. The Birkenstocked Burkeans' opposition can't possibly do real free market principles any more harm than the Pot-Smoking Republican's defense.

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