



Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

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Disclaimer: The following "Letters to the Editor" were sent to the respective publications on the dates indicated. Some were printed but many were not. The original articles that are being commented on may or may not be available on the internet and may require registration or subscription to access if they are. Some of the original articles are syndicated and therefore may have appeared in other publications also.

13 May 2007

The Editor, New York Times
229 West 43rd St.
New York, NY 10036

To the Editor:

Convinced that the economy is a shambles for all but the rich, Bob Herbert writes that "one of the biggest problems is the simple fact that so many jobs pay so little that even fulltime, year-round employment is not enough to raise a family out of poverty. One-fifth of the working men in America and 29 percent of working women are in such jobs" ("The Millions Left Out," May 12).

Mr. Herbert mistakenly implies that workers who hold such jobs today hold them for their entire careers. But as workers acquire skills they typically get raises or move to jobs with better pay. Other - mostly entry-level - workers then fill for a while the low-skill jobs these workers abandon. I'll bet that Mr. Herbert's gig as a New York Times columnist pays him much more handsomely than did his first full-time job. Why does he suppose that he's unusual?

12 May 2007

Editor, The Wall Street Journal
200 Liberty Street
New York, NY 10281

To the Editor:

My colleague Bryan Caplan clearly explains that economic ignorance is political manure: it fertilizes the growth of policies that choke our freedoms and drain our prosperity ("Special-Interest Secret," May 12).

I here emphasize a point deserving more attention than Bryan could give it in his op-ed. People have harmful preferences about public policies largely because each voter gets to express his or her political opinion free of charge. Because no single vote will swing an election, the personal cost to each voter of voting stupidly is zero.

In short, unlike in private markets, in the political arena it is rational for each of us to be irrational.

11 May 2007

The Editor, Business Week

Dear Editor:

Surely your reporters can muster more than token skepticism of the popular delusion that businesses hurt poor people by making credit more readily available to them ("The Poverty Business," May 21). While example can be piled atop example of borrowers who today are "trapped" by debt, your reporters instead should ask "what's the alternative?" Were poor persons in the past who had no access to credit better off than poor persons today who enjoy genuine access? Is being trapped by poverty with absolutely no hope for credit better than having the option of securing loans?

11 May 2007

The Editor, Harper's

Dear Editor:

Alleging that the dollar is "overvalued," Dean Baker describes this situation as

a "calamity" ("The Economy," June). Some calamity.

The higher the dollar's value on foreign-exchange markets, the more it buys - meaning higher real wages for American workers. But if Mr. Baker truly feels burdened by possessing currency with high purchasing power, I'll be delighted to rescue him from his calamity: he can give me all of his dollars and, in exchange, I will give him the same nominal amount of monopoly money.

9 May 2007

Editor, Washington Post
1150 15th St., NW
Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

Robert Samuelson argues that free trade benefits Americans only when foreign governments practice free trade ("China's Trade Bomb," May 9). Not so. The case for free trade rests on the recognition that prosperity is enhanced by permitting consumers to spend their money as they choose. When foreign firms are subsidized, those subsidies (while they hurt foreign taxpayers and foreign economies) benefit

American consumers and the American economy just as surely as when the attractive prices and qualities of foreign products result from foreign-producers' comparative advantage.

8 May 2007

Editor, Washington Post
1150 15th St., NW
Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

According to E.J. Dionne, Nicolas Sarkozy's call to deregulate French labor markets offered mere "clarity" while Segolene Royal's opposite message was muddled but "well-meaning" ("Progressives' French Lesson," May 8).

Why imply that persons who advocate freer labor markets don't mean well? Whether correct or not, there's a coherent case that freer labor markets generally help workers. If M. Sarkozy accepts this case, then he, too, was well-meaning on the subject of French labor markets.

Mr. Dionne is mistaken to suggest that support for freer labor markets reflects frosty apathy toward workers.

7 May 2007

Friends,

My GMU colleague Thomas Stratmann and one of our many superb PhD students (Mike Makowsky) are getting lots

of attention for their recent study on police officers' traffic-citation practices. Here's a teaser from a report on this research that appears in today's Chicago Tribune:

"It has long been suspected that race and ethnic background often influence the likelihood of a driver being pulled over for a traffic stop in many localities. But the George Mason researchers documented additional factors showing that all motorists are not treated the same under the law.

Drivers whose vehicles have out-of-state license plates have about a 50 percent chance of receiving a ticket when pulled over, compared with 30 percent for local drivers, according to the study."

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The link to the full Tribune report is here:

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/classified/automotive/columnists/chi-0705060426may07,0,2457136.column>

7 May 2007

Editor, Washington Post
1150 15th St., NW
Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

The key sentence in Walter
Zadan's anti-free-trade

letter is "I choose to
purchase produce sold at a
local farmers market - or
that, at least, is grown in
this country" (Letters, May
7).

Those of us who endorse
free trade never insist that
Mr. Zadan and those who

share his tastes buy
foreign-made products.
The deal we offer to Mr.
Zadan and his ilk is simply
this: you keep your nose
out of our consumption
choices and we'll keep our
nose out of yours.