

Graffiti for intellectuals



SIMON SAYS



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By SI FRUMKIN

A BICYCLE IN AMERICA'S FUTURE?

When I was a kid we would gather in an empty field to play soccer. There were always more guys who wanted to play than there were places on the team but there was always room for Danny. Danny always played. He wasn't the best player, in fact, he wasn't all that good, but he had a great advantage: he owned the only soccer ball we had; if he didn't get to play, no one would – he'd take the ball and go home.



The current Detroit crisis reminded me of Danny and the ball. The 3 Big Guys who own the ball are having an economic crisis. They tell us that unless we give them enough money to keep going for another 6 months or so, well, it

will cost us. They will deflate the ball and then all of us will have to take care of 3 million unemployed workers and help out the thousands of small businesses who will not have any customers for the wheels, upholstery, door handles and the other parts they now produce. Worst of all, they tell us, without their factories there will be no automobiles for the people to buy and the unhappy pedestrians would be very angry at the stingy politicians who wouldn't give a few measly billions of dollars to the great Detroit business wizards who, unlike their smarter foreign competitors, apparently can no longer produce something that they can sell at a profit.

keep the factories running, manned by workers who will be overjoyed at being able to keep earning, even at a reduced rate. A bankruptcy would void the existing inflated Big Three contracts that cost Detroit employers, on the average, about \$75 an hour while the cost in the U.S.-based Toyota plants is around \$48.



for will last only the next three or four months and then we will be back where we started and they will threaten to take the ball back again. There is no question but that the bankruptcy will result in increasing unemployment but the numbers and the financial burden on the unemployment insurance system will not be nearly as great as the bailout money would be. The plants will run, cars will be produced and Americans will continue buying them. Wages of the automobile workers will drop to a more reasonable level, some of the less productive workers, suppliers and plants will have to retool, restructure and reorganize but America will not become a nation of bicycle riders.

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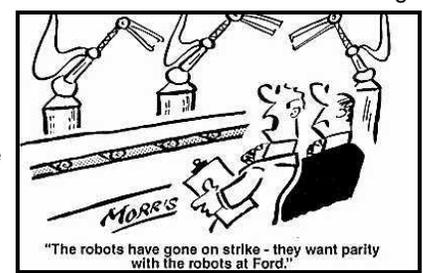


The new owners of the new repaired ball would be Toyota, Honda, Nissan, Volkswagen, and a few others. They would use the existing facilities – renovating some of them – pay lower wages, make a profit and supply America with automobiles, place orders for parts with suppliers, transport the cars by rail and truck, and supply the dealerships, just like they do now, but at a profit, without taxpayers being hit with yet another debt to be passed on to our children and grandchildren.

I am also quite certain that there is a good probability that our politicians will vote to bail out the Big Three – the politicians, after all, believe that money is the life blood of politics and the U.A.W. is one of the major donors.

There is just one thing wrong with this reasoning: unlike my friend Danny, the Big Three cannot take their ball home. Like it or not, this ball has to stay where it is.

Dan Luria, research director at the Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center has interesting – and surprising – insights on the problem. He confirms that the U.S.-based automobile industry is capable of producing 17 million cars a year but that sales have recently dropped to only 10 million. He adds that the Big Three cannot make any money at 10 million – they need to sell at least 15 million - but that the “transplants”, foreign firms with production facilities in the U.S. can make a profit by selling just 12 million.



I am also quite certain that if there is a bailout, Washington will then force the production of a “green”, clean, ugly, slow and politically correct

If the movers and shakers of the Not-So-Big-Anymore Three decide to lock their offices and factory gates and announce that they are not willing to play anymore, in other words, declare bankruptcy, Americans will not stop buying cars. There will be enough professional engineers and smart entrepreneurs who will jump at the chance to

During the last decade, at least 15 million autos and light trucks have been sold yearly. This means that the transplants kept increasing their profit margin while the Big Three barely broke even and are about to go broke. The half a trillion dollars they ask

monstrosity that no one would want to buy and which would resemble the government-planned Soviet Zhigulis and Yugoslav Yugos.



A final thought. If Washington will somehow conclude that a bailout is necessary, would it not make more sense to give a sizeable bonus - \$15,000, 20,000,???? - to anyone who buys a car (luxury cars excluded)? This would swell sales, increase production, enable even the Big Three to make a profit, and it would cost a heck of a lot less than giving countless billions to those who have wasted them in the past and will surely waste them in the future.

Shortly after the London Tube bombings in 2005, a reader of Tim Blair, *The Sydney Daily Telegraph's* columnist wag, sent him a note-perfect parody of a typical newspaper headline:

"British Muslims Fear Repercussions Over Tomorrow's Train Bombing."

Indeed. And so it goes. This time round — Mumbai — it was the Associated Press that filed a story about how Muslims "found themselves on the defensive once again about bloodshed linked to their religion".

Oh, I don't know about that. In fact, you'd be hard pressed from most news reports to figure out the bloodshed was "linked" to any religion, least of all one beginning with "I-" and ending in "-slam." In the three years since those British bombings, the media have more or less entirely abandoned the offending formulations — "Islamic terrorists," "Muslim extremists" — and by the time of the assault on Mumbai found it easier just to call the alleged perpetrators "militants" or "gunmen" or "teenage gunmen," as in the opening line of this report in *The Australian*: "An Adelaide woman in India for her wedding is lucky to be alive after teenage gunmen ran amok."

Kids today, eh? Always running amok in an aimless fashion.

The veteran British TV anchor Jon Snow, on the other hand, opted for the more cryptic locution "practitioners." "Practitioners" of what, exactly?

Hard to say. And getting harder. For the *Wall Street Journal*, Tom Gross produced a jaw-dropping round-up of Mumbai media coverage: The discovery that, for the first time in an Indian terrorist atrocity, Jews had been attacked, tortured and killed

produced from the *New York Times* a serene befuddlement: "It is not known if the Jewish center was strategically chosen, or if it was an accidental hostage scene."

Hmm. Greater Mumbai forms one of the world's five biggest cities. It has a population of nearly 20 million. But only one Jewish center, located in a building that gives no external clue as to the bounty waiting therein. An "accidental hostage scene" that one of the "practitioners" just happened to stumble upon? "I must be the luckiest jihadist in town. What are the odds?"

Meanwhile, the *New Age* guru Deepak Chopra laid all the blame on American foreign policy for "going after the wrong people" and inflaming moderates, and "that inflammation then gets organized and appears as this disaster" in Mumbai.

Really? The inflammation just "appears"?

Like a bad pimple? The "fairer" we get to the, ah, inflamed militant practitioners, the un-fairer we get to everyone else.

The murdered Jews were described in almost all the Western media as "ultra-Orthodox," "ultra-" in this instance being less a term of theological precision than a generalized code for "strange, weird people, nothing against them personally, but they probably shouldn't have been over there in the first place."

Are they stranger or weirder than their killers? Two "inflamed moderates" entered, shouted "*Allahu Akbar!*," tortured the Jews and murdered them, including the young rabbi's pregnant wife. Their 2-year-old child escaped because of a quick-witted (non-Jewish) nanny who hid in a closet and then, risking being mowed down by machine-gun fire, ran with him to safety.

The *Times* was being silly in suggesting this was just an "accidental" hostage opportunity — and not just because, when Muslim terrorists capture Jews, it's not a hostage situation, it's a mass murder-in-waiting. The sole surviving "militant" revealed that the

Jewish center had been targeted a year in advance. The 28-year-old rabbi was Gavriel Holtzberg. His pregnant wife was Rivka Holtzberg. Their orphaned son is Moshe Holtzberg, and his brave nanny is Sandra Samuels. Remember their names, not because they're any more important than the Indians, Britons and Americans targeted

in the attack, but because they are an especially revealing glimpse into the pathologies of the perpetrators.

In a well-planned attack on iconic Mumbai landmarks symbolizing great power and wealth, the "militants" nevertheless found time to divert 20 percent of their manpower to torturing and killing a handful of obscure Jews helping the city's poor in a nondescript building. If they were just "teenage gunmen" or "militants" in the cause of Kashmir, engaged in a more or less conventional territorial dispute with India, why kill the only rabbi in Mumbai?

And yet we take it for granted that Pakistani "militants" in a long-running border dispute with India would take time out of their hectic schedule to kill Jews. In going to ever more baroque lengths to avoid saying "Islamic" or "Muslim" or "terrorist," we have

somehow managed to internalize the pathologies of these men.

We are enjoined to be "understanding," and we're doing our best. A Minnesotan suicide bomber (now there's a phrase) originally from Somalia returned to the old country and blew up himself and 29 other people last October. His family prevailed upon your government to have his parts (or as many of them as could be sifted from the debris) returned to the United States at taxpayer expense and buried in Burnsville Cemetery. Well, hey, in the current climate, what's the big deal about a federal bailout of jihad operational expenses? If that's not "too big to fail," what is?

Last week, a Canadian critic reprimanded me for failing to understand that Muslims feel "vulnerable." *Au contraire*, they project tremendous cultural confidence, as well they might:



They're the world's fastest-growing population. A prominent British Muslim announced the other day that, when the United Kingdom becomes a Muslim state, non-Muslims will be required to wear insignia identifying them as infidels. If he's feeling "vulnerable," he's doing a terrific job of covering it up.

We are told that the "vast majority" of the 1.6 billion to 1.8 billion Muslims (in Deepak Chopra's estimate) are "moderate." Maybe so, but they're also quiet. And, as the AIDS activists used to say, "Silence=Acceptance." It equals acceptance of the things done in the name of their faith. Rabbi Holtzberg was not murdered because of a territorial dispute over Kashmir or because of Bush's foreign policy. He was murdered in the name of Islam — "*Allahu Akbar.*"

I wrote in my book, "*America Alone*," that "reforming" Islam is something only Muslims can do. But they show very little sign of being interested in doing it, and the rest of us are inclined to accept that. Spread a rumor that a Quran got flushed down the can at Gitmo, and there'll be rioting throughout the Muslim world. Publish some dull cartoons in a minor Danish newspaper, and there'll be protests around the planet. But slaughter the young pregnant wife of a rabbi in Mumbai in the name of Allah, and that's just business as usual. And, if it is somehow "understandable" that for the first time in history it's no longer safe for a Jew to live in India, then we are greasing the skids for a very slippery slope. Muslims, the AP headline informs us, "worry about image." Not enough. ☆

Mark Steyn is a syndicated columnist F.Y.I.— he is not Jewish.





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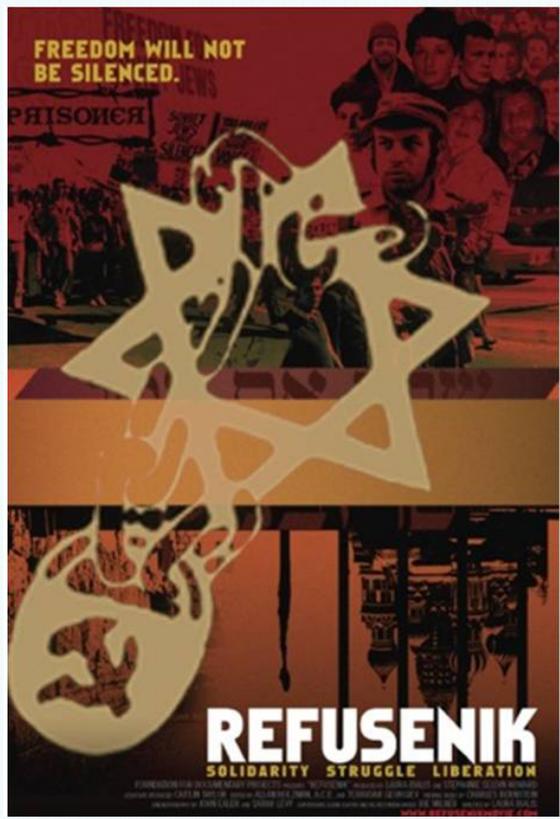
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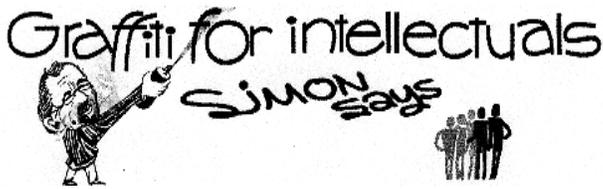
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Failure Is Not an Option by Victor Davis Hanson, Tribune Media Services, 11/24/08

WE ALL remember the advice about failure we received from our parents and teachers. "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." "Learn from your mistakes." "Failure breeds success."

The common theme was that some sort of failure in life is inevitable. It is a wake-up call for reflection — and should prompt needed change. Our character is not just built from success, but during setbacks as well. But now Americans seem to think such folk wisdom is obsolete. First came the \$700 billion bailout of the financial industry. Such a one-time federal guarantee was perhaps necessary to restore liquidity for the failed banking system, but it sent a terrible message.

Those who caused the mess — greedy traders, corrupt politicians, incompetent CEOs and gullible stockbrokers — got a collective reprieve. Most inside the rescued Bear Stearns, American International Group, Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae are either quiet about their failure or are blaming others rather than showing contrition. So far, few have admitted that their managers were both incompetent and far too highly paid.

The teetering U.S. auto industry is now next in line for a multi-billion-dollar federal bailout. But for decades, Detroit made gas-guzzling automobiles that the public believed were not as well built as the Japanese competition — despite being made by unionized workers who were paid nearly twice as much as those somehow building better cars. Will overpaid auto executives and workers worry about the consequences of their ongoing mistakes when the government has assured them that failing is not an option?

States and cities are lining up as well for fail-safe cash. California is nearly bankrupt; the state was just projected to have a deficit of \$28 billion through June 2010. The state has vastly increased its public spending over the

rate of inflation. Californians pay among the highest sales and income taxes in the nation.

But what they see in return are bloated bureaucracies, poor schools, congested highways and dysfunctional community hospitals. With a bailout, California's governor and legislators won't worry too much that their constituents are some of the most taxed and least served of any in America.

All sorts of promises are proposed to bail out mortgage holders who have defaulted or owe more than their homes are worth. Apparently, no debtor is really culpable. And apparently, no one took out second or third mortgages for optional consumer purchases, or bought homes too large for their incomes.

What is the lesson here for other pinched families who will not default and will somehow meet their mortgage obligations, even on homes with negative equity? Is it that those who pay what they owe are punished while those who fail to are excused?

President-elect Barack Obama promised over \$1 trillion in new entitlements at a time when the Bush administration may well run a \$500 billion annual deficit, only adding to a \$10 trillion national debt. We also have \$50 trillion in federal unfunded liabilities, ranging from long-term promises to Medicare and Social Security to payouts for government bonds and guaranteed loans.



Such massive borrowing and guarantees all offer cover for insolvent or poorly run programs (that face no worry of running out of money — and thus have no incentive to change). Corporate farmers just learned that the current \$288 billion farm bill will once again provide government subsidies to ensure that it won't matter much whether they plant the wrong crop at the wrong time.

Universities raise tuition rates that exceed the rate of inflation. But in our brave, new no-failure world, why worry when more promised federal-guaranteed student loans and credits will ensure steady paying enrollment? With guaranteed federal money, why be concerned that colleges and universities are over-staffed with administrators, replete with centers and programs that have nothing to do with undergraduate education, and erecting Las Vegas-like student unions and colossal recreation centers?

Americans are creating a therapeutic society in which none of us need fail. No one loses in T-ball anymore. Schools honor a dozen valedictorians. In universities, a "C" passing grade is now the understood kinder and gentler version of the old and now-rare "F." Our culture forgot that there was once a utility in failure. Failing reminded us of what works and what doesn't — and how we must learn to avoid the latter. Instead, in our new economic purgatory, no firm, company, state, city or individual ever quite goes to financial heaven or hell. A Bear Stearns or Chrysler neither succeeds nor fails but just sort of endlessly exists.