Is That REALLY Your Final Answer?

Author : michaelbloomer

At a November 5th news conference, White House comedienne, Press Secretary Dana Perino, fielded questions about Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's imposition of emergency rule and the consequent suspension of constitutional protections it entails. At one point, the following exchange occurred:

Q "But what [Musharraf] says what he's doing is against the terrorists, that is necessary to preserve stability there against terrorist organizations?

MS. PERINO: We do not believe that any extra-constitutional means were necessary in order to help prevent terrorism in the region. And that's why we are deeply disappointed with the actions, and we asked them to not do it.

Q Is it ever reasonable to restrict constitutional freedoms in the name of fighting terrorism?

MS. PERINO: In our opinion, no." Full transcript

I know, I know. It's like that old story of the 800 pound gorilla sitting in the living room who everyone somehow manages to ignore. In this case, though, it's a 9,000 pound gorilla sitting ON the living room that gets ignored. Note that the follow-up to Perino's "In our opinion, no" is a question about Bush's delegation of authority to the Secretary of State for the upcoming Mideast summit. Reporters never returned to her "In our opinion, no" for the glaringly obvious follow-up, "Is that *really* your final answer?" At the very least, you'd expect something like mtvcmiller's YouTube take on it:

So, the spokesperson for the Bush White House -- the administration whose record of constitutional abuses would have to greatly improve to be judged merely horrifying --

doesn't even get a "WHOA!" from the sleepy journalistic class. What *would* it take to get a response from these people? "In our opinion, no" followed by monkeys in full SCUBA gear streaming out of Ms. Perino's rear? Would *that* be sufficient? For jaw dropping moments of disbelief that caused me to question my very existence, I'm old enough to have experienced Nixon's "Im not a crook," but, Ms. Perino, I tip my hat to you.

Irony is clearly dead, and apparently long forgotten, for reporters to have failed to notice the volume and weight of the lies folded into that simple, "In our opinion, no." Truth has been so thoroughly routed and retooled during the Bush administration that such a patently embarrassing statement by an unctuous press secretary slips by unchallenged. Where have those famous follow-up questions gone? Given the abuses visited upon our Constitution by this administration, has there ever been a better opening for a swift journalistic uppercut to a presidential chin? And yet, the press turns and walks quietly to its corner.

Where else might Ms. Perino have gotten away with this? Well, one can think of many venues in WingNut Nation where this might've come to pass, but few so welcoming as last week's Federalist Society 25th anniversary blowout gala in Washington, D.C. There was the ideal setting, among 1,800 or so of the 35,000 conservative-libertarian-strict-construction-states-rights lawyers of the Federalist Society, *i.e.*, with few exceptions the jurisprudential *intelligentsia* of the conservative movement.

It was not Ms. Perino this time, but the President himself, in fine fettle, who addressed the assembled conservative lawyers. Along the way, Mr. Bush provided a civics lesson, one any eighth grader should know, or used to know:

"When the Founders drafted the Constitution, they had a clear understanding of tyranny. They also had a clear idea about how to prevent it from ever taking root in America. Their solution was to separate the government's powers into three co-equal branches: the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary. Each of these branches plays a vital role in our free society. Each serves as a check on the others. And to preserve our liberty, each must meet its responsibilities -- and resist the temptation to encroach on the powers the Constitution accords to others." (Applause.) The Full Speech

Note: Applause. Well, it *was* the Federalist Society, the forthright conservative defenders of our Constitution, and it was a conservative President they were appreciating. Yet, as Daniel Patrick Moynihan once observed, "Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts." And somehow, in the admittedly dim light that flickered from the Presidential podium that evening, these "conservative" flag bearers and icons missed the big picture that's emerged in the past seven years: the Bush/Cheney attack on the concept of separation of powers; the abuse of the War Powers of the Presidency; the attempt to tear away the fabric of constitutional liberties; the treatment of Congressional oversight as tantamount to

treason; the trampling of the concept of privacy inherent in the Bill of Rights; the legal and moral defense of torture; the pogram to politicize the Department of Justice, its Civil Rights Division and Voting Rights Section; and the other shameful acts that are suggested by these known misdeeds, and which, given the administration's secrecy fetish, may never see the light of day.

In full knowledge of the backdrop of this indictment of bedrock conservative principles, the Federalist Society gave a round of applause to Mr. Bush's words about "separation of powers" and "tyranny" and the importance of "resist[ing] the temptation to encroach." *This* is a *conservative's* response? If this is now the conservative viewpoint -- if *conservatives* are now comfortable with a concept of conservatism that permits the Bush administration's revolutionary and tyrannical Constitutional mischief -- then our Nation is truly in a dark night, and as F. Scott Fitzgerald noted, there, "it is always 3 a.m., day after day."

And it's the darkness now upon the land that perhaps explains why there was no follow-up to Ms. Perino's "In our opinion, no," and why Mr. Bush was rewarded with Federalist Society applause rather than rebuffed in stunned silence. This stumbling in the darkness by those who proudly view themselves as being among the primary protectors of our Constitution -- the press and the conservative movement -- will take a sustained burst of light to correct and to once again illuminate the way home.