

Nygaard Notes

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PLEDGE DRIVE ♦ PLEDGE DRIVE

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Greetings,

This is the SECOND week of the first Nygaard Notes Pledge Drive of 2010. As soon as the Pledge Drive is over we'll get back to publishing as usual.

Already eleven of you have either renewed your Pledge, sent in your new Pledge, or committed to get something sent in before the end of the month. Thank you!

Now we need the rest of you to get in the spirit. Help to make this newsletter the best it can possibly be. I'm really hoping to shut this Pledge Drive down by the end of the month, but I can only do that if I have a good response to the Drive, including a few brand-new Pledgers. Will you be one of them? I hope so! Make your Pledge today – the end of January approaches.

This issue tells you how you can support Nygaard Notes in ways *other* than making an official Pledge, and I also offer in this issue a thought or two about what I think my job is in the Age of Obama. It's a little bit different than it was under the age of W.

I hope this Pledge Drive will be a short one. Please help to make that true by sending in your Pledge THIS WEEK. Thanks!

Nygaard

What Your 2010 Pledge Will Be Supporting: Nygaard Notes in the Age of Obama

Nygaard Notes was born when Bill Clinton was President, and most of the current readers came on board while George W. Bush was residing in the White House. What, now, for Nygaard Notes in the Age of Obama?

I commented a couple of weeks ago that the year 2009 in the Notes marked a period of somewhat longer, more in-depth essays than had been the standard for the past few years. When I asked myself if there were any particular reason for that, I discovered that there is, and that it has to do with Barack Obama. Or, rather, with the “change” that has come about since the 2008 Obama campaign. No, not *that* change. The change in us.

I'm old enough to remember the election of Bill Clinton and the excitement that many felt then, as they saw it as... The End of the Reagan Years! For heaven's sake, I'm old enough to remember the election of Jimmy Carter and the excitement at... The End of the Nixon Years! So my excitement about the election of Barack Obama—The End of the Bush Years!—was tempered by my knowledge of history.

My greatest hope is that millions and millions of USAmericans become disillusioned by the Obama administration. I mean that literally, in the sense that I hope people will let go of some important illusions about how power works and about how social change comes about in a society as large and out of balance as is the modern United States.

One of the most important illusions that obstructs our capacity for social change is the “Heroic Individual” illusion. I talk all the time about Individualism (I call it one of the Three Pillars of American Ideology, along with Dualism and Fetishized Freedom; see NN #174 and #146). The Heroic Individual model is the model that most of us have been taught to use in understanding history. You know how it goes: George Washington founded the Republic. Abraham Lincoln ended slavery. Barack Obama inaugurated a post-racial era in the United States. Let's use the example of Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation as an example. An individualist would say that the Proclamation was

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signed because Lincoln was a remarkable man. I would say that the remarkable thing was the social movement that built up over decades and made it possible—no, demanded—that slavery be formally ended.

This more complex interpretation of history does not deny the unique gifts of the famous people who populate our history books. But it goes beyond that to recognize that such people traveled on roads paved by the energy of innumerable other remarkable individuals. And that they drew support from social movements built up over time. And that they lived in certain historical moments that shaped and gave outlets to their gifts.

Now, in 2010, we too live in a certain historical moment. Many of us seemed to forget that fundamental truth during the 2008 campaign, allowing ourselves to buy into the illusion that Barack Obama—himself, the individual—was going to usher in some sort of “change” through force of will, or political skill, or something. That’s why this particular illusion is dangerous: It gets people to expect “someone” to make change happen, and to forget that the “someone” is us.

There is a reason why Richard Nixon was, in many ways, more “progressive” (at least domestically) than Bill Clinton. He was driving on the roads of the 1960s/70s. Bill Clinton was driving on the post-Reagan roads of the 1990s. That’s why systems thinkers did not expect an individual—even the charismatic and articulate Obama—to execute much “change” of any substance, regardless of his intentions. We understand that a President is simply a driver, and as long as all the roads lead to Empire, he or she will inevitably steer us in that direction, however we get there. So we focus our attention on changing the map, not on changing the driver. At the same time, a new map will usually need a new driver. It’s never simple!

Once we come to see the social structure of the United States as just that—a structure, not the result of a leader’s orders—we can begin to understand why we are not only still in Afghanistan, but are escalating the violence there. We can begin to understand the failure to seriously address climate change. And we can begin to understand the persistent economic inequality that characterizes life in the U.S. Something seems to have prompted millions of people to believe that these were among the things that would change if we only were to elect a “good man” to the Presidency. Even the most

fervent believers in the goodness of Barack Obama are beginning to see that real change must require something more. That something more is what Nygaard Notes is interested in.

Nygaard Notes in 2010?

The reason that the average Nygaard Notes issue was shorter under the Bush administration is that it didn’t take so many words to illustrate the workings of Empire when the neoconservatives served up so many lazy pitches that anyone could hit out of the park. (A rare sports metaphor in the pages of Nygaard Notes!)

Obama offers up fewer lazy pitches, since he is more articulate and seems to have a little more going on upstairs than did his predecessor. For Nygaard Notes, this is leading me to focus more on the social/cultural/institutional realities that I think help to explain why things seem to be changing so little. So far this has meant more multi-part series than usual, and more double issues. I expect that to continue.

Your 2010 Pledge will be supporting more analysis of longer-term trends and more attempts to understand the non-electoral factors which explain the words of Edward Luttwak from last week’s 2009 “Quote” of the Year: “All is constantly changing as rulers and nations rise and fall. Only the empire is eternal.”

Obama must navigate using the Map of Empire that has been bequeathed to him by the many decades of Empire building that is the history of the United States. Helping people to see that imperial map—to help people see that there IS such a map—is what I consider to be the job of Nygaard Notes, or at least a good part of it.

And, more than that, Nygaard Notes will continue to do what I like to call Imagination Rejuvenation. Can we imagine a different United States, a different world? One based less on capitalist accumulation and more on human life? I think our imaginations have become a little stunted. That’s why I try to help myself—and, in the process, all of the readers of the Notes—to think big, to have a vision, and to let that vision motivate us.

2010. Time to dig down deep, to understand where we are and how we got here. Time to look up high to see where we might go and imagine how to get there. That’s the coming year in Nygaard Notes. Should you choose to make a Pledge—and I hope you will—this is what you will be supporting. Thank you! ♦

Creative Ways to Support Nygaard Notes

Some of you may not want to commit to an annual Pledge to the Notes, but you still would like to support the project. Or, perhaps you have already made a Pledge and would like to extend your support in additional ways. Well, there are other ways, besides making a Pledge, that you can contribute to the Nygaard Notes project. Here are some ideas for you:

1. You could support the Notes by making a...
ONE-TIME DONATION FOR A NEW
NYGAARD NOTES COMPUTER.

Nygaard Notes needs to upgrade it's technology. Many of you made contributions back in 2004 to help with the last upgrade, when I bought my last new computer. Well, almost six years have gone by, and it's becoming clear to me that I need to upgrade again. So... **I plan to purchase a new Dell PC on February 9th, and will gladly accept any one-time donations to help defray the costs of this necessary and overdue upgrade.** I will also have to purchase a new printer, a new modem, and who-knows-what-else. Everything I have is too old to be compatible with a new system. So, that will be the major expense for this year. Total cost I expect to be in the range of \$700 or so. Yikes!

2. You could support the Notes by making a...
NON-CASH DONATION OF EQUIPMENT.

Speaking of new printers and such, some of you may have surplus high-tech items sitting around that Nygaard Notes could use! In addition to the above-mentioned

printer (plain black-and-white laser printer, for printing tables, reports, text files, etc), here is a short list of the machines that are needed here at Headquarters:

- * An external hard drive for backing up the Notes and related files;
- * A flat-screen monitor to replace the ancient machine that has served me so well for so long;
- * Maybe a modem. I can't seem to learn from Qwest whether I need a new one or not.
- * A really good surge protector.
- * A 16 GB flash drive. I like to do double backups frequently.
- * A new bicycle. Oops, that's not a Nygaard Notes expense! Never mind...

3. You could support the Notes by...
SPREADING THE WORD.

How? Well, you could...

- * Re-publish, or re-post, issues that you particularly like
- * Link to Nygaard Notes on your website or in your emails
- * Forward specific pieces to your friends and family and encourage them to subscribe
- * Tell your friends about the Notes
- * Give gift subscriptions (you don't have to tell the recipient that subscriptions are free)
- * Print out PDF copies of the paper version of the Notes and leave copies in your favorite hangouts.

Maybe you have other ideas. If so, get in touch. ♦

How to Go About Making a Pledge

You'd like to support Nygaard Notes with a Pledge, you say? Well, here's how:

You can make out a check to "Nygaard Notes," and mail it to

**Nygaard Notes
P.O. Box 14354
Minneapolis, MN 55414**

OR you can

Go to the Nygaard Notes website at www.nygaardnotes.org, look for "Donate to Nygaard Notes, and follow the instructions to donate online using the PayPal system.

Thanks for your support! ♦

“Quotes” of the Week

Praise for the Notes in 2010

Everyone has their own reasons for supporting the Notes, and for making a Pledge. Here are a few comments that readers have recently sent along.

Just before this Pledge Drive began I received a contribution from a reader in Minneapolis (proving that you don't have to wait for a Pledge Drive to donate!) and he sent a note along with his contribution. This man said:

“I enjoy the scope and depth of your analysis and appreciate the obvious effort you put into each issue. Thank you.”

That man lives about five miles from Nygaard Notes World Headquarters. About two weeks earlier a man who lives about 10,000 miles from NNHQ sent the following note:

“Thanks for your hard work—you're helping make 2010 a year for greater fairness, justice and freedom for us all.”

And, right after the first of the year, a reader in Washington DC re-posted my piece on Honduras to her website, saying:

“I really like your take on empire... Thanks for bringing these issues as they relate to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and our other imperial exploits to the fore.”

Hard work. Bringing important issues to the fore. Yeah, that's what it's all about!

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Subscriptions are \$25.00 for 40 issues, which just covers the cost of printing and mailing. Go to the website for details.