

Opinion

US - "Civil War in the United States?"

Immanuel Wallerstein

Tuesday 17 March 2009, posted by [John Malone](#)

March 15, 2009 - We are getting accustomed to all sorts of breakdowns of taboos. The world press is full of discussion about whether it would be a good idea to "nationalize" banks. None other than Alan Greenspan, disciple of the superlibertarian prophet of pure market capitalism, Ayn Rand, has recently said that we have to nationalize banks once every hundred years, and this may be that moment. Conservative Republican Senator Lindsay Graham agreed with him. Left Keynesian Alan Blinder discussed the pros and cons of this idea. And while he thinks the cons are a bit bigger than the pros, he was willing to spend public intellectual energy writing about this in the New York Times.

Well, after hearing nationalization proposals by arch-conservative notables, we are now hearing serious discussions about the possibilities of civil war in the United States. Zbigniew Brzezinski, apostle of anti-Communist ideology and President Carter's National Security Advisor, appeared on a morning television talk show on February 17, and was asked to discuss his previous mention of the possibility of class conflict in the United States in the wake of the worldwide economic collapse.

Brzezinski said he was worried about it because of the prospect of "millions and millions of unemployed people facing dire straits," people who have become aware "of this extraordinary wealth that was transferred to a few individuals without historical precedent in America."

He reminded the listeners that, when there was a massive banking crisis in 1907, the great financier, J.P. Morgan, invited a group of wealthy financiers to his home, locked them in his library, and wouldn't let them out until they all kicked in money for a fund to stabilize the banks. Brzezinski said: "Where is the monied class today? Why aren't they doing something: the people who made billions?"

In the absence of their doing something on a voluntary basis, Brzezinski said, "there's going to be growing conflict between the classes and if people are unemployed and really hurting, hell, there could even be riots!"

Almost simultaneously, a European agency called LEAP/Europe that issues monthly confidential Global Europe Anticipation Bulletins for its clients - politicians, public servants, businessmen, and investors - devoted its February issue to global geopolitical dislocation. The report did not paint a pretty picture. It discussed the possibility of civil war in Europe, in the United States, and Japan. It foresaw a "generalized stampede" that will lead to clashes, semi-civil wars.

The experts have some advice: "If your country or region is a zone in which there is a massive availability of guns, the best thing you can do...is to leave the region, if that's possible." The only one of these countries which meets the description of massively available guns is the United States. The head of LEAP/Europe, Franck Biancheri, noted that "there are 200 million guns in circulation in the United States, and social violence is already manifest via gangs." The experts who wrote the report asserted that there is already an ongoing emigration of Americans

to Europe, because that is "where physical danger will remain marginal."

If Brzezinski hopes for the emergence of another J.P. Morgan in the United States to force sense upon the "monied" class, the LEAP/Europe report sees a "last chance" in the April 2 London meeting of the G20, provided the participants come forward with a "convincing and audacious" plan.

These analyses are not coming from left intellectuals or radical social movements. They are the openly expressed fears of serious analysts who are part of the existing Establishment in the United States and Europe. Verbal taboos are broken only when such people are truly fearful. The point of breaking the taboos is to try to bring about major rapid action - the equivalent of J.P. Morgan locking the financiers in his home in 1907.

It was easier in 1907.

Commentary No. 233.

These [commentaries](#), published twice monthly, are intended to be reflections on the contemporary world scene, as seen from the perspective not of the immediate headlines but of the long term.

Copyright by Immanuel Wallerstein, distributed by Agence Global. For rights and permissions, including translations and posting to non-commercial sites, and contact: rights at [agenceglobal.com](mailto:rights@agenceglobal.com), 1.336.686.9002 or 1.336.286.6606. Permission is granted to download, forward electronically, or e-mail to others, provided the essay remains intact and the copyright note is displayed. To contact author, write: [immanuel.wallerstein\(AT\)yale.edu](mailto:immanuel.wallerstein(AT)yale.edu).

Permission granted by the author on December 8th, 2006.