

I know I haven't written a rant in a long time now - been very very busy at work. I wanted to share this excerpt from an exchange I had with my friend Mary, who is currently traveling in Europe. She starts by commenting on the news (seen from the perspective of a hotel in Florence, Italy) and my reply:

On Thu, 2005-11-17 at 03:10 -0800, MARYÂ wrote:

The news has been really interesting lately hasn't it? I watch CNN in the room, a real treat for me. Bush's popularity is what now? 36%?

It is really starting to get interesting. There is just this steady drumbeat of bad news lately. The cronyism exposed by the Katrina disaster is just the tip of the iceberg. The past few days have seen some really interesting developments:

1. Ken Tomlinson, an ardent conservative (former editor of Reader's Digest) whom Clinton appointed to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and who Bush elevated to chairman of that group, was forced to step down from CPB two weeks ago. He had rammed through the Wall Street Journal show at a cost of \$4.5 million/year and was bent on correcting what he saw as a liberal slant to PBS and NPR. He went so far as to hire a former lobbyist to watch 600 hours of PBS talk shows and score the guests as liberal or conservative (ranking such conservative die-hards as Chuck Grassley as liberal when they disagreed with Bush). Anyway, an Inspector General's report came out this week saying that Tomlinson had broken the law as well as violated CPB guidelines when he hired lobbyists, fired people (some for not being conservatives) ran out the former president and replaced her with a Republican party fundraiser, etc. etc. More to come.

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/july-dec05/kenny_11-15.html

2. David Gunn was recently fired as head of Amtrak. This is the man who turned around the NYC subway system many years ago, and was brought in to solve Amtrak's perennial problems - a feat he has largely achieved. He was fired by a runt Amtrak board last week because he disagreed with their (and the Bush administration's) goal of dismantling the railway. The 7 member board, however, currently lacks quorum - there are now only four members (5 are required for quorum) and three vacancies - the situation for a few years now. Two of the current members are Bush recess appointees whom the Senate wouldn't confirm, and their appointments will end when congress adjourns in a few weeks. It would seem, then, that this body is operating illegally, and congress is preparing to restore Gunn to his job. Investigations have begun.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/16/national/16amtrak.html?pagewanted=print>

Taken individually, these seem like minor stories, but when combined, and with the constant trickle of news about political machinations in the Plamegate affair, the Jack Abramhof case, Tom DeLay's indictment, Bill Frist's stock sales, etc. etc., we start to see the "culture of corruption" (as the Democrats like to say) and an arrogance of power of startling proportions for a party which has only held the majority for a decade.

It is manifest that the party most in control of power is the most likely to get caught up in corruption scandals, but with the Republicans in control of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary we haven't seen too many cracks in the armor up till now. With the President's poll numbers sinking to unheard of lows, however, and the dismal performance of their party in the recent elections, the Republicans in congress are now starting to question their own. Once the wheels start to come off of the wagon like this, it is only a matter of time.

It is often said that Bush was a keen observer of his father's presidency and was determined not to make the same mistakes in his own. This White House has often been compared to Nixon's in its efficiency, loyalty and secrecy. Now, perhaps, in its corruption, cronyism and criminality as well.

Keep having fun!