

Principalities & Powers

by Samuel Francis

There's a bad moon on the rise, and as 1990 drew to a close, the American ruling class began to huddle in its tents to meet the coming storm. When ex-Klansman David Duke seized 44 percent of the vote in Louisiana's senatorial election last October, the howling of the political cyclone could be heard even in the cellars of New York and Washington, where the oligarchy's augurs at once set to work to explain away the tempest as just a light rain. Louisiana's voters are racist, whined the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. The state is economically depressed. It was all Ronald Reagan's fault anyway.

The pundits may actually believe their own propaganda, and it's just as well if they do, since it means that once again they've managed to miss the point and lose the message Mr. Duke's supporters were sending. Duke did not run as a Nazi or a Klansman, but neither did he campaign as the kind of conservative that is now fashionable, and no one has accused him of being liberal. Indeed, one of his two opponents, Ben Baggert, was precisely a fashionable sort of conservative Republican, and Duke ripped his political throat out. Three weeks before the election, Mr. Baggert's campaign fell apart like a wet grocery sack, and his top aides resigned. Two days before the election, Mr. Baggert himself withdrew and endorsed the Democrat, third-term Senator Bennett Johnston, and a whole flock of Republican geese suddenly flapped south to honk in Mr. Johnston's support. Had it not been for such last-minute devices, Duke would almost certainly have forced a runoff and perhaps would have wasted Mr. Johnston as thoroughly as he did Mr. Baggert. Thus does the oligarchy close ranks when it spies the lightning of revolution flash in the darkening sky.

Of course, by itself, Mr. Duke's ability to gain votes does not constitute a revolution, nor does the candidate himself seem to promise much as a serious leader of one. He simply carries too much baggage, and there are persistent rumors about irregularities in his personal life, which, if true, point to serious character flaws and threaten an

eventual political embarrassment. Whatever his plans for the future, Mr. Duke and his supporters shouldn't count on holding high elective office. He can at most be a gadfly, and perhaps the best thing for him to do now would be to institutionalize the movement he has started in a nationwide organization that could exert cultural and indirect political power and radicalize Middle American consciousness still further.

But despite Mr. Duke's shortcomings, the election of October 6 was not a fluke, and it could be the first rumblings of a new national political force that rejects the dominant political culture and the increasingly meaningless poles of right and left between which it shuffles. More than twenty years ago, George Wallace, who was in the same mold as Mr. Duke, declared that there wasn't a dime's worth of difference between the two major parties, and the hasty coalition between left and right formed to make sure Duke didn't cause any more trouble pretty much proves he was correct.

Not only the Duke election but also the paralysis of the federal government over the same weekend shows that the old order is simply out of gas. The President and Congress wheeled and dealt and ran off the road trying to draft a miraculous budget that would placate all the parasites while at the same time not bankrupt the country. The recession that began to settle over the economy, the threat of a war in the Middle East on behalf of a "new world order" that is irrelevant and inimical to real American interests, the disgust that most voters express for Congress, and the apparent end of the Cold War all point to the exhaustion of incumbent elites, the uselessness of their ideologies, and the readiness of many Americans to forge a new identity that reflects their real needs, interests, and values.

There is, in fact, statistical support for this thesis. One month before the election in Louisiana, the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Polls released a comprehensive survey of political opinions in the United States, a sequel to a similar survey published in 1987. The study divided the electorate into several groups called "attitudinal

clusters," and it found no category larger than the one it labeled the "Disaffecteds." In 1987 this group comprised 9 percent of the adult population, and by last year it had grown to 12 percent. It leans toward the Republican Party, but the GOP has not been able to secure its loyalty, and it remains volatile, ready to follow whoever has the boldness to lead it.

The Times Mirror survey characterizes the Disaffecteds as "alienated and pessimistic" and "highly suspicious of all forms of authority, alienated from both the political and economic establishment, aggravated by constant financial pressure, and ready to defect politically at the slightest provocation." The Disaffecteds bear a striking resemblance to, and may be identical with, the group sociologist Donald I. Warren in 1974 called the "Middle American Radicals," or MARs, who perceived themselves as caught in an iron sandwich between an irresponsible and oppressive elite, on the one hand, and, on the other, a ravenous underclass that the elite supports at the expense of the middle class. The MARs were the core of the Wallace constituency, and it is likely they would support a candidate like David Duke, baggage or no baggage, wearing a Klan bedsheet or a Dacron suit bought at K-Mart.

But even outside the Disaffected category, the Times Mirror survey found a "significant intensification" of feelings of alienation, mistrust, disillusion with politics, and helplessness. While there was little evidence of increasing racial intolerance, "there has been a greater proportionate increase in feelings of economic pressure among middle-income whites and greater indications of personal alienation among poor white people than among blacks." One of the most interesting changes in opinion was the decline of the perception of communism as a threat, but at the same time the survey concluded that "the American public remains as militant and nationalist as it was a few years ago," and there has been an increase in hostility toward Japan, Israel, and Mexico. Nationalism, the survey found, is linked with economic pessimism as well as with unfavorable opinions about Japan.

Obviously, the attitudes recorded by the Times Mirror survey do not constitute a coherent ideology, but they do point to profound dissatisfactions that cannot be resolved within the framework of left-right politics. Attitudes that might be classed as "conservative" seem to coexist with those that would normally be called "liberal," and what is significant is that not much of anyone seems to support increased opportunities for minorities, more immigration, spreading democracy abroad, freer trade, deregulation, and all the other wise and wonderful gimmicks that pseudo-conservatives like to play with. Nor do very many people seem to support what the left wants in the way of increased taxes and a more active governmental role in redesigning social institutions.

The fundamental social and political conflict that is emerging in the United States and to which the "alienation" reflected in the Times Mirror survey points is not between left and right, neoconservative and paleoconservative, state and individual, black and white, Jew and Christian, Yankee and Southerner, or rich and poor. All these divisions merely feed the main conflict, which is between elite and non-elite. The former consists of the interconnected groups that predominate in the bureaucratic organizations of government, the economy, and culture and that use their power to dissolve the nonbureaucratic social institutions that limit and resist their hegemony. The elite makes use of universalist, progressivist ideologies that offer justifications for its apparatus of power as well as for the functions the apparatus performs in managing the economy and environment, redistributing wealth, building the new world order, and reconstructing the domestic social order by providing "therapy" for every "problem" from smoking cigarettes to practicing genocide. The structure of power the elite has built up is also used by various gangs and subfactions of all kinds that seek no ideological goals but simply want to fill their pockets, stay in office, or twist public policies for their own benefit. The structure is thus tyrannical and corrupt at the same time, seeking to destroy the social order as well as to exploit it on its way to destruction.

The non-elite consists of everyone

who does not control or gain from this structure. In the terms of abstract political theory, the non-elite is the "people," but today, in the wake of the cultural fragmentation the elite has inflicted, it is difficult to apply that term, which presupposes a shared body of institutions and beliefs. In the United States today, there virtually is no "people" any more; there are only "clusters," fragments that share only the non-vocal perception that somebody else is in the saddle and is slapping leather toward a precipice.

It is precisely because of the deracination of the American people that these fragments now constitute a radical, perhaps a revolutionary, force, dispossessed of their traditional culture, denied political expression, and increasingly endangered by the "global economy." But the clusters by themselves will not engender a revolution or form the myths, ideologies, organizations, and agendas of revolt. Only leadership can accomplish that, which is why people like Mr. Duke and those who may soon start emulating him are important. They—if there is a "they"—have the opportunity to build not just a coalition or a third party but a new people, as it were, by uniting these clusters and informing them with a new understanding of who they are and what destiny they should seek. That, more or less, is what various black leaders are trying to do today through articulating a myth of "Afrocentric" history and reformulating political and cultural issues in terms of that myth. It ought to be rather obvious that "Afrocentrism," whatever its other virtues, doesn't have much to say to non-black Americans, and the myths, history, and identity of white Americans are increasingly suppressed and delegitimized by the elite itself.

The main task now for the would-be leaders of the Middle American Revolution is therefore to formulate a comprehensive myth able to express the alienation that prevails among the culturally immiserated and economically threatened Middle American proletariat and hammer it into an effective sword. The kind of myth that is needed today must raise this proletariat from a passive state of disgruntlement to being an active force of social and political power. It is doubtful that orthodox paleoconservative, traditionalist, or lib-

ertarian ideas can be very helpful in forming such a myth, since the social and political order they were designed to reflect and defend no longer exists. A new myth, to be effective, must solidify the fragments of that order and prepare them for a protracted challenge to the incumbent elite's apparatus of power, with the ultimate goal of dismantling that apparatus, displacing the elite, and constructing a new order. "Myths," wrote Georges Sorel, "are not descriptions of things, but expressions of a determination to act. . . . A myth cannot be refuted, since it is, at bottom, identical with the convictions of a group, being the expression of those convictions in the language of movement." Given the fragmentation of the old order, much paleoconservatism is today not the language of movement but of antiquarianism.

But it is certain that what now passes for mainstream conservatism has nothing at all to say to those fragments. The evening before the election in Louisiana, neoconservative guru Jack Kemp addressed the 35th anniversary celebration of *National Review* at a banquet at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City. Mr. Kemp boasted of how he had endorsed Bennett Johnston and opposed David Duke, and he affirmed his own dedication to the ideals and principles of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. William F. Buckley, announcing his retirement the same evening, proclaimed that he considered it his greatest achievement to have driven "extremists" from the conservative movement he led from the 1950's.

But by purging itself of "extremists" and seeking alliance with the urban intellectual establishment of the Northeast, movement conservatism effectively insulated itself from one side of the major social and political conflict of our time and now has been consumed by the elite itself, even to the point of deluding itself into thinking that John Kennedy and Martin Luther King were conservatives. Whether Mr. Kemp swayed any votes in Louisiana and whether Mr. Duke's supporters can really be called "conservatives" at all anymore is doubtful. Down there they never had many illusions about Kennedy, or King, or Kemp, and they don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind is blowing. ◊



Anna Mycek-Wodecki

Divorce Italian Style

by Thomas Fleming

When I told friends that I was going to Italy to study the political situation there, the usual response was an amused puzzlement. Italian politics, I was informed, is like the Italian army: a grand opera performance of a comic opera plot. I am not so sure. Since the later Middle Ages, the Italians have been feuding and fighting in a grand style that often looks suicidal, but what are the results? The Renaissance, Italian opera, and—most recently—a standard of living that combines a high disposable income (largely unreported) with an everyday life that the American leisure class can only envy. The difference between Italy and the United States can be measured most simply by considering the table. Over there, everything is fresh, local, and wonderfully prepared—four and five course meals, washed down by wine that cannot be successfully exported beyond the region. Here, on the other hand, hardly one American in five knows how to prepare the simplest meal from scratch.

Even in politics, the Italians may have a few lessons to teach. Perhaps because Italian public life has always been a cynical game, Italian political thinkers have written about politics with a remarkable candor. In *The Machiavellians*, James Burnham traces an intellectual history from the

author of *The Prince* down to Mosca and Pareto. Today one might wish to include the occasionally brilliant Communist Antonio Gramsci as well as Giovanni Sartori, now at Columbia University. But, my friends tell me, look at how often the Italians change their government. Really? Since the 1950's, we have had eight Presidents; however, in looking back over the past 35 years of Italian politics, one sees only the figure of Giulio Andreotti. As one Sicilian gentleman told me on a train, "Mussolini was a dictator, of course, but so is Andreotti, only he is not so good a ruler as Mussolini."

Where else in the world would a retired businessman tell a stranger not only that he was a Fascist during the war, but—worse—that after years of being an anti-Fascist, he has come round to preferring Il Duce to the current rascals? "At least he tamed, if only temporarily, the Mafia. It was your President Roosevelt who turned Sicily back over to Lucky Luciano." It is a story that every Italian seems to know and of which every American is ignorant, how FDR cut the deal with Luciano, who threatened the Sicilians with retaliation if they resisted the American invasion. In return, the Mafia was restored to its former glory. These twin subjects, the corrupt despotism of the government and the