

by Samuel Francis

Stupid and Proud

When the editors of the *New Republic* told writer Stephen Rodrick to get his cute little fanny down to Washington's Omni Shoreham Hotel and cover the first conference of Pat Buchanan's American Cause Foundation last May, Mr. Rodrick must have felt something like a character in Sartre's "No Exit." The prospect of idling for an entire weekend among the sworn enemies of Robert Mapplethorpe and Hillary Clinton is about as enticing an assignment for a budding New Republican as reporting on the recent water-tasting contest in Berkeley Springs, West Virginia. Nevertheless, even the Buchanan Brigades might be good for a snort, he probably figured, and who knows, he might get to meet a real, live anti-Semite of the kind he's read so much about.

So Mr. Rodrick came, saw, and reported, and his magazine duly carried his reportage in its June 7 issue. He never met any anti-Semites, but he seems to have had himself a grand old time anyhow.

"[M]others in floral-print dresses, red-necks selling 'Keep Our Privates Straight' stickers, clergy adorned in pro-life fetus buttons and respected conservative thinkers in navy blue suits grab croissants and pour themselves coffee in Delft cups," he snickered. Mr. Rodrick didn't seem to get much out of the speeches at the conference except a few madcap quotes that *New Republic* readers must think just rip the lid off what the Buchanans are really up to, but he sure enjoyed himself making fun of the people. The subject of the conference was "Winning the Culture War," and there were citizens on hand who picket abortion centers, organize grass-roots efforts against homosexual rights, and think the public schools ought to be closed down by the local vice squad. There was a black woman—Ezola Foster of Los Angeles—who praised the Los Angeles Police Department. Then there was the lunch of what Mr. Rodrick distastefully and not entirely accurately described as "ham sandwiches and Nilla Wafer pie," which was probably not at all like what they put into their mouths over

at the *New Republic*. And there was even a man from Altoona, Pennsylvania.

That, however, is about as close to anti-Semitism as the impenetrable Mr. Rodrick could get. He had to content himself with a longish account of Mrs. Foster, who "discusses the difficulty in expressing alternative viewpoints in the African-American community but soon veers into a forty-five minute filibuster detailing exactly how alternative her views really are." It seems Mrs. Foster not only likes the LAPD but also believes that Jesse Jackson and certain other black leaders should be in jail and that public schools have become socialist training centers. Well, now, we at the *New Republic* are all for "alternatives," of course, but that wasn't precisely what we had in mind, especially for "African-Americans." Regrettably, Mr. Rodrick never asked Mrs. Foster what she thought of his magazine. Had she told him, he might have lost his Nilla Wafer pie even before the conference was over.

You can't expect more from the *New Republic* and its lesser lights than the sophomoric snobbery dressed up as enlightenment that Mr. Rodrick burped out in his story. Nor, as it develops, can you expect much more from the magazine generally thought of, in what passes for a free country these days, as the *New Republic's* counterpart on the right, *National Review*. The other NR also sent a reporter to cover the proceedings, one Matt Scully, a former speechwriter for Dan Quayle, and Mr. Scully also spent the first paragraph of his article putting a bit of distance between the inhabitants of the conference and the Uptown Right as represented by his own journal. Among the funny-faces Mr. Scully spied were "young staffers who look as if they have just left Salt Lake City on their first mission abroad" and "a woman in satin gloves and a sun hat with crepe veil, recalling Barbara Stanwyck or Claire Trevor in a 1940's thriller." These, he fretted, were "the sort of political eccentrics who make for 'they're-not-like-us' caricatures in the *Washington Post* Style section."

But Mr. Scully went on to say that such "eccentrics" were indeed "principled and articulate, and prefer winning elections to winning good ink in the Style section." That's nice, but for some

reason he, like Mr. Rodrick, felt compelled to crack wise about the good folks who attended.

The fact is that there just weren't very many oddwads at the Buchanan conference. I have been attending gatherings of the right for some 24 years, and I have seldom seen a more normal-looking crowd than showed up for this one. These were, almost to a man and woman, Middle Americans, principled and articulate to be sure, but also the kind of people you'd be glad to see walking toward you in a parking lot after dark. If it's funny-faces you want, go to any one of the various conclaves sponsored by the mainstream "conservative movement." At these geekfests, you will indeed run into young men who look like fugitives from the Nerd Room in *Animal House*, as well as the usual gaggle of "populists" who rally the masses by direct mail from Northern Virginia, mothers who make good livings defending family values yet haven't seen their own husbands and children since Jimmy Carter was President, and petty functionaries in the federal government who earn handsome fees lecturing on behalf of anarcho-capitalism. As for the *New Republic* and its tribe, if gatherings of conservatives look like the bar scene in *Star Wars*, those of the left usually resemble the basement of the mental hospital in *Silence of the Lambs*.

Moreover, *National Review*, as well as the other unofficial organ of the Stupid Party, *Human Events*, both contrived to miss the larger meaning of the American Cause conference. Mr. Scully used a good part of his article to scratch the back of his old boss, Bill Kristol, a speaker at the conference and former chief of staff to Vice President Quayle, and what both NR and HE found most compelling were Mr. Kristol's comments on a recent *Atlantic Monthly* cover story entitled "Dan Quayle Was Right." This, in the words of *Human Events*, proves to Mr. Kristol and presumably to itself that "reasoned argument can eventually gain ground even with hidebound liberals." Yep, we've got 'em on the run all right. A few more reasoned arguments from Dan and Bill like the ones they came up with last year and we'll have Jeffrey Dahmer in charge of the Food and Drug Adminis-

tration.

Dan Quayle was right about what, exactly? Was Dan Quayle right when he criticized “Murphy Brown” for glamorizing illegitimacy, or was he right a few weeks later when he tried to make nice by sending a letter and a toy stuffed elephant to Murphy’s fictional bastard? Was Dan Quayle right when he blasted the country’s cultural elite for eroding “family values,” or was he right later in the summer when he boasted of the Bush administration’s “very good policy of nondiscrimination” against homosexuals? It’s hard to tell what Dan Quayle was right about because no sooner did he enunciate one cultural position than he renounced it or diluted it shortly afterwards, and by waffling on the rhetoric as well as the substance of cultural conservatism, Mr. Quayle merely made a fool of himself and succeeded in fumbling the chance to frame the cultural issue of the campaign in meaningful terms.

I don’t mean to pick on either Mr. Quayle or the two Stupid Party journals for saluting Mr. Kristol’s generally harmless talk, but their cuddly reception of his speech and some similar ones shows that the really interesting aspects of the American Cause conference sailed right past their horn-rims. What was most interesting about the conference was the presence, for the first time on something like a national stage, of a more or less authentic counterrevolutionary (as opposed to merely conservative) force. And those who gave voice to that force were not the luminaries whom NR and HE found so fascinating but rather a band of obscurities and ne’er-do-wells who were barely noticed by either magazine and who happen to be associated with *Chronicles*.

The counterrevolutionary tactic was implicit in *Chronicles* editor Thomas Fleming’s remark that the cultural war is “New York, essentially, against Nebraska,” which Mr. Scully quotes but can’t understand. Taking Dr. Fleming’s largely metaphorical antithesis literally, Mr. Scully thought it was contradicted by the success of Mary Cummins’ recent rebellion against the New York City schools. Not everybody in New York is a liberal, Fleming. So there.

I will forebear recounting my own speech to the conference, which dealt with the theory and practice of Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “cultural hegemony” and how it might be applied to the causes of the right. I proceeded from the

premise that the main mission of “cultural conservatives” today is not to conserve but to overthrow—namely, the cultural elite and its apparatus of political and cultural power. My remarks happened to receive a standing ovation from the audience of “eccentrics,” but neither *National Review* nor *Human Events* bothered to mention it.

Nor did the similar counterrevolutionary thrust of the speeches of Mrs. Foster and Rabbi Yehuda Levin, who also received a standing ovation, excite much thought from the deadly duo from the conservative press. *National Review* did not even mention them. *Human Events* did mention them but only to make the utterly jejune and somewhat insulting point that having a black and a Jew at the conference refutes the smear that Mr. Buchanan is a racist. Only the Stupid Party really believes that having a couple of blacks and Jews around will save them from being accused of racism. Pat Buchanan, of course, is not a racist, but inviting Mrs. Foster and the several Jewish speakers who were on hand doesn’t prove he isn’t, nor was that why they were invited anyway. *Human Events’* point is so banal that it ought to apologize to the two speakers as well as to Mr. Buchanan.

Paul Gottfried, author of the recently published monograph *The Conservative Movement* and a frequent *Chronicles* contributor, spoke on the subject of how “political correctness” and “multiculturalism” are not merely superstitions of the academy but have now permeated the institutions and minds of the country at large. The implication of Mr. Gottfried’s remarks was that revolt not “conserving” is the appropriate mission of the serious American right today. Finally, classicist E. Christian Kopff, a *Chronicles* contributing editor, delivered perhaps the most forceful address of the whole conference, arguing for an educational system grounded in mathematics and the classical languages as the only means of preserving the main traditions of Western culture in science, thought, language, and religion. As with Dr. Fleming’s remarks, Mr. Gottfried’s, and my own, the implications of Professor Kopff’s speech involve a mission of challenging and overthrowing the incumbent elites of education and culture, not conserving them or fighting them with “reasoned arguments” drawn from the Stupid Party’s repertoire.

Though neither Dr. Fleming’s speech

nor Professor Kopff’s nor mine seemed to register with *Human Events*, Mr. Scully did refer to Mr. Gottfried as what he called a “pockets-of-virtue man”—i.e., one who thinks it’s impossible to recapture the culture or the country and merely advocates retreat to backwaters like Altoona. As it happens, that is the direct opposite of what Mr. Gottfried advocated. The line Mr. Scully drew between “conservatives who aim to ‘recapture the culture’ and those resigned to finding little ‘pockets of virtue’ within it” actually excluded, concealed, and (again) missed the point of the most significant parts of the conference. In Mr. Scully’s view, the real hero of the weekend was—guess who?—Bill Kristol, whose reasoned argument that Dan Quayle was right all along was invigorated by his sense, “as with the Soviets in the early Eighties, of a hollowness at the center.” In Mr. Kristol’s view, you see, the dominance of the cultural left in the United States is about to collapse like the Kremlin state. Once more, we’ve got ’em on the run.

The true line of division at the American Cause conference had nothing to do with “pockets of virtue” or “recapturing the culture.” Everyone, including Mr. Kristol, wanted to accomplish the latter; what they differed on was the tactic by which that can be accomplished and exactly what it is that ought to be recaptured. To the conservative mind, as represented by the reports of *National Review* and *Human Events*, the cultural, social, and political structure of the United States is essentially healthy and needs to be conserved. Hence, there’s no need for radicalism; we just have to sit back and wait for Bill and Hillary to catch up on what the *Atlantic*’s been publishing, for Murphy Brown to get married and the lavender lobby to abandon politics and open a florist’s shop. In the meantime, we should meet the repression, exploitation, lies, smears, and calculated cultural destruction of the left with “reasoned arguments” about family values, global democracy, enterprise zones, and Martin Luther King as a conservative icon. Conservatism thus becomes a counsel of inaction, passivity, infantilistic optimism, and banality.

To the warped minds of *Chronicles* editors and writers, however, the future is not so bright. “Reasoned argument” won’t work with the enemies of Middle America because those enemies don’t care about reason. They care about power and using power to advance them-

selves by subverting American beliefs and institutions. The only way to dislodge them and their power is through countervailing power, which is why Gramsci has more to teach us than Dan Quayle. And the only way to mobilize that countervailing power is to organize the normal people of the nation who come from places like Altoona and Salt Lake City and who gobble down entire buckets of Nilla Wafer pie every day, to engender in them a common consciousness of how they are losing their country, their culture, their wealth, and their political power, and to design and popularize a strategy by which they can do something about it.

And that, of course, is the reason why

Mr. Scully and his editors felt it necessary to put a few cultural miles between themselves and the Middle Americans who attended the conference. If everything is as OK as *National Review* and *Human Events* think, there's no reason to have Middle Americans around at all, and there is in fact some danger in letting them loose in Washington. The folks over at the Style section and the *New Republic* might see them and try to make out that we of the Stupid Party are just like them, and then they'd be caricaturing *National Review* as well. How can we at *National Review*, *Human Events*, and other strategic centers of the Stupid Party enjoy reasoned argument with the cultural elite if the cultural elite

thinks we too eat Nilla Wafer pie and wear funny hats?

The real significance of the American Cause conference was that it showed that there exists at least a nucleus for a Middle American counterrevolutionary force, outside the Republican Party and outside the whole incestuous, complacent, and outright crooked ranks of the mainstream conservative movement. If Mr. Buchanan is smart (which he is), he'll build this nucleus into a broad-based, independent social and political movement, and he'll leave the Uptown Right and the Stupid Party to hold all the reasoned arguments they want with the enemies of American culture.

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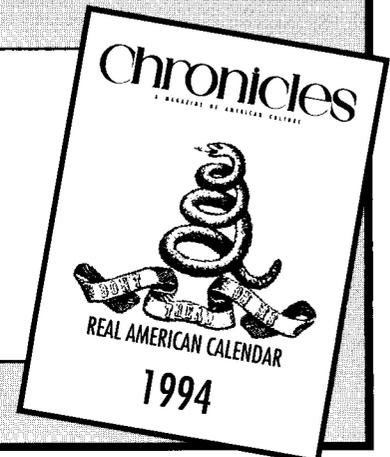
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Anthologies

by George Garrett

In this fat book I find
the signature, my own, my name
done in my same hand but different.
I could not make it that way now.

Summer of 1947 it would have to be.
The copyright is 1946—
A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry:
The Best Poems of the 20th Century.

A bit early then, wouldn't you say?
with this bloody century not yet half done
to be collecting and publishing the best.
Not at that time when everything was new

and wonderful, when so many of these poets,
words on pages, pictures in the back,
were new names to me and even now
look younger than any of us ever were.

Day Lewis, Eberhart, George Barker
and John Manifold are purely and simply
smiling and now are sure enough dead
or dying. Others look deadly serious.

And all but a precious few of them
are long gone to glory or oblivion.
Does anyone alive still miss Gene Derwood
with those wild eyes and that funny hat?

Does anybody else but myself and Mary Lee
Settle still march to Manifold's "Fife Tune"?
Is anyone around to rejoice at the rhymes
of Hildegard Flanner's "Noon On Alameda Street"?

The child who believed he was a man
and scribbled my name in the flyleaf here
went forth like Ransom's "Captain Carpenter"
to read his way through the book of wounds.

And this book sitting on its dark shelf
for years, a buried treasure of shining words,
a safe house assigned to all the dead poets
he loved and cherished at first sight.