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Who Will Speak for Middle America?

A Book Review by Paul Gottfried

BEAUTIFUL LOSERS: ESSAYS ON THE FAILURE OF AMERICAN CONSERVATISM

By Samuel Francis

Columbia, Missouri:

University of Missouri Press, 1993

237 pages, \$37.50

Though widely read as a syndicated columnist, Samuel T. Francis does not enjoy mainstream journalistic respectability. He is not invited onto TV talk shows, even those featuring conservative columnists, and is not part of the political conversation between what Francis regards as the almost (ideologically) indistinguishable right and left. His voice and demeanor, like his political commentary, are unchangingly glum, and his views of the current "conservative movement" so unrelievedly negative that members of that movement will not likely greet this anthology with enthusiasm. Despite undisguised contempt for the "happy talk" of those resigned to being "beautiful losers," what Francis says about the American right is entirely on target. His anthology of essays assails almost every received assumption of respectable N.Y. - D.C. conservatism, especially of its neoconservative kingmakers. He stresses that the Reagan "conservative revolution" actually increased the size and scope of the managerial welfare state. He believes that the defenders of the Reagan presidency contributed to the dangerous illusion that Ronald Reagan had begun to roll back the state created by FDR. In fact, according to Francis, Reagan hardly touched the Great Society, except at the edges, let alone the New Deal, and he left Americans with a greater tax burden (if one factors in added Social Security payments) than had existed in the '70s. Francis is also bothered by the fact that in recent years conservative foundations have spilled rivulets of ink defending the imperial presidency. Francis insists that there is little difference between Republican and Democratic executive bureaucracies, even if leadership changes at the top. Though he may not be aware of it, an exhaustively researched study by Larry M. Schwab published by Transaction Publishers (1991) makes exactly the same argument.

Francis is particularly devastating in mocking self-congratulating conservatives whose major interest in life is securing bureaucratic advancement and federal funds under Republican administrations. Such conservatives are depicted as having no interest in dismantling the welfare state or in antagonizing liberal

mediacrats, upon whom they are socially and professionally dependent. Thus they vie with each other in appearing "compassionate," and "sensitive" to designated minorities, and in justifying the political status quo. Like George Will, one of Francis's targets, they are "beautiful losers" because their concerns are tied up with the present left-liberal ascendancy.

Moreover, members of the respectable conservative movement, as opposed to Francis's Middle American counterrevolutionaries, are mere appendages of the political class. Representatives of the "harmless persuasion," they staff the public administration, and produce variations on liberal public policies to create the appearance of opposition within an unelected permanent administrative state and its media apparatus. And for Francis there is no significant difference between the media and the political class: both are committed to the transfer of power from once self-governing communities to the social engineering judges and bureaucrats who have amassed effective control over American society. Both the vision of a leveled, homogenized human-kind and the belief in managerial manipulation are, for Francis, the defining characteristics of the new class, in its administrative and mediocratic roles.

Significantly, Francis views large corporations as tacit allies in this managerial takeover. The corporate boards that pour money into liberal foundations and neoconservative initiatives for global democracy, he maintains, are supporting changes which they believe will advance their own interests. Multinational corporations favor the breakdown of regionalism, local loyalties, and favor liberal immigration, governmentally-brokered freetrade agreements like NAFTA, and a world consumer culture. If not passionately in favor of everything done and said by government administrators and mediacrats, the directors of large corporations, as typified by Lee Iacocca, Felix Rohatyn, and David Rockefeller are generally happy with a managerially centralized American government and society. It removes the cultural lumpiness that stands in the way of creating a docile consumer public.

Despite my general agreement with this analysis, there is a problem in it that should be noted. Francis pushes too far a belief, which he shares with his mentor James Burnham as well as with Karl Marx and the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, that the dominant class pursues its material and political interests no matter what kinds of fanciful rationales it uses to mask

them. Dan Himmelfarb, in the February issue of *Commentary*, cites Francis's selective use of radical social analysts to present him as a fellow traveler of the far left. The charge is, of course, ludicrous, given the total lack of political correctness in all of Francis's writing and the hostility vented on him by liberal journalists. Nonetheless, it can be objected that Francis does not pay sufficient attention to culture. A biographer of James Burnham, whom he praises in this volume, Francis points to the significance of a "managerial revolution" as the shaping event of the twentieth century. He treats cultural and moral changes as merely incidental to the quest and exercise of power; and he describes himself as an "anti-modern modernist," who accepts a demystified reality but does not believe that human nature is either rational or good.

What should make Sam Francis's anthology particularly informative to *The Social Contract* readers is his awareness of the connection between changing immigration policies and the growth of the managerial state. Francis provides a context for the liberalization of immigration laws, which has occurred since the seventies. State managers and their social worker and educationist loyalists have worked in conjunction with corporate business interests, to change the makeup of American society and to create for themselves an expanding clientele.

Although Francis may not pay enough attention to the cultural upheavals preparing the way for these changes, he does grasp the role of immigration as a factor in the consolidation of managerial power. Bilingualism, mediation between ethnic and racial groups, and the pushing of multiculturalism (really government-mandated monoculturalism), are all activities fostered by federal agencies and their state affiliates for their own benefit. Anything that smacks of multiculturalism and open borders, Francis argues, can also count on at least some support from big business. A cheap work force, with welfare costs distributed among the general population, and a mixing of world populations are appealing to those seeking to cut production expenses and to fashion a larger international market. Such observations, sprinkled throughout the essays, make the entire volume worth reading. They also explain the author's justified reputation as a hardened counter-revolutionary. ■