

Mission to MAR's

JOHN MCCAIN may have just let slip his last best chance to be president of the United States. When he flew back to Washington to address the banking crisis, McCain could have seized the hottest issue in America by taking the side of his countrymen who were enraged by the Paulson plan to bail out a power elite whose greed and stupidity caused a financial disaster unequaled since the crash of '29.

But rather than denounce the Bush-Paulson-Pelosi-Barney Frank plan as a rip-off of taxpayers, lacerate Obama and Co. for bedding down with the kleptocrats of Fannie Mae, and advance his own plan, McCain played the establishment man. He sought modest concessions for the Republican view, urged swift passage and left town.

Working with Democrats rather than battling the establishment has ever been McCain's way. And undeniably, his deserved reputation for bipartisanship helped him to get where he is.

He campaigns proudly on his capacity to work with liberals and has McCain-Feingold, McCain-Lieberman, and McCain-Kennedy to prove it. But as George H.W. Bush and Gerald Ford discovered, the politics of compromise and consensus does not always produce the best result.

The tax hike of 1990 may have destroyed Bush I's presidency, and Ford's nomination of John Paul Stevens to the Supreme Court helped propel the Ronald Reagan challenge.

Philosophically and culturally, we are a divided people. Across the spectrum there are us-versus-them folks who see politics as a zero-sum game between Middle America and a global elite. Below the upper-income brackets and along the center-right are the folks

the late columnist Sam Francis, citing sociologist Donald Warren's 1976 study, called Middle American Radicals.

Nixon brought the "MAR's" to national attention when, as David Broder then wrote, the "breaking of the president" was underway in October 1969. Nixon went on television and called for the Great Silent Majority to stand with him against antiwar demonstrators and rioters in the streets, and for "peace with honor" in Vietnam.

When TV anchors trashed Nixon's speech, he unleashed Spiro Agnew on the establishment media. No White House had ever before attacked the networks or national press for ideological and political bias.

Within a month, Nixon hit 68 percent approval, the apogee of his presidency, and Agnew was the third most admired man in America.

Reagan, by opposing the surrender of the Panama Canal to a leftist dictator, also rallied the MAR's. He lost that battle, but his consolation prize was the GOP nomination and the presidency.

In recent years, we have seen the MAR's rise again and again in roaring rebellion. But invariably, when these rebellions occur, John McCain can be found inside the castle walls.

In 2007, McCain rushed to Washington to support George W. Bush, Ted Kennedy, Bill Clinton, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post* in the drive to grant amnesty to 12 to 20 million illegal aliens. A national firestorm killed the bill and almost killed McCain's campaign.

A year earlier, a MAR's uprising killed the Dubai Ports deal. The power elite was stunned by the explosion of outrage over the leasing of six U.S. ports to Arab sheiks. Nationalism remains a more

potent force than globalism, and not only in America.

In Clinton's first term, McCain stood with the establishment for NAFTA, GATT, the WTO, and the Mexican bailout. Middle America opposed them all.

In the past decade, the MAR's have opposed free-trade deals and lost, but won virtually every referendum on gay marriage, affirmative action, or welfare for illegal aliens. Invariably, the MAR's are portrayed as bigots, nativists, xenophobes, protectionists, and isolationists, and their leaders as demagogues. In McCain's words from 2000, they are "agents of intolerance."

This is fine if you wish to be beloved in Washington, but it may be a fatal impediment if you want to be president.

McCain's problem is that, in 2008, when his old press idolaters have found a new favorite, these are the people who hold his key to the presidency. They are the Democrats who voted against Barack Obama by wide margins in Pennsylvania and Ohio and landslide margins in West Virginia and Kentucky.

These Democrats can still win this race for John McCain. Many admire his war record. But he is not one of them and has taken pride and pleasure in having been their great antagonist.

Could McCain win them back in four weeks? Perhaps. Is he willing to do what is necessary to win them back? Probably not. It would go against his instincts and his image of himself.

The issues that move these folks are not just the \$700 billion bailout of Gordon Gekko's comrades but the invasion of America from Mexico, the export of their jobs, factories, and future to Asia, and the gnawing fear that the country they grew up in is being sacrificed for the benefit of an internationalist elite. ■

Head of State

Is there more to John McCain's rage than just bad temper?
A psychotherapist puts the candidate on the couch.

By Jim Pittaway

HE HAS BEEN CALLED McNasty and Senator Hothead, but John McCain has called his fellow senators far worse. *Newsweek* reported that he “erupted out of the blue” at Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici, saying, “only an a--hole would put together a budget like this.” He called Sen. Chuck Grassley a “f---ing jerk” and capped a profane tirade during last year’s amnesty debate by screaming “f--- you” at Sen. John Cornyn. Then there was the scuffle on the Senate floor with Strom Thurmond when the South Carolina senator was a less-than-spry 93.

No one is immune from his outbursts. A pair of Arizona physicians, Robin Silver and Bob Witzeman, went to meet McCain to discuss their concerns about a telescope project he wanted to fund. “He jumped up and down, screaming obscenities at us for at least 10 minutes,” Silver told *CounterPunch*’s Jeffrey St. Clair. “He shook his fists as if he was going to slug us.”

Even McCain’s family comes under fire. In *The Real McCain*, Cliff Schecter writes:

In his 1992 Senate bid, McCain was joined on the campaign trail by his wife, Cindy. ... At one point, Cindy playfully twirled McCain’s hair and said, ‘You’re getting a little thin up there.’ McCain’s face reddened, and he responded, ‘At least I don’t plaster on the makeup like a trollop, you c---.’

McCain’s excuse was that it had been a long day.

Asked about her husband’s temper on “The View,” Cindy McCain said people mistake his passion for rage. But others are less accommodating. Former Phoenix mayor Paul Johnson has been quoted as saying that McCain is “in the area of being unstable.” Republican senator Bob Smith told the *Washington Post*, “His temper would place this country at risk in international affairs, and the world perhaps in danger. In my mind, it should disqualify him.” During the 2000 campaign, McCain’s hometown newspaper warned of his “volcanic” temper.

This round, the most notable voice questioning the senator’s fitness is conservative George Will, who recently wrote, “For McCain, politics is always operatic, pitting people who agree with him against those who are ‘corrupt’ or ‘betray the public’s trust,’ two categories that seem to be exhaustive—there are no other people. ... It is arguable that McCain, because of his boiling moralism and bottomless reservoir of certitudes, is not suited to the presidency.” Beyond bad manners, Will hints at a dark stream running beneath McCain’s outbursts—impulsive, defiant, unforgiving, narcissistic.

There is something almost medieval about the way McCain cloaks himself in virtue and treats anyone who questions him as unworthy of public trust. His

crusade for campaign-finance reform is a case in point. McCain manipulated the press into bestowing on him the “reformer” mantle and waged a scorched-earth campaign over something relatively superficial, as if it would by itself save America’s troubled democracy. His passion outpaced any perceived benefit. But when McCain gets a notion, he seems to listen only to his inner voices—and staffers and sycophants who echo them. He is always angry at someone, or he is looking for something to be angry about.

McCain’s most devoted supporters hardly disagree—they just think that’s how heroes act. And the candidate himself is dismissive, citing a temperamental streak running through his whole story: “As a young man, I would respond aggressively and sometimes irresponsibly to anyone whom I perceived to have questioned my sense of honor and self-respect.”

But the country faces a more difficult question: Is John McCain’s pattern of volatile behavior simply a matter of style and personality, or is there some underlying cause that makes these well documented traits “driven” and thus dangerous?

Much of the speculation about McCain’s mental status is irresponsible, even defamatory. But there is enough to justify looking through all the smoke to see if his anger is fed by flames he cannot control. Evaluating McCain through this lens makes sense