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POLEMICS & EXCHANGES

On 'America First'

Concerning Thomas Fleming's December Perspective about the America First Committee, anti-interventionists might have taken heart from the statement attributed to Winston Churchill in August 1936 by William Griffen, editor of the New York *Enquirer*: "America should have minded her own business and stayed out of the World War. If you hadn't entered the war the Allies would have made peace with Germany in the Spring of 1917. Had we made peace then there would have been no collapse in Russia followed by Fascism, and Germany would not have signed the Versailles Treaty, which has enthroned Nazism in Germany. If America had stayed out of the war, all these 'isms' wouldn't today be sweeping the continent in Europe and breaking down parliamentary government, and if England had made peace early in 1917, it would have saved over one million British, French, American, and other lives."

—Kenneth McDonald
Willowdale, Ontario, Canada

On 'Environmentalism'

I enjoyed Jigs Gardner's "Letter From Cape Breton Island" (January 1992) on the subject of "The New Utopians." He correctly states that environmentalists are openly utopian, and as such are full of "cocksure ignorance" in support of utopian views. A true utopian has boundless faith in his dream world, and any challenge to that dream is regarded as an example of the unworthiness of mankind to even exist. "We must put civilization in reverse, before it is too late! All we have to do is take our orders and control our every action to be in 'harmony' with the latest fad—population reduction, primitive hardship, and a short, ugly, starving, disease-ridden, preyed-upon 'existence.'" Of course, the Greens would have said it better.

As to Mr. Gardner's liberal arts education, he should not apologize. His letter shows he is way ahead of the mob and has the basics of an inquiring mind, which is the foundation of all liberal arts curricula.

—John A. Fletcher
St. Paul, MN

CULTURAL REVOLUTIONS

WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR. didn't have a spy novel or a yachting saga in him one recent week, and the skiing season in Gstaad hadn't started yet. So he sat himself down and tinkled out a 40,000-word tome titled "In Search of Anti-Semitism." The article—or book, or monster—consumes the entire issue of the December 30, 1991, *National Review*. The major work of the conservative luminary's declining years goes on—and on and on—for no less than 42 double-column pages of Buckleysque bloviation.

Mr. Buckley's ostensible purpose is to ponder whether certain ostensible friends on the right and one ostensible foe on the left are or are not guilty of anti-Semitism. The unusual suspects include his "close friend," protégé and

colleague at *National Review*, Joe Sobran; former columnist and present presidential candidate Patrick J. Buchanan; the *Nation* and its contributor, novelist Gore Vidal; and the *Dartmouth Review*, an undergraduate conservative publication chiefly notable for sophomoric pranks and the ideological equivalent of swallowing goldfish.

No one much cares what Mr. Buckley says about the *Nation* or the Dartmouth fratty-baggers, but his reflections about Mr. Sobran and Mr. Buchanan have stimulated dismay and outright anger among his and their friends on the right. After wending a tortuous path strewn with misapplied logic and overstuffed sentences, Mr. Buckley puffs to a dubious and equivocal conclusion. While he refrains from saying that either suspect is an anti-

Semite, he finds the sentiments expressed by Mr. Sobran "indefensible," and also "finds it impossible to defend Pat Buchanan against the charge that what he did and said during the period under examination amounted to anti-Semitism, whatever it was that drove him to say and do it."

It would be unproductive to retread the road by which Mr. Buckley and a number of others less talented than he have arrived at these non-overwhelming thoughts. Essentially, the case against both Mr. Sobran and Mr. Buchanan consists in applying the most sinister interpretations to the highly figurative language in which both of them (and many other journalists) habitually write. At no time in the several years of controversy over the two individuals in question has anyone who personally knows them well—including their Jewish friends and associates—accused either of them of harboring anti-Semitism or seeking to promote it. Moreover, a number of their friends, Jewish as well as gentile, have defended them against the charge. In the absence of such accusations and of clear evidence of their anti-Semitic intentions, only the malevolent or the manipulated would bring in a verdict of guilty.

Nor does Mr. Buckley reveal anything new about either his "close friend" Mr. Sobran or Mr. Buchanan. Indeed, never in the entire length and breadth of his gargantuan odyssey does Mr. Buckley emit any new information or any enlightening thoughts that would yield a conclusion more portentous than his own personal inability or unwillingness to defend either man. Given the triviality of Mr. Buckley's conclusions, the absence of any compelling evidence to support them, and the staleness of the charges themselves, readers are led ineluctably to an overwhelming question: why did Mr. Buckley choose this particular time to secrete so much mental fluid about this immaterial matter?

Some light on this may be shed by a "backgrounder" published by the American Jewish Committee more than a year ago, in November 1990, at the height of the controversy about Mr. Buchanan. The backgrounder's author, Kenneth Stern, wonders what "we" should do about Mr. Buchanan, and his decision was suggestive. "Un-

less he says something Mein Kampf-ish," wrote Mr. Stern, "we should refrain from calling him an anti-Semite. That will only draw attention to him, and bring him defenders. Rather, I suggest we approach other people whom Buchanan's adherents see as equally qualified for the title of 'defender of the faith' to write a rebuttal. When it comes to Catholic-Jewish tensions, why not a leader in the church? And when it is an anti-communism based issue . . . why not a non-Jewish conservative?" If Rasputin and Machiavelli had conspired over cocktails, they could not have concocted a more furtive stratagem.

The shoe that fits, of course, is Mr.

Buckley, a Catholic conservative. Is it too cynical to ask if the American Jewish Committee (or someone associated with it) manipulated him into launching his insubstantial Scud against Mr. Buchanan and Mr. Sobran? If so, the plotters didn't get their money's worth.

Bill Buckley used to be the king of the conservatives, and when he whispered, the trumpets sounded. Today that's not the case. Most of what he has written in the last few years is simply fashionable chatter; it may make the best-seller list, but there'll never be a Classics Illustrated version.

—Samuel Francis

