

dle and drive the pickup to town for a closer look.

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Political Orgies

by Paul Gottfried

The Politics of Empowerment

by Robert Weissberg

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Robert Weissberg produced the present volume, on the concept and practice of empowerment, almost simultaneously with another monograph, on tolerance, published last year. Both studies highlight the difference between a political ideal and its grim result—that is, between what people are told the ideal consists of and what they ultimately get. In *Political Tolerance*, Weissberg shows how the ideal of openness to dissent evolves from the simple acceptance of particular religious or cultural differences to the glorification of lifestyles and ideologies generally considered as obnoxious or even perverse. In *The Politics of Empowerment*, he argues that a similar evolutionary process is at work, from exhortations to help raise up the impoverished and marginalized to the shake-down of those deemed empowered amid a cacophony of claims and protests from self-certified victims.

Weissberg covers a daunting range of topics, from the Empowerment Act passed by Congress in 1993 for the purpose of providing federal funds to economically impoverished communities to prescriptions for participatory democracy and calls for self-liberation by black, feminist, and “homeless” organizations. Despite the distinctions to be drawn among these groups, all contenders for empowerment illustrate the ultimately non-political nature of the problems for which political solutions are sought. For the most part, “a decent case could be made that [the Empowerment Act] merely rewarded numerous big-city Democratic mayors and was not a well-crafted instrument to alleviate poverty.” In one possible exception to this rule—the city of De-

troit, which created jobs after an infusion of federal funding—Weissberg shows that economic improvement resulted almost entirely from major auto industries agreeing to build plants in Detroit. In Atlanta, another major recipient of Empowerment Act funds, the use of federal funds went primarily toward subsidizing “administrative overhead.”

Most efforts at empowerment, according to Weissberg, lead to bureaucratization, increased power for the central state, and little benefit for the supposedly disadvantaged. There are two major reasons, according to Weissberg, why empowerment schemes yield these sorts of dividends. First, the advocates of empowerment projects do not recognize their own failure: “The term failure is almost unspeakable, and irrelevant; discredited theories are cherished as valued family heirlooms.” In fact, failed plans serve “to justify yet more ill-conceived forays bringing personal rewards and opportunities to propagate radical ideologies.” Second, the problems that advocates of empowerment claim to be addressing are often not amenable to political solution: Some, such as the demands by feminists that the state be authorized to provide “a solution [to all their grievances] by overthrowing patriarchy,” are utopian and delusional.

Other nonpolitical problems for which empowerment is demanded are low scholastic achievements among minorities, insufficient public attention to multiculturalism, and an unacceptably high unemployment rate in urban areas. It may be questioned whether any of these problems can or should be remedied by applying political coercion to outside groups. Multiculturalists are free to celebrate whatever they wish to celebrate in private institutions or under their own auspices. Cities like Detroit improve their financial climate by recruiting industrial support, not by extracting federal handouts that are used to enrich municipal administrators. Those racial minorities who are unhappy with their children’s grades or scholastic ineptitude can organize themselves to tutor, or to find tutors for, the young. They can open charter schools that stress real learning skills. Finally, they can and do vote for candidates of their choice, who, as Weissberg notes, devote more energy to complaining about racism, while lining their pockets, than to solving the crises for which they demand greater manipulative clout.

Weissberg raises the provocative question of why blacks imagine that their well-being improves in proportion to the public offices they hold. American Jews, as Thomas Sowell notes, acquired more wealth and influence than Irish-Americans while holding only a fraction of the number of political offices. One possible reason why, for several generations, Jews did better professionally than the Irish, according to Sowell, was that they ignored the allure of elected office, while applying themselves to occupations that did not require winning popularity contests to control and distribute public funds. In the end, the Irish did well despite, not because of, machine politics. They entered non-political professions and were able to prosper. The history of the Irish in America deserves to be noted by blacks who believe that once they elect—or get a congressional act to provide them with—enough black officials, they will close the social distance between themselves and whites and Asians.

Weissberg further observes that orderly government is impossible as long as people believe that they can get what they want by mounting noisy protests in search of special rights and benefits: “The easy insistence on power breeds insatiable appetites.” Though “conflict is endemic and healthy [in popular government] . . . it must be bounded. Democracy requires disputes be ended and defeats accepted.” On this last point, Weissberg is right in principle, less so in terms of the example offered. He calls attention to the argument—made by the American Founding Fathers, among others—that inner restraints on factional passions must exist in order to hold together a constitutional republic. From this perspective, one is justified in castigating most empowerment advocates for arousing envy and factionalism as well as for inciting the central government to plunder taxpaying citizens.

Weissberg, however, avoids the question of how to halt the constitutional derailment currently taking place. My own view is that it cannot be stopped, and that the present orgy of empowerment claims is the inescapable outcome of a deeply corrupt regime.

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Principalities & Powers

by Samuel Francis

What a Swell Party This Is

The final presidential election of the millennium is still more than a year away, but by last summer rumblings of discontent with the plastic dashboard figurines who are the leading candidates of the two major plastic dashboard political parties were already audible. The rumblings first attracted national notice when Pat Buchanan, in the course of his third campaign for the presidency, emitted a few rumbles himself about the possibility of leaving the Republican Party to which he has been attached for most of his life. Throughout the 1990's, Mr. Buchanan has been among the first voices to define issues and point future political directions while most in his party and the (snicker) "conservative movement" have merely squealed in dismayed terror at his maverick positions. His dissent on the Persian Gulf War in 1990-91 pointed toward the far larger and more generalized opposition to the recent Balkan war, and his support for economic nationalism contributed to an increased skepticism of the "global economy" and free-trade dogmas among congressmen in both parties in the last few years. When Pat started rumbling about leaving the GOP smack in the middle of his campaign for its nomination, therefore, pundits were well advised to pay attention.

But Mr. Buchanan soon distanced himself from his own remarks. On *Meet the Press* a few days after his reported threat of defection, he confirmed that "if the Republican Party walks away from life [i.e., a pro-life, anti-abortion position], it walks away from me." He might leave the party or refuse to endorse its ticket, but he gave no firm indication that he would start a new party or accept the nomination of one, and he did say that by the time the Republicans picked their ticket next year, it would probably be too late to start a new party anyway.

Nevertheless, the word had been spoken, and soon speculation about a third party was commonplace. Even after Mr. Buchanan's demurrals, columnist Robert Novak insisted that he might actually bolt the GOP and run as an independent, while the *New York Times* a few days later carried a major front-page story recounting in some detail how Mr.

Buchanan wasn't the only Republican thinking of what he had called "a stampe for the Metroliner" out of the party.

In fact, the prospect of a "third party" of the right has been discussed in virtually every presidential election in my memory. Indeed, the very term "third party," if taken literally, is rather grotesquely inaccurate. In addition to such perennials as the Communist Party USA and its cheap imitations in World-Peace-and-Save-the-Silverfish crusades of the left, there are vehicles on the right that have become institutionalized despite their marginal political impact—the Libertarian Party, the U.S. Taxpayers Party, and, of course, the Reform Party, which has actually proved itself capable of electing Jesse Ventura to the governorship of Minnesota. In other words, whatever happens to the Republicans or the Democrats (speaking of cheap imitations of the communists), a new party built on their wreckage would not be a "third" but a fifth or sixth party at least.

Of course, that's not what is meant when people talk about a "third party." What they mean is a political party with a real chance of winning national elections, and today, with the possible exception of the Reform Party, there is no such animal. The Reform Party might be able to win a national election only because of the strong and distinctive personalities of its leaders, the indefatigable Ross Perot and the refreshingly unconventional Mr. Ventura, probably the only political candidate in human history who has openly discussed his youthful visit to a house of ill repute and been elected anyway. Third parties have historically been successful in American history only because of their leaders—William Jennings Bryan and George Wallace come quickly to mind—or because the rest of the political establishment was so fractured that even mediocrities like Abraham Lincoln could creep into the White House while everyone else was fighting. When the personalities of the leaders fade and the establishment fractures are patched up, third parties usually begin to vanish.

Yet despite the interminable jabber about a new party, there is more reason in this election cycle than ever to take it seriously. Not only Mr. Buchanan but also New Hampshire Sen. Bob Smith, almost

as firmly on the right as the former commentator and an actual elected officeholder, spoke openly about bolting the Republicans, and what he had to say represented precisely the feelings and thoughts of thousands, if not millions, of other Americans who have supported the GOP in recent years. "Right now we have one political party in America," the senator told the *New York Times* a couple of weeks before he actually did leave the Republicans. "It's run by moderate Democrats and moderate Republicans, and conservatives are stuck. If you talk to conservative activists there's a lot of frustration. I have no desire to see the demise of the party. But I'm not going to see our views compromised."

Among the views that rank-and-file Republicans believe have already been compromised—if not entirely abandoned—by the party and its leadership, the *Times* itself mentioned not only abortion but also "taxes, gun control, military spending and gay rights." Yet that's only the icing on the cake. How about the party's support of statehood for Puerto Rico, a brainchild of the now forgotten Newt Gingrich and his "Republican revolutionaries," intended to "lure" the Hispanic vote into the party; the abandonment of efforts to abolish affirmative action (last year, the Republican House actually defeated a bill that would have abolished federal affirmative-action mandates for educational institutions); and the total sellout of the immigration issue, both with respect to reform of existing legal immigration procedures and of any serious attempt to control illegal immigration? As for gun control, the implosion of the congressional Republicans on this issue in the aftermath of the Littleton shootings last spring helped undermine the support of one of the key constituencies that gave the party a congressional majority in 1994. It was a Democrat, John Dingell of Michigan, who caused the collapse of the gun-control package pushed by the Clinton White House and swallowed whole by the Republican leadership in both houses.

The Republicans no longer even pretend to be interested in such matters as reducing the size and scope of the federal leviathan or abolishing federal programs and departments, let alone revers-