



## Standing Athwart History

There is, we like to think, solid reason for rejoicing. Prodigious efforts, by many people, are responsible for *National Review*. But since it will be the policy of this magazine to reject the hypodermic approach to world affairs, we may as well start out at once, and admit that the joy is not unconfined.

Let's face it: Unlike Vienna, it seems altogether possible that did *National Review* not exist, no one would have invented it. The launching of a conservative weekly journal of opinion in a country widely assumed to be a bastion of conservatism at first glance looks like a work of supererogation, rather like publishing a royalist weekly within the walls of Buckingham Palace. It is not that, of course; if *National Review* is superfluous, it is so for very different reasons: It stands athwart history, yelling Stop, at a time when no one is inclined to do so, or to have much patience with those who so urge it.

*National Review* is out of place, in the sense that the United Nations and the League of Women Voters and the *New York Times* and Henry Steele Commager are *in* place. It is out of place because, in its maturity, literate America rejected conservatism in favor of radical social experimentation. Instead of covetously consolidating its premises, the United States seems tormented by its tradition of fixed postulates having to do with the meaning of existence, with the relationship of the state to the individual, of the individual to his neighbor, so clearly enunciated in the enabling documents of our Republic.

"I happen to prefer champagne to ditchwater," said the benign old wrecker of the ordered society, Oliver Wendell Holmes, "but there is no reason to suppose that the cosmos does." We have come around to Mr. Holmes's view, so much so that we feel gentlemanly doubts when asserting the superiority of capitalism to socialism, of republicanism to centralism, of champagne to ditchwater—of anything to anything. (How curious that one of the doubts one is *not* permitted is whether, at the margin, Mr. Holmes was a useful citizen.) The inroads that relativism has made on the American soul are not so easily evident. One must recently have lived on or close to a college campus to have a vivid intimation of what has happened. It is there that we see how a number of energetic social innovators, plugging their grand designs, succeeded over the years in capturing the

liberal intellectual imagination. And since ideas rule the world, the ideologues, having won over the intellectual class, simply walked in and started to run things.

Run just about *everything*. There never was an age of conformity quite like this one, or a camaraderie quite like the liberals'. Drop a little itching powder in Jimmy Wechsler's bath and before he has scratched himself for the third time, Arthur Schlesinger will have denounced you in a dozen books and speeches, Archibald MacLeish will have written ten heroic cantos about our age of terror, *Harper's* will have published them, and everyone in sight will have been nominated for a Freedom Award. Conservatives in this country—at least those who have not made their peace with the New Deal, and there is serious question whether there are others—are nonlicensed nonconformists; and this is dangerous business in a liberal world, as every editor of this magazine can readily show by pointing to his scars. Radical conservatives in this country have an interesting time of it, for when they are not being suppressed or mutilated by the liberals, they are being ignored or humiliated by a great many of those of the well-fed Right, whose ignorance and amorality have never been exaggerated for the same reason that one cannot exaggerate infinity.

There are, thank Heaven, the exceptions. There are those of generous impulse and a sincere desire to encourage a responsible dissent from the liberal orthodoxy. And there are those who recognize that when all is said and done, the marketplace depends for a license to operate freely on the men who issue licenses—on the politicians. They recognize, therefore, that efficient getting and spending is itself impossible except in an atmosphere that encourages efficient getting and spending. And in back of all political institutions there are moral and philosophical concepts, implicit or defined. Our political economy and our high-energy industry run on large, general principles, on ideas—not by day-to-day guesswork, expedients, and improvisations. Ideas have to go into exchange to become or remain operative; and the medium of such exchange is the printed word. A vigorous and incorruptible journal of conservative opinion is—dare we say it?—as necessary to better living as chemistry.

We begin publishing, then, with a considerable stock of experience with the irresponsible Right, and a despair of the intransigence of the liberals, who run this country; and all this in a world dominated by the jubilant singlemindedness of the practicing Communist, with his inside track to History. All this would not appear to augur well for *National Review*. Yet we start with a considerable—and considered—optimism.

After all, we crashed through. More than 120 investors made this magazine possible, and more than fifty men and women of small means invested less than \$1,000 apiece in it. Two men and one woman, all three with overwhelming personal and public commitments, worked round the clock to make publication possible. A score of professional writers pledged their devoted attention to its needs, and hundreds of thoughtful men and women gave evidence that the appearance of such a journal as we have in mind would profoundly affect their lives.

Our own views, as expressed in a memorandum drafted a year ago, and directed to our investors, are set forth in an adjacent column. We have nothing to offer but the best that is in us. That, a thousand liberals who read this sentiment will say with relief, is clearly not enough! It isn't enough. But it is at this point that we steal the march. For we offer, besides ourselves, a position that has not grown old under the weight of a gigantic, parasitic bureaucracy, a position untempered by the doctoral dissertations of a generation of Ph.D.s in social architecture, unattenuated by a thousand vulgar promises to a thousand different pressure groups, uncorroded by a cynical contempt for human freedom. And that, ladies and gentlemen, leaves us just about the hottest thing in town.

—*National Review*, November 19, 1955

Athwart History by William F. Buckley Jr.



## Marx Is Dead

Although it is likely that more academic and philosophical attention has been devoted in the last fifty years to the flowering of Marxist thought than to life under Marxism, it is astonishing how little thought is given to the great residual paradox. It is expressed in the antipodal manifestos of our time. The first is the voice of Solzhenitsyn—a single voice to be sure, but it is the voice of baptized humanity. What he said is that there is probably not one believing Marxist in Moscow. The contrary voice is the voice of—the Politburo: a great assembly of lords secular, disposing of three thousand silos armed with hydrogen bombs, and the world's greatest army, navy, and submarine force, commanding the greatest empire since Rome's. They are fighting for the most penetrable idiocies in the history of superstition; and yet on and on they go.

What would the Soviet Union be, if you stripped it of its ideological pretensions? There are three typhonic vectors in the postwar world. One of them is nationalism. The second—related—is anti-imperialism. The third is Marxist imperialism. Although every nation represented in the

United Nations, ourselves included, will vote against imperialism, very nearly as many (subtract a dozen) regularly vote to ratify the Soviet Union's de facto imperialism. Although every nation will swear out a blood oath against tyranny, the majority will back tyranny—as long as it is done in the holy name of Marx. Find yourself any old country, impoverished, agricultural, illiterate: by rigorous definition laid down by Marx himself, lacking the constituent parts to pass over into Communism. But you need only require that the prevailing tyrant declare himself to be a Marxist, and the propaganda war is half won. If Samora Machel of Mozambique had said everything he has said, done everything he has done, but announced that he was just a good old-fashioned bourgeois despot, he'd have been the target of universal obloquy from the beginning, in 1975. He has only to say that he is a Marxist, and he is accounted blessed among the ignorant, and the cynical, of this world. The question arises: Why doesn't the West take better advantage of the palpable superstitions? The obvious differences apart, Karl Marx was no more reliable a prophet than was the Reverend Jim Jones. Karl Marx was a genius, an uncannily resourceful manipulator of world history who shoved everything he knew, thought, and devised into a Ouija board from whose movements he decocted universal laws. He had his following, during the late phases of the Industrial Revolution. But he was discredited by historical experience longer ago than the Wizard of Oz: and still, great grown people sit around, declare themselves to be Marxists, and make excuses for Gulag and Afghanistan.

The Republican candidate for president of the United States should declare himself devoted absolutely to the total atomization of the Marxist myth. He doesn't need to conscript thinkers-for-hire. The thinking has been done. The research has been done. History is there begging to be used as witness before the court of the people. The demonstration, at a private level, has been done by the poets, historians, and martyrs of our time. It requires only that it become an official crusade, one to which we will attach ourselves as vigorously as if we were spreading the word of how to extirpate smallpox from the fetid corners of the world.

In this effort we can exploit the technology of communications. The Voice of America? Hell, the voice of humanity. If we undertake a systematic, devoted, evangelical effort to instruct the people of the world that the Soviet Union is animated not by a salvific ideology, but by a reactionary desire to kill and torture, intimidate and exploit others, for the benefit of its own recidivist national appetites for imperialism—we will have done, by peaceful means, what is so long overdue. We will have buried Marx, and Marxism, in that common grave in which he belongs, together with such

recent historical figures as Jim Jones, or such ancient historical impostors as Lucifer.

—January 24, 1980

Athwart History by William F. Buckley Jr.



## The Health Paradigm

The emanations from President Clinton about the new health program understandably baffle many who try to materialize from what he said the exact shape of the program he will endorse.

We know about it only that the idea is to universalize health care, and to make employers responsible for paying the cost of it, and to impose some kind of managed system on suppliers, in order to keep costs down; and, yes, there will be a role there for the individual states to play; and, no, the burden on business will not be overwhelming or instantaneous inasmuch as the program will phase in over a period of five to seven years, and we mustn't make this a partisan struggle, and so's your old man.

It's understandable, in the circumstances, that early commentary on the Clinton prolegomena wanders hither and thither, seeking to get to the

bony tissue of the Clinton plan. What follows is one man's version of the basic structure that ought to govern thought on this problem:

1. The American people have decided that they will not tolerate a society in which individuals who run into costly medical problems will find themselves either incapable of paying the costs of their treatment, or destitute after paying such costs.

2. That is where insurance comes in. It is no different, really, from what you do to protect yourself in case your house burns down. Instead of facing, suddenly, a \$150,000 loss, you go to a company that is taking in money from a thousand other homeowners, and the representative tells you that if you pay \$525 every year, the company will insure your house against fire loss.

You run your eyes down the Yellow Pages and find another insurance broker who tells you that his company will write an identical policy for \$500, so you give your business to him. The broker who lost out alerts his company to the loss of the policy, and efforts are made to tighten up so that, the following year, the company can be competitive against the lower bidder.

3. Now the company that agrees to insure you for \$500 lays out options. If you will agree to a \$5,000 deductible—only your garage burned down, maybe, not the house—the company will agree to reduce your premium from \$500 per year to \$425 per year. You sit down and do some calculations.

What is decided depends on a million variables, and no one can satisfactorily anticipate what will be the decision of Mr. and Mrs. Jones applying their own variables to the question with reference to their own disposition to run risks. They decide to take the risk; to save the extra premium. Their neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, decide: No way! They want the full insurance, so they pay the extra premium.

4. The insurance company then says: Look, some fires do more damage than other fires, depending on precautions that are taken. If your electric wiring is out of date, if you live more than five miles from the nearest fire station, if you don't have enough fire extinguishers in your house, then the risks mount. If you will agree to an annual examination of your house by our expert, we'll reduce your premium by another \$25.

The expert will then make recommendations. If you act on those recommendations, then, depending on the gravity of the exposure, we'll



reduce your premium by anywhere from still another \$25 to \$75. This idea appeals a lot to the Smiths, whose house is pretty new, but not much to the Joneses, whose house is quite old and might require a fair amount of rewiring. One couple says yes, the other couple says no.

5. A third couple resists the entire plan. The hell with it, Mr. Lucky says, I am a gambling man. Ah, but Mr. and Mrs. Lucky run into The Law. The law in their state says: All residents of this state have to take out insurance against a fire that totally ravages their home. Unless you can show an insurance policy that protects you against a 100 percent loss, the state will take out a policy for you and send the bill to your town clerk, who will add the premium to your property tax.

6. Meanwhile, no company has stepped forward to offer a fire policy for \$50—which is all that 10 percent of the homeowners can afford. So those who are paying for fire insurance agree to share the cost of those who simply can't afford any policy. That means a 10 percent surcharge, so that now the basic policy is going to cost \$550—\$500 to the company that supplies the coverage, \$50 in taxes that go to the state capital, and are then forwarded to the insurance companies to underwrite coverage for the poor.

This is the schema against which Clinton's plan should be judged.

—August 19, 1993



## Mrs. Thatcher Stays the Course

The joy should not be confined to Great Britain, if there is joy to be got from the exercise by a plurality of mature political sense. The reverberations of Mrs. Thatcher's victory will be heard in great and small echo chambers up and down the chancelleries of Europe and the United States. What happened on Thursday is by no means of parochial interest.

You remember Anthony Wedgwood Benn, Viscount Stansgate? He is the highly educated gentleman who was in the forefront of the left wing of the Labour Party. Over the years he did a kind of aristocratic striptease, in his effort to achieve an adamite austerity. First he dropped the title. Then he dropped Wedgwood. Then he shortened his Christian name and was no longer Anthony, just plain Tony. Somewhere along the line I remarked that his march toward proletarianization had left out only the elimination of the second "n" in his surname. Well, on Thursday, the voters took Tony Benn's seat away from him, after thirty-three years.

Oh, how certain the dashing Benn was that socialism was the way of the future for England.

"It is widely predicted that in the next few years there might be three parties, of which yours—or what's left of yours—would be a kind of left-split, a trade-union party, devoted to the repristination of socialism. Is this a fair analysis of the trend in British politics?"

I was in London, on television, exchanging views with Mr. Benn. It was September 1980. The leader of the left forces of the Labour Party replied: "The Labour Party will never split, and it won't split because it is held together by the commitment to seek to represent the interests of working people, so that all these predictions about its splitting are wholly false. I feel absolutely confident about that." In fact, just six months after our exchange, a group of moderate Labourites, disaffected from the far-

left leadership of the party, formed a new Social Democratic Party, which joined forces with the Liberal Party

He was then asked whether the hard left turn of the Labour Party might not reduce its constituency, even as membership in the trade unions had recently diminished. He replied: "The Labour Party is a socialist party, it always has been, and its socialism has been renewed. The fall in membership occurred at a time when the Labour Party was swinging sharply to the right. The biggest votes we've ever had is when we had the most radical programs—1945, 1964, 1973."

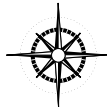
Although the Labour Party has more seats than the SDP-Liberal Alliance, and retains enclaves of power here and there in Britain, two great mandates have been given by the voters, and they have to do with unemployment and with sovereignty.

Unemployment in Great Britain is at 13 percent, a frighteningly high figure. But how does one define frightening, without a context? Although the word "unemployed" has not changed its formal meaning in the past generation, it has greatly changed its substantive meaning. To be unemployed in Great Britain continues to be a severe hardship. But its severity is of the spirit more than of the pocketbook. In England people do not starve or lack for lodging or for medical attention if they are out of work. Accordingly, the voters are not moved by exclusive consideration of the one datum: How many people are unemployed?

The alternatives offered by Labour were, in effect, to put all unemployed workers on the payroll of the government. The effect of this would have been to isolate Great Britain economically; because a nation that solves its economic problems in that way does so by means of inflation, and serfdom. The road to serfdom was being paved by the program of the Labour Party. The voters said they would rather endure unemployment, and a gradual economic recovery, than surrender to the inflationists, pull out of the Common Market, and sink like Albania into an autarkic isolationism.

And then, at a critical moment in European history, the British voters resolved that they would not progressively surrender their independence to the Soviet Union by unilaterally disarming. Mrs. Thatcher's decisive movements in the Falkland Islands captured a spirit in England thought to be flagging. The same spirit that was captured by Winston Churchill. And, while we are at it, the same spirit that was captured by Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth I, with whom, with all justice, Margaret Thatcher is being compared.

—June 14, 1983



## On Learning from Other Cultures

The prime minister of Pakistan has announced to the legislature, over which he rules supreme, that it is his intention to make the Koran the law of the land, subjecting all aspects of life, from social behavior to civil liberties, to Islamic tenets. If any of the gang at Stanford University who a year ago marched through the campus with Jesse Jackson shouting, “Hey, hey, ho, ho/Western Culture’s got to go,” wants to pull up roots and move to an Eastern culture, I herewith undertake to raise the plane fare.

Dinesh D’Souza, the talented young critic whose book *Illiberal Education* is causing campus-watchers to stop, look, and listen, has written an illuminating essay for *Policy Review*, the quarterly of the Heritage Foundation. It is called “Multiculturalism 101,” and its purpose is to try to help the multiculture hounds out a little bit in their anxiety to reach beyond Western culture for true learning.

He concludes his essay, by the way, by recommending a dozen non-Western texts that are faithful to indigenous foreign cultures and helpful to Westerners who are anxious to cosmopolitanize their knowledge.

Take, for instance, the Koran, which the prime minister has proposed to elevate to Pakistan’s equivalent of our Constitution. The Koran stipulates that “Men have authority over women, because Allah has made the one superior to the other.” Do the boys and girls at Stanford—and at Michigan, and Brown, and Yale—really wish that the Koran be studied while, oh, British common law be slighted?

D'Souza quotes a renowned Islamic scholar, Ibn Taymiyya, who advises, "When a husband beats his wife for misbehavior, he should not exceed ten lashes." Ten lashes is about what some of us had in mind as appropriate for those at Stanford who succeeded in abolishing the theretofore compulsory courses in Western Culture that are deemed too "Eurocentric." It has yielded to a required course called Cultures, Ideas, and Values.

Having dealt with Islamic codes on women, the pilgrims in search of better ideas than those of our own culture can study the attitudes of others toward homosexuality, since "homophobia" is one of the central targets of the multiculturists.

It would not be wise to study the cultural role of homosexuality in Marxist Cuba, where practitioners are jailed and sometimes executed; in Mao's China, the problem of homosexuality is summarily dealt with by a firing squad.

What the protestors against Western values really have in mind, D'Souza confirms, is to induce a dislike for our own culture. To this end, different cultures are more or less assumed to be superior, but it is very hard to use the term "superior" unless one has a scale of values. For instance, if socialist practice is "superior" to liberalism, then it becomes safe to adduce Marxism as a superior means of social organization.

D'Souza (himself an Indian-American) explains: "Multicultural curricula at Stanford and elsewhere generally reflect little interest in the most enduring, influential, or aesthetically powerful products of non-Western cultures. 'The protestors here weren't interested in building up the anthropology department or immersing themselves in foreign languages,' comments Stanford philosophy instructor Walter Lammi. Alejandro Sweet-Cordero, spokesman for a Chicano group on campus, told the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 'We're not saying we need to study Tibetan philosophy. We're arguing that we need to understand what made our society what it is.' Black activist William King says, 'Forget Confucius. We are trying to prepare ourselves for the multicultural challenge we will face in the future. I don't want to study China. I want to study myself.'" William King 101.

A widely used textbook by the hate-Western-ideas folk is called *Multicultural Literacy*—a book that "devotes virtually no space to the philosophical, religious, and literary classics of China, Japan, Indonesia, India, Persia, the Arab world, Africa, or Latin America. . . . Instead the book includes 13 protest essays, including Michele Wallace's autobiographical 'Invisibility Blues' and Paula Gunn Allen's 'Who Is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism.'"

It is a pity, the whole messy thing, among other reasons because we could all learn from reading classics of other cultures, of which D'Souza mentions a few, beginning with the Hindu scriptures, written in Sanskrit, especially the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, the burden of which is that God must not be sought as a being separate from us, but rather as a sublime force within us, enabling us to rise above our moral limitations.

There are many such works in the realm of multiculturalism, but unless they condemn everything from IQ tests to Reaganomics, they will not satisfy those whose principal aim is to rage, rage against the longevity of the West.

—April 12, 1991

Athwart History by William F. Buckley Jr.



## Is Multiculturalism the Answer?

The sensation seekers have been amply satisfied lately, and every day leaves the betting man in the quandary of not knowing whether the number of people who tried to blow up Manhattan a few weeks ago will match or exceed the number of prostitutes murdered there by Joel Rifkin.

Of course, there are precedents for both crimes—massacres in the pursuit of jihad are historically commonplace, and Jack the Ripper is the stuff of legend.

But suddenly we are up against something we have no cultural training for. When during Reconstruction the Ku Klux Klan emerged, we were so to speak ready to contend with it. By this I mean that what the KKK sought to do was generally recognized as (1) illegal and (2) immoral. Whatever the laxities of the law in the South during Reconstruction, there was never such a condition of anarchy as to authorize lynching Negro dissenters or flogging white suspects.

Moreover, there was the ultimate appeal to the Southerner, namely the word of the Christian God: The sanctions of the culture of the South were available to the critics of such behavior. Martin Luther King Jr. appealed to the higher law of Americans when he invoked the teachings of Christ as dispositive.

But we are dealing now with that creature, the Muslim fundamentalist, which we have all along comfortably thought to be a problem of other cultures. We knew that the Algerians recently decided to forgo democracy for a spell, when a democratic exercise brought in Muslim fundamentalists in a general election. We knew that the assassination of Anwar Sadat in Cairo was the act of Muslim fundamentalists who were protesting his civilized attitude toward Israel; and, again, we reasoned that this was a regional problem.

When Ayatollah Khomeini locked up American diplomats, the suggestion was made in this column that an appeal to the ayatollah using Koranic language having to do with justice might be the best available weapon. And such an attempt was made, but Khomeini wasn't somebody to whom it was easy to lecture on the more benevolent strictures of the Koran.

We are, after all, face to face with something very different from the religion that has dominated our own culture. Even in the most theocratic of times, St. Thomas Aquinas rejected the idea that the state is obliged to tailor its laws exactly to those of the divine by, e.g., compelling conversion. But that is not so in Islam, where The Law as put forth in Scripture (the Koran) and Tradition (Sunnah) is to be reflected exactly not only in the personal lives of believers, but in the laws of the state as well.

The word "*islam*" means "submission." The government of a Muslim state is explicitly an institution of God. Moreover, such governments are to irradiate Islam not merely by the example of their rulers, but by the institution of *jihād*.

Again, that word literally means "to struggle," or to endeavor, and it can be used to describe personal self-discipline. But it is most notoriously used to describe the holy war that Islam is engaged in to expand its reach over the whole world.

There was a period in Christian history when the same impulses were felt, but it has been centuries since Christians excused spreading the word by shedding blood. Chapter 2, Verse 193, of the Koran enjoins the faithful to "fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but do not commit aggression. Fight against them until sedition is no more and allegiance is rendered to God alone; but if they make amend, then make no aggression except against evildoers." That seems to say that there is no need to blow up Manhattan after Manhattanites all make their allegiance to Islam.

The current enthusiasm in academic circles for multiculturalism has got to face some difficult problems. The Koran, for instance, informs us (2: 228), "The husband is one degree higher than the wife, because he earns by his strength and expends on his wife." The institutional implications of this superordination of the man over the woman we are all familiar with: From all appearances, the only time men and women get together socially in Muslim countries is when they copulate. Somewhere along the line, the feminist movement in America is going to have to give up either feminism or multiculturalist egalitarianism.

And we are all going to have to take explicit notice of the incompatibility of our own culture and that of the fundamentalist Muslim, and we need to organize our immigration laws with some reference to this problem. The



idea of welcoming the alien doesn't include inviting him to blow up Ellis Island en route to citizenship.

—July 6, 1993

Athwart History by William F. Buckley Jr.