

Force and Idea

by Samuel Francis

“The tone and tendency of liberalism . . . is to attack the institutions of the country under the name of reform and to make war on the manners and customs of the people under the pretext of progress.”

— Benjamin Disraeli

After Liberalism: Mass Democracy and the Managerial State
by Paul Gottfried
Princeton: Princeton University Press;
176 pp., \$27.95



Although Paul Gottfried begins his most recent book with what appears to be merely a cliché of modern conservative thought—that “Liberalism has . . . lost any meaningful connection to what it once signified,” that the word no longer refers to the defense of decentralized power, a restricted state, and a strong and independent moral order and has come to mean the defense of exactly the antithesis of historic liberalism—he succeeds in elaborating the cliché into an incisive and at times brilliant, if occasionally flawed, interpretation of the “managerial state” that parades under the mantle of liberalism.

The concept of the “managerial state,” first used by James Burnham and reformulated by myself largely in articles and columns in *Chronicles*, is more than a synonym for what conservatives and classical liberals usually call “big government.” As Gottfried explains, 19th-century reformers in Prussia and France introduced an enlarged scale of government by sponsoring public education, but “the justifications were both practical and nonegalitarian,” the purpose being to increase the literacy of workers and to strengthen national unity. By contrast, public education in the managerial state aims explicitly at “changing social structure and social attitudes.” The manage-

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rial state, in Gottfried’s usage, has an explicit mission—reconstructing society—that was (so he claims) foreign to classical liberalism.

In Burnham’s original usage, however, and in the reformulated usage that I have developed, the state (as well as the culture and the economy) is an instrument of a managerial class, a class characterized by its acquired mastery of the technical and managerial skills that enable modern society to function. Such skills include not only scientific and engineering but economic, legalistic, administrative, communicative (public relations), and psycho-social techniques that have become essential for the operation of large-scale organizations, whether the organizations in question are formally political (the state and its units), economic (the mass corporations), or cultural (the media, foundations, and educational institutions). While the managerial state and the other components of the regime are indeed driven by a need to reconstruct society, this need arises only secondarily from the ideological persuasions of the managerial class and primarily from its structural interests: In order to enhance the

rewards of its technical skills, it must extend their application to an increasing range of governmental, economic, social, and cultural functions, and the extension of technical skills to new functions and institutions brings the managerial class into conflict with older classes that lack its skills and interests.

But, like any elite or ruling class, the managerial class cannot baldly acknowledge that its behavior is driven by its interest in gaining wealth and power, and so it masks its drive for these by adopting and invoking convenient ideologies that justify expanded government and state manipulation of social functions while also denigrating, debunking, and delegitimizing the older, pre-managerial class and the institutions and values by which it dominated. The “social reconstruction” that the managerial regime undertakes arises, then, not only from the interests of the elite that controls the regime but also from its need to destroy its predecessors and competitors for hegemony.

Gottfried’s analysis of the “managerial state” only tangentially resembles this Burnhamite model, and he accords far more motivating force to the ideology of the state than either Burnham or I. “It is hard to demonstrate,” he writes, “that managerial elites have consistently benefited by pushing their own bodies of belief.” Nazi state managers, for example, were “rushing headlong into cosmic violence and arbitrary personal rule,” while liberal managers today universally support mass immigration, which Gottfried argues cannot be justified in terms of the interests of the managerial class. Those who run Gottfried’s managerial state are primarily driven by ideology, and that ideology is not a mask by which to disguise the pursuit of their group interests.

I must say that he is simply wrong on both counts. Just because an ideology ultimately leads to disaster for the class that peddles it, it does not follow that the class expected to gain nothing from its adoption. Nazi state managers enjoyed a hell of a ride while it lasted, and the early political and military successes of the National Socialist state gave them every material incentive to support its ideology. As for mass immigration, it ought to be obvious that both corporate and bureaucratic elites benefit from it, the one by gaining cheap labor, the other by acquiring a new underclass on which they may tinker even further with their managerial skills.

Nor is it the case that a class simply pretends to believe in an ideology, as Gottfried suggests I believe. "For all these writers," he writes, meaning myself, Burnham, and C. Wright Mills, "ideology takes a back seat to social forces in explaining modern political organization;" but "When conservative Republican Congressman Dick Armeley lectures his Texas constituents on the need for even higher levels of immigration from Mexico, it is not opportunism but ideological fervor that explains his behavior." What really explains Republican congressmen like Mr. Armeley is probably sheer stupidity, but even cognitive dysfunction need not be invoked as an explanation. I have no doubt whatsoever that Mr. Armeley does truly and deeply believe in mass immigration and that he is in large part motivated by his beliefs. The point is that it is irrelevant what he believes; the regime—the system, the society, the apparatus by which the managerial class dominates—demands mass immigration, and leaders like Mr. Armeley emerge in response to that demand. They are elected and acquire leadership positions because the "social forces"—the interest groups that help manage and finance campaigns and elections, the media that condemn immigration restrictionism and eulogize those who oppose immigration controls, the organized voting blocs that help determine who gets elected—push them into leadership and either ignore or push out anyone who neglects their interests. Since Gottfried readily acknowledges that opinion polls show strong majorities opposed to mass immigration, how else can he explain its continuation if strategically powerful social forces are not pushing it and those who support it? In the absence of such social forces and of a

popular consensus in favor of immigration, leaders like Dick Armeley could neither emerge at all nor survive in leadership positions simply because they happen to "believe in" open borders.

I have no major quarrel with Gottfried's argument that those who espouse liberalism (or what passes for it) really believe in their stated beliefs, but acknowledging this does not help explain why those who believe in some ideas triumph over others who believe in different ones. Yet his emphasis on ideology leads him, in my view, to concentrate too much on the historical and philosophical analysis of ideas rather than of the social forces that do explain what triumphs and what loses. His book would have been stronger had he paid more attention to social forces such as managerial corporations and their elites as engines of social reconstruction. As a critical dissection of the ideology of the "liberal democratic" state that prevails today, however, Gottfried's book is unparalleled since James Burnham's *Suicide of the West*. Like Burnham, he shows in luxurious detail how those who repeatedly invoke "pluralism"—Horace Kallen, Theodore Lowi, Ronald Dworkin, and Amy Gutmann, among others—contradict their own premises and expose themselves, with their saccharine-sounding agendas of "tolerance," "diversity," and "harmony," as crypto-authoritarians whose ideas justify not only the suppression of opposition but also what Gottfried calls, in a phrase that should be perpetuated, "the dehumanization of dissent," by which anyone who disagrees with the "pluralistic" deconstruction and delegitimization of bourgeois society is less than human, certainly less than rational, an "authoritarian personality," a "status-frustrated" victim of alienation, a subject more suitable for the analyst's couch or the padded cell than a mind to be argued

with. This contradiction of pluralism's own premises is not a lapse in logic but rather part of a calculated strategy by which the suppression and delegitimization of dissent by the managerial state is justified.

Once initiated, this mission continued beyond the point at which moderate pluralists wished to have it stop. For if the state is to be empowered, as all pluralists believe it must, to fight "prejudice" through social engineering, why should it limit its energies to "anti-Semites" or "racists"? The pluralist mandate for change can be and has been applied to other ambitious ventures, which like earlier ones have come at the expense of social freedom. With due respect to its former practitioners now suffering second thoughts, all phases of pluralism reveal the same tendencies, the ascendancy of the managerial state and its restructuring of social relations.

Gottfried's book is probably destined to become a classic of contemporary conservative thought and to endure long after the tracts and pamphlets of neo-conservative sloganeers are forgotten. Whether one takes the ideas themselves or the social forces behind them as the primary engines, Paul Gottfried shows clearly that the totalitarian imperatives of modern post-liberalism are inherent in the ideology itself and not an accidental accretion that is epiphenomenal to modernization. In this respect, *After Liberalism* belongs in the same category as *Suicide of the West* and *The Road to Serfdom*. Absent the hegemony of the managerial class and its apologists on the right and the left, it might come to enjoy the same stature and influence those classics have acquired. <c

After Liberalism: Mass Democracy and the Managerial State

"In Western Europe and North America, [the] state rests its power upon a multi-tiered following: an underclass and now middle-class welfariate, a self-assertive public sector, and a vanguard of media and journalistic public defenders. . . . [T]he regime and its apologists have been able to marginalize their opposition. This is apparent on . . . the now respectable or moderate Right. There a tolerated opposition offers tepid criticism of the administrative state while warning against populist extremism."

—Paul Gottfried

Ah, Wilderness!

by Scott McConnell

*“Oh, for a lodge in some vast wilderness,
Some boundless contiguity of shade,
Where rumor of oppression and deceit,
Of unsuccessful or successful war,
Might never reach me more!”*

—William Cowper

**An Empire Wilderness: Travels Into
America’s Future**
by Robert D. Kaplan
New York: Random House;
393 pp., \$27.50



Having written books on the Balkans (*Balkan Ghosts*) and the most disorganized parts of Africa (*The Ends of the Earth*), Robert Kaplan, contributing editor to the *Atlantic Monthly*, has turned his eye on the western half of North America. Such bastions of Middle American stability as Omaha, Nebraska, and Tucson, Arizona, are subjected to the author’s characteristic scrutiny: that of an observant traveler well informed by history who takes due note of the social fissures in whatever place he happens to be visiting. These cracks—usually foreshadowing more serious social fragmentation and often used by the author to explain seemingly unavoidable cycles of conflict and failed leadership—provide Kaplan with the narrative thread by which he is able to convey his own, generally pessimistic, worldview.

The idea for such a book about the American West is itself arresting. *An Empire Wilderness* is an unambiguous sign that concern about the impact of economic globalization and mass immigration on America’s long-term cohe-

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it enjoyed a permanent exemption from the condition of being human. Yet in the graceful writing and the half-alarmed asides, there is insight and painful realism; as a portrait of half a continent undergoing rapid and generally wrenching change, *An Empire Wilderness* is first-rate.

Kaplan begins his journey at the Army staff college in Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas—the departure point for hundreds of wagon trains and the cavalry’s Indian campaigns, the base where Eisenhower studied war and Colin Powell served as commander. Sitting awestruck in the Protestant memorial chapel, going over the names of those fallen in battle, Kaplan feels himself at the “core of nationhood.” Today’s officers are adept at computer modeling (urban warfare, possibly on the American continent, is a hot subject), conversant with history, well read, and personally disciplined. A select group by measure of achievement and, quite often, bravery, they cannot help but be conscious of the cultural gaps separating them from the elites on both coasts. Whether black or white, Leavenworth’s officers usually have rural and blue collar roots—backgrounds which, though once well represented at the higher levels of American government and business, are now marginal nearly to the point of quaintness. Kaplan notes, in an almost off-hand way, that the living conditions at Leavenworth are Spartan by contemporary standards, the consumption of modern creature com-

sion—which has preoccupied realist and traditional conservatives for years—is beginning to affect the center and left of the political spectrum as well, having bypassed the more established Beltway right and its mainstream journals with their notorious reluctance seriously to entertain such issues. Kaplan explores his subject with detached understatement, always aware that he is speaking of (and to) a nation that has not experienced a major national tragedy since the Civil War and whose leaders behave as if