

SLAYER OF STRAW MEN

Having wasted my time reading Robert Locke's "Marxism of the Right" (March 14), I found myself laughing and crying out loud. Locke performs the oldest trick in the demagogue's book: erect a straw man embodying characteristics one finds reprehensible, and then demonstrate that these attributes are, in fact, reprehensible. Far be it from the slayer of straw men to prove that any person or group actually embraces or exhibits these traits. The demagogues' self-satisfaction comes from first attributing to his enemy those detestable features (a pleasure in itself), and then self-righteously condemning both the enemy and its supposed defects (exhilarating righteous fury). Locke excels in such "argumentation" and condemnation.

For a publication of nominally serious policy discussion, *TAC* has dropped the ball by devoting substantial space to Locke's diatribe. There may indeed be serious flaws in mainstream libertarian philosophy and prescriptive social constructs, as elucidated by recognized libertarian writers and speakers. It may be that even without serious internal contradiction or conflict with documented human experience, libertarianism is not a philosophy or set of societal organizing principles attractive to traditional American political conservatives or classical liberals. Whatever the case, one will find no rational basis for embracing or rejecting libertarianism in Locke's fulminations.

DICK THOMPSON
Joplin, Mo.

INFANTILE IDEOLOGY

You ask, "Libertarianism: A Home for Conservatives?" Are you kidding? Robert Locke has the libertarian number. In his "Marxism of the Right," Locke shows that libertarianism is a dead-end street. It is a soulless, sophomoric philosophy that adores not God but radical individualism. It also fails to recognize that man is a social being. Such a philosophy

is not in sync with human nature, thus making it a political impracticability.

Fortunately, libertarians are not the threat to the Republic that their Marxist mirror images on the Left are. At worst, all libertarians can do is throw a few close elections here or there by either going the third-party route or staying home on election day.

Therefore, the right question to ask is, "can libertarians find a home in the conservative movement?" I think the answer is a qualified "yes." If they choose, libertarians can do detailing for positions like trade-offs in free trade, marginal tax rates, etc. But the hollowness of the libertarian soul would prohibit them from having a seat at the table where strategic matters of importance are decided for the nation. Sorry to break their hearts, but libertarians have to grow up before more responsibility can be entrusted to their hands.

PETER SKURKISS
Stow, Ohio

ENEMY OF MY ENEMY

Scott McConnell's "Hunger for Dictatorship" is an excellent article (Feb. 14). As a progressive/liberal-minded person, I feel the full weight of those who consider me to be un-American because I dare to stand in opposition to the Bush administration. I have seen fascist tendencies grow more powerful every day since Bush took office, and it is worse now, considering that W. and his followers are thoroughly convinced that the last election validated their questionable goals and methods.

I've often said that the more traditional conservatives share many of the same complaints of the Bush administration as do progressives and liberals. Your magazine is a breath of fresh air and is the most hopeful sign I have seen in quite awhile that this country can one day heal from its self-inflicted wounds. I can live with the honest differences between liberals and conservatives, but these neocons have gone completely off the deep end, and our nation's democ-

racy is truly in jeopardy as a result. Watching so many Americans become true believers of this dangerous movement is frightening. How did we get here?

ADAM TAMBONE
Portland, Maine

LEADING BY EXAMPLE?

I just completed reading Scott McConnell's article. Supporters of the president are now "hungry to bomb foreigners," "maniacal lovers of the state," "eager to smash those who object"? All this in a magazine with the name *The American Conservative*? Please. I do not read your publication for vicious, left-wing, hate-filled, diatribes by naïve pacifist America-haters.

Respectfully,
HAL PIERCE
Via e-mail

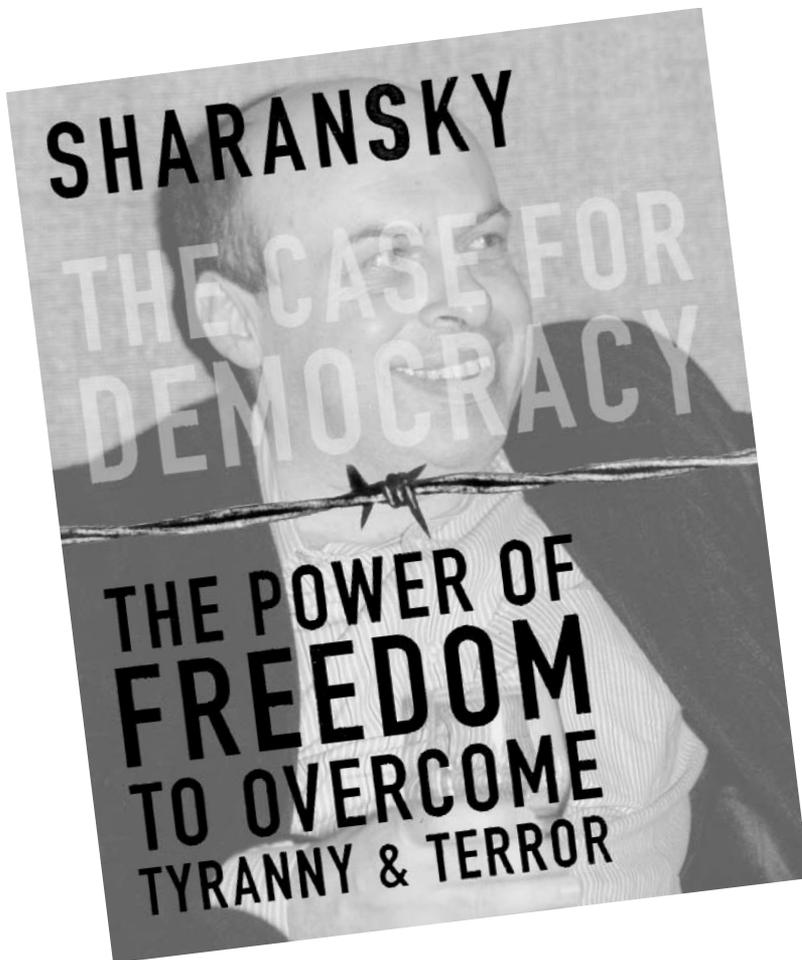
WHINE & CHEESE

Who do you want to have in charge? Consider the big picture. In 2000 we were given the choice between Gore and Bush. 2004 was 100 times worse with Kerry and Bush. I do not even want to think what condition we would be in at this moment if either of the democratic choices would have been elected to the highest office in the land.

President Bush has a tremendous job without sore losers whining. Bashing Bush every time you get a chance is not helping anyone.

We are conservatives who reserve our votes for those we consider capable of doing the best job. Whining shows lack of integrity. Promote freedom.
TOM & KAREN SCHINDLER
Via e-mail

The American Conservative welcomes letters to the editor. Submit by e-mail to letters@amconmag.com, by fax to 703-875-3350, or by mail to 1300 Wilson Blvd., Suite 120, Arlington, VA 22209. Please include your name, address, and phone number. We reserve the right to edit all correspondence for space and clarity.



[COVER]

Sharansky's Double Standard

BY MICHAEL C. DESCH According to the former Soviet dissident and advocate of universal democracy, everyone deserves self-determination—except, perhaps, the Palestinians. **Page 7**

[ALLIES]

Mr. Bush Goes to Europe

BY STUART REID The president made the Europeans an offer they couldn't refuse—but they did anyway. **Page 11**

[POLITICS]

Anatomy of a Red State Rebellion

BY JIM PITTAWAY Montana's live-and-let-live electorate is not a Republican lock. **Page 16**

COLUMNS

6 Patrick J. Buchanan: A Republic, Not a Democracy

35 Taki: The inside word on Charles and Camilla

NEWS & VIEWS

4 Fourteen Days: Sharon vs. the Settlers; Tax Hikes—Like Father, Like Son?; Chalabi of the Month

23 Deep Background: Speak No Evil in Baghdad; Homeland Security Sees No Evil; al-Qaeda's Cave of Darkness

ARTICLES

14 Eric S. Margolis: Gunning for Syria

19 James Bamford: The intelligence is right: the war is wrong.

21 Gregory Cochran: Bush fails to learn from Napoleon.

24 Paul Moreland: Praying to Newark

25 Anthony Gancarski: Hunter S. Thompson (1939-2005)

ARTS & LETTERS

28 Steve Sailer: "Up and Down" and "Head-On"

29 Thomas E. Woods Jr.: A Factually Correct Guide for Max Boot

31 David Gordon: *The Neocon Reader* edited by Irwin Stelzer

33 Marian Kester Coombs: *The Secret Wars of Judi Bari: A Car Bomb, the Fight for the Redwoods, and the End of Earth First!* by Kate Coleman

[MIDEAST]

MAN OF PEACE?

Speaking in Brussels, President Bush declared Mideast peace “an immediate goal.” He added that Israel must “freeze settlement activity” and that a Palestinian state made up “of scattered territories”—the kind of Bantustan plan preferred by some on the Israeli Right—“will not work.” This is exactly what a president must say if he is serious about peace. We hope he follows through.

Ariel Sharon—once described as a “man of war” in these pages—has been acting as if he might now understand that Israel’s interests would be served by a just peace with the Palestinians. Consequently, there are glimmers of progress on many fronts—a ceasefire with the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian elections, the decision to withdraw Israeli settlements from Gaza, the return of Egyptian and Jordanian ambassadors to Israel. Thus far a murderous terror assault in Tel Aviv has not derailed the process.

The fact that Sharon might be serious about moving toward a settlement is underscored by the ugly reaction from the Israeli settler movement. Some Israeli ministers have received death threats from extremist settler groups, and Sharon had to post guards by his wife’s gravesite after settler activists threatened to desecrate it. The invective now leveled against Sharon and his ministers reminds some of the venom the settler movement spewed at Yitzhak Rabin before he was assassinated.

The settlers—many of them born and raised in the United States—are now as much a part of the volatile Mideast extremist mix as the loopy Saudi fundamentalist cleric or Palestinian intifadist. But they can be politically isolated. Both Sharon and Abu Mazen have solid majorities of their peoples on their side. It is not yet clear whether Sharon contemplates going beyond a relatively



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easy Gaza withdrawal and will work towards a realistic final settlement or whether Abu Mazen can control the Palestinian groups who reject any peace with Israel. But with a strong push from the United States, peace in Israel and Palestine, so necessary for the peoples there and so vital for America’s own security, once again has real prospects.

[ECONOMICS]

READ HIS LIPS

President Bush’s fiscal legacy has been typified by staggering spending and rising red ink, but up until now economic conservatives have had one consolation—at least he’s held the line on taxes. This too may pass.

When Bush first outlined his plan to revamp the Social Security system, he promised he would not finance it by raising taxes. Read his lips. The president has since told reporters that while he is still ruling out a hike in the payroll-tax rate, he is willing to consider increasing the income levels at which this tax applies.

The 12.4 percent payroll tax currently applies only to the first \$90,000 of wages. Raising this ceiling by definition increases taxes. If the cap were eliminated entirely, 9.2 million Americans would see their tax bills rise and marginal tax rates for top-bracket wage-

earners would hover near 50 percent. The revenue gains would be minor—the Social Security Administration estimates the change would only extend the system’s surpluses by seven years. Wasn’t the point of Social Security reform to shrink government and promote private wealth creation?

[JUSTICE]

AFFIRMATIVE ACCESS

By a 5-3 vote, the Supreme Court ruled against California’s policy of separating inmates by race during their first 60 days in prison. A state corrections official told the *Los Angeles Times* that the move will be “catastrophic and extremely dangerous.” “The only way the system has maintained any sense of control has been through segregation policies.” But apparently multiculturalism trumps all practical considerations.

During oral arguments, Justice John Paul Stevens asked what he called a “stupid question”: if the state’s goal is to discourage racial violence, would it not be better to house prisoners with members of a different race? He was right—about the stupid part. Human Rights Watch reports, “white inmates are disproportionately targeted for abuse.” A warden testified, “You cannot house a Japanese inmate with a Chinese inmate.