

next Reagan is coming, the next Contract With America will work, the next Republican nominee will be one of us. All it takes is for someone to appreciate the anger—and it doesn't matter that she supported the bailouts that enraged them or the candidate who forsook their ideas and support. Just as in 1994, Republicans have only to keep up the pretense that they, and they alone, are responding to an urgent uprising across the country.

Brilliantly, Sarah the Maverick mentioned her husband's "independence" from the GOP during her Tea Party Convention speech, referring to Todd Palin's membership in the Alaskan Independence Party. Her suggestion of outsider status charged her bond with the conventioners, but the veep nominee was not introducing Tea Partiers to possibilities outside their GOP abode. She was merely validating their feeling that Republicans have to win them over. Eventually, they will give in. They always do.

Judson Phillips, playing the affable host, told the crowd that just two words scared our nation's liberals, then almost whispered them: President Palin. He could easily have come up with two words to scare Republicans: third party. He could have found a pair that would rock the entire establishment: Revolution Now! But that's too risqué, even when everyone is hopped up on tea.

The Tea Party movement may be a bit frisky and unpredictable, but it will always have a warm cup to serve the GOP. In Nashville, the chanting went up tentatively at first, then gained force: "Run, Sarah, Run!" She graciously accepted their adoration—then left in the company of the Republican professionals who make up her entourage. ■

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# No Life on MARS

This latest populist revolt is not the rise of the Right.

By John Derbyshire

The social class on which [Will Herberg] and I both once pinned our hope of national regeneration, those whom we jokingly referred to as 'the Archie Bunkers,' has gone the way of the dinosaur. It has been replaced by a multitude of vastly more radicalized versions of Meathead, Archie's fashionably liberal son-in-law who by now could be an editorial writer for the *Wall Street Journal*.

—Paul E. Gottfried, *Encounters*

THE TEA PARTY MOVEMENT seems to put the lie to Professor Gottfried's despair. At the movement's February convention, the Archie Bunkers were out in force: politically unsophisticated working- and middle-class Americans asserting themselves against the Meatheads of fashionable liberalism, into whose hands the levers of power had passed barely a year before.

As Herberg and Gottfried pinned their hopes on those Archie Bunkers, so Sam Francis, a few years later, saw the possibility of national regeneration in the conservative surge that had helped elect Ronald Reagan. Examining the base of citizens from which that surge drew its strength, Francis borrowed a tag from sociologist Donald Warren, calling them "Middle American Radicals." These insurrectionists, Francis said in his 1982 essay "Message from MARS," had grasped the essential power conflict in postwar American society. That conflict is not between rich and poor, as both Old Left and Old Right had supposed,

but between, on the one hand, an alliance of meritocratic elites with underclass government clients, and on the other, those whose work and enterprise feeds both components of that alliance. Our political contest is not top vs. bottom, but top-and-bottom-united vs. middle.

In a different essay 16 years later, by way of pooh-poohing secessionist talk, Francis gave his clearest statement of this dichotomy:

Today, the main political line of division in the United States is not between the regions of North and South (insofar as such regions can still be said to exist) but between elite and nonelite. As I have tried to make plain ... for the last 15 years, the elite, based in Washington, New York, and a few large metropolises, allies with the underclass against Middle Americans, who pay the taxes, do the work, fight the wars, suffer the crime, and endure their own political and cultural dispossession at the hands of the elite and its underclass vanguard.

Francis's thought shows an interesting development. "Message from MARS" is written in the rather abstract diction of Machiavelli and James Burnham. A ruling class had established itself with aid from underclass allies to whom it had given promises of provision and protection. This ruling class had become careless and decadent. A rising group sought to replace it. Middle American radicals could be that rising group, said

Francis: “The MARs form a sociopolitical force now coalescing into a class and perhaps into a new elite that will replace the managerial elite.”

By 1998, Francis’s reports from the class-war front were darker, more urgent, and more tribal. The overclass-underclass alliance, he said, had seized on a new strategy for strengthening itself: the importation of massive underclass reinforcements via unrestricted immigration of poor, unskilled Third Worlders from regions of low civilizational achievement—people bound to end up on the elites’ clientage rolls in perpetuity.

The elites had not scrupled to enlist the most primitive and dangerous social emotions in defense of their power: “The leaders of the alien underclass, as well as those of the older black underclass, invoke race in explicit terms, and they leave no doubt that their main enemy is the white man and his institutions and patterns of belief. ... Middle Americans now face [the imperative] of constructing their own autonomous political movement that can take back their nation rather than assisting the new underclass and the globalist ruling class in breaking it up. The time left for us to do so is shorter than it has ever [been] before in our history.”

Twelve years further on from that, here are the Tea Partiers vowing to “take back America.” Is there any real prospect of their doing so? If the “time left for us to do so” was short in 1998, how much shorter is it now? Why did those Middle American Radicals of 30 years ago—Donald Warren actually coined the phrase in 1976—not fulfill the hopes Sam Francis invested in them? Are the Meatheads now immovably entrenched as a ruling class, the Archies condemned to a permanent impotence relieved only by occasional spasms of semi-organized resistance, easily quashed or co-opted? Is the Tea Party

movement merely one of those fits? Will elitism always vanquish populism?

I would give pessimistic answers to all those questions. To understand the prospects for the Tea Partiers—or rather, their lack of prospects—recall the fate of Reagan-era Middle American Radicalism.

The MAR phenomenon had emerged from the crash of liberalism in the late 1970s. The busing and ERA wars, stagflation, the gas crises, and the Tehran hostage debacle left liberals chastened and the political Right fired up with indignation. Conservative intellectuals like Sam Francis had good reason to think that with its leadership demoralized, the overclass-underclass alliance might be brought down by concerted action on the part of disgruntled heartland populists.

They failed to appreciate the degree to which ruling-class values, already long dominant in the media and universities, had seeped into Middle America’s soul. Even as the leadership of the liberal project overreached and stalled in the late 1970s, rates of illegitimacy and marriage failure crept steadily upward, gay rights advanced, abortionists plied their trade unhindered, and popular culture coarsened. As the malign demographic consequences of the 1965 Immigration Act began to dawn on conservative thinkers, the middle class they hoped to awaken remained as intimidated as ever by liberal ruling-class rhetoric about “nativism” and “racism.”

Our intellectuals also overestimated the economic radicalism of the MARs, projecting their own cherished abstractions onto citizens who, however aggrieved they might feel about government’s grosser impositions, had no wish to let go of their Social Security, Medicare, public-school and state-college establishments, or the patriotic satisfactions of having the world’s largest and best-equipped military.

Political activism by new groups in any case follows a parabolic trajectory. It is a fundamental truth of politics in open societies that any person likely to give significant time to politics already does so by early adulthood. A contentious local issue may fill your high school auditorium with angry citizens for an evening or two, but people will soon lose interest and drift away. Political activism is the enduring enthusiasm of a very few, like contract bridge.

Also like bridge, insider politics has its own stylized language of phrases and signals, not easy for the newcomer to master. Archie may grumble picturesquely about the state of public affairs. If his job or property values are threatened, you may get him out to a rally. Eventually, though, his heart will return to where it belongs: his family, his TV, his job, his skeet club. He is, after all, middle-aged (to judge from the Tea Party gatherings) and cannot easily acquire new habits. Meathead knows all this and can wait the situation out.

So it will be with the Tea Partiers. I see no sign that the liberal establishment is seriously concerned by them. Everyone understands that the Obama administration was reckless, turning up the heat too high under that pot in which the proverbial frog is being boiled. The fire will be turned down so that the boiling can continue at its former barely perceptible pace. The Tea Partiers will be marginalized by appeals to political correctness, a thing easily done as practically all of them are white. The less committed will drift away; the minority that remain will be folded into the Republican Party, after first being subjected to a brief, painless operation to remove the “R” from “MAR.” Peace will descend, and all will be as it was, the elite secure in its power, the underclass secure with its dole, the middle classes back on the treadmill to pay the bills run up by the elites and their clients. Our

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rulers will say what imperial Chinese generals used to say after laying waste some rebellious prefecture: harmony has been restored.

The first steps have already been taken. Meghan McCain, a self-described “progressive Republican,” has publicly deplored the “innate racism” of the Tea Party movement. Meghan’s dad—who thought the much more explicit racism of the Rev. Jeremiah Wright a topic not proper to be mentioned when contesting for the presidency with Reverend Wright’s parishioner and who favors continuing mass Third World immigration—has been endorsed for his Senate race this year by Sarah Palin, the darling of the Tea Party Convention. McCain’s primary challenger, former Congressman J.D. Hayworth, whose opinions coincide very precisely with those of the Tea Partiers, will have to find endorsements elsewhere.

Perhaps it is just as simple as this: a meritocratic elite is, by definition, smarter than the rest of us. It can always “control the discourse,” planting shame and doubt in the minds of those who seek to challenge it, manipulating their sensibilities, feeding them a steady diet of soma through media and educational outlets, bewildering and outfoxing them with bogus appeals to the higher emotions. Perhaps it is all an unequal contest.

And it is probably too late in any case. The good intentions of the Tea Partiers could not, even if translated into action, stop the slide to national bankruptcy and humiliation. If Sam Francis were still here, I am sure he would tell us what the prophet Jeremiah told the people of Judah: “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.” ■

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CONTEMPORARY CONSERVATIVES place a higher value upon private property, the free market, and production for profit than do liberals and radicals, past and present. A substantial segment of the American people also appears to believe along these lines, thus calling themselves “conservative” or “right of center.” But, alas for conservative values, a very large majority of Americans, including those in the business class, behave differently from what might be inferred from expressed creed. George Will has noted that there are 2,200 trade associations based in Washington, D.C. In many instances their offices are seeking to protect a given business interest’s freedom, but in a great many more, the objective is, as the phrase has it, getting a piece of power.

But let us not lay the cudgel on business alone. The rush to Washington, D.C. for participation in the power structure is to be seen elsewhere: in the universities and schools; in the churches—eager for some new tax exemption or to promote some new welfare reform; in the labor unions; in just about every sector indeed of American society. The family is important: there must, therefore, be a plethora of federal laws and agencies protecting women and children. The local community is important: there must, therefore, be a vast community redevelopment act passed by Congress and an appropriate bureau established. Given present currents, one has the sense that if the move toward decentralization and localism did become major, it would culminate in some new Federal Bureau or Department, doubtless titled “Department of Decentralization and Localism.” But I am being cynical. The great question that must be answered by conservatives is that of the relevance in our time of such values as the family, neighborhood, locality, religion, social rank, voluntary association, and, alone making these possible, limited political government.

It is easy to caricature such values, to declare them mere survivals of the past, as out of touch with anything important institutionally as, say, Halloween festivals. This is the real dilemma of the conservative in our populist society: how to make the essential values of conservatism seem important to Americans; important enough to live by. Everyone, I assume, apart from a few militant women’s liberationists and homosexuals, is “in favor of” marriage, family, and their embedded ideals. The same holds true, undoubtedly, with respect to voluntary association and neighborhood. Similarly, there can’t be many Americans passionately opposed to religion. And the evidence suggests that most of us accept, even like, some degree of inequality in society, some kind of hierarchy, especially that based upon visible achievement. And a rising number of Americans express disillusionment with and distrust of big, centralized, bureaucratized Federal government.

But what we would like to know is the degree of intensity of such beliefs compared with the degree of intensity of belief we find among those for whom the centralized welfare state, reaching all areas of life, is the ideal. Alas, one thing is clear. Given the number of Americans who, whatever their professed principles, are nevertheless in chronic quest of Federal contributions to family, school, daycare center, to the unemployed, the ailing, and the old aged, irrespective of the often-mammoth bureaucracies which are or will be associated with these contributions and the invasions of personal privacy which must necessarily go with the bureaucracies, it is hard for any genuine conservative to be very optimistic.

—Robert A. Nisbet, “The Dilemma of Conservatives in a Populist Society,” 1978