



The End Is Nigh

by Tom Bethell

As I write, at the end of September, the conventional wisdom is that Bill Clinton will win the election. The feckless Ross Perot, who poses as an outsider but seeks to implement the establishment goal of "deficit reduction" (tax increases), may be getting back into the race, thereby introducing a element of uncertainty. Discounting Perot, however, the conventional wisdom seems sound. Various polls put Clinton ahead by about ten percentage points. Failing some dramatic new development, I expect to see Bill and Hillary Clinton on the reviewing stand in front of the White House, accepting salutes from the inaugural parade next January.

My purpose here is not to berate President Bush or to lament his dramatic decline but to anticipate the news media's response to a Clinton victory. We have already begun to see the media strategy: a Clinton win will be construed as a repudiation of the "failed policies of the Reagan-Bush years." A number of columnists have already begun to conflate the policies of Reagan and Bush. The latter was a continuation of the former, we will be told, and in the end they both failed. Bush's campaign strategy makes such revisionism all the easier. He has been trying to sound like a conservative—this being the autumn of a leap year—and now the press is happy to cooperate. They figure it's too late for him to recover anyway. If Bush campaigns as a conservative and loses, it will be that much easier to portray his defeat as a rejection of conservatism by the electorate.

Members of Bush's entourage will themselves contribute to such a

post-election analysis. Budget Director Dick Darman told friends in New York the other day that "if we lose this thing," it will not be difficult to apportion the blame: first, to the "Reagan deficits"; second, to a rather inoffensive, mid-level White House aide named James Pinkerton. (Despite harboring conservative inclinations, Pinkerton has been permitted to survive as window-dressing on the White House staff. He achieved a moment of fame for promoting something very vague called the "new paradigm." Darman didn't like it, apparently.)

Well, thanks Dick, and goodbye.

I believe that Jude Wanniski of Polyconomics was right when he said a year ago that there has been no criticism either of Darman or of Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady in the news columns or editorials of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, or the TV networks over the past four years.



Bill Clinton will be a most ungrateful President if he does not reward the perfidious "budget czar" with an ambassadorial plum. (He would be well advised, however, to keep him away from the levers of power.)

The reality is that throughout his administration Bush repudiated conservative ideas, especially in the economic realm, where he seems to have been guided by a half-remembered Keynesianism. What we are about to see, if Clinton wins, is a media analysis that will represent Bush's repudiation of conservatism as the electorate's repudiation of it. Bush would have done better to have taken the advice of his "moderate" inner circle and moved to the center, we will be told. We will be shown clips of Patrick Buchanan, Pat Robertson, Phyllis Schlafly, Bill Bennett, Jack Kemp, and Marilyn Quayle speaking at the GOP convention—and for those who still don't get it the lesson will be repeated.

Bush clung to the discredited Reagan line when he should have moved away from it! Even though the electorate is fed up with right-wing hate-mongering, Bush allowed himself to remain the captive of the right. And so on.

Judging by recent history, President Bush ought to be able to pull this election out of the bag, even at this late stage. If Perot is in the race, Bush will be running against two candidates who have promised to raise our taxes. Bush himself has said that he will cut them—not very convincingly, of course, but at least he has not said that he will raise them. In almost all elections in recent years, including the British general election last spring, tax cutters have defeated tax-raisers.

Tom Bethell is The American Spectator's Washington correspondent.

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The trouble is that Bush carelessly discarded this ace long ago. Pollsters have found that when they outline the Bush and the Clinton economic programs to voters, without identifying their authors, the voters prefer the Bush plan—until they are told that it *is* the Bush plan.

How did Bush manage to get into such a fix against such a potentially weak candidate as the Governor of Arkansas? (Clinton must have thought, incidentally, that 1992 would be a mere tryout year for him.) In the first place, Bush is a perennial babe in the political woods. Take the case of Magic Johnson, the sexually promiscuous basketball player whom he so unwisely appointed to the National Commission on AIDS. Johnson's qualification was that, as a result of his philandering, he had become infected with the virus that supposedly causes AIDS. Someone told Bush that here was a meritorious figure who deserved to be appointed, and one cannot but wonder what went through the President's mind at that point.

It might have occurred to him that Johnson was a public figure whom he could not control, and who could therefore easily embarrass him. The true purpose of the AIDS commission, of course, is to promote destructive needle-exchange and yet more radical sex-education programs at the federal level, and to generate public pressure for increased AIDS funding at every opportunity. If Bush does not go along, the commission will use its media access to embarrass him. As always, however, Bush played the good sport and allowed his agenda to be set for him. He appointed his own tormentor to the commission. Now Johnson has quit, complaining that Bush "utterly ignored" the commission's recommendations. Johnson added insult to injury by saying that he would be voting for Clinton. The *New York Times* played it straight, construing Johnson's contemptible behavior as "the most recent in a series of blows" to the Bush Administration's claim to have "responded effectively to the AIDS epidemic." Bush did what he was told, and was rewarded with "blows" that rained down on his head.

The truth is that Magic Johnson was the political instrument of those who opposed Bush politically. One wonders if

Bush even understands that AIDS itself is the most politicized disease in history. Johnson benefited from favorable publicity when he went on the commission; likewise when he left it. Try to imagine, twenty-eight years ago, a petulant member of the Warren Commission feeling so scornful of Lyndon Johnson's authority that he could feel free to resign in a huff over some trivial matter and endorse Barry Goldwater into the bargain. There's no way it could have happened.

This episode, the recent PBS series on American Presidents, and the recent antics of the House of Windsor point to one of the great changes that has occurred in the past generation, and it is the only piece of good news that I have to offer this month. Our leaders are being demystified before our eyes. In England at least, the emperor (or empress) may actually be walking along without any clothes at this moment. We are better off for the change. If the demystification proceeds much further, voters may at last begin to question why they have to contribute so much of their hard-earned money to support this vast, deadweight class of parasites on the public payroll.

A PBS program on John F. Kennedy showed the embarrassing performance of his press corps—laughing heartily on cue at everything he said. The servile press of Kennedy's day has of course been replaced by today's arrogant press. On balance I prefer the modern version. True, the news media today set up a great and concerted howling for more government; on the other hand they gleefully unmask the officials of that government as incompetents or thieves, liars or philanderers, or worse. This is not a stable recipe. The Communists also sought the centralization of power, and for decades achieved it. But at least they realized that the necessary herdlike passivity could only be preserved in the population at large by deifying the leadership. Centralization requires it. Not without reason were Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and suchlike thugs represented as secular gods.

Some members of the American press, our moral tutors, would like to see vast powers vested in Washington today (ensuring that we avoid greed, use condoms, shun homophobia, etc). Fortunately

for us, their fantasy of life steered and guided by progressive opinion is undermined by the media's unrestricted license to embarrass and expose each and every pol who rises to power. Since Kennedy, occupants of the Oval Office have been accorded a declining respect. Ronald Reagan is the only one to emerge from the ordeal of strict scrutiny relatively unscathed, and it's instructive to note the reason. He was admired because people realized that he stood for something more than the mere aggrandizement of government power. There's no reason to suppose that a President Clinton will be spared highly critical press treatment, after a brief honeymoon. The *Washington Post* will be eager to let him know who's in charge, after all.

In short, journalistic license is undermining the prestige of the governing classes. Conservatives should relish this deconstruction, it seems to me. The goal of conservatism should not be an all-powerful America "leading" the world in some no-doubt-destructive direction. Global ambition goes hand in hand with big government, which is why we should look askance when Anthony Lewis and his friends accuse the U.S. of failing in its "global responsibilities." The goal should be a free America with constitutional government—staffed by obedient servants employed for no more than a few years at most. We are of course very far from that ideal. But the end of the Cold War at least permits us to hope that some radical and beneficial change might yet occur.

In the New World Order that Bush mentioned but misconstrued, we no longer need a big federal government. As recently as last year it could plausibly be argued that we did, for military reasons. But the Soviet Union is no more; paradoxically, this great change in the world has undermined the GOP. With a Brezhnev or an Andropov still in the Kremlin, Bill Clinton would have no chance of defeating Bush. Now that the ICBMs are no longer pointed at us, however, the U.S. electorate may feel as free to change the U.S. government as the British electorate did at the end of World War II. Thus may George Bush in 1992 be compared to Winston Churchill in 1945. There. I wanted to end up saying something nice about Bush, who is after all a nice man. □



Does It Matter Who Wins the Next Election?

Does it matter who wins the next election? This may seem like an easy question to answer: of course we're all concerned about who will lead the Congress and the Presidency for the next four years.

The 1992 elections are on everyone's mind and lots of politicians are running scared. Why? Because millions of Americans are fed up: fed up with the federal bureaucracy, fed up with the 500-plus members of Congress and their 32,000 unelected staffers, fed up with a failing educational system, fed up with higher taxes, fed up, in short, with just about everything that emanates from Washington, D.C.

Up until now, even though it was rife with scandal, Congress could be assured of perpetual incumbency, with the Senate re-election rate at 85% and the House at 98%. But many members face certain defeat at the polls in November and many have decided not to run again. And the Presidential race will be just that—a real race.

It is important to note that most of the candidates are promising not less government, but "government that works."

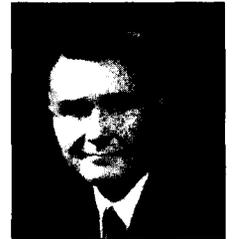
They've missed the point: What Americans want is *less* government. Our Founding Fathers knew that, unless stopped, government always tends to grow in size and power. Without strong limits, it is a threat to our liberty.

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The Coming Clinton Dynasty

Conservatives who think the Clinton Administration will be a short interregnum are making a disastrous mistake. For since Watergate, Democrats have learned to deal behind the scenes to ensure their re-election—with or without popular support.

by Grover Norquist

Certain well-intentioned Americans are saying that the nation, the Republican party, and the long-term prospects for a free society would be improved if Governor Bill Clinton were to defeat George Bush on November 3. The argument runs as follows: Bill Clinton will raise taxes,

overregulate, inflate the currency, cripple the economy, and champion his party's left-wing cultural values; while the Republicans unite in opposition, rediscover their Reaganite souls, and elect a truly principled President in 1996. This new conservative—Reagan II—would sweep away the follies of the interregnum and finish the Reagan revolution. Nineteen ninety-two is to be a reprise of 1976. Bill Clinton is to play the role of Jimmy Carter. George Bush is to be thrown overboard, as was Gerald Ford, to lighten the load and prepare the party for true victory.

It would be tempting to view a Clinton administration as a rerun of the Carter years, when Republicans sacrificed the presidential veto and four years of judicial nominations in return for the chance to go into full, bold opposition. And with the Soviet threat removed, we have less to fear from a four-year period of left-wing weakness in the White House. But however seductive the idea of punishing George Bush for his apostasy, any vision of conservatism as the ultimate winner in a two-steps-forward, one-step-back Leninist march, is a flawed one.

History chastens us. The 1976 election of Democrat Carter was the only time since Grover Cleveland's 1892 victory that a party has regained the presidency for a four-year term and then lost it. Furthermore, a better analogy than 1976 is the 1974 Watergate-driven election of seventy-five freshman Democrats to the House of Representatives. Like Clinton, this liberal band of congressmen did not command the support of a working majority of American voters—and, like

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