

MINORITY REPORT.

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"Electable." That was what all the clever-stupid politicians said about Bill Clinton. That, when you came right down to it, was the only point of the great lummoX from Arkansas. And since "electability" is an unquantifiable property, usually conferred by the very commentators who coined the term, there was no rational argument against it. Nor was there intended to be. It will take me a little while to erase from my mind the picture of Bill Clinton the day after he oversaw the de-election of half his party. There he stood on the lawn of the dictator of Indonesia, with East Timor relegated to the bottom of the day's corporate troughmanship, and smirkingly modeled a batik shirt for some local entrepreneur—the perfect moment, as he obviously thought, to say that the Christian fanatics have a good point on school prayer. He looked and sounded like nothing on earth, and President of nowhere. Or on second thought, perhaps he did look like something. Bulking out that batik, he resembled Gore Vidal's description of Teddy Kennedy as possessing all the charm and bearing of 200 pounds of condemned veal.

We will now have to suffer through some turgid rethink, and one can already hear the dirging tones of the rethinkers.

First out of the trap comes Al From of the Democratic Leadership Council, whose brilliant idea it was to have Clinton in the first place. With the nerveless stupidity of his kind, he urges a further move to the right as the "lesson" or "message." A moment of silence is what is required from From. Other brilliant schemes on offer are bound to include such untried initiatives as moving to capture the middle ground/the vital center/the extreme right/the forgotten middle class/Joe Sixpack/Jane Lunchbox. (Fill in as applicable. Put me down as favoring Jane Sixpack.)

In past cultural and political wars and alarms, there have always been those to argue that we need to "take back" some issue or theme or other. Thus "take back" the flag from the flag-wavers, "take back" law and order from the law-and-order Nazis, "take back" anticommunism from the cold warriors. You end up like the nervous duelist in the Caran d'Ache cartoon, who asks for a lesson from his second and is cut to ribbons by way of a demonstration while his real opponent looks gloatingly on. As the school prayer fiasco has already shown, and as will be further shown by future clothes-stealing expeditions, to act in this way is not to "take" the issue from the forces of reaction. It is to give it to them.

Enough of masochism. The Democratic Party is going the way of the Whigs, and a very good thing too. To see the back of men like Foley and Rostenkowski and Cuomo is a positive pleasure. The pity is only that it didn't all happen in 1992, thus

sparing us the miserable two years past and the dismal two years still to come. But rather than just living through the next two years, it is past time to attempt a new synthesis that has been *in potentia* for a while. Faced as we are with an apparently libertarian inclination among the voters, and a strongly authoritarian strain among the Republicans, the dialectical thing to do is to work with the libertarian tendency.

Elements of this possibility were present in the much-derided Jerry Brown campaign last time. If you want to simplify and minimize the relationship of the citizen to the state, there is no necessary contradiction involved in favoring (1) a flat tax, which would eliminate the parasitic class of tax-fixers who exempt the rich and the corporations from their fair share, and also eliminate the pulverizing bureaucracy which keeps people in permanent, servile confusion about whether or not they have complied with the law; (2) single-payer health care: advantages too obvious to mention but including the elimination of wasteful duplication and stupefying insurance company paperwork; (3) abolition of the national security state, and the downsizing of the military budget to one that is appropriate to a large, nonimperialist democracy; (4) decriminalization of narcotics and an end to Prohibitionism—the acid test of seriousness about crime; (5) a "Freedom Summer" for the cities and ghettos, with a massive public-works and reconstruction program. And obviously (6) the state needs no dealings with any church or churches.

During the lunacy of the Reagan period in Washington, I was impressed by how often it was the Cato Institute that held the sane meeting or published the thoughtful position paper. These days, I get more out of reading the libertarian magazine *Reason* than I do out of many "movement" journals. There are important differences of emphasis, but it can be more of a pleasure to joust with the libertarians than to have another go-around with the center-left and its doomed coalition of dwindling "out groups."

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In Zaire this summer, I was privileged to watch French colonialism in action, as it moved to commit the double crime of shoring up the Mobutu despotism, the better to provide succor to its defeated Rwandan clients. Those Hutu murderers who were not given shelter by Mitterrand's regime in Paris were being found accommodation in Kinshasa, and with Zairian Army help were establishing control over the refugee camps. Latest reports indicate a newly confident Hutu military caste, refreshed by French arms and training, preparing to challenge the military victory of the Rwandan Patriotic Front. This almost unbelievable outcome, which has been supported in most important respects by the Clinton Administration, needs to be countered urgently. The invaluable book *Rwanda: Death, Despair and Defiance* has opportunely been published by the new organization African Rights. It has a particularly fine section on the origin of racist and supremacist ideology among the Hutu elite: African Rights can be contacted at 11 Marshalsea Road, London SE1 1EP, England (tel.: 44-71-717-1224; fax: 1240).



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