

# Pat Buchanan: Cultural Conservative Warrior

By Jerry Harris

It's easy to see why Buchanan left the Republican Party. In his book The Great Betrayal he praises socialist John Stewart Mills, backs Keynesian economics, and uses arguments from left wing liberals Robert Reich and William Grieder to bolster his own position. On the other hand he attacks right-wing stalwarts Newt Gingrich, Dick Arme, and Phil Graham, while criticizing conservative economists icons Milton Friedman and Ludwig Von Mises. No wonder Republicans are saying good-bye Pat, while the left tries to figure out how a right-wing populist can steal so much of it's own agenda.

Beyond interesting copy for the pundits, Buchanan is worth a deeper look. Politically he represents a doctrine of economic nationalism that has deep roots among workers and the middle class. Neo-liberal globalization is the political face of third wave information capitalism. It's this new world order of free markets and digitized speculation that Buchanan attacks, seeking to build a political base from the right-wing social movement of the Reagan era. His politics are based on maintaining the social contract that grew out of industrial age imperialism. Second wave capitalism had a nationalist project that rooted its stability and popularity in sharing the wealth of imperialist plunder from the Third World. Foreign policy was based on creating jobs and cheap consumer goods for the white middle class and labor aristocracy. As the slogan said, "What's good for General Motors is good for the U.S.A." In this sense Buchanan is truly a reactionary, placing himself in a bygone era and building barricades against the future.

The global goal of today's ruling class has no nationalist project, only a class strategy unattached to any particular country. The strategy of the new global capitalist class is based on world accumulation. This includes a world labor market, global assembly lines, and the rule of international finance. Paying U.S. auto workers \$18 an hour is seen as an inefficient use of money compared to \$3 an hour in Mexico, or 25 cents an hour for textile workers in Honduras. This is what Buchanan means by the "Great Betrayal." He is angry at a capitalism that has outgrown its national straight jacket and thereby liberated itself from any national responsibility. He wants America to return to a pre-globalized world where foreign policy served to enrich the capitalist class while cultivating a middle class consumer society. From this context Buchanan sees Gingrich, Bush, and his former Republican cohorts as third wave conservatives whose main agenda is global free markets, and he's right!

Buchanan's sympathy is for, "Second Wave America, the forgotten America left behind. White-collar and blue-collar, they work for someone else, many with hands, tools, and machines in factories soon to be hoisted onto the chopping block of some corporate downsizer in some distant city or foreign country. Second Wave America is a land of middle-class anxiety, downsized hopes, and vanished dreams ... This other America is the inner city, where the yellow brick road to the middle class narrows to a single lane."

It's clear Buchanan was caught in an unsolvable contradiction. The right-wing coalition was built on an alliance between social movement conservatives, Reagan democrats, and neo-liberal globalists. But the economic policies of free market speculation undercut the living standards and jobs of the conservative middle class and blue-collar nationalists. These contradictions forced the alliance to split and Buchanan had to make a choice; whether to join the globalist's camp, or attempt to lead a right-wing populist movement based on economic nationalism and social conservatism.

Buchanan articulated this problem in his weekly column (3-23-98) titled "Free-trade Extremists Undermine Reagan's Legacy." He argued that while global free trade and cutting government safety nets created fortunes for some, "in the middle and working classes they generate anxiety, insecurity, and disparities in income. Since these classes seek stability and order from their political systems above all

else, Thatcherism and Reaganism undermine the very social structure on which they were built". He concludes that, "Conservatism is thus at a crossroads. And if social conservatism is at war with unfettered capitalism, whose side are we on?" Well, Buchanan has made his choice about which side he is on and the type of movement he wants to build.

Economic nationalism comes easy to Buchanan, as he writes in The Great Betrayal, "This is the way the world works. Nations are rivals, antagonists, and adversaries, in endless struggle through time to enhance relative power and position. So it has been: so it shall ever be." (Buchanan p. 66) Regardless of class differences, Buchanan sees nationalism as the basis of solidarity under the leadership of benevolent and patriotic corporations in a never-ending Darwinian struggle for national supremacy. His archetype seems to be Henry Ford who "saw himself as pater familias of Ford Motor Company, a patriarch...who posses that sense of obligation similar to what a good commander feels toward his soldiers." (p. 94) Of course, Buchanan fails to mention that Ford installed machine guns in front of his house and hired gangland thugs to protect him from this "family" of laborers after his guards shot down four workers during a protest march in the Great Depression. But Buchanan goes to great extents to tell readers of the virtues of U.S. industrial giants. As he points out, "It is grossly unfair to damn for lack of patriotism GM and all the other U.S. companies now siting new plants outside the United States," they were "driven out of American, whipped into exile by government policies...virtually designed to rid this nation of its core industrial base." (p. 86)

Buchanan may keep the auto industry close to his heart because of their bashing of foreign imports before they went global. But whom does he think he is attacking when he states, "A transnational has no heart or soul. It is an amoral institution that exists to maximize profits, executive compensation, and stock dividends. If the bottom line commands the cashiering of loyal workers after years of service, it will be done with the same ruthless efficiency with which obsolete equipment is junked." (p. 55) Sounds like General Motors to us, and the manufacturing giants of the Fortune 500 who have built the global assembly line. Buchanan may want to lay the basis for an alliance between industrial workers and corporations, but it will only work if the global economy collapses and corporations retreat to national markets. The fear of a collapse may be the exact reason Buchanan is kept in the wings awaiting his turn, but more on this later.

## **PROTECTIONISM AS HISTORY**

To understand the historical roots of economic nationalism and how closely tied it is to industrial imperialism we can look at Hilferding's Finance Capital, where he writes, "For the imperialist this nation is real; it lives in the ever increasing power and greatness of the state, and its enhancement deserves every ounce of his effort...the national idea has become the driving force of politics. The common action of the nation, united by a common goal of national greatness, has taken the place of class struggle, so dangerous and fruitless for the possessing classes." (p. 336)

How far the current globalists have evolved from this description can best be understood from their own words:

Gilbert Williamson, president of NCR; "I was asked the other day about U.S. competitiveness, and I replied that I don't think about it at all. We at NCR think of ourselves as a globally competitive company that happens to be headquartered in the United States." (Buchanan, p. 99)

George W. Ball; “The urgent need of modern man is to use the world’s resources in the most efficient manner...that in turn will be possible only when national boundaries no longer play a critical role in defining economic horizons.” (p. 106)

Zbigniew Brzezinski; “A global human consciousness is for the first time beginning to manifest itself...Today we are again witnessing the emergence of transnational elites...composed of international businessmen, scholars, professional men, and public officials. The ties of these new elites cut across national boundaries, their perspectives are not confined by national traditions, and their interests are more functional than national.”

Strobe Talbott (Clinton’s Oxford roommate and architect of his Russian Policy); “All countries are basically social arrangement...No matter how permanent and even sacred they may seem at any one time, in fact they are all artificial and temporary...Within the next hundred years...nationhood as we know it will be obsolete; all states will recognize a single, global authority.” (p. 106)

President of IBM’s World Trade Corporation in 1974; “For business purposes, the boundaries that separate one country from another are no more real than the equator. They are merely convenient demarcations of ethnic, linguistic and cultural entities.” (p. 106)

These statements are from a political self-conscious global ruling class, busily engaged in constructing a new world order. They have moved far beyond the national priorities set out by Hilferding to a truly transnational worldview. Rather than understanding this as a natural development of capitalism that continually expands in its drive for accumulation, Buchanan attempts to write the history of capitalism as the history of national protectionism.

One of Buchanan’s favorite presidents is William McKinley, elected in 1896 and again in 1900. McKinley’s presidency ushered in America as a great imperialist power. Declaring war on Spain the U.S. soon possessed Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. McKinley’s imperialism also believed in protective tariffs, foreign colonies were to open markets for American goods, not open America to foreign competition. Such a policy expanded jobs at home, expanded markets for American business, and created common unity around national greatness.

For Buchanan America’s rise to a world power was due to protectionism. As he states: “Behind a tariff wall built by Washington, Hamilton, Clay, Lincoln, and the Republican presidents who followed, the United States had gone from an agrarian coastal republic to become the greatest industrial power the world had ever seen....such was the success of the policy called protectionism.” (p. 224)

It’s at this point that Buchanan wants history to stop. He fails to understand that capitalism’s project is based on markets not nations. Protectionism is a stage of development, not a principal of national organization. Newly developing states always want to protect their national markets in order to secure their power base. But once the national markets are saturated and factories turn out goods that can’t be consumed at home, imperialism naturally follows as a way to obtain new markets. This, in turn, leads to building a global system and capitalism maturing beyond its national base. As world markets come to dominate the process of accumulation, the capitalist class transforms into a transnational class with global free markets, as it’s economic policy. The capitalist class has no patriotism beyond itself. Its nationalist period that expanded the middle class was self-serving. Keynesian social contracts insured labor peace and smooth production, not love of country and workers. Some individual capitalists certainly have true feelings of social responsibility and concern, but as a class they have always seen themselves as the only true embodiment of the nation.

In fact, McKinley's presidency was a time of fierce class warfare inside America. But class conflict disappears in Buchanan's history. He even defends his old boss, Ronald Reagan as a great protectionist. What hypocritical nonsense. It was the Reagan years in which Paul Volker at the Fed let loose financial speculation. Raising interest rates undercut manufacturing investments in favor of money markets and stocks. It was Reagan's 1980s that saw an explosion of global financial markets and the economy that Buchanan criticizes. Far from saving industrial jobs the Reagan/Volker recession from 1980-82 destroyed hundreds of thousands of the good paying blue-collar jobs in America. Those workers remaining were faced with threats of factory closures and the export of jobs, creating the pressure for huge contract concessions and lower wages.

In the Chicago/Gary region over 120,000 steelworkers lost their jobs, or almost half of the total workforce, including the shutdown of some of the largest mills in the area.

## BUCHANAN'S CLASS STRATEGY

The threat of Buchanan's political strategy is twofold. In the short run it can seriously weaken the progressive thrust of the growing anti-globalist movement. Although Buchanan had few people in the streets of Seattle, he received more than his rightful share of media coverage and his protectionist rhetoric has a home among the ranks of many in the labor movement.

The strategic threat of a Buchanan led movement is its real possibility of coming to power in the event of a worldwide economic crash. Such a crash would produce a political backlash against globalist's policies, and a necessary drawing inward to deal with the severe social ramifications of a world depression. In this scenario the ruling class would need a powerful political movement based on protectionism, racism, and a corporatist social agenda to counter progressive solutions. Buchanan's mass appeal is well established among the social conservatives of the middle class, the protectionist wing of labor, and the small business class who is often at odds with the globalist transnationals. That is enough to build a social base of support.

But Buchanan would also have support from nationally based capitalists, and this is key in understanding who Buchanan represents. The national bourgeoisie is mainly bound to the national market with its production rooted in local labor markets, and politically linked to the nation-state phase of capitalism. Their interests lie in a strategy of national accumulation, including a whole set of traditional national regulatory and protectionist mechanisms. They also need a social contract with labor in order to insure social stability for production. Since the 1970s they have been in descent to the ascending transnational fraction of capital. This battle for domination has been the backdrop to many political and ideological struggles of the past 25 years.

Nationally based capitalists can also be international, but we need to distinguish between international and transnational forms of capital. International capital still competes as national blocs of capital attempting to sell their commodities abroad. They seek to have their interests represented by the state, which they expect to extract advantages for them in international competition. During the era of industrial imperialism this led to the great nation-state systems of international rivalries, as powerful blocs of nationally lead capital fought for world domination. Some national capital blocs still compete on the global stage, but world trade and finance today is clearly dominated by transnationals.

Transnational capital is driven by a strategy of global accumulation. It is not dependent on a system of interstate rivalries, but has built a global system of transnationalized production, labor, finance, and

markets. This is a transition from the nation-state phase to a new transnational phase of capitalism, in which economic integration is much deeper. World linkage now springs from the productive and financial process itself, which is integrated at a supranational structural level. As stated by Robinson and Harris: "Globalization therefore redefines the relation between production and territoriality, between nation-states, economic institutions and social structures." (*Science and Society* Vol. 64, #1. p. 17) This system has liberated transnational capital from the political jurisdiction of nation-states, as well as from any national responsibility to form a social contract with the working class.

This brings us back to Pat Buchanan and what he calls "The Great Betrayal." Buchanan represents the descending fraction of national and international capital that once ruled America. Their best chance for regaining leadership is a global crisis that would weaken transnational capital, and drive a reactionary and protectionist movement towards political hegemony. In some important ways this is what happen with the stock market crash of 2001 and the attack on 9/11. The Bush White House has taken a sharp turn towards nationalism not only in military affairs but on a number of important trade issues also. When Buchanan official left the Republican Party he put himself outside the inner circle in Washington. But he certainly is part of a larger conservative right-wing political bloc that has gain hegemony and currently dominants in the United States.