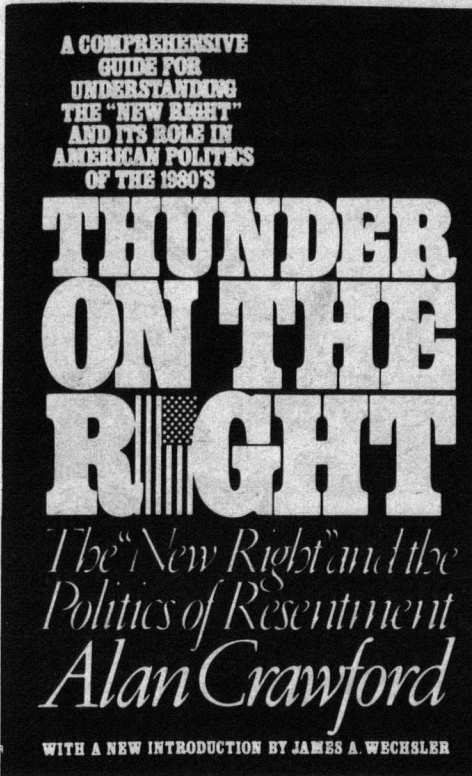


# Conservative vs. strange bedfellows



Thunder on the Right  
Alan Crawford  
Pantheon Books 1980

review by Peter Michalyszyn

It may come as some surprise to those whose nourishment is their hate for conservatives that William F. Buckley Jr. is considered — by others most frequently described as on the right — a liberal hack.

Buckley, columnist George F. Will, and at times even Ronald Reagan, are fingered as "soft on the world" by the "new" right wing in American politics, so tells author Alan Crawford in a recent book.

"Thunder on the Right: the Politics of Resentment" is its title. It is must reading for those who suspect themselves of being conservative, yet are disturbed by the

extremism of the forces of the right to the south.

Crawford, a journalist writing just prior to Ronald Reagan's presidential sweep last November, attacks and ridicules the self-styled "New Right" conservatives with the zeal and confidence of an "old" conservative sure of a kill.

*The New Right is essentially populist, not conservatively elitist.*

To wit: the "New Rightists" call themselves conservatives for change, an obvious contradiction of terms; their movement is essentially populist, not conservatively elitist, reaching out for support to the Archie Bunkers of America. They are reactionaries who would in Rev. Jerry Falwell's words, "stamp Communists on their foreheads and send them back to Russia."

Their program, such as it is, includes attacking mega-corporations in the name of libertarian free enterprise, attacking large government in the name of plebiscitary direct democracy, attacking gay, feminist, and otherwise "bleeding heart liberal" minorities in favor of a return to Biblical law.

Claiming a massive conspiracy by a wily Eastern liberal establishment based in Nelson Rockefeller's backyard, New Rightists see only radical change — a conservative revolution — as the means to make America great again.

Philosophically the New Right corrupts the dichotomy of freedom vs. order that rules conservative thinking; their interpretation is freedom for the True Believers to impose order on everyone else.

But Crawford repeatedly observes it is fundamentally unconservative in any but the most oppressive and distasteful circumstances to advocate upheaval of any established order, if only for the simple reason that, as history shows, the alternative will probably be worse. Yet the New Right as one believes in the wisdom, if not the possibility, of such radical change.

The estrangement of William F. Buckley from the New Right is highlighted by Crawford. Buckley, editor of the *National Review*, a journalist respected even by the left, and in a large way credited for bringing conservatism back into American politics in the 1960's, disdains the extremism of the New Rightists.

The New Right equally disdains Buckley for supporting former President Carter's Panama Canal treaty, for his evident if not unequivocal support for feminist and gay rights, for his "trans-ideological" friendships with the likes of James M. Schlesinger Jr. and John Kenneth Galbraith.

Strangely enough, the New Right isn't so fond of Ronald Reagan either. After the 1976 Republican nomination race which Reagan lost to Gerald Ford and in which he chose moderate Richard Schweiker as his running mate, he has been considered too much the politician.

Crawford says the New Rightists are essentially anti-political ideologues, holding any compromise to the decadent forces of liberalism to be intolerable.

(The last politician the New Right liked was Spiro Agnew; and only when Richard Nixon faced impeachment did the right-wingers reclaim him, says Crawford. Buckley, representing the ethical side, called for Nixon's resignation during Watergate.)

*There is Congressman Larry MacDonald ... whose office is adorned with portraits of Joseph McCarthy and Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet.*

Accompanying such political obstinance is a legislative influence in Washington limited to a half dozen fringe representatives led by Jesse Helms of North Carolina and Larry McDonald (a Georgian whose office is adorned with portraits of Joseph McCarthy and Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet).

But Crawford warns not to underestimate the lobbying potential of the New Right forces. They are mainly two-fold: first the evangelists such as Anita Bryant and Jerry Falwell and his Moral Majority Inc.; and second, the direct-mail lobbies and fund-raising expertise of Richard Viguerie and others.

Viguerie alone can reach out to 25 million Americans with petition-letters or fund appeals to fight "undesirable" legislation in Congress. Working with lobbies such as the National Right to Work Committee, Viguerie has orchestrated campaigns to defeat pro-labor legislation in Washington. The Stop-ERA forces speak for themselves.

Waiting at the side are organizations like Gun Owners of America, Conservative Caucus, the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC), and dozens more. Crawford concludes that in spite of their radical craziness and political ineptitude, the New Right is a reckoning force (he estimates the fourth most powerful) in American politics, and growing.

But as he notes, they are not conservatives.

Arts quiz answers

1. Benjamin Disraeli
2. Napoleon
3. Nietzsche
4. Voltaire
5. Mark Twain
6. H.L. Mencken
7. Honore de Balzac
8. Benjamin Franklin
9. Peter Laouheed (anybody in possession of an English translation of this quote should contact the Arts desk.)
10. Michelangelo (his favorite saying).

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