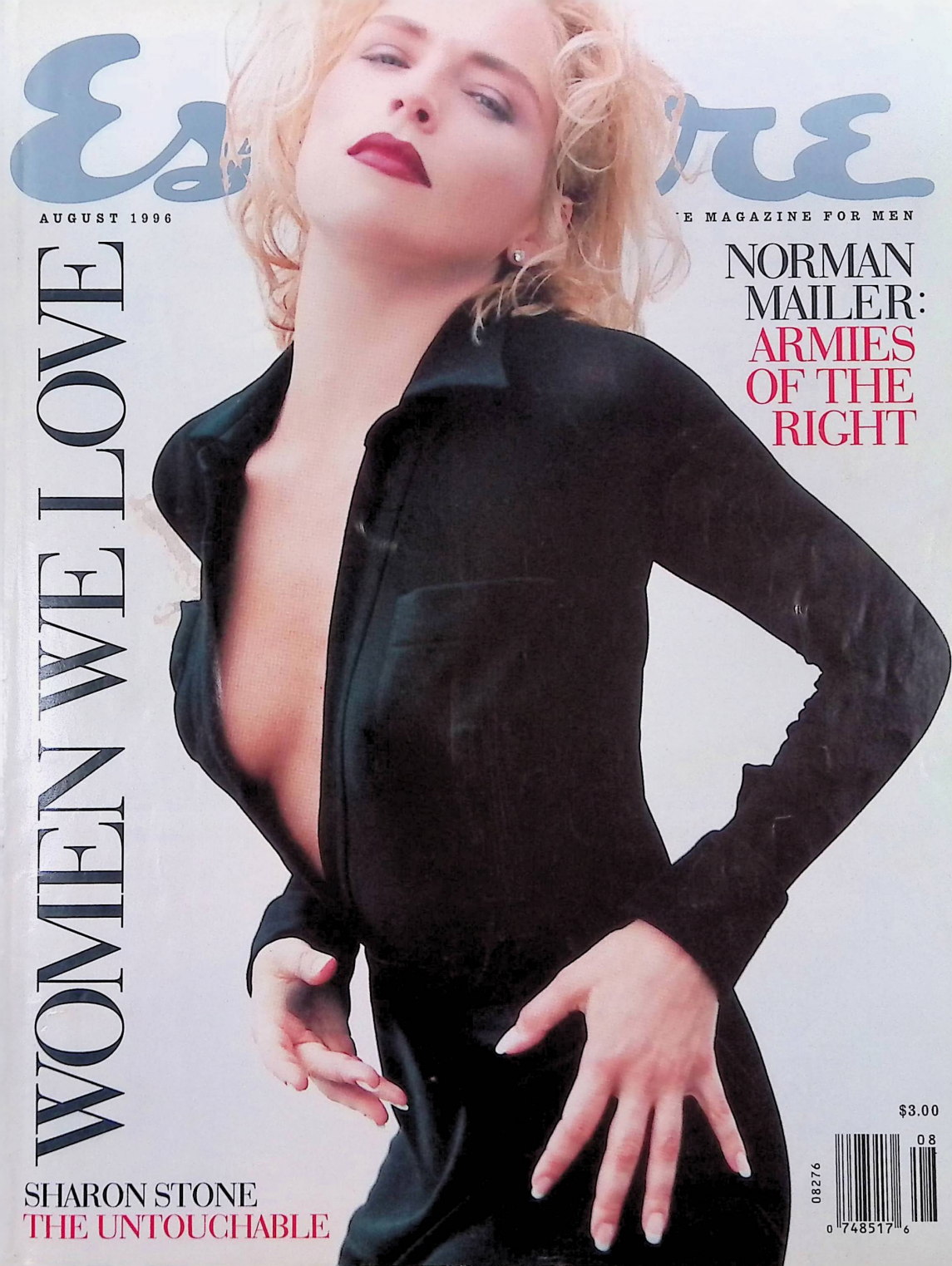




Esquire

AUGUST 1996

THE MAGAZINE FOR MEN

WOMEN WE LOVE

NORMAN
MAILER:
ARMIES
OF THE
RIGHT

SHARON STONE
THE UNTOUCHABLE

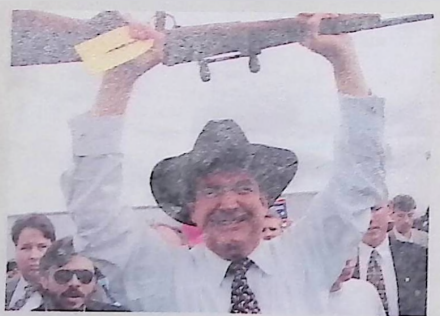
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NORMAN MAILER SEARCHING FOR DELIVERANCE



Imagine a nation in which the Right and the Left unite to combat the unchecked power of corporate America and the craven accommodations of Bill Clinton's Boutique Politics. That time could yet come, says the author, who finds Patrick J. Buchanan an authentic populist and a most unlikely soul mate in the pursuit of a radical new society.

A Political Encounter

PERHAPS IT CAN BE SAID THAT CLOSE TO FIFTY YEARS OF the cold war had to go by before Patrick J. Buchanan and Norman Mailer could speak to each other through a long afternoon.

Since it was Norman Mailer who sought the interview, we may as well begin with the motive. He was approaching a conservative as far to the right as Pat Buchanan. Why? The answer, clear to hand, is that during the Republican primary in New Hampshire, Buchanan had spoken not as a conservative but as a left-conservative. Since Mailer had for years been assuming that he was the only left-conservative in the land, he now had the curious pleasure of discovering that he was half of a two-man band. Of course, the novelist, by his own measure, was two-thirds left and one-third conservative, whereas Buchanan had to be, at quick estimate, three-quarters conservative. Nonetheless, some agreement might be found. Mailer had become so exercised, so infuriated, by what was happening in the country, the Congress, and the Clinton administration that he had been ready to run in the Democratic primary for president. He had actually seen himself traveling through New Hampshire in the fall of 1995 and the winter of 1996. He would campaign without money, without a staff. Perhaps a skeleton staff. Of course, he would have a name—of sorts—to attract some media attention, and he was not modest about the force of the ideas he would introduce while campaigning against Bill Clinton.

Nonetheless, he was no recognizable grade of presidential timber. His wife made it plain. In quiet tones he had come to know all too well—the steel in the voice of a soft-spoken southern woman is as palpable as the cutting edge of a Damascus blade—his wife promised that she would leave him if he dared to declare. She was furious that he saw it as a conceivable effort. Worse!—as a breath of fresh air! For the nation! Considering that this was an age to uncover the darkest secrets in each candidate's life, the author had pictured himself saying to the press: "I've been married six times. I committed a felonious assault against my second wife. I've been untrue to every woman I cared about. Gentlemen and ladies of the press: Do your worst! I've broken through the media barrier. There's nothing to ransack in the closet."

It was a speech he could utter in the lively if private amphitheater of his mind, but he knew his wife was not without reason. The glare generated by the feeding frenzy of the media would blind the public to every political insight he hoped to offer. The real substance of his thought, such as it was, could only be injured by a candidacy. It was the American presidency, after all. As soon could the Marquis de Sade have proposed himself for the papacy.

Besides, Mailer no longer had the simple strength to campaign. He was seventy-three years old, and running for office called for stamina. Even a mediocre politician who could bring off a successful candidacy was entitled to respect, as much respect as one would give a mediocre but nonetheless professional athlete. When he had run for mayor during the New York City primaries in the spring of 1969—and that was more than twenty-five years ago!—he had discovered by the middle of a three-month campaign that he had dwindled; he was, by that point, only half as good as when he'd commenced. The rest of him had been consumed by endless campaigning through eighteen-hour workdays. Whenever one took off even an hour in the course of an uphill campaign, one lost a few good votes. You had neglected to visit

one more place. At the end of the day, you drank. Booze was equal to gasoline. The demands of a campaign were inexorable. As soon get into condition for a fifteen-round fight as for a three-month campaign. By 1995, twenty-six years later, he came to realize that he was, implacable verdict, too old. Too old to run uphill. So he would not try to install himself in the immortal shade of Eugene McCarthy's surprise showing against Lyndon Johnson in 1968; he would not go up to New Hampshire to campaign against Clinton. His wife was right. The reputation was hopeless and the energies, by his own measure, too limited.

Yet it gnawed at his opinion of himself that Clinton's nomination in 1996 would not be contested. Having belonged to the legion of enthusiasts for Bill and Hillary in '92, he had been hopeful that the candidate and his wife would help to bring forth a new era for a nation addicted, by the end of the cold war, to a host of foul habits. Before long, he had been bitterly disappointed. Clinton soon demonstrated a resolute inability to draw a line in the sand. There had not been a single idea for which the new president seemed ready to suffer the risk of political death. At the start, he had squandered his presidential patrimony in a feeble and ill-conceived notion of bringing gay men openly into the military, a whole failure to comprehend that the military was the greatest institution known to humankind for developing rites of sacramental male bonding—the final defense, so to speak, against homosexuality itself.

From the outset, few were the male Americans, therefore, who did not know that we had a new leader who was psychically blind, or innocent, or egregiously vain! This attempt so injured Clinton's reputation for good judgment that the Republicans were encouraged to recognize that they could defeat a universal-health-care bill of which the country was much in need, even if the corporate cohorts of the Republicans had found it inimical to their higher-level profits.

Clinton soon proceeded to become too many things to too many: pro-choice, pro-feminist, pro-black, pro-gay, pro-church-on-Sunday, pro-family-values, pro-Hollywood, even pro-corporate-business to the degree they would accept him; if it came to it, and it would, he would be pro-military, pro-combat. Wars were the first emolument of incumbency!

It certainly had to be said: Bill was, by now, bedded down with every special-interest group in the Democratic party and with a good fraction of the opposition—a species of political diddling that Mailer had come to call Boutique Politics. Clinton had not steered a navigable course. Instead, the vessel of the Democratic party was becalmed. Separate banks of oars, strained upon by separate echelons of galley slaves in the White House, pulled in opposite directions. Where were the gays to be found who would pool resources with blacks? Or vice versa? And everyone knew that the leader was not going to die for a political idea unless it was pro-choice. There, he had no choice. Female liberationists would dismember Bill Clinton if he wavered. Indeed, it may have been the only matter on which he had not compromised with the Republicans.

The Second Government

OF COURSE, THE INANITION OF CLINTON'S ADMINISTRATION was but in part his fault. With the end of the cold war, the United States had lost an essential paranoid fiction,

precisely that dramatic myth that had supported the well-being of the American system for forty-five years. We had had an evil empire as our enemy, and it had been invaluable to us. What a shock for the system to discover by the end of the cold war that this evil empire was but a poor thing—a Third World country—that needed our economic support to prevent a descent into chaos.

The abrupt disappearance of this once-trustworthy fiction helped to produce a distrust of our government so profound that many a militia patriot was ready to fight the FBI down to the last man. Paranoia being a state of imbalance that lives on absolute answers, the militia, in company with some sizable number of Americans, had come to believe that the federal government was engaged in a worldwide plot to hand America over to international bankers. Indeed, the International Monetary Fund was giving \$10 billion to the Russians.

Our erstwhile candidate suspected, however, that the militia was mistaking the American government for another force that might be dominating our lives more closely. The feds, after all, were a gaggle of highly separated institutions, bureaucratic mills, and grassroots extensions; we all know how they aid and certainly impede the average American in a thousand if not a million ways.

Yet on reflection, it is hard to conceive of the federal government as owning so purposeful a will that it controls an alien force that is able to come creeping into our beds. A more appropriate name for the source of the phenomenon—creepage!—has to be technology with its half-compatible parents, the U.S. government and the U.S. corporation. And of the two, it was the corporation (if you were seeking to detect an invisible force able to control your life despite yourself) that looked to be the likelier villain.

After all, the federal government was always under examination. Monitored by the cold and venal eye of Congress and by the opportunistic eye of the media, it was always under scrutiny, whereas the Corporation, which henceforth will be capitalized (for it is a Second Government!), could sequester itself from inquiry with echelons of lawyers and vaults of massive banks. Within its worldwide net, a horde of secrets worked like termites to generate money.

So for decades, with increasing skill, the Corporation had been successful in influencing, corrupting, motivating, stultifying, and overstimulating the youth of America. Indeed, the Communist party of the Soviet Union had never been remotely as successful at subverting its young. Any young Russian with wit or inner fire could ignore communist propaganda in his private life, mock it, repudiate it. Not only had Soviet attempts at brainwashing been heavy, absurdly heavy, but—fell omission!—insufficiently insidious.

The U.S. Corporation, however, had flooded American lives with plastic from the cradle to the grave; it had voided architecture of its art by building huge, faceless office buildings and/or high-rise condominiums that proceeded to destroy the faces of our cities. It had inundated all the nerve centers of the American psyche with television. It had helped to uproot our sense of the past. And the need of the Corporation to market what it made had long invaded our personal lives. Advertising permeated the clock of our days.

Mailer could even recognize that he hated this Second Government, the Corporation, with something like the same intensity that the militias brought to their passion against the U.S. government.

The Populist on the Hoof

ONTO THIS STAGE OF THE AUTHOR'S MIND ENTERS Buchanan in the Republican primaries of '96. He wins early in Louisiana, comes in second in Iowa, and then proceeds to thrive in New Hampshire. Moreover, Buchanan is acting in much the way Mailer had expected to carry himself if he had run. Pat is being himself. He is saying, "Here am I with my quick wit and my caustic tongue, my offbeat laugh and my political passion and my gaffes. I haven't been prepared in advance for you, freeze-bagged and microwaved by political technologists. I'm a brilliant boy with a lot of faults, but I'm here on the hoof, and you can take an honest look at me."

Buchanan had scored in New Hampshire! There had been an energy in his campaign, an off-the-cuff virtuosity one had not seen in years. While what he said remained for the most part ultraconservative, right to life, pro-NRA, and he called for fences to keep out illegal immigrants, he also kept after the Corporation like an attack dog. Its loyalty, he told all who would listen, was no longer to America but to money.

His crowds loved him. There was a subtext to all he was saying, and it was ultrapopulist. "Wisdom," declared this subtext, "is not to be found in the think tanks of the experts but in the experience of the people."

Soon enough, Mailer began to play with the idea of doing an interview with Buchanan. It could prove costly, however, to the hard-earned equanimity of the author's days. Buchanan had reverence for icons, and the first was Ronald Reagan.

Yet Buchanan's raids on the sanctity of the Corporation might be a trumpet call to some kind of new politics. For years, Mailer, dreaming of a left-right coalition, had known it must start on the Right. People on the Right, oriented to the sacramental, were suspicious, stingy. Most of their ideas were fixed in Perma-bond, whereas people on the Left were more flexible, more—it could be said—more desperate in their political isolation. Ergo, they were more ready to take on a new idea. At the least, one could explore the possibilities. Would Buchanan, for example, be inclined to a serious reduction in military outlay? All the other concerns of Mailer's good political day—medical support for the sick and the elderly, the restoration of the environment, warfare, some honest revision of welfare, a reduction of the deficit, even a reduction of the hatred between black and white—could be in part resolved by downsizing the Pentagon.

Of course, when it came to politics, Mailer knew that he was part of the ongoing naïveté of the majority of Americans. At the age of seventy-three, he was still looking for hope in outlandish places. To think that Buchanan, who had made this one startling move to the left, could be the harbinger, if not the protagonist, of a profound realignment in American politics was naïve indeed; yet Mailer was weary into the grinding grit of his soul with the tiresome, wholly condemnatory politics of the American Left and the American Right. Neither spoke of the other except to excoriate or misrepresent, and all the while, capitalizing on their mutual animadversion, the Corporation was enjoying lavas of greed while raking in avalanches of appropriation. So, too (via TV), had flourished Roman circuses of mind-leaching entertainment for the populace.

It was time to have a dialogue between Right and Left. Might there be some potential for agreement? If Mailer went

to talk to Buchanan, however, it must not be with a set of preformed media stereotypes of the man. He would not be there to scold Buchanan for being loyal to Larry Pratt of the Gun Owners of America nor to assume he was anti-Semitic; no, such routine media baggage would make their dialogue mutually fail-safe and sterile. On the contrary, if he wished to elicit a new point of view, he would have to take Buchanan on his own terms and assign as much purpose to the candidate as he gave to his own ideas.

Besides, Mailer was intrigued by the political possibilities. In the military sense—and where was any pleasure to be found in campaign analysis without a military analogy?—

Buchanan had anchored his right flank on pro-life. Abortion, he had made clear, could never be acceptable. His right-wing credentials impeccable, therefore, Buchanan was free to move as far as he wished to the left, the economic left; the Corporation could now be attacked from the left and the right. A crucial difference. No political force would ever prevail against the Corporation if it could move forward on only one flank or the other; it would soon be opposed by the other wing brought along quickly to join ranks with the center (exactly what happened in the election crusades against Goldwater in '64 and McGovern in '72). The Corporation, monarch of the center, could be deposed only if both ends attacked in combination. Left-conservatism! For forty-five years, it had been no more than an oxymoron. Now, with Buchanan, there was a gleam of possibility, call it no more than a wink, but the possibility was there. How far to the economic left was Buchanan willing to go?

The 45 Degree Angle

THREE WEEKS AFTER BUCHANAN'S LAST EFFORT AGAINST Dole in California, the interviewer's taxicab, having proceeded westward along the verdant south bank of the Potomac for some four or five miles, came to the first exit at McLean. After a short search on a suburban road, the driver deposited him at five minutes to 1:00 P.M. in a driveway by the side of Buchanan's home, a large two-story house painted white with high white columns in front of a long but narrow veranda.

The door was opened by a maid whom Mailer took to be Hispanic—her name, he learned, was Galle—and he was left alone for a few minutes in the library, a dark-paneled room with two facing sofas, a large square coffee table, and a fireplace. On the mantel were a small cast of an American eagle and a small cast of a tiger, nicely striped. Between them, on the wall, was an oil painting of two lions. The several hundred books on the shelves were political and/or historical. He noticed the works of Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and William Manchester together with those of William Bennett and William Safire, which occasioned the random rumination that if one wished one's son to be a literary fellow, one

could do worse than to name him William. He would then share nomenclature ancestry with William Shakespeare, William Faulkner, William Styron, William Makepeace Thackeray, William Carlos Williams!

Enough of such felicities! Mailer decided to take a quick look at the adjacent living room, which was long and wide, had many windows, and looked to have been furnished either by Mrs. Buchanan or an interior decorator, for it revealed a nicely toned set of contrasts in pale green.

Buchanan came into the library shortly after this brief excursion. He was taller than he appeared to be on television, perhaps six feet, and his weight was trim. They shook hands, and, after a moment or two of mutual recollection of Chicago in the summer of 1968 (where they had both been in the same group of shocked and startled onlookers on the nineteenth floor of the Hilton, looking down on Michigan Avenue when Mayor Daley's police proceeded to beat the demonstrators), they now sat down, tape recorder on the coffee table, not quite twenty-eight years later, and began to talk.

They had met again a few times in the intervening years, once in a Washington restaurant sometime in the eighties and again in a corridor of the Astrodome in Houston during the Republican convention of 1992. Man to man, face to face, Mailer liked Buchanan well enough. Given the fragmentary basis of these brief meetings, Buchanan looked to have humor; your heart would not sink if he turned out to be the passenger who sat next to you on a long flight.

All the same, Mailer was under no illusion that they would begin with a great deal in common. As part of his preparation for the interview, he had read Buchanan's memoir of his youth and young manhood, *Right from the Beginning*. Published in 1988, the book portrayed Buchanan as much to the right of Richard Nixon and somewhat to the right of Ronald Reagan. He had certainly been filled with the dye-fast anticommunism of the most devout Catholics of the 1950s, that anticommunism whose roots had so penetrated into the faithful that there was joy in the thought that one was waging war for God, Church, America, and Freedom.

At least eight years had gone by, however, since Buchanan had finished writing that book. How much, then, had changed in the last decade? Not much, one could easily have thought at first. They both sat in high-backed upholstered chairs about six feet apart, and Buchanan set his body at a full 45 degree angle away from his interviewer; their eyes did not often meet. Mailer, who liked to lean forward in conversation, felt as if they were speaking to each other across a space of water.

On the other hand, Buchanan still had to be weary of

MAILER'S FEELING IS THAT
BUCHANAN'S
FUTURE
IS IN THE DEMOCRATIC
PARTY

SEARCHING FOR DELIVERANCE

the rigors of campaigning. Few defeats bite into one so thoroughly as a final loss at the polls. To campaign with heart is to be decimated by defeat. One's energies are as decimated as by rejection in love. Sitting there, Buchanan

Lock and Load

NORMAN MAILER: I followed your campaign in New Hampshire and enjoyed sheer hell out of it. Having had that small dip in the water myself, when I ran for mayor of New York in the primary back in 1969, I think I know a little about a candidate's inside feelings in the middle of a race. So I started following your ups and your downs. In New Hampshire, it was mostly ups, but afterward there were a few downs that I laughed at, because I had done worse things when I ran. I refer specifically to the time you were wearing a black cowboy hat and you held a rifle aloft out of sheer joy. That's how I interpreted it: This guy is happy now.

PATRICK BUCHANAN: We were in Arizona, right after New Hampshire. We were at a gun show.

NM: And you were on a roll.

PB: We were on a roll. There was a lot of exuberance after New Hampshire.

NM: Yes. How could there not be?

PB: We had started in Arizona in single digits, and we kept building in the polls. We did not go over the top; if we had, I think we might have won the nomination. But there's three reasons we didn't: One, absentee ballots. Forbes and Dole had thousands of absentee ballots already cast, where we had only a tiny percentage. Second, Forbes spent four million in Arizona, unanswered, which is forty dollars a vote. And third, Dole put in half a million dollars in attack ads as we were surging.

I don't know if we could have won it, but clearly, if we had, we would have gone much longer.

NM: I believe New Hampshire changed attitudes in the Republican establishment from "Buchanan is worrisome as hell" to "Buchanan must be stopped at all costs."

PB: We were under savage attack. This is why we felt confident afterward. We felt they had thrown pretty much everything they were going to throw at us in those last five days in New Hampshire, and we had overcome it.

But I did say in my victory speech, "We no longer have the element of surprise." You know, don't wait for the sound of their guns—they are coming.

NM: The feeling I had, watching

was relaxed, but his brown eyes were somber. The hearty readiness to take on all comers that had been so much a part of his presence while campaigning in New Hampshire was absent. Or such was true as they began.

litical arm of what I call the Second Government, the Corporation.

PB: Yes. At the national level, it remains that. But when we fought against NAFTA and GATT, the grassroots Republicans were against it. The Mexican bailout was opposed by 80 percent of the American people, including Republicans. Yet most of the Republicans voted for NAFTA and GATT.

Only one thing explains it: They got a phone call that said, "Look, we don't care where you stand on vote to life. But this is one we want. Vote for GATT. We're calling in our IOUs. This is it. This is the bill we paid for when we bought the advertisements and the program for the dinner, when we made these contributions to your campaign; this is the one you have to vote for." And all of them, Gingrich, Dole, Gramm, others, went right along with NAFTA, went right along with GATT, went right along with the Mexican bailout. Fifty billion dollars. And the only reason they did that is because the people pulling the strings told them to. I don't see any other explanation.

The Republican party is going to have to cut those ties, or it's never going to be the nation's majority party.

NM: But the Republican party, I will say again, is the political arm of the Corporation. By this logic, you can no longer be a Republican.

PB: It's the old question: Do we stay inside the country club and try to open up its admissions policy, or do we leave in protest and start our own club? That's the decision before us.

NM: I have an ax to grind. My feeling is that your future is in the Democratic party. I do see it as the other political arm of the Corporation, the minor political arm, but all the same, the party is closer to that huge mass of Americans who don't like greed.

PB: Let me tell you this, Norman. In Louisiana, I spoke at the library in a tiny town about fifty miles outside of Lake Charles, over near Texas. The mayor introduced me and gave me the key to the city, and they cut loose, they were cheering, yelling. And as I was leaving, because I had come there as a presidential candidate, the mayor said, "Why did you come here? There's only two Republicans in the whole town." They were

all Democrats, but they loved what we were saying about the corporations.

So our problem is this: A significant slice of our coalition is in the Democratic party. Where Democrats could vote in Republican primaries, we did best. A significant slice is Perot supporters; a significant slice is Republican. The best way to get that all together, we believe, was to capture the Republican nomination and then reach out to those Perot voters and those grassroots Democrats and say, "We are populist, conservative, traditionalist; we are against big government, big corporations. America first, and we're running against the establishment."

Our problem is, Republicans tend to be loyalists. When we ran against George Bush in 1992 in the primary in New Hampshire, 80 percent of the New Hampshire Republicans said they agreed with me, not with George Bush. But they would not go against the presumptive leader of the party. That's what Richard Nixon had going for him. That's what Dole has going for him. He's our titular leader. And it's very, very hard from a third-party standpoint to pull away those Republicans who are loyal to the party. They're very good people. The party is strong. The problem is the establishment in Washington. Can you overcome and displace the establishment? Or is it just too strong, too determined?

NM: You are running into the stone wall of all time if you're trying to separate the Republican party from the Corporation.

PB: Well, we could have if we'd gotten the nomination.

Let that part of the party go; let it walk away. Where is it going? Let them ride in the back of the bus.

You can get the grassroots of the party, the Perot people, these grassroots Democrats. Of course, it would be tough. The entire establishment—the media, the corporate establishment, and all the others—will try to stop you from the nomination. But once you could get the grassroots, I think it would be one of the great, glorious contests of all time.

NORMAN MAILER

NM: But the key problem—and you stated it clearly—is, if you leave the Republican party, many of those loyalists will not vote for you, no matter how sympathetic they are.

PB: Yep. And you have to take a look at the possibility that you're not a third party but a fourth or fifth or sixth party. You've got the Libertarians there and Ralph Nader and Ross Perot.

BUCHANAN: YOU'RE EXACTLY RIGHT. THE CORPORATIONS ARE NOT GOING TO LET GO OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

of the spirit" would be enormous.

What you're up against, and I will say this over and over, is, I can't conceive of the Corporation ever letting go of the power they have in the Republican party.

PB: You're exactly right. The corporations are not going to let go. But we had almost taken over. Almost. Six points more in Arizona. If we had broken through there, it might have carried us over the top in Georgia. One week after Georgia came Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee, Oregon, Texas, Oklahoma. That's Super Tuesday.

NM: You would have had a chance at Super Tuesday?

PB: Georgia was the key southern state. If we'd beaten Dole there, the whole South would have been up for grabs. All you needed after New Hampshire was to go over the top in Arizona and then in Georgia... but it didn't happen.

NM: That's the kind of thing that has guys standing at the bar rail twenty years later.

PB: I'm not that type. [Laughing] You think I shouldn't have put the gun over the head?

NM: You had to; it's part of your character. You believe in rejoicing after victory.

A Worn-out Palooka

THROUGH ALL OF THIS, THE CANDIDATE kept sitting at the same 45 degree angle away from his interviewer. Yet the more he spoke of what could have been, the more his mood seemed to improve. After a pause while Mailer turned the tape over, Buchanan agreed to change the seating. Now they faced each other across a chess table whose pieces were taken off to make way for the tape recorder. The chess set, Buchanan remarked, had been a gift from his wife. British redcoats faced Revolutionary minutemen on the board.

By now, Mailer had come to the conclusion that Buchanan said only what he wished to say. He was a seasoned pol, after all, he was a pro. Nor could you make too much of his body language. Buchanan could have agreed to this change in their seating as a reluctant courtesy or because he, too,

But here's my point: The average Democratic congressman who dares to invoke the name of Jesus Christ is doomed!

PB [laughing]: Go on...

NM: The president can be a practicing Christian—he can go to church and invoke the name of God—but the average urban white Democratic congressman certainly cannot. The result is that the Republicans have picked up a great many Democratic voters whose religious faith is more important to them, finally, than their politics. You have more or less said the same thing. The power that you would set loose in the Democratic party by saying, "We are for more economic justice and, at the same time, reinvigorating some sense

felt more comfortable. Mailer, therefore, decided that he was not going to offer descriptions of each of the candidate's moves. He did not wish to ascribe significance to body language that was probably well within Buchanan's choice.

Mailer would, however, indicate when they laughed. In that sense, Buchanan's sense of humor was like the gleam in the eye of a good boxer who will not only take pleasure in landing his shot but is also ready to gain from an unexpected blow. One has just learned something. So Buchanan would laugh as heartily at points scored against him as at those in his favor. Mailer, having something of the same disposition on this matter, laughed in the same way.

All the same, their shift in position had made it easier to talk. Mailer decided to risk a first radical premise.

NM: I don't mind if some people make twenty or thirty times as much as others, but I don't think the ratio should be five hundred to one. That breeds all sorts of social disease.

PB: If middle-class and working-class folks were seeing a steady increase in their standard of living, as they did in the fifties and early sixties, I don't think people would pay much attention to someone making a lot of money. But they do if they're slipping themselves. You look at some of these corporate executives. When their companies do badly, their incomes remain astronomical. There's a sense that an enormous amount of rip-off is going on. The return is in no way justified.

NM: And the products are not getting better.

PB: Right. The products are not getting better. I think it increases the national—almost contempt—of the capitalists. Eventually, this will translate into contempt of the system. We're getting to the point where the big corporations are being seen as increasingly unpatriotic. It is a new era, but most of the Republican party at the national level is still very much a cold-war party. It can't let go. It misses the Soviet empire, all the cold-war paraphernalia.

NM: Would you agree that the cold war gave a free ride? We had an enemy. That enemy was godless materialism.

PB: It made everything easy. It provided clarity.

NM: But at a huge cost. Because it was a drug. Absolutely a drug, that cold war. Here, you may disagree profoundly—but I think the cold war was over twenty years before it ended.

PB: People watched Jimmy Carter talk about, We've gotten over our "in-

ordinate fear of communism," and all of a sudden Iran is gone, they're holding Americans hostage; the Red army's in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Angola; they're in Grenada; they even have a beachhead in Nicaragua. I was in Ronald Reagan's White House. We were doing our best to expel the Soviet beachhead in Nicaragua. It all collapsed—you're right; I think it was hollow by then, and you probably anticipated that. . . .

NM: Hollow! The Soviet Union was endlessly hollow, and I think there were certain people who knew it. But you guys loved it, that this was an expanding empire.

PB: Here's the thing, here's the thing: Why was everyone saying, "We have to watch Reagan; he will get us into a war with this mighty Soviet empire"? Reagan did not directly confront the Soviets. He challenged their empire around the periphery, where the Soviet empire would not feel its vital interests were threatened. He moved the Stingers into Afghanistan. Moved aid to the Angolan resistance and aid to the Nicaraguan resistance. Moved aid

that succeeded. The cold war, we won.

NM: I'd say we didn't win it. We were just a rich bank bankrupting a poor bank.

PB: In a way, we did. We bankrupted them.

NM: At huge cost to ourselves.

PB: Enormous cost to ourselves, there's no doubt about it.

NM: And we're paying for that cost now in a lack of faith in government, in a sense of outrage.

PB: You know, the one thing I think the American people do believe is that we did win. People ask me: Can you name one good thing that government has done? Yes. We won the cold war.

NM: Well, I try to take that away.

PB: Look, Norman, look, it seems to me—I was there with Nixon, remember, in 1972, '73, '74. The United States lost the Vietnam War, or at least, the West lost the Vietnam War. The demoralization of the United States in the seventies was incredible. I believed, generally, at the end of the 1970s that we were in danger of losing the cold war.

NM: There we disagree. The Soviets didn't have it anymore. Under Stalin, it

was a great threat. He, no question, was insane. An evil empire, if you will, back in the fifties. But I think Khrushchev alleviated the worst Soviet strictures to a considerable degree.

If America had gone through several revolutions and several overthrows of government, and had had a hideous system for over fifty years and an incredible war in which twenty million people were killed and another twenty million expired over several decades in prisons and camps, how much will to fight would be left? I've never been in a country where so many people were depressed as in Russia in 1984. You were there earlier than I was, and you saw the same thing: this prodigious depression. When you have a country where everyone is down that low, it is not about to wage a major war. They knew by then that they certainly didn't have the stuff to conquer the world.

PB: Eurocommunism was a very big thing in the late 1970s. I think Ronald Reagan really provided the leadership, the philosophical offensive, the economic offensive, the Reagan Doctrine. The Soviet Union collapsed without firing a shot, and it was a phenomenal victory for the West.

Now, it could have been we overestimated, although I don't think we overestimated how strong they were militarily.

NM: Well, that's arguable. They couldn't even win in Afghanistan.

PB: One of the reasons is we provided Spanish mortars and Stinger missiles. I think Reagan made the Soviet Union pay a hellish price for its empire.

NM: Would you agree that we, too, paid a great price for the cold war?

PB: Oh, we paid an enormous price.

NM: Not only economically. Spiritually. For four decades. We assumed that we had an enemy who was dangerous, lethal, godless, and evil. All our hatred—and a lot of hatred exists in this country—was focused on those Soviets. I've used this image before, and I'll use it again. We were all like iron filings in the same magnetic field. With rare exceptions, we all pointed in the same direction. And when the war ended, when the cold war ended, it was like you threw a switch. The magnetic field no longer existed. The filings began to scatter. But the hatred was still there.

America has been more divided in the last four or five years than at any

time I can recall. Everybody is hating everybody. Hating your enemy is no longer as comfortable as it used to be. For politicians, the Soviet Union had been invaluable. It was like having a dependable mother-in-law, the one you can blame for everything.

PB: I think there was a genuine feeling in this country, and it was valid, that we had a mortal enemy outside the gates, and it took a measure of unity and solidarity to face that enemy. Suddenly, the enemy is gone. So we go back into the house, and all the old disputes that existed before the threat have now come to the surface.

I think what happened in the conservative movement is that a lot of us have gone home to where we came from—the idea that America ought not to be an empire. That we ought to tend to our own business and stop meddling in other countries' affairs. We see that the war is over. We ought to come home, retrench, repair, reorganize, and rebuild our own country, our own nation. All right. Some communists have been reelected in Eastern Europe. But I think this second-generation communism is not what the earlier one was. It doesn't have the spiritual hold on anyone. It's no longer, quite frankly, a threat to the United States of America.

The United States ought to take a look at the world as it is. The potential threats and menaces to American security are very, very few, and they're very far away. I think we ought to be a normal country in a normal time. Look, if Russia rises again, it's not going to look around for an enemy halfway around the world. It's mainly going to be a threat to its neighbors. I don't think the United States ought to counterthreaten them with military force or hot war or blockade or all-out war. I would say to the Russians this: We know you can invade the Baltic republics and Poland. There's nothing we can do about it militarily. You can overrun them in two days. But if you do, here's what's going to happen: You'll be diplomatically isolated; you'll be politically isolated; you're probably going to force massive rearmament in Western Europe, which we will assist. You're going to be alone in the world. You're going to have problems with the Muslim countries, problems with the Muslim countries, which we're not going to help you with. You'll have the hostility of Western Europe, which we're not going to help you with. You're probably going to have the hostility of China and Japan.

You will be friendless on the earth. Why are you going to do it? Why are you going to reestablish an empire that you people had to give up because it was bankrupt and the people hated you? Do you want to remain friends with the United States? There is no natural conflict between Russia and America or between the Russian people and the American people. Why create one?

But I wouldn't threaten them with war. It's ridiculous. It's ridiculous!

Yet a part of the Republican party and the conservative party still says, "We've got to go on a crusade for global democracy. The great enemy now is Islamic fundamentalism." And a lot of us are saying, "Look, this time we don't go. That's not our war. Our war's over." Republican conservatives have to give up their global empire and all the security arrangements, all the treaties, all the troops in all the countries overseas.

NM: You'd be willing to reduce the size of the Pentagon?

PB: Surely. I think that's right. I believe the United States should remain superior, on the seas, in the air, in technology, and we have to have the finest fighting men in the world, but you don't need a hundred miles of American troops sitting in the middle of Germany, guarding a border that doesn't exist against an enemy who went home six years ago. Eventually, the South Koreans, who are twice as populous and have six times the economy of North Korea, have to take full responsibility for their own defense. I think the United States should confine its treaty commitments to air and naval power. We're not going to put another army on the ground in Southeast Asia.

NM: So you are saying that we don't need a military organization which attempts to control the affairs of countries all over the world?

PB: Now that the cold war is over, Europe is as prosperous as we are. It has more people than we do. It is as technologically advanced. There is no reason why Europeans cannot handle the defense of Europe themselves. We aren't the Romans protecting an empire. I think if we're going to become normal, we should be coming home soon.

A Tiny, Tiny Victory

WELL, THERE WAS NO OTHER PRESIDENTIAL candidate who was ready to downsize the [continued on page 118]