

Skeptical View of

By Patrick J. Buchanan
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The suspicion deepens that brother Charles W. Colson, having departed the bosom of the White House family, has fallen in among evil companions. With his embrace of public financing for all federal campaigns, the decorated veteran of the attack group enlisted in ranks captained by the honorable John W. Gardner, the chauffeured capo of Common Cause.



PATRICK BUCHANAN
He's against it

Mr. Gardner's boundless enthusiasm for public financing is not unreasonable. When private contributions are permanently prohibited, the "peace" money, the "liberal" money that formerly went by the millions into the presidential campaigns of Muskie and McGovern, Lindsay and Humphrey, will be looking about for a new home.

If politically active men of wealth and "progressive" views cannot legally contribute to candidates who personify and forward their political views, they will turn to organizations which do. And the most publicized of these, on the American left, is Common Cause.

A
Personal
View

Watergate is said to be the unanswerable argument for campaign reform. But public financing is simply a euphemism for taxpayer financing. And the Watergate follies could have been easily financed with a check from the U.S. treasury as a check from some corporate contributor.

Still, we are told, public money is pure; and private contributions, are often tainted with the expectation of preferment on the part of the giver.

But the donor who means to purchase political influence will not long be deterred simply because Congress has declared that one stall is no longer open. Where there is a will, there is a way. And the politician who will sell his services to the highest bidder will not close shop simply because the campaign contribution has been outlawed as the medium of exchange.

But, although eliminating the private contribution will only momentarily confound the corrupt politician and the influence peddler, that elimination will permanently close for tens of thousands of honest citizens—wealthy, middle class and working class—the only avenue available for participation in a presidential campaign. For whole classes of citizens, access to the political process will be limited, when the private contribution becomes a feel-

ony.

The young man of few responsibilities could still volunteer at the campaign headquarters, but the older man working ten-hour days would be denied making an equivalent contribution, of earnings, to the candidate and campaign most representative of his beliefs.

And what kind of standard is that that judges it exemplary to contribute 10,000 dollars to Common Cause to pressure Congress for some new agency, but a federal crime to contribute 10,000 dollars to the presidential campaign of a George Wallace who might shut down that agency, abolish those sinecures, and return the money to the taxpayers whence it came.

Campaign

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'Reform'

If Republicans are prohibited from contributing their savings to conservative presidential candidates, who will prevent Mr. Meany's committee on political education from making its quadrennial contribution of 10,000,000 dollars in manpower and time to the candidate of the Democratic party? And what requirements are to be imposed upon the nation's dominant networks which, in the estimation of many conservatives, annually provide millions in free publicity for liberal candidates and liberal causes?

Masquerading as reformers, the political left is busy drawing up new guidelines and restrictions of campaign financing, the ultimate result of which will be to leave the political assets of the left intact, while denying to Republicans and conservatives the necessary wherewithal to communicate with the American people, over the heads of a sometimes hostile media.

Public financing, we are told, will re-establish public confidence in the political process. But, will Mr. and Mrs. Hardhat really be enthusiastic when they learn that not Clement Stone, not Stewart Mott, but they themselves, are footing the bill for 200-dollar-a-day political consultants, two-inch thick carpets for junior cam-

campaign staffers, Bloody Mary parties for the campaign gang and traveling press corps, and millions of dollars for unnecessary polling or idiotic campaign ads that contradict their political beliefs and insult their intelligence?

The taxpayer is already subsidizing enough nonsense without adding politics to his tab. The waste and folly in a presidential campaign are gargantuan in scale. How could it be otherwise when a

50-state, 50,000,000 dollar organization has to be started from scratch and functioning smoothly in the three months between nomination and election?

The people's lobby is what Common Cause has christened itself. Well, if the people's lobby works its will, the people will end up paying the salaries of federal bureaucrats to police our elections, as well as the cost of the elections themselves. Meanwhile, those tainted

voluntary contributions, that used to pay the freight, will be freed up for channeling into less sinful enterprises, such as the latest lobbying effort of Common Cause.

Like so many of its predecessors, the net effect of this reform will inevitably be: first, a costly new agency inhaling tax dollars; second, an increase in the tax burden on the average citizen; third, new restrictions upon the individual's political freedom; fourth, yet another

transfer of resources and responsibilities out of the private sector and into the government sector; and last, the disillusionment that inevitably follows the failure of utopian schemes to legislate morality.

Rather than imposing this unworkable cure upon the nation's political process, we are better off living with the disease. Indeed, the situation is not that bleak. The election reforms of 1971 and 1972 cannot really be said to

have failed because — as Chesterton said of Christianity — they have not really been tried. It was not post-April but pre-April that the fiduciary hanky-panky attendant to the campaign of 1972 seems to have occurred.

If the American people were asked: "Do you believe political campaigns should be financed with voluntary contributions, or with your tax dollars?" conservatives could have confidence

in the response. But the question is rarely framed thus.

Indeed, last week's frantic effort to smuggle the contraband of public financing onto the statute books, aboard the neutral vessel of the debt ceiling, seems indicative that the "people's lobby" is not all that confident of the people's support.

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Buchanan is a special consultant to President Nixon.