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Richard Krickus. *Pursuing the American Dream: White Ethnics and the New Populism*. Anchor Press/Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1976, 424 pages.

New Populism is to become the latest rage in Democratic party politics if Richard Krickus, in *Pursuing The American Dream: White Ethnics and the New Populism*, succeeds in convincing the ethnics to actively support the most current of evolving reform movements. An emerging "new breed" of activists the white ethnics, joining forces with progressive politicians, social unionists, and civil rights leaders, among others, would seek fundamental public policy changes. Such a coalition, similar in composition to the New Deal supporters, would pursue, for instance, the nationalization of the oil industry. It might also support a national health and pension plan and legislation encouraging widespread unionization of the labor force. If these and other reforms were to materialize, Krickus believes that the cause of social and economic justice would be greatly advanced.

The realization of any of these goals, however, requires that white ethnic activists be sought out. Consequently, in order to mobilize their forces, Krickus attempts to persuade the New Populists that this ethnic support is indispensable. Moreover, as it is noted in the book, the white ethnics have been the "keystone of the Democratic coalition since 1930." In this light, then, Krickus devotes the substance of his discussion to the plight of the Irish, Jewish, Italian, Polish, and to some extent Lithuanian immigrants.

Incorporating both historical facts and current data, the author surveys the institutional forces that shaped the immigrant worker's way of life. The survey extends from the early beginnings of the labor movement to the Nixon era. Throughout, much substantive information on the labor movement, urban machine politics, national politics, the influence of the Catholic Church, and black-white ethnic conflict is presented. Virtually every element germane to the ethnic in America receives some degree of focus. The reader, therefore, is oftentimes left with the impression that the New Populists are supplied with any number of issues and strategies by which white ethnic commitment might be engaged.

Although this appears to be the author's underlying theme, as indicated by the title of the book, intermittently touched upon throughout the discourse, and finalized in the concluding chapter, it is by no means the whole of the book. The actual scope and implied intent is far more encompassing. By his own admission, Krickus sets out to explore "the origins and evolution of the white ethnic." The trauma of immigration, nativistic bigotry, immigrant family relationships, and the community, are all incorporated within this cultural framework.

Each ethnic group, although sharing certain common problems, developed uniquely. Given that more than five ethnic groups are considered, it is difficult to discern an in-depth treatment of any one of them in the one-volume text. The comparisons, contrasts, and summations made by Krickus, although apparently intended to demonstrate various common denominators among the white ethnics, result in mere overviews and over generalizations of only vaguely related circumstances.

Were it possible to present a thorough analysis of the ethnic plight, as the author had hoped to do, this alone would have been an undertaking of mammoth proportions. Krickus' aspirations however, assume still greater dimensions when he professes to explain the intricate interrelationships of social, political, and economic events. Specifically, he claims to provide explanations for "why the left failed to attract immigrant workers, why the labor movement prior to the Great Depression ignored most of them, why the private sector is as responsible for the decline of white ethnic neighborhoods as poorly designed government programs."

To offer a perspective or to attempt a reasoned analysis would certainly be conceivable. On the other hand, an exhaustive study that would wholly explain definitive causal relationships in such complex areas is too difficult an assignment for most scholars. Krickus' attempts to accomplish just this illuminates a further serious flaw of the book. Oversimplified, over generalized, and inappropriately categorical statements are the result. He provides weak analyses within his discussion and uses limited factual support for his contentions.

An excellent illustration of Krickus' lack of perception is his use of economic theory, which, relying upon only the superficialities of a single school of thought, presents an incomplete perspective. Being extremely critical of the free

enterprise system, the author asserts that it is nothing more than a myth and that the white ethnics adhere to this myth. He then pursues his argument by declaring that Big Business perpetuates "the hoax of free enterprise because it functions like a tranquillizing gas destroying the critical faculties of the American people and confusing them as to the truth of our economy." The "real" truth is that major corporations are decidedly anticapitalist. They choose to work with government because such an alliance decreases corporate risk and insures them a greater profit margin.

To suggest that major corporations are in collusion with government is simply a misconception unsupported by hard data. Compared to European and Japanese companies, there is little cooperation between government and business in the United States. To the extent that cooperation exists, however—in public utilities, the airline industry, banking, etc—it exists to protect both capital-intensive industries *and* to benefit the worker.

It becomes apparent that Krickus, throughout his discussion, considers an enormously complicated subject in a casual manner. Implicit in his tone is an aversion for corporate profits. At the same time, he discounts the fact that it is profit which encourages capital formation, which in turn provides the opportunity for capital investment, thereby leading to more jobs. Such a structure—granted all of its inequalities—has provided the worker, the focus of this book, with the prosperity he enjoys today.

Krickus, nevertheless, chooses to ignore the benefits the white ethnic has derived from the corporate structure. Instead, he argues that social and economic injustice has been perpetrated by the business community's manipulation of government. Having taken this stance, the author then asserts that such a condition must be remedied. To this effect, he offers a twofold solution: first, there must be greater citizen participation in decision-making; second, there must be a redistribution of the national wealth. Although neither recommendation is set forth in sufficient depth, Krickus does indicate that the labor movement is "bound to play a profound part in this endeavor." He further maintains that the direction labor must take is toward social unionism and away from the corporate umbrella. The recent experience of Great Britain would indicate that steps in this direction would be exceedingly unwise.

It would be possible to continue analyzing these and other deficiencies of Krickus' argumentation as he attempts to convince the reader of the urgent need for a New Populism that would involve the white ethnic and allow for the realization of suggested national reforms. However, it is equally important to emphasize several noteworthy aspects of *Pursuing the American Dream* especially evident in its historical chapters.

Of particular interest is the discussion surveying the immigrant legacy and the beginnings of the labor movement. Special attention is devoted to the Lawrence Strike of 1912 and the 1919 Steel Strike. The immigrant workers' turmoil is presented in such vivid detail that even those not acquainted with the plight of the immigrant can begin to appreciate the tremendous obstacles he encountered while settling in America.

The historical schematics of urban machine politics are also presented although a more in-depth inquiry would be desirable, Krickus provides an ample account of the role of machine politics in the political growth of the immigrant. As the basis of his discussion, he chooses several interesting arguments: "The urban political machine introduced the immigrants to the American political system, it ameliorated interethnic discord, it served as a quasi welfare system, and it enabled ethnic minorities to acquire wealth and gain social status."

"Black/White Ethnic Conflict" is yet another section of significant distinction. Refraining from inflammatory rhetoric, Krickus presents the reader with a lucid and perceptive inquiry. He effectively argues that too much attention has been given the black minority, to the detriment of the white ethnic worker and his family. Whereas blacks have gained advantages through governmental programs, blue collar families have been virtually ignored. Using the 1960's as one example, Krickus states that only a few urban experts both in Congress and in the White House "demonstrated a real appreciation for the discontent percolating in white ethnic communities."

Further, black/white ethnic conflict itself has more often than not been thought of in terms of white prejudice. Black racism, a highly contributing factor of interracial conflict, is "rarely mentioned by most social critics."

Other forces at work that cannot be ignored are also emphasized. For instance, the white worker is often discriminated against through minority quota systems. Differences of social class and conflicting cultures play an important role as well. To the extent that these and other observations are developed, they skillfully highlight diverging attitudes among minorities and the dilemma of the white ethnic worker. This and Krickus' synopsis of the immigrant legacy within a historical context make the book worth reading—though warily.

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