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CAFTA

Free-traders losing Congress because they have lost the country

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Two years ago, our tireless troubadour of globalism, The Wall Street Journal, was beside itself with giddiness and excitement.

A Free Trade Majority is born, said The Journal, hailing as midwife Nancy Pelosi for leading a third of all House Democrats behind free-trade pacts with Chile and Singapore. The Journal mocked the 27 GOP dissidents as union poodles, Northeast liberals, textile-state reactionaries and "protectionists of the Pat Buchanan stripe (who) could fit into a phone booth."

Well, something is slouching toward Washington to be born, all right. But it does not appear to be a free-trade majority. Here is how the alarmed editorialists of the Financial Times described what went down in the CAFTA vote last Wednesday night on the Hill.

Fragile democracies

"The White House and the Republican leadership had to resort to every trick in the book to get the bill passed. Mr. Bush and Dick Cheney . . . worked the Republican caucus in person. House leaders cut side-deals and loaded pork on the highways and energy bills. With the free-trade cause alone insufficient to carry a majority, the bill's sponsors talked national security: the need to protect fragile democracies against the leftist populism of Hugh Chávez and Fidel Castro."

Concluded the FT, "The narrow margins and the intensely partisan vote are matters of serious concern." You got that right, fellas.

To win a 217-215 vote for a trade deal with five tiny Central American countries and the Dominican Republic, with combined economies not 1 percent of our own, the GOP leadership had to hold voting open for 45 minutes after the allotted 15 minutes expired. Otherwise, they would have lost. As for the WSJ heroine of '03, Pelosi, she led 185 Democrats in opposition. Only 15 Democrats voted for CAFTA.

Query: If, two years ago, the "protectionists of the Pat Buchanan stripe could fit into a phone booth," what can we say today of The Journal's "CAFTA 15"?

The Journal seems to be awakening to the revolution even as it cannot understand the causes. On Monday, it wrote: "The political recriminations from the cliff-hanger passage of (CAFTA) are even worse than we thought. Nancy Pelosi, the House minority leader, is contemplating revenge against the 15 Democrats."

The editorial then bugled the cavalry, "We trust the business community will appreciate that Democrats who break with their party's new liberal isolationism deserve support."

What The Journal is doing here is congratulating Democrats for selling out their constituents and signaling its corporate chums to reward them for the betrayal with campaign cash from the political war chests of the Business Roundtable, Fortune 500 and U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The Journal is calling for corporate payoffs for the Democratic turncoats.

We all know how the game is played. But The Journal and its con-celebrants of free trade should ask themselves why -- if their case for free trade is so strong, their logic so compelling and the benefits so

manifest -- they need to bribe congressmen and, as Rep. Jim Kolbe sweetly put it, "break arms into a thousand pieces."

Jobs shipped overseas

The free-trade true believers need to ask themselves why they are losing Congress when they have all the king's horses and all the king's men behind them: The New York Times and Washington Times, The Washington Post and The Journal, the Heritage Foundation, Cato and Brookings, National Review and The New Republic, Congress and the White House, and most of the corporate lobbyists and big campaign contributors.

Answer: The free-traders are losing Congress because they have lost the country. Every community has now seen factories shut and jobs shipped overseas. Working men and women know that their wages are barely keeping up with inflation. They worry about their country's dependency on foreign goods and foreign money. They all now have friends who have lost jobs to outsourcing. They see the foreign folks pouring in to take jobs from neighbors, and they know the mass invasion of America by armies of illegal immigrants is depressing wages -- no matter how often the politicians and their corporate contributors say, "Hey, it's a free lunch." They do not need a degree in economics to know that a \$700 billion trade deficit says that something is wrong with America.

A revolution is brewing over the U.S. government's failure to defend America's borders and its betrayal of working Americans via the conscious export of their jobs and importation of foreign labor to compete with U.S. workers at half the wages. The eventual rout of the open-borders, free-trade crowd approaches. That's the real meaning of the midnight rescue of CAFTA.

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