

East Bay/ Emerald Triangle FREE

# LOOKOUT!

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Sixty  
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# Where I'm Coming From

A few words of introduction and explanation are probably in order with this issue of the *Lookout*. Longtime and new readers alike might be bewildered at what appears to be a heavy streak of geographic and cultural schizophrenia running through its pages. Depending where you start reading, you might think the *Lookout* is an environmental journal from rural northern California, a left-wing rabble-rousing broadside out of Berkeley, a scholarly dissertation on economics and history based in London, or a sardonic and frivolous critique of pop culture and punk counterculture from all over and under the map.

Yes, that's exactly what it is, among other things. About half of this issue was put together in London during the winter of 1991-92, and the rest emanates about equally from Berkeley and the Emerald Triangle. In response to readers who have inquired as to what exactly the Emerald Triangle is, it's the name coined by government drug raiders to describe the prime marijuana-growing region of Mendocino, Humboldt, and Trinity Counties, an area distinguished by strong back-to-the-land and environmental movements, and which continues to be one of the more prominent thorns in the side of the crypto-fascists attempting to turn the United States of America into a hermetically sealed 1950s time capsule with the esthetics of a Mormon tabernacle and the morality of a Nazi death camp.

Through most of the 1970s, few outsiders took much notice of this backwoods community. But the amount of money being generated by the underground economy and the ways in which it was being spent (in addition to conspicuous consumption, significant amounts went into alternative institutions and green/left movements) attracted the attention of the mass media and government authorities. This led to a paramilitary strike force under the name of the Campaign Against Marijuana Planting (CAMP), which beginning in 1983 mounted annual search and destroy missions against what had by then become the region's most valuable cash crop.

The local economy was devastated, families were forced off the land to be replaced by more mercenary growers, and a climate of paranoia and violence was encouraged. I had recently moved to the area in search of peace and quiet to do my writing, only to find myself in what sometimes resembled a war zone, or, more accurately, a third world country being stripped of its resources at gunpoint. The rapacious logging corporations who dominated what used to be known as the Redwood Empire resumed their rape and ruin operations with a vengeance. Economic conditions enabled them to crush employee unions and slash worker pay while stripping the countryside of its last viable forests.

Although I had originally planned to write novels based on my experiences of the 1960s and 70s, I was abruptly and unpleasantly yanked back into the here and now. When I finally put pen, or more accurately, typewriter to paper, it was to cry out with rage and frustration at what was being done to this land and the people who inhabited it.

I made a lot of enemies, which I expected; what I didn't expect was that many of them were the people I thought I was trying to help. Marijuana growers didn't want publicity, the quiet, retiring sorts didn't want controversy, and the time-warp hippies trying to pretend that Mendocino County was a northern suburb of the Haight-Ashbury circa 1967 didn't appreciate my constant digs at the bloated, deformed monstrosity that post-hippie culture had become.

Still I blundered and floundered ahead, propelled by a sense of moral outrage that too often verged on self-righteousness. I attached more weight to polemics and invective than to reason and

persuasiveness, but I have no hesitation in saying that my faults or shortcomings were at least honest ones. "Like a salmon swimming upstream," was how my friend Indiana Slim characterized my efforts; another critic described me as "Too smart to keep quiet and too dumb to shut up."

That was seven years ago. I assume I'm still making some people mad, though I haven't had any death threats in a long while. If anything, I get more uncritical praise than I need. I no longer need assurance that I'm a good writer, or that I speak for a lot of people who for one reason or another haven't found it in themselves to put words together the way that I do. That's not to say I don't appreciate compliments, merely that they've taken on the same aspect as virulent criticism: unless phrased in truly exceptional language or containing genuinely arresting ideas, they're filed away in some vague recesses of memory that have little bearing on how I see myself or my work.

And how is that? More and more as a historian, though I have obviously not abandoned polemics and advocacy. But I am concerned with telling a story, one that has remained invisible through previous generations because those who told it had no access to the tools of expression or dissemination. Computers and photocopy machines and global communications facilities changed all that. As a high school student listening to tales of how Charlemagne ruled the Franks, or how Richard the Lion Hearted led the glory-seeking and the simple-minded off on grand crusades, I used to wonder, "But what did the ordinary people do? What kind of houses did they live in? What did they eat for breakfast? What kind of love songs did they sing, how did boys and girls make themselves pretty for one another?"

No one ever answered my questions. We learned of kings and popes and the movements of great armies, but the human beings who dwelt beneath the surface remained invisible, just the way that I felt as a slowly-going-insane young boy in Dwight D. Eisenhower's stressed, neatly encapsulated America of the 1950s.

That no longer has to be true. At any other time in history, I and everyone else I know would have been consigned to the status of serf or peasant, deemed irrelevant to those who controlled the workings of society unless by some extremely unlikely chance our talents happened to catch the eyes of our "betters." Now, for the first time, we can not only tell our story, but we can make sure that it is heard.

The popular perception is that culture, or what passes for it, is handed down from on high, and we who exist near the base of the social pyramid are expected to study and mimic it. In reality, culture rises from the frustrated ambitions and desperate dreams of the most lowly, far more so than from the worlds of privilege and power. We who are held at bay by mockery and intimidation need to reclaim our human heritage and to redefine our humanity, in the same way that we who have been born American owe it to our native land to redeem it from the murderers and psychopaths who have seized control over it and who now manipulate its imagery in defense of their crimes.

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I've never been a big flag-waver, but it still bothers me when hanging up an American flag becomes a statement in favor of mass murder and wholesale environmental destruction. I'm just as stirred as anyone by the rhetoric of freedom and the rights of the individual, but when freedom becomes merely a codeword for unrestrained greed and the trampling of the rights of the weak, then I have to question the very foundations of the language that we English-speaking Americans use to read, write, speak, and think with one another.

And I suppose that's another aspect of what I'm on about: in addition to reclaiming history, I want my language back. I'm tired of seeing it brutalized, twisted, drained of meaning, and used to obscure rather than reveal the truth. One of the greatest rewards of publishing this magazine has been its ability to appeal to young people who previously had little interest in reading or writing on any subject, let alone some of the fairly weighty material I cover. Kids who sleep through economics or history classes at school read what I say; kids who were flunking English class now publish their own magazines.

Whether that's because they admire what I do or because they figure if a bozo like me can have his own magazine, anyone can, doesn't matter. What's crucial is that they've stopped being passive receptacles for other people's thought, and started generating their own. Ideas and the language which gives them shape are the most powerful tools we have for redefining and realizing our lives.

This is big talk, I realize, not at all what I expected to become involved in when I started this magazine and my socio-political analysis seldom rose above the level of "Fuck the government, and society too." I don't think of myself as especially brilliant, but I refuse to be relegated to some fringe group or subculture. As a citizen of the United States, and more importantly, of Planet Earth, I expect my ideas and my humanity to be accorded respect and consideration. Those who think I'm mad or misinformed are free to refute me, but I won't make it easy for them to ignore me.

As you look through these pages you will find many prescriptions for living, both individually and as a society. Some are theories I've been developing all my life; others are ideas that popped into my head

five minutes ago. Although I've studied at universities, I'm largely self-taught, and as is the case with most autodidacts, there are large gaps in my knowledge. Anyone who takes my words as gospel is as misguided as anyone who dismisses them as the ravings of a fool.

John F. Kennedy often quoted Dante saying, "Divine justice weighs the sins of the warm-hearted and the sins of the cold-blooded in different scales." I would use the same words in defense of my mistakes and even, on occasion, my ignorance. While none of us can completely escape the workings of our egos, I feel safe in saying that the overriding motivation for my work is a love of humanity and the life force coursing through it.

That said, I must admit that my greatest doubts come from the disparity between my vision and my reality. While I feel confident that my views of economics, politics, and history are saner and more humane than many of those currently accepted, I have never been especially successful in obtaining happiness for myself. I lead a lonely, workaholic existence, nearly the polar opposite of the joyous, fulfilling experience of life that I believe is the rightful state of all humankind. Just as charity is alleged to begin at home, so, I suspect, must wisdom.

The paradox is maddening: I have seen others benefit from my advice and inspiration, yet as the years pass I sink further into personal despondency. Not counting working hours, I spend about 90% of my time alone. I appear incapable of initiating or maintaining substantive human relationships. I tell you this not so much to indulge myself (though it is a good deal cheaper than psychiatry), but as a sort of truth-in-packaging announcement. If the words you read in these pages fire your imagination, or induce you to do great things, bear in mind that they emanate from a physician who as yet has been unable to heal himself.

Still, something keeps me crawling crablike across these pages, searching for definition between the lines of meaning, seeking to awaken in you and myself some heightened understanding of what it is to be a human being. I really don't know anything else to do, and what I do know, at least I'll try to do it well.

# Life And Death In America

*You can be a king or a streetsweeper, but everyone dances with the grim reaper.*

...Last words of Robert Alton Harris

It was a fitting finale to the bad taste extravaganza of the year, when asked to repeat the last word of the condemned man, the efficient, businesslike spokesman for the California Department of Executions unwittingly quoted a line from *Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey*, a crassly hilarious movie whose broad humor will probably elude the grasp of most people over the age of 18.

Whether Robert Alton Harris (and why, we wonder, did he need three names; did the fairly pedestrian "Robert Harris" not sound sufficiently sinister or dramatic?) was aware that his last words were part of the comic "Grim Reaper Rap" or if he thought he was being genuinely profound, we will probably never know. What we do know is that the full power of the State of California, with considerable assistance from the federal government and an expenditure of many millions of dollars and many thousands of man-hours, was mobilized to commit the fairly sordid murder of one pathetic individual.

Snuffing out Harris' life was not the point of this exercise anyway, as people on both sides of the capital punishment issue well knew. As the perpetrator of an especially heinous crime, and more

importantly, as a white man, Harris merely served as an appropriate first victim. Execution enthusiasts like State Attorney General Dan Lungren hope that the floodgates will now open, with killings on a weekly or even more frequent basis, to "clean up" the backlog of 450 prisoners now waiting on California's Death Row. The overwhelming majority of them are black and poor, the products of a social system that, while always unfair, is now careening toward outright barbarism.

A couple months ago I was on the radio in the Bay Area, and made a joke in not particularly good taste about the soaring murder rate in Oakland. A listener called to complain that the subject was not funny. I agreed. I have many friends in Oakland, and I don't like having to worry about them. I don't like having to worry about myself when I go to visit them. I don't like the climate of paranoia and violence now considered normal on the streets of Berkeley and San Francisco and almost every other American city.

Sometimes, I said in defense of my attempt at humor, I have to laugh to keep from crying. Sometimes the sights and sounds and smells of millions of my fellow human beings being systematically

abused and degraded, treated worse than most of us would consciously treat an animal, subjected to a way of life barely if at all worth living, is quite simply more than I can bear. In order to function in America today, it is necessary to suppress some of our most basic human instincts, to close ourselves off to the graphic evidence of our own senses. In doing so, we may maintain a semblance of normality, but at the price of a growing, soul-killing schizophrenia. With gratuitous violence and death commonplace, with the cries of the desperate reaching a deafening crescendo that somehow remains unheard, with Americans wearily turning their backs on whatever redeeming virtues this country might once have had, we are faced with the unsettling prospect of a nation that has not only lost its way, but is collectively, inexorably going insane.

We have power but do not wield it, we have voices but are unwilling to make them heard. In pursuit of our private destinies, we are prepared to ignore not only the lessons of ten thousand years of history, but the obvious, fundamental promptings of our own consciences. We ask despairingly what can any of us do, but before allowing that question to answer itself, we turn away, terrified by the magnitude of the task before us, defeated before we begin by the apparent strength of the forces arrayed against us.

But darkness flees before light, ignorance before ideas, hate and cruelty before justice and mercy. Fear clouds our judgment, but love, that much misused and still more abused notion that in a profound sense is our sole redeeming feature as a species, makes all things clear. I do not aspire to spend a lifetime tilting at windmills, but neither do I wish to go quietly into the malign night of abject surrender.

What can I do? I am only a very tiny human being, not physically strong, far from being brave or even self-assured. I seek the truth, and when I think I may have found it, proclaim it to the world. Does that make a difference?

The answer to that question may be years, or centuries, in coming. If my efforts have bettered the human condition by one iota, if one person anywhere on this planet lives a more fulfilling life because of what I have done, I may never know it. What is crucial is that neither I nor the millions of people like me become discouraged by that uncertainty, that we continue to work unencumbered by expectations of success or failure, that we are driven not by individual, short-term needs or desires, but by the all-encompassing life force that, however briefly, however fleetingly, however painfully, even, has honored us by its presence.

Are those the words of a martyr in waiting? I hope not; I see no advantage in embracing suffering, nor in denying the self for the benefit of the masses. I seek a world in which we can best serve ourselves by serving all life, where our individual interests mesh neatly and inextricably with the interests of the whole. I do not hold this up as some sort of absolute vision, but as a perpetually shining star, unattainable perhaps, but by which we can always set our course.

Many more will die, some far more unjustly and painfully than Robert Alton Harris. Some of them may even now be reading these words. It is possible, perhaps likely, that conditions in this troubled land will grow far worse before any of our dreams of a better world begin to take shape. But is that any reason to embrace cynicism as a way of life, to exchange feelings of hope and compassion for the pursuit of anesthetic pleasure?

I think not. Maybe I am foolish, maybe my words represent only the idealistic musings of a perpetual adolescent who refuses to accept that the world is a nasty, brutish hellhole into which we are cast by some malevolent deity to be tortured and in turn to torture one another. But we choose our visions, when we are not allowing them to choose us, and no matter how pervasive the darkness might appear to be, I choose to rage, passionately, against the dying of the light.

Then On The Other Hand...

## The Fire This Time

The optimism and idealism expressed in the preceding words go careening into the brick wall of reality as the American system of jurisprudence reaffirms the right of police to randomly and brutally beat any citizen, so long as he or she is black. The nearly all-white (there was one Asian) jury that acquitted four Los Angeles police officers of assaulting Rodney King despite overwhelming videotaped evidence to the contrary was like something out of segregation-era Mississippi. The vicious ignorance of the jurors explaining that it was necessary to show some sympathy for the police left me half filled with loathing for the streak of smug racism that courses through middle class society, and half terrified for the future of a country that accepts and encourages such obliviousness.

As I write, Los Angeles is burning, and trouble is stirring in other cities as well. People are dying, losing their homes, businesses and places of work. The National Guard is moving in; more people will probably die, and more hatred and fear will be sown. It's the worst racial violence since the 1960s, and anyone who claims to be surprised by it is either a liar or an idiot.

Put another way, what did you expect? One miscarriage of justice might have passed unnoticed, but not when it typifies a pattern of abuse that has received the encouragement of officials at the highest levels of our government. George Bush's sanctimonious exhortations to nonviolence ring more than a little hollow, coming from one who has consistently treated violence as a first resort, who won election by pandering to racists, and whose domestic program, like that of his predecessor, amounts to institutional and social genocide.

I don't see people looting and burning in the streets as any kind of revolutionary action. It's a tragedy, one which will almost certainly only make things worse. More money that should be used for social programs will go into arming police and building prisons. More middle class people will abandon the cities, and more fear and mistrust will poison relations between the races. But as much as it hurts to see what's going on in the streets today, what can I say to the people who are so angry, so hurt, that they see no way to express themselves but to destroy everything in sight? Should I tell them to trust the system, work from within for change?

I'd have a lot easier time saying that to white people than to black. White people in this country still have some options, though they too are dwindling. For large numbers of black people, survival itself is the issue. Twenty-five or thirty years ago, there was some reason for patience; the conscience of white America seemed to finally have been awakened, and leaders like John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson made it the nation's business to redress the grievances that had left black America separate and unequal. If we had continued on that path, continued to mount the War on Poverty, to establish Head Start and child nutrition programs, to increase the availability of job training and education and health care, Los Angeles would almost certainly not be burning today.

But George Bush and Ronald Reagan chose to fund their imperial adventures with the birthright of our citizenry. Now there are millions of people who, as Franklin D. Roosevelt put it, are "ill-clad, ill-housed, ill-nourished." In the 1930s, Roosevelt roused the national conscience to indignation and action; in 1992, George Bush mirrors and encourages the complacency of white America; after all, most of the suffering millions are "only" black.

If I were a black man, I might not be able to confine my rage to pounding on a typewriter. I might well be out throwing bricks, even if I knew full well that no good would come of it in the long run.

Desperate people are pushed to desperate measures, and I think any reasonably cognizant black person must be aware that there is a significant segment of the white American power structure that genuinely wants a race war. The way that black people are being treated in this country is not substantively different from the treatment of Jews in the early days of fascism in Germany. If conditions continue to deteriorate, it is easy to envision rabid right wing Republicans developing a consensus for walling off innercity ghettos and treating urban unrest as a military problem to be addressed with the same sort of subtlety and grace employed in levelling Iraq.

Black people need to make themselves heard by whatever means necessary, but they can't go it alone. They haven't got the numbers, and they haven't got the firepower. More importantly, if this country sinks to all-out race war, life will hardly be worth living for the victors or the vanquished. Those of us who still enjoy certain privileges because of our white skin owe it to ourselves and to our black brothers and sisters to help turn this country around before it self-destructs.

Meanwhile, darkness falls and I sit, safe, it seems, atop a mountain hundreds of miles from the riots. As I write I listen to the radio, hear the reporters denouncing the burning and looting, hear them asking, "What do these people want?" Then they break away from the carnage for several minutes of horribly tasteless commercials that explain more eloquently than all the reporters' labored analysis why whole cities appear to have suddenly lost their mind.

Luxury automobiles and Caribbean cruises, diamond rings and fifty dollar a plate restaurants, lawn care products and home saunas, a vast cornucopia of excess dangled tauntingly in front of people to whom a burger and fries at McDonald's is the height of luxury. It's not just the inequality of it all; if it were a question of there simply not being enough resources to supply everyone with their basic needs, it might be easier to accept one's fate. But the spectacle of a society devoting the preponderance of its wealth to providing some of its people with an endless array of useless and destructive products at the cost of constant deprivation and misery for millions of others must be nearly unbearable.

Racial justice and equality are essential goals, but they won't be attained without a fundamental restructuring of society and a massive reordering of values. There is enough of everything to go around, but not until we take a deep, searching look at what we truly need. If there is anything good to come out of the death and destruction of these days, it may be that America may finally be forced to confront the selfish, insensate monstrosity it has allowed itself to become.

## Yes, There's An Election Coming (Sigh)

It's almost self-defeating trying to do topical election commentary in a magazine that appears irregularly at best. By the time this issue hits the streets, probably in the second or third week of May, most of what I rant and rave about here could easily have been rendered obsolete. But then it would be hard to do a bigger pratfall than that managed by Time, which managed to put its "It's down to Clinton vs. Tsongas" cover on the newsracks at about the same moment that the plodding Massachusetts pol dropped out of the race.

So if a weekly that comes out like clockwork and spends millions on its presidential campaign coverage can come off so clueless, I guess it's safe for me to give it a stab. Besides, it's fairly unlikely that Gov. Bill Clinton, aka the inflatable Jimmy Carter doll with the Kennedy hair and the Pee Wee Herman brain will have quit the scene before press time, regardless of how fervently we might wish for such a development.

But Time's fascination with a nonexistent Clinton vs. Tsongas confrontation should come as no surprise. The mass media have - more flagrantly than ever, it seems to me - not only set the (non)agenda

for the presidential primaries, but pretty much told us in advance who was going to win them. And while that might demonstrate remarkable prescience on their part, I suspect it has a good deal more to do with the fact that the corporate media no longer see a need to pretend to report the news. It's far more efficient to create it, especially when the results are then sure to come out the way they want them.

Pardon me for being cynical, but I have yet to meet a single person from anywhere on the political spectrum who can muster the slightest bit of enthusiasm for Bill Clinton. The most profound reaction I have yet to see his name elicit has been one of soul-crushing apathy tempered with instinctive antipathy. Yet to hear everyone from the New York *Times* to the Podunk *Gazette* tell it, the Clinton juggernaut is unstoppable.

For a while even George Bush was portrayed as running scared from the Oxford-educated Arkansas cracker. I was startled to see England's left-liberal daily, the *Guardian*, touting Clinton as the Democratic Party's last best hope, and bemoaning what then seemed the likelihood that the Gennifer Flowers sex scandal would erase him as a viable candidate.

So allow me to become a lonely voice among the media and ask: where did this guy come from and why are we getting stuck with him? Everyone knows the Democratic Party is in trouble, but is this really the best it can do? Here we've got George Bush, who commands virtually no respect even in his own party and is probably the least-liked President since Herbert Hoover, and the Democrats look set to nominate a mealy-mouthed dweeb who'd be hard pressed to defeat Willie Horton in the Alabama primary.

In other words, things look on course for Bush to be reelected and the country to continue going to hell in a handbasket. Why the majority of Americans have abandoned politics as a means of achieving change is understandable, or would be if they'd found some more adequate means. But they haven't; instead they're mostly hunkering down and hoping to ride out the storm, maybe making a buck or two in the process.

The Texas billionaire Ross Perot may throw a monkey wrench in the works. Though he'll most likely drop out of sight once people start getting a better look at what he stands for, the minority of Americans who still bother voting are growing so desperate that he might actually have a chance. The guy is strictly loony tunes, of course, his most prominent claim to fame being his ongoing insistence that hundreds of Americans are still, for reasons no one has ever attempted to explain, being held captive in Vietnam. One commentator noted the similarity in both name and approach between Perot and the Argentinian populist Juan Peron. I think he may be on to something.

Jerry Brown had a chance, but he blew it. Not this year, but way back in 1976, when if he'd gotten into the primaries earlier, he could have trounced Jimmy Carter (as he did in every primary in which he did face Carter) and waltzed into the White House. The trouble with Brown in more recent years is that every time he gets on to something, he beats it to death. The reason people pay attention to him in the first place is that he presents original ideas, but as soon as he senses that he's connecting, he turns ideas into slogans and sound bites just like the politicians he's attacking.

His flat tax didn't help any, even if it did have some worthwhile features, and neither did his insistence on having Jesse Jackson as his running mate. While Jackson is an inspirational speaker and is right on many of the issues, he's unelectable, and perhaps for reasons other than racism among the American electorate. I endorsed him in 1988, but I'd have trouble supporting him today, partly because of his complete lack of experience in government, more importantly because of his demagoguery on the drug issue.

Anyway, Brown and Jackson are both out of the picture now, and unless a last-minute candidate emerges to challenge Clinton, the

November race looks set, however dismal that prospect may appear. Mario Cuomo is the only Democrat who could derail Clinton now, and he shows no sign of jumping in. I've suspected for a while that his reluctance is due to some serious skeleton in his closet that he fears would come out under the intense scrutiny of a presidential campaign. Whether that's the case, or if, to his eternal discredit, Cuomo is merely waiting for 1996 because he thinks his chances will be better then, he's forfeited any right to the presidency by failing to challenge George Bush now, when the country desperately needs to rid itself of the Republican plague that has so tragically subverted democracy in this country.

Four more years of a Bush White House might spell twenty more years of extremist right wing control of the Supreme Court; already the Reagan-Bush appointments (shamefully acquiesced to by the Democratic Congress) have set civil liberties back fifty years. I have no illusions that any Democrat, even the silver-tongued Cuomo, can do much to halt the downward spiral besetting the United States. But dumping Bush might at least give us some breathing room, from which some genuine leaders might emerge.

For that reason, I'll vote for Clinton if I have to, barring some truly hideous revelation as yet unforeseen. I'm not hopeful it'll do much good, but neither will voting for a third or fourth party candidate without a chance in hell of winning. Yes, we need a new party, but the place to build it is on a local level. Bernie Sanders' success in Vermont shows that we can even elect socialists if we start building from the grass roots, but running a socialist for president at this point is an exercise in futility. Sure, maybe ten or twenty years from now, things will be different, but frankly I don't think the country can endure that much more of the status quo. Bush has to go.

## Have You Hugged A Catholic Today?

Who's Cokie Roberts? If I were in a less than charitable mood, I might write her off as a certifiable dingbat who, after years of annoying NPR listeners with her chirpy and generally ill-informed views, finally jumped to the big time with ABC news. Recently she distinguished herself by labeling Presidential candidate Jerry Brown as "weird."

Compared to what, we can't help wonder. After all, isn't this the same Ms. Roberts who recently joined with perpetually salivating madman William "Drug Czar" Bennett and several other lesser lights of American intellectual life to form a sort of "Fair Play For Catholics" committee? Said group felt that the RCs were too frequently being mocked and ridiculed in the media, and held a well-publicized press conference to say so.

"I'm tired of having my intellectual or emotional maturity questioned because of my religious beliefs," protested Ms. Roberts. God (to use the term loosely) forbid that one should question mental state of people who worship bread chunks and cheap table wine, who believe that a few mumbled words can transform said commodities into the flesh and blood of the son of God, and that the highest tribute true believers can pay to their deity is to cannibalistically devour him.

No sir, nothing weird about that, but now this Jerry Brown fellow, he actually speaks out about cooperation being better than competition, about investment being better than leveraged buyouts, education being more important than last night's TV sitcoms. Worse than that, he claims that society has some kind of responsibility to the weak and helpless, and that they shouldn't have to search through garbage cans for their dinner while normal, responsible citizens like Cokie Roberts and Bill "Kill 'em all" Bennett are engaging in their ritual human sacrifices down at the local Catholic church. What a nut!

## Trickle Up Or Trickle Down?

Anybody remember Tom Harkin, the self-styled populist? A few months ago, when he still had the ear of the media, I hear him ragging on "trickle-down" economics as practiced by the Reagan and Bush administrations. "Trickle-down," for those of you who haven't bothered to learn the nuances of rhetorical gobbledegook, refers to the theory that if the rich are made richer through tax cuts or simple giveaways, they will spend or invest their new wealth in a way that creates jobs and opportunities for the peasants at the bottom of the social pyramid.

It's a twisted enough concept in itself, making about as much sense as constructing a building from the top down and not bothering to build a foundation until the upper floor offices have already been fully rented. So I'd been waiting in vain for years for an opposition politician to demolish it.

So too, it seemed, had Senator Harkin, and he worked himself up into a frenzy, declaiming how we'd been waiting for "forty years" for something to trickle down. "Isn't it time we learned..." he cried, and I smiled with satisfaction at the devastating putdown he was no doubt going to deliver - "...that it never trickles down."

Huh? That had all the electrifying impact of a sodden match struck against a damp sponge. Apart from being wrong - as any one who's ever lived downstream from a pig farm can tell you, something always trickles down, though you may well wish it hadn't - it missed by a country mile the point Harkin should have been making.

"Isn't it time we tried some trickle-up economics for a change?" would have been a far more pertinent question. While elementary physics might seem to indicate that liquids don't flow uphill, liquid capital does, and very effectively. And since Harkin neglected to explain how such a program should work, allow me to do it for him.

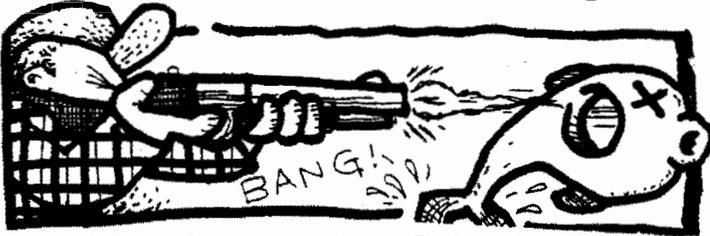
It's like this: if, as per Reagan-Bush theory, you double the wealth of every millionaire in the country, some of that money will find its way into the economy. Stocks and bonds will be purchased, new servants hired, and yacht builders swamped with orders. But an awful lot of the money will also leave the country, or be squandered on high living, or gambled and lost on speculative investments.

In trickle-up economics, on the other hand, say you give an extra ten bucks a week to the forty million poorest Americans (for you penny pinchers, that adds up to \$20.8 billion a year, not chump change, certainly, but not as much as Reaganomics has handed over to the wealthiest one percent of Americans). It's a safe bet that very little of that money will disappear into tax-free Swiss bank accounts or high-flying weekends on the French Riviera.

It's equally safe to say that almost all of it will be spent, and quickly, on fundamentals like food, clothing, and housing. And each of those dollars spent will help to create or sustain jobs for farmers, factory workers, and builders, who in turn will spend their new income on job-creating and economy-stimulating basics. The resulting prosperity will gradually percolate upwards, and yes, the multi-millionaires will eventually get their share, too. Sure, they'll have to wait a while, maybe even years or decades, but chances of their being rendered homeless or their children suffering from malnutrition in the meantime are pretty slim. Which is more than we can say for the millions among us still faithfully waiting for the wealth to trickle down on them.



## The Last Salmon Roundup



At least half a dozen years late, the Pacific Fishery Management Council finally did the right thing by all but cancelling the 1992 commercial salmon season. Fishermen are hollering, as well they might, since many of them will be forced into bankruptcy, and at least one Indian tribe, exempt from federal regulation, has announced that it will be going ahead with its salmon "harvest" as usual.

With all due sympathy to those affected, one can't help but wonder where the hell they've been over the past ten or twenty years while California's once-massive salmon runs have been destroyed by runaway logging and complete disregard for the well-being of north coast river systems. To hear some of these crybabies, you'd think that the end of salmon fishing in California - and let's be realistic; the salmon are finished unless drastic changes are made in the way we treat our watersheds - was the result of nothing more than bad decisions by pointy-headed bureaucrats in Sacramento and Washington.

Those bureaucrats do share some blame, but not for stepping in with way too little and way too late to save the salmon. The fishermen deserve at least as much blame for a) not speaking up sooner and more loudly about what logging was doing to the rivers where salmon need to spawn and b) for not voluntarily restricting their catch a few years ago when salmon stocks first began to decline. Instead, too often, fishermen took the same approach toward salmon as big timber did toward trees: they're out there, they're ours, and we want them all now.

Part of the blame for the demise of the salmon goes to the drought, now six years old, and part to the criminally wasteful diversion of north coast water to Central Valley agribusiness. But rising water temperatures and increasing siltation due to irresponsible logging are at least responsible, and until the last year or two, fishermen willing to speak out against their inland counterparts in the resource mismanagement department have been few and far between.

And there are still plenty of self-centered whiners who somehow don't get the idea that salmon are not some sort of magically appearing resource put there for no other reason than to benefit human beings. Eureka fisherman Dave Bitts, echoing the let's-barbecue-a-spotted-owl refrain of misinformed loggers, claims "Now we are the endangered species." Is this guy living on the same planet as us, or speaking the same English language that most of us use? We're talking about North Coast salmon becoming extinct. That means finished, dead, gone, *no mas, finito*. He's talking about the fact that he might have to get a different job. Even if we do decide that it's legitimate to exterminate a species to keep an industry going for a couple more years (as the Bush administration looks like it's preparing to do with the spotted owl), the salmon (or trees) are still going to be gone soon. Then not only the fishermen and loggers will be in trouble, but everyone and everything else that depends on a healthy, balanced ecosystem.

## Return To The Emerald Triangle

It'd been three months since I'd been home, and nearly six since I'd spent any significant amount of time here. Things looked hopeful as I traveled up Highway 101, what with the hills showing distinct hints of green for the first time in years, and the Russian River looking like a river once again instead of an overactive mud puddle.

But southern Mendocino County is hardly the Emerald Triangle in the purest sense, although the woolier sections of greater Boonville and Potter Valley probably deserve inclusion. Not to get excessively regionalist about it, but for me the true Emerald Triangle doesn't begin until you're in reach of the KMUD signal. Sometimes that can be in Willits, or even atop the Ridgewood Grade, but the most likely place is when you begin the descent into the Long Valley, about 15 miles south of Laytonville.

That's when I flipped on the radio and realized I was really home. The first thing to come cascading out of the speakers was "Locked Gates and a Loaded .45," a memorable ditty about a paranoid pot grower that's been a local underground hit for nearly a decade, and which you're unlikely to hear on the radio anywhere else in the world. I thought of all the people in England and Ireland and urban America to whom I've tried to explain what it's like to come from one of the last places in the English-speaking world where culture still grows organically instead of being mass-produced, and I wished they all could have been riding with me just then.

But my delight and amazement were just beginning, for when the song ended, the DJ turned out to be Michael Ferretta, one of the bigger-than-life characters who even more than the spectacular landscape, the relatively unsullied elements, and the majestic force of nature, make this place a world apart. I can see Michael reading this now, and doing a sarcastic "Aw shucks" (probably more profanely than that), but the fact is that he's a mighty poet, and not merely by words alone.

But words were what he was trafficking in this grey-green Sunday afternoon, and they were weaving a powerful spell. Most of the time he was just goofing around, encouraging listeners to send in photos of their outhouses for his new contest ("Now that we're not going to have any more redwoods or salmon, we'll have to find something else to take pride in.") and conducting Jack Jones singalongs, but in between the bouts of silliness he dropped some powerful and poignant bits of wisdom.

Like when he segued from a droll reference to the truckloads of fishermen lined up along the Eel in hopes of bagging the last salmon to a commentary on the state of the river and of America, circa 1992. "Yeah, there's water in it again, and the river looks like everything's normal, but it ain't got no soul. The river's full, but there's nothing in it." He compared 1992 to 1962, another time when the American dream had begun to come unravelled but most people hadn't quite yet noticed. And he advised everyone, regardless of which side they were on, to "batten down the hatches."

Though such a gloomy prognosis sounded decidedly out of place on such a beautiful almost-spring day, with trees beginning to flower in pink and white, and crocuses and daffodils opening up everywhere, and the brooding skies holding the promise of more life-giving rain, it was hard to deny the truth of what he said. And yet, I couldn't help thinking, if all hell has to break loose, what better place to ride out the storm?

Back in Garberville, the semi-urban heart of the Emerald Triangle, I wondered if anyone would remember me. But Garberville's not like the Bay Area, where you practically need a public relations agent to remind people that you still exist if you can't make personal appearances every few days. In fact the main problem with getting anything done in Garberville was the same as it's always been: it's difficult to walk 50 feet in any direction without running into someone you know and finding yourself in a several hours-long conversation.

Luckily I was in no hurry this day, because between visits to KMUD, Wild Horse Records, Treats, the Mateel Cafe's Jazzbo Room, and random street encounters, I didn't get out of there until long after the streetlights had come on. Among the more rewarding meetings: while sitting in Treats, who should appear but Beth Bosk and R.D. Deines, making the rounds to distribute the latest issue of New Settler Interview. Oddly enough, those were exactly the same circumstances under which I last saw Beth, and it's not exactly as though I while away all my days in Treats (though I can think of worse fates, even if the jukebox does need to be transported back to the 1970s and left there).

As usual, Beth, who has probably forgotten more than I'll ever know about the Emerald Triangle, was full of gossip, of both the entertaining and enlightening varieties. One of the most significant bits was that Ed Denson, best known for a host of political and environmental activities, his Saturday morning folk music show on KMUD, and as co-proprietor (with wife Mary Alice) of Kicking Mule Records, has signed up to run for Humboldt County Supervisor for the Second District.

The district, which runs from the county line through Garberville and up to Fortuna (though recently gerrymandered by the pulp mill and corporate timber-dominated Board of Supervisors to exclude much of the area to the west of Garberville), has never had proper representation, being run from Eureka as a sort of third world rural fiefdom. There have been charges that incumbent Harry Pritchard, an old-line patriarch who looks like he belongs on the TV show *Bonanza* and whose views can be found clearly stated in the annual reports of Louisiana Pacific and Maxxam, Inc., was only able to hold on to his position in recent elections through some very creative vote counting.

But Pritchard is retiring - not, as far as we know, to avoid criminal charges, though some of his more vocal critics would prefer to think of it that way - and the Second District race is wide open. We here at the *Lookout* can't think of a better person for the job than Ed Denson, and so let's pause parenthetically here to lend him a wholehearted endorsement:

#### (ED DENSON FOR SUPERVISOR!)

Though I've long admired Ed's work, I barely knew him personally, so I was happy when Beth invited me to join her and Bob later that afternoon when they were going to meet Ed and Mary Alice to talk strategy. It was my first visit to the Jazzbo Room in beautiful downtown Redway (he said sarcastically; I've long felt that Redway's few high points should be moved forthwith to Garberville and the rest of the place promptly razed).

The first couple days of March can hardly be counted on to bring beautiful weather to southern Humboldt, as I well know, having dug myself out of several blizzards that came later in the year than that. But this particular day was about as perfect as one could dream of, and we sat on the outdoor patio until well after dark with nary a chill in the air. The bone-chilling cold of London and the soul-killing alienation of the American metropolis seemed a million miles away. Yes, a lot of what we were saying was hardly beyond the level of a hopeful dream, but it was a dream that had real possibilities of coming true. Or, more precisely, that we had the ability to make come true.

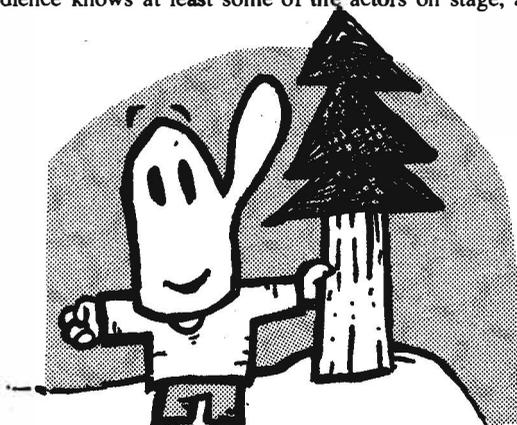
It's easy to become cynical - in fact it's hard not to - about democracy as we see it practiced on the scale of national politics. Even in San Francisco or Berkeley, it's difficult for an individual to see how he or she could have much impact on public policy. But in

places like Humboldt or Mendocino Counties, corrupt as their governments have often been, constructive change is well within reach of a sufficiently motivated citizenry. A healthy skepticism is always appropriate when dealing with political matters, but the wholesale cynicism that is poisoning the well of American democracy has no place hereabouts. If criminals and con artists continue to wreak havoc on the Emerald Triangle, it's at least partially because we as citizens have allowed them to.

End of sermon, more or less, except to say that the Ed Denson campaign needs volunteers and donations (especially donations; we can be reasonably sure that whatever candidate Louisiana-Pacific decides to run will have nearly unlimited funds at his disposal). Send checks and all other offers of help to: Ed Denson For Supervisor, PO Box 158, Alderpoint CA 95411. Yes, I'm sure there's a phone number, and no, I don't have it; try information.

A few days later I found myself seated in the Mateel Community Center (and how many communities can boast something like this, funded entirely by voluntary subscriptions) watching the latest production by the Feet First Dancers. As is usually the case with local theatrical efforts, *Mr. Whyne and the Final Taboo* was amazingly professional and polished. Towns ten, or for that matter, a hundred times the size of Garberville would be hard pressed to come up with that much talent.

I suppose it makes for a difference, too, when nearly everyone in the audience knows at least some of the actors on stage, and can



appreciate how the roles played and the lines spoken intertwine with real life. It tends to break down the barriers between performers and audience, something which, if you think about it, we'd also be well advised to carry into everyday "real" life.

The next morning was my own turn to perform, at KMUD, where I was sitting in as a substitute DJ for Michael and Jackie's popular *Club Mud* show. Although I've been on the Mud many times over the past three years, this was of my first shows in "prime time," Monday mornings being perhaps the primest time of all because they begin with what might well be KMUD's most listened-to show, *Good Morning*.

Having not been near a broadcasting studio in months (except for a brief appearance on a pirate station in Amsterdam), I was less than my usual professional self (he said facetiously), but what both amazed and gratified me was that at times I had trouble handling the control board because I was so busy fielding calls from listeners welcoming me back or telling me how much they enjoyed my music or commentary.

Since I could well remember a time when my KMUD broadcasts engendered only complaints or, at best, apathy, this was extremely gratifying. Even more so because this was the middle of a school day, meaning that the audience was almost entirely made up of adults who a few years back tended to dismiss my tastes in music as kid stuff. The last season that Chris Appelgren and I were on the air with *Wild In The Streets* we were given the award for best music show. While I was

immensely gratified, I suspected that the award was meant more as a thank you-and-goodbye present than to indicate that people had come around to genuinely liking what we played. Now I'm beginning to think they really meant it, which makes me feel as though I've had started to accomplish one of most important goals: to serve as a conduit for the exchange of political and cultural information between city and countryside. Historically that transmission of information has been overwhelmingly one-sided and imperial in nature, with rural areas getting a filtered and bastardized version of urban culture some years after the fact, while cities saw rural culture as little more than a collection of yokels and hicks as seen on *Hee-Haw*.

It's true that much of the music I'm interested in is of urban origin (though Nuisance, my favorite band right now, and to my mind, one of the best new bands of the 90s, is straight out of Humboldt County, and recently some of us realized we could put together a major punk rock concert consisting only of bands in which at least one member had ties to Humboldt). But one of things I'm proudest of is that the social and ecological values that have emerged here in the Emerald Triangle are now making their way into the urban punk rock scene as well. The flow of people and ideas between Humboldt/Mendocino and the Bay Area has become much more of a two-way street, or should I say bike path or hiking trail?

Anyway, it's now a few weeks later, and I'm sitting back at my solar-powered computer, regularly pausing to gaze out the window at my favorite color combination of grey and green, the grey being low-hanging rain clouds that seem to wrap this tiny corner of semi-wilderness into its own snug, secure, and self-sustaining world, and the green being the thousand million subtle shades and hues of a forest being reborn into another spring. Five minutes ago a great brown bear meandered by my front door, sending the dogs into an ineffectual frenzy. Now everything is quiet again, except for the water dripping from the rooftop and splashing on the leaves, the cranky metallic outbursts of a warm wood stove, and the methodical ticking of the kitchen clock that waits so patiently on my song.

## Paula Mulligan, Laytonville Kids Show How It's Done

Although I live in Mendocino County, for the past few years most of my interests and activities have tended to center around Humboldt. That's been due in large part to the fact that I have a lot more friends in Humboldt, and also because I perceived Humboldt as having a more well developed sense of community. It also is the result of my having been made *persona non grata* in certain Laytonville circles because of what I'll admit have been sometimes intemperately expressed opinions.

And while the community based around Laytonville has much to recommend it, one must admit that downtown Laytonville is hardly as welcoming or as pleasant a place as, say, Garberville or Arcata. Having the main street of town be a major highway doesn't help matters, nor does the fact that the town simply isn't big enough to sustain the kind of gathering places and cultural institutions found elsewhere.

But Laytonville is rich in many regards, and nowhere more so than in the character and quality of some of the people who make things happen hereabouts. One of our greatest treasures is music and drama teacher Paula Mulligan, whose devotion and tireless energy have given Laytonville kids opportunities for cultural expression that many urban kids in far bigger and richer school districts can only dream of.

Paula's inspiration was in full evidence in the Laytonville High School production of *The Madwoman of Chaillot*. The play is an extremely challenging one, full of lengthy and complex speeches

demanding a wide range of expression, and requiring a large, talented cast that would be hard to find in many college drama departments, let alone a tiny rural high school. As I watched the closing performance Saturday night, I repeatedly found my jaw hanging wide open at just how *good* these kids were. It didn't seem possible that out of a school with only 180 students you could find so many (25, if I counted right) outstanding actors. Clearly somebody very special had been working with these kids to bring out their best.

But there was something more than that. This was not just kids at their best, but kids learning through doing that they had abilities they might never have imagined if someone had not taken time and trouble to draw them out. The love and respect they felt for Paula was almost palpable in the speech given by Bodhi Burgess after the curtain fell.

And I'm not just engaging in small town boosterism here. I don't give automatically glowing reviews to the efforts of friends or family (though I must pay special tribute to the juggler as played by Gabrielle McPherson, a completely unbiased opinion that is not in the slightest influenced by the fact that she is my beautiful and talented niece). In fact I have seen a lot of professional theater, both on Broadway and in London's West End, and while I'm not suggesting that the LHS Drama Club can immediately transport itself to those empyrean precincts, I do have pretty high standards.

As chance would have it, I had seen another high school play the night before in Santa Rosa, at a school probably ten times larger than LHS. I wouldn't hesitate for a minute to say that the Laytonville production was ten times better. That's not to put down the Santa Rosa kids one bit, just to emphasize how good our own were. I hate to single out any of them for special attention for fear that I'll overlook someone, but I have to give special credit to Violet Hales in the title role, who time and again had the audience absolutely mesmerized. The aforementioned Bodhi Burgess was also especially good, as was Josh Purinton in his role as a fast-talking, cold-blooded corporation head spilling out the essence of modern industrial society.

Christopher Collins did an all-too-brief star turn as a demented old lady who, like the Countess Aurelia and her hilarious compatriots in madness, Constance and Gabrielle (played by Signe Damgaard and Jennifer Iacuanillo), ended up making more sense than most supposedly sane people. Sadie Hales lent a touching note as the deaf mute.

The play itself is about greed, and how the lust for money and power poisons our environment even more surely than the pollutants, toxic waste, and heedless destruction it produces. Were it not so clearly a fantasy, and one set in another time and place, it might in fact be quite controversial with respect to the environmental and economic issues so much on the agenda in this area. One bit of unintentional humor was produced when a member of the audience objected vocally to a line about the sewers of Paris being full of "republicans;" he was apparently unaware that French republicans are quite a different kettle of fish from the big-R Republican Party here in the United States. (While I'm tempted to say that the sewers would be an appropriate place for those Republicans as well, I realize that sewers are too important a part of a city's infrastructure to risk clogging up with such useless detritus, and suggest that extraneous Republicans - i.e., all of them - would be better exiled on some distant asteroid, preferably in another solar system.)

After the show I offered my congratulations to Paula Mulligan, and while she was happy to accept them, she almost instantly changed the subject to praising all the kids who participated in the play (including the unsung backstage heroes) and the unique cultural climate of this area that has produced so much talent. Then she was off to help clean up, and after that, she was hosting a cast party. Talk about tireless; I'm getting exhausted right now thinking about the woman's energy. Before she left, she also confided that she herself had once played the title role of *The Madwoman of Chaillot* when she

was in high school. I could only think that if she brought as much devotion to her own acting as she has to opening up the world of theater to the kids of Laytonville, that must have been one amazing performance.

## Stenberg, What Are You Doing?

Not that I want to be divisive or stir up more bad blood among Mendocino County's already horribly fragmented left. But the entry of Anna Marie Stenberg into the race for County Supervisor on the Fourth District is hard to fathom, or for that matter, to stomach.

This is not meant as any kind of attack on Stenberg's character. She's worked long and hard on many important issues, and though I'm not always in perfect agreement with her, I believe her to be a woman of integrity and principle who genuinely wants what is best for the county and the bioregion.

That's why it's so hard to comprehend why she's willing to risk handing the Fourth District over to a neo-fascist candidate like Heather Drum. I'm sure that's not Stenberg's intention; in fact she may well believe that she has a real chance to be elected. But the chances of that happening are slim indeed; far more likely is that she'll siphon off enough votes from Liz Henry to give the election to Drum, who is closely associated with the nazi Jack Azevedo, Henry's opponent in the 1988 election.

Even harder to understand is why Stenberg and her supporters would pick on Henry, the most intelligent and progressive member of the Board of Supervisors. Longtime readers of the *Lookout* will know that I have never been sparing in my criticism of local government, or government in general, yet I have found very little fault with Henry. Even when she didn't take as progressive a stand as I might have wished, she has always seemed open to hearing about new ideas and attentive to her constituents' needs. And, need I point out, she is the only Supervisor to vote against the annual squandering of scarce county resources on the marijuana witch hunt (the Board's other liberal, Norman DeVal, went along with the majority, despite his history as a pot smoker and his election campaigns having reaped considerable contributions from the marijuana sector).

As near as I can see, Stenberg is largely a one-issue candidate, said issue being garbage. A lengthy editorial in Richard Johnson's *Mendocino County Environmentalist* explained its support for Stenberg on what appeared to be a largely imagined slight by Henry of the garbage reform movement in which Stenberg has been so active over the past couple years. Well and good, so far, but even if Henry was wrong on garbage - and that is by no means clear - there are dozens of other equally vital issues that Henry has dealt with very well indeed. Certainly Stenberg and her supporters can't imagine that Heather Drum as Supervisor would be more supportive of their agenda.

All this might be moot if Stenberg had a real chance of winning the election. She doesn't, of course, and it's hard for me to understand how someone as active in county politics as she is could think otherwise. Henry won in a landslide last time, but that was in a one-on-one contest with a candidate who hailed from the same ideological ground as David Duke. While Drum's views may not differ substantially from Azevedo's, she isn't perceived as an outright nazi the way he was. What's more, the county has been redistricted since the last election, giving the Fourth District a distinctly more conservative hue. And while Stenberg has been on the right side of most issues, there's no way that she could attract the middle of the road votes that Henry can.

Rightly or wrongly, Stenberg is viewed by many people from all over the political spectrum as an extremist. There's nothing wrong with that; many would view me as an extremist, too. But I'm not running for public office, especially not against a good and effective Supervisor. I think I can do more good from the position I hold now,

providing a forum for new ideas and attempting to broaden the range of political discourse. I suggest to Anna Marie Stenberg that the same holds true for her, and I strongly urge her to withdraw from the race and throw her support to Henry.

## Big City Hack Comes To Small Town Country Weekly



Since it's undeniably the best newspaper in the country, I don't usually have much critical to say about the *Anderson Valley Advertiser* (subscriptions: \$30/yr to PO Box 459, Boonville CA 95415; don't miss out any longer). But a distinct downer early this year was the series of front-page articles (in extra-large type, no doubt catering as much to the limited reading abilities of his readers as to the inflated ego of the author) by Warren Hinckle, an unprincipled political hack from New York City who occasionally stops into the Bay Area long enough to grind a few of his largely pointless personal axes.

Why, with political and environmental disaster dogging us at every turn, anyone would have a more than passing interest in the murder trial of porn magnate Jim Mitchell is a question that could best be answered by a demographic analysis of *National Enquirer* readers. Why it should be the lead story in the *AVA* for several weeks running is better answered by the fact that that Hinckle has made large contributions, financial and otherwise, to the perennially strapped Boonville weekly.

While it's understandable that editor-publisher Bruce Anderson would give special consideration to a writer who once deservedly enjoyed an excellent reputation and who has been of great help to the *AVA*, it sets a bad precedent. If editorial space in the *AVA* is to be put up for sale, what can we expect next? The wit and wisdom of Harry Merlo (who can certainly afford to donate more than Hinckle)? The religious perorations of the Lord's Avenger?

Yes, I'll admit I bear a personal grudge against Hinckle. The ability to write well is a rare gift, and one which is all too seldom used to good purpose. Hinckle had such a gift, in spades, and squandered it. His vendetta against Art Agnos, which played a large part in electing the bumbling right-wing cheeseball Frank Jordan mayor of San Francisco, had nothing to do with the best interests of San Francisco and everything to do with Hinckle's petty animosities. Hinckle, who has married into wealth and spends most of his time on the East Coast, will not have to live with what Jordan's corrupt mismanagement will do to the city. But hundreds of thousands of other people will.

Some of Hinckle's account of the trial did make for interesting reading, though it was massively overblown and rendered in the style of a late 19th century muckraker. While the Mitchell case was a tragedy, and a not particularly pretty one, efforts to paint Jim Mitchell as some sort of star-crossed hero rang a little hollow. A couple of brothers made a few million bucks in the porno biz, got into drugs, alcohol, and high living, and eventually had a spat that resulted in one of them winding up dead. Except for the element of the few million bucks, it's a story that gets repeated nearly every day somewhere in the sleazy underbelly of American society. The difference is that most guys who get themselves into similar messes don't have access to

high-powered attorneys and PR flacks, and go straight to jail without anyone noticing.

Don't get me wrong; it's none of my business if people want to make porno movies and other people want to make them rich in return. It's just the American free enterprise system in action. I feel the same way about dope dealers, saloon keepers, and, for that matter, newspaper editors. But neither is it grounds for canonization; to suppose that the Mitchells' O'Farrell Theater ever represented some triumph of artistic achievement or free expression is to stand history and logic on their already badly dented heads.

But this isn't meant to further damage the reputation of a dead man or of his bereaved killer. My quarrel is with Hinckle, and the way that he has abandoned his once impassioned commitment to social justice for an ever more parochial obsession with the personal issues of himself and a tiny inner circle of friends. Write about the Mitchell trial, fine, but not as if it represented a fundamental struggle for the heart and soul of democracy. Put it in context; perhaps point out that whatever injustice Jim Mitchell endured at the hands of the Marin County judicial system pales into insignificance compared to that faced by the overwhelming majority of criminal defendants who are unable to assemble million-dollar defense teams.

But in the microscopic world view of Hinckle and Co., all that appears to matter is the well-being of his personal buddies. Such loyalty may be touching, but not when it extends to the point of completely obscuring one's judgment. As merely one instance, I give you Hinckle, with as straight a face as can be found in print, portraying one Jack Davis as a "positive" character witness for the accused. For those of you who don't follow San Francisco politics, Davis is a particularly loathsome political operative of the Charles ("I'd walk over my grandmother for Richard Nixon") Colson school of sleaze.

And not to belabor the point, though it's hard to avoid it: Hinckle surrendered all claims to left-wing credibility or intellectual respectability when he donated his wholehearted efforts to electing Frank Jordan mayor of San Francisco. Jordan, despite protestations to the contrary, is essentially a Republican bagman for the corporate interests who have been devastating that city for years. Whatever Hinckle's personal grudges against Art Agnos, they can't justify supporting someone who is the urban equivalent of Marilyn Butcher or Nelson Redding. Hinckle himself is not a right wing thug, even if he increasingly looks in danger of becoming one. But his irresponsible and unprincipled actions can accomplish much the same ends. Hinckle is one urban expert we definitely don't need in the Emerald Triangle.

## Small Minded County Hicks Hack At Big Time Country Weekly

If the previous opinion hasn't gotten me declared *persona non grata* in the *AVA*, or even if it has, I still must put fingers to keyboard to defend that mostly excellent paper against the accumulated post-hippie nut cases of the *Sonoma County Free Press*, who devoted almost the entire April issue of that otherwise nondescript handout to attacking Bruce Anderson. If he's managed to get this collection of whiners, wankers, and self-fixated new age nebbishes that riled up, Bruce must be doing something right.

Although I've been accused of it, I'm no slavish admirer or follower of Bruce Anderson. I've had a number of arguments with him about his unnecessary attacks on people or groups who are essentially in the same political camp as he is and are guilty of little more than offending his well-honed sense of esthetics. And in his eagerness to create maximum impact with minimal resources (despite his critics' constant contentions that Bruce's blunderbuss tactics are simply a device for selling papers, the *AVA* has never been anything resembling a profitable enterprise), he's been guilty of publishing

inaccurate or imprecise stories. So, it might be noted, has the *Lookout*; which like the *AVA* does not have the resources to hire the legions of reporters and fact-checkers an institution like the *New York Times* employs (and in spite which the *Times* manages to consistently be more dishonest and offensive than the *AVA* and the *Lookout* combined).

But while neither the *Lookout* nor the *AVA* are without blame when it comes to creating "obstacles to movement building" (the title of the *Free Press*' "special issue"), we both possess something that the *Sonoma Free Press* can only rarely aspire to: challenging and thoughtful writing rather than a strung-together recitation of slogans and clichés. Our readers may get mad as hell, they may rip our papers to shreds, call us names, and vow never to sully their sight again with our obnoxious and immature prose, but they can't accuse us of being bland, tepid, or boring. We're not in the business of providing intellectual backrubs.

Warts and all, Bruce Anderson's writing will still be read a century from now. I'd be surprised, in fact, if he doesn't achieve the status in history of (at least) an H.L. Mencken. The collective efforts of the thin-skinned liberals and erstwhile radicals who have banded together to attack him in the *Free Press* would be lucky to produce a single idea or concept worth remembering a year from now. That's not to say all their efforts are worthless, simply that they should stick to what they can do, which is publishing a low-key, middlebrow journal of moderately green-left opinion. They're just plain out of their league when they go after Bruce; there are probably no more than a handful of journalists currently working in the English language who wouldn't be.

The gist of the *Free Press* charges against Bruce, by the way, are familiar, and spurious ones: he's a sexist and a racist. I've found some of Bruce's rhetoric and humor to have mildly chauvinistic overtones, though nothing that would shock me coming from any man my age or older. Old habits die hard; try as we do to change and adapt, both of us were raised in a world that was far more sexist than the one we live in today.

But when it comes to crucial issues, Bruce is no sexist. He may irritate the hell out of many women - Judi Bari, among others, has called him on it many times - but he has long been a staunch defender of women's rights. And to call him a racist, as the self-styled black nationalist Kwazi Nkrumah is absolutely idiotic (let me interpose, just for the record, that I find all nationalists of any color or country idiotic). Nkrumah, like the bafflegab-spouting late-60s black power activists he emulates, identifies his own self-important and largely neurotic views with those of the entire black race; therefore, any criticism of him is *ipso facto* "racist."

For those who don't know, Bruce Anderson has lived most of his adult life in a multi-racial household, and if he has ever acted in a racist manner to his Asian wife or his half-Asian children, I've seen no evidence of it. And this is the same Bruce Anderson who brought more than a dozen inner city African-American children and teenagers into his own home and treated them with the same respect and dignity he accorded his own kids. And not just any African-American children, but delinquent ones, the kind nobody wanted, who otherwise might have spent their entire youth locked up in some sort of holding facility. How many white liberals or even radicals ever demonstrated that kind of commitment? Not the Sonoma County libs, I'll wager.

## Welcome To Wackoland: L. Ron Cult Sets Down In Petrolia

Over the past couple of decades Mendocino County has been home to more than its fair share of cults and individual wackos. Now it seems that Humboldt County is getting in on the action as well.

From the San Francisco *Chronicle* comes news that the tiny town of Petrolia has unwittingly acquired a new neighbor in the form of a gigantic underground bunker constructed at a cost of \$7 million by the "Church" of Scientology.

375 feet long, and encompassing 12,669 square feet, the bunker is allegedly meant to provide a safe storage space for the writings and recordings of the cult's founder, L. Ron Hubbard. But considering its size, and the fact that two similar bunkers already exist in New Mexico and southern California, this explanation seems a little ingenuous. According to the *Chronicle*, Hubbard's output includes 50 books, 3,000 lectures, and "many films and audio tapes." Perhaps I'm missing something, but I don't think I'd have much trouble fitting the aforementioned into my room of about 300 square feet.

More likely is that the Scientologists, like numerous other cults, are preparing for the imminent demise of civilization, when they can retreat to their bunkers and ride out the storm while waiting for the opportunity to emerge and impose their bizarre sense of reality on all unlucky enough to come within their grasp. Certainly the manner in which Scientologists have conducted themselves in the past doesn't inspire one with a great deal of confidence in how they would behave in a post-apocalyptic world.

While Scientology is primarily a mercenary enterprise, charging gullible truth-seekers tens of thousands of dollars for the privilege of becoming "clear" (enlightened, reaching nirvana, satori, saved, you know, the usual riff) and fiercely harassing clients who drop out before their bank accounts have likewise become clear, there is an element of powermongering and megalomania that is plainly visible in Hubbard's writings, particularly in his best-known work, *Dianetics* (best-known largely because it is endlessly advertised on late-night TV).

On the bright side, Scientology appears to lack staying power. Some twenty years ago the Berkeley branch of the cult owned or rented a magnificent building just up the street from my house. Since then it has had to move into far smaller and less desirable quarters, and it's been years since I've personally heard of anyone who's been taken in by the "personality quiz" used to entice potential recruits. I suppose the Petrolia vault could always end up being converted into a giant mushroom farm, or perhaps an underground bowling alley. Maybe even a trendy all-night disco - something Petrolia has needed for years.

## As Bill And Ted Would Say, It Was Most Pulpous

The much-coveted Eureka Medal of Honor, emblazoned with the city's famed twin pulp mill smokestacks crossed by two expired salmon and a three-eyed mutant sea tortoise should be awarded to the visionary behind Northern Humboldt's newest tourist attraction, the Pulp View Pier.

Located near the end of scenic Wabash Street, the pier reaches several hundred feet out into the murky grey waters of the Humboldt Sludge Pool (known in ancient times as Humboldt Bay), and affords visitors to the region a breathtaking close-up view of Eureka's most spectacular site, the Simpson Pulp Mill.

Native and stranger alike, anyone who's ever been fortunate

enough to spend time in Eureka has stopped to wonder at the awesome size and power of the gigantic "plumes," as Eureka's like call the clouds of smoke that exude from the towering smokestacks of their beloved mills. But except for those fortunate enough to be employed by Simpson or its partner in progress, Louisiana Pacific, until now few have ever enjoyed the opportunity to witness at close hand the State of California's single largest source of emissions and effluents.

The *Lookout* particularly recommends a nighttime visit to the pier, when the mercury lights at its end attract millions of writhing orange and brown eels which appear to be the Humboldt Sludge Pool's dominant form of marine life. What it most decidedly does not



recommend is allowing its water-like contents to come in contact with one's bodily temple, advice ignored by Chris Gambin and another local punk rocker, who while celebrating one of that subculture's arcane rituals on a recent rainy Sunday afternoon, were inspired to strippnaked and dive into the muck. We are still waiting for the autopsy results.

## Hey Coachie, Here's Your Hat, Now Stuff It In Your Mouth

LHS football coach Grover Faust has been embarrassing the Laytonville public schools for years with his infantile tirades, macho histrionics, and exhortations to unsportsmanlike conduct delivered on the sidelines of football fields throughout the Deadwood Empire. Of course no one expects a particularly high standard of behavior from organized football, the sport which best embodies the most grotesque aspects of Americana.

Unfortunately, Faust is also allowed to teach physical education classes to innocent Laytonville High School students who must endure his bullying and browbeating if they wish to graduate. He is especially fond of picking on teenage girls who appear insufficiently overwhelmed by his wonderfulness. I've had reports from several girls who've been singled out by Coach Faust for repeated, and usually pointless verbal abuse.

Faust may have outdone himself, however, when he recently advised a class of tenth graders that since none of them were likely to be accepted into a really good college, they shouldn't "waste their time" on illusory dreams and instead prepare themselves for more "realistic" educational goals. Like Mendocino JC, maybe? Or perhaps the Ukiah Beauty College (sic)?

Laytonville kids are up against it in many respects. In most cases they don't have a lot of money, and many of their parents, particularly those in the logging and marijuana industries, face an uncertain future. On top of that, the stigma of being from a small and not all that highly regarded town discourages them from believing themselves capable of anything extraordinary. But a tenth grader still has most of her life

in front of her, and any teacher or parent who discourages her from thinking that almost anything is possible is doing that kid the ultimate disservice.

With minimal resources and all the usual limitations of a tiny school district, Laytonville schools have done a pretty decent job of preparing kids for an uncertain future. The teachers and administrators added to the staff in recent years have for the most part been intelligent and caring individuals who have been doing their best for the kids under very trying circumstances. The last thing they need is for some dinosaur like Grover Faust to be telling students to rein in their dreams and settle for mediocrity. Faust should already have been put out to pasture (if indeed that is where superannuated dinosaurs go) for his offenses, of which overt racism was not the least, on the gridiron. If he's going to insult the intelligence of students who with the proper encouragement could go on to make all of Laytonville proud, he should be out of here, and pronto.

## "Higher" Education?

On the other hand, a not so shining hour for Laytonville public education came when a substitute teacher was arrested in front of his Middle School class on marijuana charges. Apparently intent on making some kind of point, sheriff's deputies insisted on removing him from school in handcuffs and "throwing him," according to several student witnesses, into the back of a police car. A significant portion of Laytonville students being the children of marijuana growers, the only point likely to be made is that the police are insensitive brutes undeserving of trust, respect, or cooperation. Hardly the way to foster a sense of community, wouldn't you say?

Is a trend emerging? A few weeks later, a Covelo teacher was busted for pot while cruising down the highway on his motorcycle. This never happened when I was in school. Of course I don't think they let the nuns at our school drive motorcycles either.

## Eureka/Arcata: Still Waiting For KMUD?

You may have noticed by now, unless you are deaf, dumb and blind, that I am an unabashed KMUD booster, KMUD being the Garberville-based community radio station that is a model for community radio everywhere. And in case it needs repeating, I'll say it again right here: KMUD is the greatest radio station in America, if not the entire world.

After hearing such glowing tributes, along with the news, reported in the last couple issues of the *Lookout*, that KMUD was about to begin broadcasting in northern Humboldt, Eureka-Arcata residents might feel justified in questioning the credibility of both this magazine and KMUD itself, since the 88.5 frequency has for the most part remained noticeably vacant.

Well, suffice it to say that things have gone less than smoothly; a translator was set up in northern Humboldt but for one reason or another has continually malfunctioned or simply failed to work (sounds like a lot of friends of mine). All I can advise you is to be patient; we southern Humboldt types are not on such a severe time scale as you big city folks up there in the burgeoning metropolis astride Humboldt Bay. KMUD will come to you sooner or later, probably when you least expect it. And as for Parker Van Hecke and his disciples of complacent mediocrity over at KHSU: enjoy this brief respite, because when KMUD finally arrives, it's going to blow you right off the dial.

## KHSU, KZYX Take Note: Here's How To Do The News

Also on the KMUD beat: if you haven't spent much time outside the Emerald Triangle in recent years, you might not realize how lucky you are to have such a dedicated person as Estelle Fennell in charge of bringing the local news to you. When Estelle first took over the KMUD news department after Susan Dembitz's departure, there were some complaints that she was "unprofessional," and some xenophobes even claimed that her Irish accent made her hard to understand.

But undaunted by such criticism, Estelle plugged away at her job, and has created a nightly news report that should be the envy of community radio stations everywhere. Even Berkeley's KPFA, with its extensive staff and a news budget that's probably as large as KMUD's entire operating income, seldom manages to cover local issues with the in-depth and well-rounded perspective that Estelle brings to her work. KZYX, southern Mendocino's public radio station, recently spent a good bit of money sending Joseph Leon, their newly appointed news director, away for some sort of "training." They would have done better just to send him up to Garberville for a few days, or for that matter, set him up on top of one of mountains overlooking Boonville, where, we understand, KMUD comes in loud and clear.

KMUD local news, by the way, can be heard Monday through Friday at 6 p.m. and Tuesday through Friday at 8 a.m.

## OK, Good News About KZYX

Yes, KZYX: well, I'm tired of bashing them, and for once there are some upbeat developments to report. The aforementioned Joseph Leon, despite being hampered and hamstrung by neurotic station management, has begun to put together a creditable news department. There are now several public affairs programs that are nearly always worthwhile, most notably those hosted by David Colfax and Beth Bosk.

Still missing, though, is the kind of no-holds-barred journalism that, say, Bruce Anderson could bring to KZYX. Yes, I know he irritates the hell out of many Mendo libs, including many of the station's biggest contributors. But KMUD continues to thrive despite allowing, even encouraging, equally obnoxious commentators (myself, for example) to appear on its airwaves. KZYX's biggest fault from its inception has been an excess of timidity.

So for the umpteenth time, in case anyone's listening down there in Philo, get rid of the insipid National Public Radio, especially the horrifically smarmy Terri Gross and her cloyingly stale "Fresh Air", dump at least half of the tedious classical music and the pedantic DJs who present it, double the local news and public affairs programming, and bring in some music of more recent vintage than 1975. Contrary to appearances, there are people in Mendocino County who don't belong to the North Coast Greens, who think new age jazz is the creation of demented sadists, and would like to see Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt, Holly Near, and all similarly whiningly pompous folksters crucified on the Mendocino headlands at dawn if not sooner.

## Oh To Be In Willits Now That Asphalt Time Is Here

With predictable crocodile tears, the Willits News bemoaned the imminent departure of city manager Bill Van Orden, perhaps fearing that without his perspicacious stewardship, Willits might stray from

the regimen of asphalt-driven desertification that in the past two decades has turned a relatively pleasant little town into a sprawling, semi-urban slum.

South Willits, or S willits, as some of its less enthusiastic devotees are wont to call it, has become a depressing strip of fast food, chintzy motels, and stultifyingly unimaginative boxes housing a variety of businesses that with few exceptions belong anywhere but on the main drag of a town that still likes to imagine itself as a potential tourist destination. Anchored by the greatest monument to Van Orden's venality, the Nevergreen Shopping Center (oops, according to recent information, it's now the Nevergreen Village), the poorly-if-at-all thought out development of South Willits has virtually wrecked the town's compact and once-convenient downtown. Now a trip from one store to another often necessitates a mile-long journey under near-gridlock conditions.

You've got to admit that producing San Francisco-style traffic jams in a town whose population has yet to crack the 5,000 barrier takes some doing. But Van Orden isn't slinking away in a cloud of afterthoughts just yet. Mid-March saw him still active in city government, presiding over a "tree management" plan (Why do I get the idea that these people actually feel threatened by excessive greenery? When, for example, do you ever hear about management plans for psychotic loggers, compulsive parking lot builders, or obsessive fast food franchisers?) that would involve "tree removal and pruning to remove potential hazards." Yeah, potential hazards like a couple of stray leaves falling in an unsightly manner on some L-P junior exec's freshly paved front yard.

## It Was Nice While It Lasted...

It's seldom enough that Caltrans does anything right, and the bureaucrat behind this particular aberration has probably been fired by now, but credit should go to whoever's responsible for planting the magnificent array of crimson clover, purple vetch, and California golden poppies along a several-mile stretch of the recently opened 101 freeway north of Ukiah. While I would have enjoyed the view much more from the high speed train that Caltrans should have put in instead of continually expanding our asphalt supply and thereby increasing our dependence on internal combustion and global warming, it was a beautiful sight, particularly when set against a backdrop of hills that were genuinely green for the first spring in years.

## Good News For North Humboldt: Air Pollution Only Imaginary

Because of the giant smoke stacks towering over Eureka's two pulp mills, the billowing clouds of smoke that emerge from them 24 hours a day, and the sickening, sometimes overpowering smell that typically hangs over the city, many Eurekaans have been under the illusion that their city has a pollution problem. Contributing to this illusion have been reports that Humboldt County has been reported to be second only to Los Angeles County in air pollution, despite having a population of only 120,000 and no major industries aside from the pulp mills. Some environmental extremists have even seized upon such data to suggest that the harm done by the pulp mills is much greater than the benefits they produce (it's not widely known, but a significant portion of the nation's toilet paper originates right here in Eureka).

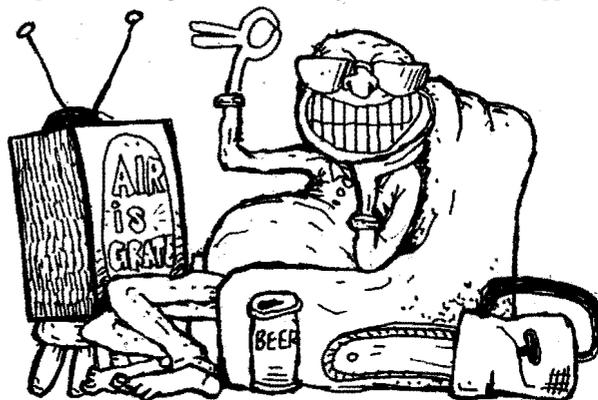
Thus it came as a great relief when one of Humboldt State University's learned professors assured us that there was in fact no serious air pollution problem locally. Richard Stepp, chairman of the

Physics Department, told the HSU student paper *The Lumberjack*, that "On a scale of one to ten, he would give Humboldt County between a six and a seven for air quality." This serious scientific opinion, no doubt arrived at after much careful study, and, no doubt, the kind assistance of pulp mill operators Louisiana-Pacific and Simpson Timber, should go a long way toward reassuring paranoid Eurekaans who might have thought the air they were breathing was dangerous because of its odd smell and consistency.

But the problem is mainly a perceptual one, he contends. While admitting that the pulp mills "produce some pretty stinky stuff," most people "would not be bothered, and maybe not even notice the smells that come from the mills." He dismissed the idea that his living in Arcata, ten miles from the mills and in the opposite direction from prevailing winds, had anything to do with coloring his own perceptions. "Why heck, Harry Merlo, who owns the whole darn Louisiana-Pacific Corporation, said he'd never been bothered by the pulp mill smells, either, and he just lives up the road in Portland."

"The mills attract all the attention," said Stepp, "but I would be surprised if the cars and homes don't pollute more. People from Los Angeles wouldn't think we have a problem." He also complained that people's mistaken impression that the air over Eureka was bad led ill-informed citizens to make unfair demands on the city's two greatest benefactors, L-P and Simpson. "Private individuals are not doing anything," he said. "They pollute more than the mills, yet they want to make the mills pay for everything."

Unfortunately the *Lumberjack's* reporter was so awestruck by the professor's expertise that he neglected to ask Dr. Stepp why we



were constantly hearing that state and federal air quality standards had been almost continuously violated by the pulp mills since the time they opened. We assume, however, that such stories are merely the result of a media conspiracy produced by ultra-liberal and eco-extremist papers like the *Eureka Times-Standard* and the *Arcata Union*.

Wayne Morgan, air pollution control officer for the North Coast Unified Air Quality Management District, a wholly owned subsidiary of L-P/Simpson Public Relations Department, claimed that pulp mill emissions matched state standards (standards for what, he didn't say). Stepp took exception to this, however, in a peculiarly worded bit of discourse that seemed part Socratic dialogue, part *Zen koan*: "State laws assume we are all standard citizens," he protested. "What about people who are not standard?" In other words, he appeared to be saying, the air could be half clean, or it could be half dirty, or it could be something quite different from air altogether, and besides, we might only think we are breathing it when in fact it is breathing us. With that the kindly scholar put on his gas mask and headed out to the Samoa Peninsula for the annual Pulp Mill Employees Annual Spotted Owl Barbecue and Mutant Fish Spearfishing Festival. The red, white, and blue bumper sticker on the back of his car cheerfully reminded us that "Lungs Are America's Renewable Resource."

# We Can't Take The Train

by Mark Scaramella

Lawrence Livermore makes a good and fairly obvious case against the automobile. I support his objections to the car culture, maybe even more than he does. And recently we even have some of these trends being noticed by some government agencies like the Air Quality Management Districts in LA and the SF Bay Area. But I seriously disagree with his proposed solution.

First, I have never believed that a person who points out a problem is automatically obligated to suggest a solution, just so that he can respond to that stupid, old right-wing cry: "Well, what's *your* solution?" We must first define and agree on the problem before we can discuss "solutions" anyway. So let's make sure we do that first. In addition, there are no "solutions." The concept of "solutions" is a Western myth. Any decent ecologist knows that everything in the world is connected, circularly. This linear, western, mostly male, overly rational "solution think" is premature, simplistic and usually incomplete, if not just wrong.

So my first objection is that Lawrence Livermore (apparently a pseudonym, a poor choice, since the Lab from which it comes - a subsidiary of University of California, Inc. - hasn't dreamed up much in the way of solutions for human problems) proposes a "solution" at all. There are no grand solutions to the transportation question, there are only reductions in the problem.

Trains didn't work well even in their so-called heyday. They were frequently unworkable boondoggles, wasteful monopolies and corporate land grabs from the Indians, with government collaboration. In the last century the government actually encouraged railroads by giving away more and more land to corporations that built railroads. These schemes created such companies as Southern-Pacific, Georgia-Pacific, Louisiana-Pacific, Union-Pacific, Great Northern - you know, some *real good* operations. Trains as they now exist in the US are obsolete, the railroading equipment would still have to be obtained from large predatory companies even if the operations could be somehow broken up into non-monopolies, an unlikely prospect.

Train-based mass transit should be a relatively small part of our transportation future. It should be pursued based on more appropriate (smaller) technologies. It should be focused narrowly on dense corridors where ridership and/or commodities will support it and where convenient access on both ends of the trip is available. In such selective cases, the railroad could be commercial, or public bond funded. Maybe we could even get to the point where interstate transportation is government owned and privately operated, or, at least, government regulated like utilities.

And light rail solutions that have been tried so far are very expensive and ineffective. When nothing serious is done to discourage car travel or encourage rail, light rail projects have become variations on the white elephant theme time after time.

What we don't need are more big solutions. Such big approaches are fundamentally impractical and bad. First, as in the other big waste, solid waste, we need to do real source reduction, reducing the amount of travel or transportation needed. Rearranging communities would be good, reducing the manufacturing of stuff that needs to be shipped, using and buying from local sources which need less transportation would be a big help (e.g., millions of logs to Mexico and finished goods shipped back to the US). For the remaining shipping, we need small, diversified, simple and slower transportation alternatives.

Another problem with a large scale railroad program is the lead time. Even under the most favorable political, economic, and technological conditions, I don't see how any serious, systematic rail improvements could be made in less than around 15 years.

We could start by emphasizing and encouraging walking and bicycles. Small changes in street and road layouts could make this a much more attractive idea than it already is.

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# We've Got To Take The Train

by Lawrence Livermore

In *Lookout #35*, I argued that the private automobile had created an economic and environmental disaster for America, and that a vital component of reversing that disaster would be to rebuild and reinvigorate a national railway system.

The article was later reprinted in the *Anderson Valley Advertiser*. Mark Scaramella, a regular contributor and editorial assistant to that paper, responded with a rambling, ingenuous set of obfuscations to the effect that railroads would not work, indeed had never worked, and were part and parcel of the bad old ways of doing business on the basis of large, centralized systems of power. He argues, instead, in favor of more economical automobiles, and for electric-powered ones in particular. He also suggests that much of our current passenger and freight traffic is superfluous and could be curtailed and eliminated to our advantage. I have no quarrel with any of these positions, except that they barely begin to address the full scope of our transportation needs.

But not content to be ineffectually moderate, he went severely off the rails, if I may be allowed such a brazen pun, by buttressing his argument with a bit of new age baffle-gab to the effect that problems exist only to the extent that we perceive them to be problems, and that by seeking solutions, we only create new problems. He went on to disparage my name on the grounds that since I share it with a nuclear weapons laboratory, it was hardly appropriate for a writer who seeks creative and peaceful resolutions to modern dilemmas (you will see that I am struggling manfully to avoid mentioning the apparently retrograde notion that there are certain, um, "problems" besetting our civilization).

While I myself do not find the name "Scaramella" especially pleasing - to tell the truth, it puts me in mind of some sort of obtrusive insect, or perhaps a recurring plague virus - I would hesitate to suggest that it invalidates the ideas expressed by its owner, ideas which are quite capable of falling on their face unaided. The most fatuous among them is the notion that if all mankind were simply to adapt to the Scaramella way of life, there would be no transportation problem, if, that is, one existed in the first place.

Mr. Scaramella finds that our cities are badly designed, necessitating large amounts of otherwise unnecessary travel, and in that he is quite correct. However, he perhaps fails to note to how great an extent that bad design is a direct outgrowth of the very badly designed automobile-based transportation system. But then in a classic case of "I've got mine, Jack," he demands that all of us stop travelling about needlessly and at such a great rate of speed. Content himself to occasionally come tootling into town on a glorified golf cart with a top speed of 35 mph, he can not comprehend why anyone else might need to get about with greater speed or efficiency.

Why indeed does anyone need to get to San Francisco, or for that matter, London, where these words are being written, when all the amenities that really count can be readily obtained within a ten-mile radius of Greater Boonville? Is not Mr. Scaramella, croaking securely within the confines of his particular little pond, surely the moral superior of those who gad madly about the globe in search of god knows what? And isn't it clear that America was a far better place when the distance man could travel in a day was irrevocably circumscribed by the speed and endurance of his horse?

Of course there is a great deal to be said for sitting comfortably in one's own domicile, and Thoreau has said most of it well over a century ago. But for every flourishing oasis of cosmopolitan culture such as Boonville, there are hundreds of insular, provincial towns with names like Laytonville and McKinleyville and New York, whose inhabitants desperately need the stimulation of travel to and communication with more enlightened quarters. Mr. Scaramella, by imposing his self-centered model of progress, would deny, or at least

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## Scaramella...

Next, get the damn mileage of existing cars way up. It's a joke! Several auto companies have proven designs with over 100 mpg and we still can't find anything much over 50 mpg in showrooms (and they don't "sell.")

It also really irks me that even so-called "environmental organizations" consider calling for the mileage of the US new car fleet to be raised to an average of 40 mpg or so to be radical. Why not 200 mpg, now *that's* radical! (And probably even technically feasible.)

In addition, we should be doing some strong, targeted things to discourage automobile usage, particularly where it is clearly stupid, as in crowded cities (or crowded, small tourist towns). We should start by moving to European/Japanese style oil/gas taxes. If this is such a bad idea, why are Europe and Japan seen as being "way ahead of the US" in so many economic and competitive ways? I understand that many Europeans laugh at the US budget deficit since could be easily eliminated (as they eliminated theirs) with a reasonably phased-in gas tax. A two-penny-a-month increase for the next ten years, for example. Do you think people's car buying habits would change if such a tax were introduced (a more dramatic \$2.00 per gallon has been proposed by the Bay Area Air Quality Management Board). Do you think the deficit would continue to be used as an excuse for not spending on social programs if gas taxes were used to eliminate it? Actually, it might be better to earmark such a tax for alternative transportation. Over time, people would start seeing alternative transportation as cheaper and better. Simultaneously, all people on any kind of public assistance should get free passes on all mass transit, since it runs around mostly empty anyway, and this would alleviate some of the effects of the gas tax on low-income people. For hourly or low-income workers, employers could be required to provide pre-paid mass transit as and additional encouragement.

His Editorship (Bruce Anderson of the AVA) says that elimination of the Mendocino County Office of Education is inevitable, and that we should get rid of it ourselves rather than wait for the more painful squeeze we're likely to feel later. The same is true of cars. We simply must make a series of major changes to significantly reduce fossil fuel burning, for the planet to survive.

My parents complain that gas taxes would penalize rural county residents like us. Not necessarily. "If gas went up," I asked them, "do you think small businesses like 'shopping services' might crop up, so that vans would do the shopping for ten people, instead of ten cars going to the store over the hill? Or would jitneys show up for such travel? Maybe not everybody would do it, but wouldn't it be worth a try?"

Further, there should be tolls into places like Mendocino and crowded cities based on vehicle size (wheel base) - particularly those gross mobile castles (and dare I say it?) the logging truck-monsters. We should also eliminate all forms of government subsidies to the car monoculture to force cars to be fairly competitive with the alternatives and give the alternatives a fair chance to get a foothold for acceptance.

Can you imagine what traffic would be like if cars were, say, half their present size? Electric cars can (and should) be smaller. Streets would be cleared and no new anti-environmental paving would be needed.

**Safety?** Another myth is that small cars are "unsafe." If they're unsafe at all, it's only because there are other *oversized* vehicles on the road, not because they're inherently unsafe. Maybe we could get all the ridiculous monster vehicles off the roads. What good are dangerous, three-ton macho muscle trucks on stilts? Or their car equivalents? Increased license fees for such consumptive guzzlers should be imposed immediately. Small car designs haven't even scratched the surface for real safety design yet, either. Much-improved crash-absorbing systems and materials have yet to be developed or installed. Not to mention that we go too fast! Most in-town driving is slow already, thanks to congestion, so why would smaller, slower, electric powered vehicles need so much "safety" anyway? Larger vehicles being registered by legitimate small businesses should be exempted

from any increase in license fees, but the roads they can travel on should be much more restricted by weight.

None of these ideas requires any new technology or any other delays in implementation, just relatively minor, sane changes in existing transportation systems, just relatively minor, sane changes in existing transportation systems, and implementation of proven but corporately-impeded technical alternatives. Are they likely? Not in the present political and corporate monoculture. But if the left continues to suggest unrealistic, semi-romantic government-sponsored, big-money, big-government ideas reminiscent of the 30s, I don't think much will change. We need to look at small-scale, community-based (again, dare I say it?) new businesses. Big corporations and big government ideas should be thrown out without the slightest hesitation.

There are also some interesting alternatives involving solar/conventional electric vehicles - recharged with solar when possible, otherwise, plug 'em in, or swap 'em at a "battery station." Plus, we don't need to own vehicles. Well over 90% of vehicle ownership time involves the damn things sitting *parked*, taking up way too much space. There have been some demonstration projects in Europe where solar/conventional electric cars are available in local, accessible, small lease-lots where you walk up with your credit card, stick it in and quietly drive off. You get charged by a combination of time and mileage. These solar lease-lot vehicles were produced by pulling the engines and drivetrains out of some Fiats and replacing them with batteries, modified simple drivetrains and adding roof-mounted solar collector cells. And even this relatively inefficient prototype approach worked well enough to be accepted by the few townspeople who tried it. The only "obstacle" to this approach as a replacement for a large portion of city or short-haul driving is a relatively small amount of startup capital and lower costs as production begins.

As with the timber industry (as Judi Bari says), any solution which doesn't address or involve the workers is no solution at all. A transportation conversion such as the one I'm describing would involve many new small-scale jobs. Building solar-electric cars of the future (using smaller auto bodies already in production) before Japan and Europe pre-empt us, building high-efficiency rechargeable batteries and solar cells, operating lease-lots, building small-scale mass transit where justified, repairing and maintaining existing roads. But ("read my lips"), *no net job loss and no new roads*. Oh, and while we're at it, eliminate Caltrans and (here I go again) privatize or assign to counties whatever normal road maintenance functions remain.

I'm not saying the car should be eliminated either. There are still situations where it may be appropriate: middle distance travel, maybe, but only when the mileage is raised, auto and truck subsidies removed, gas taxes in place, and other decent choices are available.

Some form of trains may indeed be helpful for *some* large loads over reasonably long distances. but I'll bet if we saw what was being transported (as we do when there are accidents and spills), we might think some of this stuff isn't worth manufacturing, much less transporting. (Such as solid waste, meat, nuclear/radioactive waste, chemicals, etc.) We can't look at transportation in a vacuum.

The economic, practical, and environmental benefits associated with this conversion are obvious and major. And I haven't even begun to scratch the surface of other transportation alternatives. Governments should be using their enormous buying power to start the conversion, obviously much greater Department of Transportation and Energy funding of alternatives should be applied. Alternative fuel vehicles should be part of the picture. There are all kinds of small-scale short-term alternatives out there. They just can't get a foothold against the current corporate car culture unless we start more prototype projects, fund more small-scale developments, and generally make the car culture pay its own way.

This is mostly a political and cultural issue, not a technical one. So-called "radicals" or even "progressives" must realize that the present Republicrats have no interest in fixing the present wasteful, stupid, exploitive, polluting, dangerous, but profitable transportation system. Radicals have to write about problems in radical terms and follow it up by political action to implement forward looking

alternatives.

Nothing personal, Lawrence, but the only thing that simplistic, frankly worn-out proposals like "just say no" or "just take a train" will do is make me spend more time typing longer responses. But since you clearly understand the problem side of this issue very well, I hope that this discussion is only beginning.

## Livermore...

severely hamper, their opportunity to come in contact with cultures such as, for example, his own, where they could learn to rectify the errors of their ways, while simultaneously dissolving their non-existent problems in the zen-like bath of being and nothingness.

But even if people can not be persuaded to stay in their appointed places, Mr. Scaramella argues, they can surely learn to do without much of the freight that endlessly and uselessly shuttles about on our nation's highways and railways. To an extent he is quite right; surely Boonville, or for that matter, San Francisco, can happily survive far into the future with no further shipments of nuclear waste, ozone-depleting hair spray, or forest-depleting copies of the Sunday New York Times.

To go a step further, there is no reason why the colder regions of the northeast can not learn to tough out their winters without indulging their sybaritic tastes for California's fresh fruit and vegetables. Things worked quite adequately on that basis for most of human history, and if the resultant scurvy served to keep population growth in check, so much the better. And if the residents of those far-flung realms can learn to subsist on their own resources, they certainly can wean themselves from the facile orotundities of Mr. Scaramella and myself, delivered to them weekly by fossil fuel-consuming, atmosphere-polluting planes, trains, and trucks. Surely cleverer writers can be found without searching as far afield as Boonville.

But human nature being as recalcitrant as it regularly shows itself to be, it is unlikely that the Scaramella Way will achieve widespread acceptance anytime soon. People will continue to dash about the world with the persistence and logic of a dog pursuing its tail, and they will continue to send and receive large shipments of consumer goods under the delusion that within possessions lies happiness, or at least an anodyne for unhappiness. While it is tragic that the common man has yet to elevate himself to the moral plane shared by Mr. Scaramella and myself, we enlightened beings can not reasonably hold all humankind to our own rarefied standards, and therefore it remains necessary to ensure that such passenger and freight traffic as does occur does so with the least possible damage to our economy and environment. I have seen nothing in Mr. Scaramella's argument to refute my contention that new and refurbished railroads are best suited for accomplishing that purpose.

He claims that railroads never worked when they were dominant; that is patently ridiculous. They worked very well to move people and goods, and a single decade cut their travel times about the eastern United States from weeks to a day or two. They would have worked far better had they been efficiently regulated and coordinated by government instead of being turned over to a patchwork of local monopolies and pointlessly competing robber barons. But when Scaramella calls for abolishing Caltrans and replacing it with "privatization" and reliance on county authorities, why does he think that would produce anything but a rerun of the 19th century experience?

Scaramella comes dangerously close to falling for libertarian ideology (itself not that far removed from extreme Reaganomics) when he assumes that all big government is bad, or for that matter, all big corporations. Large tasks demand large institutions. Whether we're creating a network of railways or highways, it's ludicrous to think we could rely on each neighborhood or town or county to do things in its own way at its own speed: again, it's the 19th century revisited, when counties often deliberately let their roads go to pieces at their borders to discourage competing merchants from entering their domains.

Would Scaramella like to have his Social Security check or his mail delivery dependent on "small-scale", locally based efforts? The

Ukiah City Council, for example? Even corporate monopolies are not necessarily satanic embodiments of evil: the American telephone system worked far better and was far more efficient when it was a regulated monopoly. Many of the major industries in Japan and Europe function successfully on the same basis.

Speaking of industry, the first great railway boom's need for steel and capital was the major driving force of the American industrial revolution. As a former resident and worker in one of the world's great industrial wastelands, Detroit, I harbor no illusions about the unqualified wonderfulness of industrialization. But disregarding my instinctive Luddism, reason tells me that without the benefits of modern industry, I would almost certainly, like innumerable generations of my ancestors, be grubbing for potatoes on some ever-shrinking and increasingly barren plot of old world land.

Admittedly the American Indians would be far healthier and happier today if that were the case, but the toothpaste of history can hardly be squeezed back into the tube. We live today in an exceedingly complex world which only continued advances in technology (and commensurate advances in ethics and intelligence) can sustain. Absolutely essential to that end is the swift movement of goods, people, and ideas. While a considerable quantity of the latter can be transferred electronically, it is no substitute for the flesh-bearing receptors and transmitters of ideas, i.e., we human beings.

Travel is a vital component of our education, and an excellent means of disabusing ourselves of ancient prejudices and xenophobic blinders. For an example, we need look no further than western Europe, where disappearing borders and rapid, economical travel have produced a sophisticated, internationally-minded populace, which, despite its current well-publicized problems over immigration and vestigial nationalism, is unlikely to ever again descend to the periodic wholesale bloodletting which characterized most of its history. Contrast that with the barbarism - if violent, mindless ethnocentricity can be thus described without unduly insulting all self-respecting barbarians - now sweeping eastern Europe and central Asia, where for decades the inhabitants have been told, a la moda Scaramella, that everything they need is in their own backyard.

Railroads work very well in Europe, where only England, to its everlasting sorrow, is following the United States model of forcing everyone off public transport and into his or her own private car. The high speed trains, pioneered by France and now being developed in much of western Europe, are taking significant market shares away from the airlines, as well they should, since they are quicker, cheaper, and more convenient. If politicians had the courage to legislate further restrictions on private autos, beginning with banning them from central cities designed for pedestrians and horse carts (no, I am not advocating the return of the latter), Europe would further improve its quality of life and serve as an excellent example of a rational transportation policy.

Mr. Scaramella argues that trains, if they work at all, are only useful in heavily populated corridors, ignoring the fact that it is in just such corridors that much of the American population lives. San Francisco-Los Angeles-San Diego and Boston-New York-Philadelphia-Washington are two of the more obvious examples. He also ignores, by suggesting electric cars as a partial answer, my argument that cars, regardless of their means of locomotion, squander, in addition to metal, plastic and rubber, one of the most non-renewable and precious resources of all: the time and energy of the human beings who must drive them. How, by any standard, can it be more efficient for a thousand people to devote their attention to guiding a thousand vehicles to a single destination when one person can drive them there more safely and cheaply on a train?

And the toll exacted from the individual driver is far more than the sacrifice of an extra hour or two of time per day. In order to survive, let alone prosper on our hellish freeways, it is necessary to abandon much of the civilized code of conduct that, even if honored more in the breach than the observance, makes life in crowded, modern cities possible. We - at least most of us - would not dream of pushing our way to the front of a line of people at the bank, or of

elbowing our fellow pedestrians out of our way on the sidewalk, but once surrounded by a cloak of Detroit steel and astride a century or more of horsepower, we act as though every arbitrary lane change or half mile per hour gained were worth the sacrifice of our lives and all of those around us.

At its base, the automobile is a profoundly anti-social instrument, not at all unlike the suit of armor that enabled and encouraged a medieval knight to ride roughshod through anything and anyone in his path. It dehumanizes us, and that reason alone should be sufficient to justify the elimination, posthaste, of about 90% of its uses. Certainly there will always be a need for a limited number of the beasts, primarily for travel in regions so sparsely populated that public transportation is simply not viable. But most of those who insist, day after day, on fouling our air, strangling our traffic arteries, and requiring that the American military dispatch itself to slaughter vast numbers of people to maintain our petroleum supplies, should be identified for what they are: selfish, uncaring, oblivious, and just plain stupid.

It's true, as I pointed out, that many people have little or no choice but to drive, because government, in collusion with industry, has constructed a transportation system that overwhelmingly favors the automobile. But it's also true that those who live in urban areas often fail to use the public transportation facilities that are available, giving government the perfect excuse to curtail those facilities and force still more people onto the highways. A certain amount of sacrifice and a considerable degree of patience is required of those who make the transition to public transport. But a significant reward awaits them as well: a calmer, more relaxed state of mind (except, I concede, when the BART train fails to turn up, or one stands at a rainy windblown bus stop for what seems like forever while endless processions of yuppie smogmobiles pass by) and the freedom to read or think or converse without having to devote one's full attention to surviving in the asphalt jungle of the fast lane.

Furthermore, they do us all the service of creating an obvious and

difficult-to-ignore demand for improved mass transit. It's my considered opinion that the best way to meet this demand is by light rail within urban areas, and with high-speed heavy rail between cities. The amount of investment required to create such a network could not help but stimulate the economy in a far more productive fashion than it is now being (badly if at all) stimulated, and the greater ease and efficiency of travel and freight shipping once it is finished would provide an ongoing competitive advantage over those regions of the world which follow the discredited American model of attempting to fit every citizen into his or her own car.

From my window I can watch the A40 Motorway, where for the hour or so I have been sitting here writing, bumper to bumper traffic has moved at a speed of three to five miles per hour toward Central London. As is the case in American cities, most of the cars contain only one occupant, and it would be safe to assume that many of those who passed my window as I began this article have still not reached their destination no more than five miles away. During the same time, beneath my window, ten London Underground trains have passed, each carrying hundreds of passengers, and even the most recent of them will have reached the heart of the city by the time I put the last period on this piece.

Mr. Scaramella might argue that most of these people, drivers or passengers, would have been better off staying at home and contemplating the folly of the human condition, but I leave it to him to convince them of that viewpoint. Since I myself feel an overwhelming existential need to travel to the center of London tonight to hear some live music that admittedly is superfluous to my fundamental need for food and shelter, I will thank the visionaries who created the London Underground, and curse the American-style Tories who are doing their best to destroy it. It's no solution, I know, since as Mr. Scaramella has informed me, there is no problem, but I can't help feeling that my own life and the life of the civilization I inhabit are enriched as a result.

## Throw The Bums Out?



The anti-incumbent movement in American politics is turning into a frenzy. It's understandable, since corruption and incompetence in government has reached unprecedented proportions. Those who would remedy it by throwing out all incumbent politicians are misguided, however, and their anger is being cynically exploited by forces who will make a bad situation far worse.

The recent ballot initiative limiting state legislators to two terms will do nothing to stop corruption in state government. Yes, it will provide a degree of emotional satisfaction to see flagrant bagmen like Willie Brown sent packing, but as long as we keep our present system of allowing public offices to essentially be auctioned off to the highest bidder, Brown and others like him will only be replaced by equally amenable, if slightly more anonymous, hired hands.

I'm referring of course to the way elections are conducted, in which corporations and political action committees can funnel essentially unlimited amounts of money into advertising and public relations, swamping any poor but honest candidate armed with nothing but some good ideas and a desire to serve the public. The same principle holds even more true for ballot initiatives.

True election reform would involve public financing of campaigns, a notion that immediately sets off an outcry whenever it is proposed because of the antipathy and distrust borne by Americans towards politics and politicians. I would argue, though, that that distrust plays directly into the hands of those who routinely buy and

sell politicians and political decisions. It's no coincidence that George Bush and the Republican right campaign *against* government while at the same time they are consolidating more power in the hands of the federal government than it has ever had in our history.

But true public financing of election campaigns would cost very little in the short run and save immense amounts in the long run. It would work something like this: during a strictly limited time period, say six to twelve weeks, every candidate for office (note: *every* candidate, not just Democrats and Republicans), would get an equal amount of television, radio, and print space to present his or her views. That's it. No other political advertising would be allowed.

Those with the resources to purchase vast amounts of advertising time would of course argue that their freedom of speech was being curtailed, but it wouldn't be true. Everyone would have the same opportunity to make their case. If you can't convince people to support your cause or candidate without bludgeoning them over the head with television spots every five minutes for months at a time, the fault no doubt lies with your cause or candidate.

Yes, such a system would still leave room for abuse. The major media are owned by wealthy, usually right-leaning corporations, and no doubt will continue to present biased coverage of their preferred issues and candidates. But they will no longer be able, as they are now, to deny freedom of speech and of the press to those unable to pay for it.



(British Spelling courtesy of Microsoft Word Spell-Check. Blame them.)

## Disaster At The Polls: Tories In For Another Term

Despite leading in most of the polls and mounting a campaign that was, at least by American standards, intelligent and responsible, the Labour Party has once more gone down to defeat, saddling Great Britain with the bleak prospect of several more years of Conservative mismanagement, plunder, and borderline fascism.

At this hour the final returns aren't yet in, but the Tories should have enough of a majority to continue dismantling the National Health, Service and British Rail, to press ahead with selling off of public assets at bargain basement prices, and, through a policy of malignant neglect, force hundreds of thousands more people below the poverty line. Expect to see, particularly in the large cities, growing levels of American-style homelessness, rising crime rates, a further breakdown in the social contract that once made the UK one of the world's most livable places, and a steadily deteriorating economy.

It would be easy (and tempting) to castigate the British people for the mutton-headed stubbornness in giving their support to a government which has demonstrably done them so much harm over the past 13 years, but that wouldn't be quite accurate. Even though the Tories drew a surprisingly high 42% of the vote, 58% - a landslide majority by most standards - voted against them. Unfortunately, those votes were split between the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats (except for the approximately six per cent that went to the Scottish Nationalists, Plaid Cymru, and the four Northern Irish parties), and it is on those two parties that the greater share of the blame for Britain's misfortune must be heaped.

Nobody but the phenomenally ignorant has ever suspected the Conservatives of having any but the basest and most self-interested motives. Despite their loud protestations of patriotism and glorious tradition (the same sort of treacle with which America's Republican Party has persistently drenched itself in), the Tories have made few bones about their essential purpose, that of enriching themselves and all properly affiliated cronies at the expense of the long-suffering and

far too gullible British people. In light of what the Conservatives have done since the Margaret Thatcher and Co. gained control of the party in 1979, the primary aim of any political party genuinely concerned with the well-being of Britain should be to get the Tories out of power. That neither Labour nor the Liberal Democrats were able to put their differences aside long enough to achieve that purpose speaks very badly for both of them.

Although in general I find myself more in sympathy with Labour's programme than with that of the Liberals, I have to fix the greater share of the blame on Labour for its short-sighted and undemocratic refusal to join a coalition with the Liberals to introduce proportional representation to the British electoral system. Such a move would have in one stroke broken the back of dictatorial Conservative rule and provided the British people with far more control over their own government than they have enjoyed in several decades. Labour leader (though probably not for much longer) Neil Kinnock's mistaken impression that he had a chance of winning the election outright led him to reject the opportunity to forge a deal in advance with the Liberals that would have given us a Labour-Liberal government along with long-overdue electoral reform.

Instead we have a government chosen by 42% of the electorate that will have near-dictatorial powers over Britain for as much as five more years. 58% of the voters said they wanted an end to Conservative rule, a landslide by almost any standard, but their wishes have been completely ignored. This is the state to which democracy has fallen in Great Britain, and unfortunately the Labour Party has to shoulder a hefty part of the blame. Certainly if the Conservatives possessed a shred of decency they would decline to accept the mantle of office that has been so unfairly and inappropriately thrust upon them, but only an idiot would expect such statesmanship or honesty from a party that has been deliberately wrecking democratic institutions at every opportunity for the past thirteen years.

Some blame has to attach to the people, too, and not just to those greedy and/or gullible enough to vote Tory out of misguided self-interest or a deeply ingrained slave mentality. Although voter participation was phenomenally high by American standards - nearly 80% - a significant number of potentially leftist voters have opted out of the system altogether, on the fatuous grounds that "all politicians are alike." One is tempted to say that anyone incapable of discerning a difference between Labour and the Conservatives is not mentally competent to participate in democratic decision making anyway, but the millions of working class people who swallowed the Tory propaganda line didn't let their impaired reasoning abilities stop them from doing their bit to wreck Britain.

To be fair, many non-voters stayed out of the fray because they were afraid of being nabbed for failure to pay their poll tax, proving the success of one of the more diabolical Tory schemes to wreck the democratic process. And here again, Labour deserves a good bit of the blame: the relatively few Labour MPs and councillors who were courageous enough to urge outright defiance of the poll tax were in many cases drummed out of the party. Instead of leading a campaign of civil disobedience that might even have brought down the Tories, Labour local authorities did exactly what Thatcher hoped they would do: alienated potential supporters by acting as dutiful collectors of the grossly unfair levy.

Meanwhile, what's next? Can, should Britain stoically accept another five years of Tory rule? Can its institutions and social structure hope to survive continued assaults on democracy, sabotage of the economy, and the driving into penury of millions more people? A stiff upper lip may not suffice here.

As should have been the case in this last election, the first and foremost goal should be to get the Tories out. All partisan or personal concerns should be second to that. Kinnock has to go, unfortunately - with all the criticism he deserves, I actually quite like the guy - and at this juncture, John Smith, the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer,

looks slated to replace him. Smith made mincemeat of his opponents at nearly every opportunity during the campaign, and doesn't rely on mere rhetoric; the alternative budget he offered was the most realistic fiscal document Britain has seen in well over a decade.

On the other hand, many have charged that the Smith-Kinnock wing of the party is guilty of the same sort of folly that the Democrats in America have fallen prey to: thinking that the only way to defeat right wing extremists is to become more right wing themselves. Labour, which once proudly proclaimed itself to be a socialist party, has all but banned the S-word, even though every successful Labour government this century has made few bones about its commitment to wealth redistribution and the welfare state.

Ken Livingston, who himself has backed off a great deal from the flamboyant leftism that got him dubbed "Red Ken" in the days when he headed the Greater London Council (until Margaret Thatcher, frustrated that the GLC inspired far greater loyalty among Londoners than her own government, abolished it), has his eye on the Labour leadership as well, and if he can get it, he could be a formidable opponent for the Tories. He's quick on his feet, and his glib, but very well-informed wit could gain him a lot of votes even among middle-of-the-roaders who don't share all of his principles.

Regardless of who becomes the new party leader, unless or until Labour again becomes a majority party, it must form a working alliance with the Liberal Democrats to ensure that when the next election comes there will be tactical voting and a promise of genuine proportional representation. Most important of all is to make sure that we do not have to wait five years for the next election, and that can best be accomplished by widespread non-cooperation with the illegitimate Tory government. And I don't mean merely on an individual basis, but an organised resistance spearheaded by local authorities, especially the large urban ones which are still largely controlled by Labour.

In any case, though things look bleak at present, it's hardly time to give up. Maybe it's because I've managed to survive, and on occasion even thrive, through a couple decades of malignant Republican rule in America. Maybe it's just because I'm thickheaded or hopelessly naive. But it seems most vital to not give up on the possibilities of democracy, to not be overcome by cynicism about our ability to regain control over the people and institutions who shape our lives. It's tempting, I know, but that's just what the bastards would love for us to do.

## The Efficiency Of The Marketplace

The mind still reels from the experience. Where were the green eyeshades, I wondered, at three clerks laboured with Victorian meticulousness and Eastern European efficiency over the challenging task of accepting a bank deposit.

The transaction, which consumed well over half an hour (while the next customer in line waited with characteristic English aplomb - or more likely resignation), was the last step to establishing a UK branch of Lookout Records. The whole process consumed three and a half weeks to accomplish what in America took the smaller part of an afternoon.

What an American bank clerk would have done in a few strokes on the computer involved five different deposit slips, three ledgers which may well have originated in Dickensian times, a microfiche of the sort one uses to locate books in some older libraries, and a grand flourish of rubber stamps, staplers, account books, and adding machines that rivaled the Changing of the Guard in complexity if not grace. The only thing missing, I reflected as I wandered out the door, was an elderly Chinese gentleman wielding an abacus.

The radical changes introduced by Britain's Conservative government since it came to power in 1979 were supposed to produce greater efficiency and modernisation through competition. State-

owned industries were sold off ("privatised") and others, banks, insurance companies, and the financial markets among them, were deregulated. But the only noticeable improvement in efficiency is the efficiency with which money is transferred from the pockets of the poor into the share holdings of the wealthy.

Sounds a bit like the United States since 1980, doesn't it? There are strong parallels, and Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were of course ideological bosom buddies. The big difference is that Britain's dismantlers, though every big as enthusiastic as their American counterparts, face a far greater task.

The mildly socialistic legacy of past Labour governments included a National Health Service that guaranteed free medical care to all, a social security system that attempted to supply all Britons with a living wage, and state involvement in or monopoly over a number of vital industries.

It also included what was once the world's leading public transport system, planning regulations that discouraged urban sprawl and required "green belts" between cities, and an ambitious public housing program aimed at ensuring that no British citizen should be without a home.

Much of that is gone already, and the rest fast disappearing or deteriorating. Telecommunications, electricity, gas and oil have already moved from the public sector to the private; in most cases the only visible result has been greatly increased prices. Even the water supply has been privatised, with cost-cutting measures by the water companies having this winter alone resulted in three separate alerts requiring some Londoners to boil their drinking water.

Much of the country's public housing stock has now been sold off. In many cases, occupants resold their low-priced council at profits of 100% or more, but it created the ironic situation of the government lending tax-payer money to people to buy (at a fraction of their real worth) houses that tax-payers had paid to build in the first place, and theoretically owned already. Never mind if that seems too convoluted to follow; what's easy to figure out is where the tax-payers' money went: into banks and real estate speculation, creating a largely illusionary boom that sent property prices soaring to implausible heights. Since then they've plummeted by as much as a third, and repossessions are at an all-time high.

Still set for the auctioneer's block is British Rail, once the world's premier railroad, but now starved into a malfunctioning shadow of its former self. The Tory government's notion that a service can only be valued in terms of its ability to turn a profit led it to insist that BR, alone among European rail networks, should exist without public subsidies. The result has been stratospheric fare increases, drastically declining service, and a large-scale abandonment of public transport in favour of private cars. Los Angeles freeways look like the Elysian Fields compared with the labyrinthine snarl of London traffic. A recent study indicated that average speed in central London is now 10 mph, a decline of 1 mph since the horse-and-buggy days of 100 years ago.

Even schools, hospitals, and libraries are being shoved into the competitive rat race by the government. The only trouble, as has been observed about rat races, is that the rats generally win. While an element of competition does wonders in many undertakings, all-out, unbridled competition is usually only effective in maximising destructive potential, war being the most obvious example. Just as Benjamin Franklin did not really say "Honesty is the best policy," but rather "The appearance of honesty is the best policy," companies can often offer the appearance of a good product or service more cheaply than a genuinely good one.

If we're talking about razor blades or deodorants, we presume the consumer can always change loyalties when he grows tired of lacerating his face or offending people's sense of smell, but what about when the product or service involves something less easily alterable, for example, a child's education? When, way back in 1977,

the Sex Pistols sang, "There is no future and England's dreaming," most people thought they were merely being contrary. But if England continues on its course of the past decade and a half, Johnny Rotten may eventually be seen as a more astute prophet than most economists, historians, and political scientists of his time.

## Living With Unemployment

"The sights make one lose all hope in humanity: the lack of courage and self respect of the masses who can put up with the horrible bureaucracy, the endless waiting in lines in the cold and wet for a few measly marks to be doled out." Emma Goldman wrote that while visiting Berlin in 1932, a year before the Nazis swept into power, but she could just as easily have been speaking about Moscow, 1992. Or for that matter, London, the main difference being that Brits for the most part enjoy the privilege of waiting indoors for their miserably inadequate dole cheques. £41 a week to live on? No problem, as long as you live on potatoes and beans, stay home, and go easy on luxuries like heat and light.

## Environmental Destruction? It's All Your Fault

What can any one person do about global warming? Not bloody much, but the Departments of Energy and the Environment, which have been running full page newspaper adverts asking the above question, could and should do a great deal.

Instead they're wasting tax dollars telling people to turn down their thermo-stats and take cold showers. Not a word about the biggest single source of greenhouse gases, the private automobile, but what else would we expect from a government dedicated to destroying public transport, paving over the countryside, and essentially telling the British people to either buy a car or stay home.

## Keeping Our Priorities Straight

The economy is collapsing and the environment in shambles, but count on the British press to not lose sight of matters that are Truly Important. Such as: the failure of the Australian prime minister's wife to curtsy to Queen Elizabeth when Herself turned up in Oz-land. The graceless commoner had the temerity to greet the queen with a handshake, and shock waves reverberated through the Empire. Former Queen Maggie I, in exile on the Isle of Dulwich, is said to be organising a naval flotilla to teach the colonials to respect their betters.

## God Save The Queen? Well, What Has She Done For Us Lately?

It's hardly surprising, though, that the British royal family should occupy centre stage in a society that often seems to revolve around anachronism. Other royal hubbubs include Princess Fergie's Texas toyboy (and subsequent divorce from Prince Andrew), Princess Diana's insulting the British motor industry (always quite capable of debasing itself, thank you) by buying a £72,000 (\$130,000) Mercedes two-seater, and Prince Edward's failure to marry and quash rumours that he's gay. Then there's the relative non-event of Queen Elizabeth's (remember her?) celebration of forty years on the throne.

The BBC-published Radio Times devoted ten pages of glossy text and photos to hyping its documentary of a year in the life of HM Lizzy, leading me to wonder aloud whether she'd be interviewed in

the programme. "Oh, heavens no," a shocked Brit informed me, "the Queen doesn't do interviews."

I found that disappointing, since I'd become curious about what, if anything, she'd have to say for herself. The royal family's dates back, Radio Times assures us, to Ethelred I in 978, and the monarchy has always been shot through with a certain streak of illiteracy. The Queen's regularly demonstrated facility at reading speeches belies the latter, but the former remains a question. And I'm not simply being uncharitable, being forced to recite to Parliament with a straight face the words of Margaret Thatcher could well drive anyone around the bend.

Still, aside from performing at the opening of Parliament, her Christmas Day message, and collecting flowers from schoolchildren, Her Maj doesn't appear to keep especially busy. We are told what a valuable asset to the nation she is, worth every penny of the £57 million (\$103 million) a year the tax-payers contribute to her upkeep. This is quite apart from her personal wealth, which is estimated at anywhere from £50 million to £7 billion. Since all of it is tax-free, nobody has any real idea of what it adds up to, but one well-researched study calling for the royal family to be taxed pegs it at £341m, and calls her "without doubt the wealthiest person in Britain."

To her credit, the Queen recently scotched a proposal to sink £2m of donated funds into a unicorn-shaped fountain commemorating her 40-year anniversary, on grounds that it would be seen as poor taste in a country enduring its worse economic conditions since the 1930s. But we urge her to go a step further, and give a concrete boost to her Britain's sagging fortunes.

All right, so she doesn't want to pay taxes; we can understand that. And heaven knows we're not demanding she give up her royal yacht (£9.3m per annum) or her privy purse that covers "private expenses (though £3.1m does seem a bit steep for toilet tissue, writing paper, and trips to the hairdresser). But while her apologists regularly characterise her as the hardest working woman in show business, it is hard to put a finger on what exact revenues she does rake in for the country.

Most commonly cited is her value as a tourist attraction, but it would seem to us that her earning potential in that field is woefully under-exploited. For instance, where are the guided tours of Buckingham Palace? And there are altogether too few vendors of souvenir merchandise on the Queen's doorstep. What about personally autographed pictures, or locks of royal hair?

But the main thing the tourists are itching to see is the Queen Herself, and whether because of innate snobbishness or bad advice, she persists in making herself unavailable. We suggest she commit herself to a regular schedule - say 9 to 5, with an hour for lunch - of putting herself on display for London's many visitors. It doesn't have to be tasteless; a good model might be the way American department stores present Santa Claus on his throne in the middle of a jerry-built fairy castle.

Since the Queen already possesses both throne and castle, expenses would be minimal. Tourists could pay maybe £5 a pop to file through and have a look at her. The queue would have to be kept moving fairly briskly; we wouldn't want ill-mannered louts gawking endlessly, and of course some reasonable dress restrictions could rule out Bermuda shorts and bikini tops. There might be, it has been pointed out, problems with certain foreigners, especially Americans unfamiliar with the decorum appropriate to a royal audience. How, for example, to deal with guests who persist in yelling "Hey Queenie!" or who might think it amusing to toss handfuls of peanuts in her direction?

But a special detachment of the Metropolitan Police could certainly be on hand to administer a good thumping to anyone getting out of bounds, and for those better-mannered visitors who wish to get "up close and personal" with Her Majesty, we suggest making available (for an extra fee, naturally) special photo opportunities.

## The Privatisation Bazaar

Proud American parents unhesitatingly pay upwards of \$10 for photos of their little nippers perched on Santa's lap; what might they part with (£25? £50?) for a shot of their darling ones on the knee of the Queen of England?

Dealing with young children can be a messy business of course, but the experience of North American Santas shows that most problems could be averted, or at least minimised, by providing the Queen with wet-proof royal robes. But then, it wouldn't only be children wanting to be photographed with Her Majesty. Naturally, we wouldn't consider allowing adults to sit on her lap, but here's an idea: what if an extra throne were set up alongside hers, and for perhaps £100, male tourists could be provided with fake robes, sceptre and crown, enabling them to show friends back home a photo of "me and my ex-wife, the Queen." While it might not be as convincing, the use of painted cut-outs into which tourists could simply insert their heads (as often seen at American carnivals) could obtain the same effect with less bother.

Another useful fund-raiser pioneered at American carnivals is the "kissing booth." Certainly we couldn't expect the Queen to kiss large numbers of strangers every day, regardless of what fees they were willing to pay. But perhaps on special occasions such as Royal Jubilees and Bank Holidays?

We realise that some will object to these suggestions, however eminently practical they might seem to us, on the grounds that they would debase the monarchy. But while Britain has always enjoyed a healthy respect for tradition, it's no good being hidebound about it. Times do change; it's not all that long that the Cabinet objected to George VI's coronation being broadcast on the radio because there was no way of assuring that listeners would have taken off their hats. And think of the to-do created when it was inadvertently mentioned that Buckingham Palace had had indoor plumbing installed, thus prompting an entire nation to consider the idea that the Queen (Victoria, in that case) might actually go to the toilet.

The fact is, Britain is in a terrible recession, and everyone must do their bit to pull out of it. Even if her new activities do take a bit of time away from her horse riding, fox hunting, and flower arranging schedule, it only seems right that she set an example for the rest of us. Come to think of it, what might it be worth for the Queen to pose, as in the famous Sex Pistols caricature, with a real safety pin in her nose? There'd probably be a fortune there in postcards alone...

## The Unkindest Cut From Mideast Terrorists: They Wouldn't Keep Terry

When the Middle East hostage crisis developed in the mid-80s, the most annoying aspect of it in my book was Terry Waite. Night after night he'd appear on the evening news prattling on about the most unbelievable nonsense in a voice that was the low-key equivalent of nails on a chalkboard.

The man irritated me so much that I finally wrote in an old issue of *Lookout* that Waite's greatest service to humanity would be to let himself be taken captive by Muslim fanatics, whom he could then proceed to bore to death.

I felt a bit guilty when Terry the Prat did become a hostage, but my conscience was more than salved when it turned out that the pompous "man of God" was acting as an undercover agent for the likes of Oliver North. I'm glad for all the other released hostages and their families, but as a gesture of good faith, couldn't the Mideast holy warriors have kept Waite off our hands for another few decades?

Late update: Terry Waite to Northern Ireland to "help the peace process." Terrorists are advised to put in a supply of No-Doz and anti-nausea meds.

Appendectomies, 40% off this week only. Come in for a specially priced vasectomy, and we'll throw in, absolutely free, an adult circumcision or a discount certificate on your next plastic surgery.

Ads like this are commonplace in America, but now they're beginning to take hold in Britain as well, as hospitals that have left the National Health Service in search of greater profits compete for greater market share. All part of the Conservative ideology that holds up competition and the free market as the ultimate solution for any social ill.

90% of British people still use the NHS (in many cases because it's all they can afford), which is supported by a 9% tax on the first £23,000 (\$41,000) of income. But the government refuses to adequately fund the NHS, leaving patients waiting years for routine operations, and weeks for a simple office visit. Private doctors and hospitals then skim off patients well-heeled enough to pay for better or faster treatment; this proves, according to the government, that people prefer private medicine, which justifies further cuts in the NHS budget.

Though they haven't yet admitted it, the Tories' long term aim is to do away with the National Health Service altogether in favour of following the American system of health care, popularly known as "your money or your life." In the wonderland of Tory economics, the British people need the "freedom to choose." One only need look across the Atlantic to see how well this market freedom works: the 40 million Americans who have exercised their freedom of choice to have no health care at all (think of the money they're saving!) have apparently left British consumers green with envy.

With the Post Office and British Rail next on the Tory short-list for privatisation, we can only wonder where it will end. After 13 years of running jumble sales with the nation's assets, the Conservative market fanatics will soon be left with little to sell. There's always the Department of Social Services, of course, but it's difficult to see how even the most imaginative entrepreneur can wring profits from Europe's most underfunded unemployment and welfare agency.

A more promising prospect: police and fire services. Wouldn't they work better on a pay-as-you-go basis? For instance, I haven't had an occasion to call the police in years. Why should my taxes go on paying for these other folks who persist in having crimes committed against them?

And besides, suppose someone does burgle my flat or hit me over the head. Why should the London police have a monopoly on sorting things out? Why, with no competition, what motivation do they have for doing a good job? In fact, it's just the opposite, I would think; if they arrested all the criminals, they'd be out of a job.

No, what we need is three or four competing police forces, who get paid on a per service performed basis, and only when the malefactor has been safely bunged into gaol. The streets would be swept clear of urban ruffraff in no time.

Of course such a system would present some problems. For instance, if I'm being pursued by a mad slasher and I've just made it to a telephone, I'd have to take time to consider the advantages of the various police services I could call. One might have advertised "Our response time is 40% faster" while another might boast "Over twice as many convictions as our nearest competitor." Should I phone the one who gets there fastest, and risk seeing my attacker get off in court on a technicality, or should I go for the more certain conviction at the risk of having my head lopped off while waiting?

These are the joys of the marketplace, though, aren't they? What a great day that will be when absolutely everything has been privatised, and we can spend our every waking hour doing nothing but that which Adam Smith and the Tory Party insist is humankind's ultimate purpose: shopping.



The cold snap of last December ushered in some of London's worst air pollution since the days of coal-fired furnaces. The freezing fog that shrouded the city may have looked mysterious and romantic, but a chemical analysis of the toxins permeating that gossamer cloud would have chilled one's bones more than the sub-zero cold.

The Government, always quick to safeguard the well-being of its subjects, responded to the crisis by requesting that people not drive into or around London, automobile exhausts being the main source of the pollution. They were, however, long on advice and short on example, as we don't recall seeing John Major, or for that matter, Michael Heseltine, whose Department of Environment requested the driving curtailment, hopping aboard London Transport in the course of making their daily rounds.

Of course we could hardly expect these public servants, with so many pressing demands on their time, to endure the delays and interruptions of service that have become routine, particularly on the Underground. After all, they have important business to attend to, unlike those of us too impecunious or unpatriotic to have helped fuel the thriving British economy by purchasing our own automobiles.

And while most citizens of any substance do own a car or three, certainly it's not asking too much of them to now tell them not to drive it. It's not as if they had anywhere they needed to go, is it? 13 years of Conservative free-market economics having made prosperous entrepreneurs out of all who possessed the slightest bit of get-up-and-go, the British middle-class is free to set its own hours and working conditions. There's no need for Nigel in Kent or Katherine in Surrey to come zooming down the motorway in their modified 18-cylinder Italian-German Ferrari sports tanks just to take care of some bothersome business in London when they can accomplish the same thing by plugging in their home computers and faxing their stock options and privatisation tenders to the proper quarters.

However, there remains a certain loutish lot that persists in knocking about on London Buses and Underground, despite Government efforts to put up fares to a level sufficient to discourage the riff-raff. Since the new rate of £1.20, combined with a systematic disabling of every other train and the latest spate of IRA attacks (subsidized, we suspect, by the Department of Transport) against BR and the Underground, has still not stopped London's layabouts from hopping on a bus or train at the drop of a hat en route to complete some drug deal or collect their giro cheques, we suggest that it may be time to consider the £5 fare.

Former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher has weighed in with her own scheme to minimise traffic and air pollution. "I propose to re-introduce the horse-drawn cart," she announced. "It served Britain quite admirably throughout the 19th century, a time when the Empire ruled the waves and free-market economics was the order of the day. It is tragic that we chose to embark on this socialistic programme of public transport and road building with utter disregard for the astute advice of Lord Whozis, who in 1850 argued against the expansion of British Rail with the cogent observation: 'I see no need to encourage the labouring classes to travel about needlessly.'"

At week's end, though, the winds shifted and the air cleared. The Government reversed itself and encouraged all citizens to hop into their automobiles and drive to every shopping centre possible in the remaining days before Christmas. In the event sufficient parking places were not available, motorists were advised to simply drive

about in circles for the time being. "We can't expect the British petroleum industry to lead the way to economic recovery if we don't all do our bit," said the Department of Transport.

When asked if that wasn't a bit inconsiderate, seeing as how any pollution generated in London would simply be carried across the channel to Europe, one minister replied, "It is a 'Common Market', isn't it? Share and share alike, that's what I always say." With that, he was off for a ceremonial "pulling of the first spike" to inaugurate the dismantling of another stretch of British Rail. Paving trucks, bearing steaming loads of 100 per cent British concrete, waited in the wings.

Long-time Londoners are bemoaning the dire straits that have befallen too many residents of the capital. With street begging and homelessness reaching levels not seen since the early days of the industrial revolution, it's obvious that the quality of life has fallen precipitously over the past decade.

Phalanxes of yuppies shouting down their cellular phones and blowing their car horns at hapless pedestrians who display insufficient alacrity in making way for their betters may create the illusion of prosperity, but it can not obscure the growing legions of the desperate who, at least as much as the bowler-and-brolly City chap or the Jeffrey-and-Jane professional lunchers, typify real Londoners.

With that in mind, it may come as discouraging news that, in the view of this American, you ain't seen nothing yet. On my recent return to London, nothing struck me so much as the relative *absence* of street beggars and people sleeping on the pavement compared with my home town of Berkeley. A week after arriving in London, a good deal of which was spent wandering the streets in a variety of neighbourhoods, I had been approached by exactly two beggars and noticed three people sleeping rough. In Berkeley I could tote up a higher score than that in a single city block.

That's not to downplay the problem here in London, but rather to give notice that worse is likely to lie ahead. The English social system - the "safety net", as the British press have dubbed it in an unfortunate borrowing from the dark days of early Reaganism - is being dismantled, in much the same way as is British Rail. The consequences are visible everywhere, in the form of increased crime, poverty, and desperation.

Because the English social system was much more elaborate and encompassing than anything ever existing in America, destroying it has required the full-time efforts of countless Tory bureaucrats. Annoying vestiges of it continue to crop up, such as the quaint English notion that a human being is entitled simply by virtue of being human to a roof over his or her head, to enough food to eat, and to adequate medical care and education.

Such archaic ideas have slowed long-range Conservative plans to re-institute serfdom and revive the workhouse as creative solutions for the growing numbers of people who have been made, in that marvellous and uniquely British term, redundant. Nevertheless, the forces of the market are still working their dark magic, and the full impact of the massive transfer of wealth from the lowest classes to the highest that characterized the 1980s has yet to be felt. Barring a reinstatement of the social programmes that once guaranteed at least a bearable standard of living to all citizens, the problems in the streets can only continue to grow.

Though it doesn't quite rank with the sensation of waiting on sleet-swept platforms for trains that have been indefinitely delayed while being fitted with new horses, one of the dubious pleasures of travelling on the London Underground is the opportunity to examine the clever posters with which the Transport Authority seeks to amuse us.

I'm not thinking of the ubiquitous "Think what you save when you buy a ticket" propaganda, which expands endlessly on the theme of how bad you'll feel when you get caught farebeating. (It might be worth noting that in 16 years of riding the Underground, I have yet to

see anyone get caught.) And the advertising billboards are the usual dreary lot, with the possible exception of the snootily clever excerpts from the "wits" of the Times or the tendentious recruiting essays of the Metropolitan Police.

No, what I have in mind is a series of posters - at least half a dozen per station - entitled "Art On The Underground". No Van Gogh, Rembrandt, or Michelangelo here, though; this "art" involves apparently pointless photos of domestic minutiae, enlivened by opaque or irrelevant captions.

For instance: a picture of a light switch, explained as, "We wanted a cottagey, stately home kind of feel." Or a toaster oven filled with various middle class consumer trivia that boasts, "We are fortunate that my position as a fine arts valuer..."

Another, which illustrates the statement, "Sue has definitely given things the feminine touch" with a roll of flowered toilet tissue, manages to insult women in particular as well as human intelligence in general. The whole series reeks of upper middle class smugness, with its implied putdowns of the slightly lower middle class. A good bit of the smirkiness is no doubt due to the "artists" figuring what a good leg-pull they're having at the expense of the dullardly British people, whose taxes pay for this stuff.

Some tax-payers are less than thrilled. At King's Cross someone altered "To come home in the evening and see what kind of anarchy the kids have carried out is just about the last thing I can face" to read: "To come home in the evening and read this shit..." Lest we miss the point, the "Art" in "Art on the Underground" has been crossed out and replaced with "Shit."

I'm not opposed to art in public places, nor to public subsidies for the arts. But the way such subsidies are managed now, with artists forced to compete for grants handed out by committees made up of the usual suspects, i.e., "civic"-minded businessmen and professional busybodies, virtually ensures that subsidised art will be bland and inconsequential, if not in glaringly bad taste. Genuinely talented artists rarely get grants because genuinely good art almost invariably disturbs somebody.

A far superior system of administering public support for the arts would be to provide any prospective artist with an income enabling him or her to survive while pursuing that goal. Britain used to have just such a system; it was called income support, and you didn't even have to call yourself an artist to take advantage of it. But while the system is still nominally in place, the survival quotient has effectively been taken out of it. Meanwhile, no-talent hustlers who know how to work the grant game walk away with thousands, even tens or hundreds of thousands of pounds for any sort of emperor's-new-clothes frippery that can be passed off as modern art.

Sick-making arts boondoggle, literary division: Those "Poems on the Underground" have got to go, and quickly. Any kid who regularly rides the trains and has to read the drivel displayed in every carriage can easily be forgiven for developing a lifelong prejudice against poetry before entering grammar school. The alleged poems are not dissimilar to the innocuities known as "Streetfare", which for some reason adorn public transport vehicles in nearly every American city. My own view: anyone who calls himself a poet and hasn't been dead at least a hundred years should be.

Here's a suggestion that, without costing the tax-payers a penny, could enhance quality of life on the Underground while at the same time creating much-needed jobs.

On most stations there are signs forbidding musicians from plying their trade ("Better buskers than muggers," somebody scrawled on one of them). It's actually a criminal offence, one that could land you in jail, to play music anywhere on London Transport property. Now can anyone explain to me why, aside from simple churlishness, officers of the law should go about arresting people for singing?

The one possible objection, that crowds of onlookers might

obstruct the free flow of traffic, could be easily addressed by setting aside alcoves or out-of-the-way areas as designated performance spaces. If this were half as civilised a society as it imagines itself, there would be stages not just in Underground stations, but everywhere people congregate, and anyone with a song in his or her heart would be encouraged to hop up and entertain the populace whenever the fancy struck.

The only argument I can imagine against this is that so many would-be musicians are not especially talented. But anyone wishing to introduce the issue of quality might better direct their attention to more flagrant concatenations of non-talent, for example, the BBC's "Top of the Pops" which is far more burdensome to both tax-payers and the general public.

Still more observations made on an Underground platform (yes, you'd be right to surmise that a large portion of my time in London is spent on trains or waiting for them): I found especially irritating a billboard urging people to spend their winter holidays in the garden spot of... Israel.

The weather was always sunny and warm, it promised, and one could go straight from a dip in the Mediterranean to dine in a marvellous rooftop restaurant while being entertained by the colourful spectacle of missiles and tracers incinerating Arabs on the other side of the border (all right, I made that last bit up).

A bit lacking in the Truth in Advertising department, I thought; winter temperatures in Israel rarely climb much above 16° or 17°C (low 60s F) at midday, not exactly ideal beach weather. Still, I figured, anyone thick enough to journey to the South Africa of the Middle East for rest and relaxation deserved whatever they got.

And they did; Jerusalem's weather has been worse than London's this winter, including three heavy snowfalls (London has had none), torrential rain (there's a drought on here), and temperatures as low as -4°C (25°F). Bikini-clad holiday-makers still being chipped out of the ice floes might have considered that nobody believes anything else the Israeli government says; why should they have thought the Tourist Office was any different?

The occasional shooting or stabbing of a Metropolitan police officer is unfortunate, but when it happens every week or two, it begins to look like carelessness. So Oscar Wilde might have put it if he inhabited the particular 90s which we're apparently fated to muddle through instead of his own.

But one has to begin to wonder why London's bobbies, so universally beloved if we're to believe their media image, are being bludgeoned, beaten, kicked, and even killed at unprecedented rates. Can it all be the result of impressionable children being allowed to watch too much American television?

The fact is that London's police force has lost much of the credibility it once had, largely because officers too often treat citizens, especially those with dark skins, with the contempt and suspicion one expects to see in an occupying army. Part of this can be laid at the doorstep of individual officers and their immediate superiors, but a deeper cause is the impression, emanating from the highest levels of government, that poor and nonwhite Britons are entitled to little or no respect from any sector of society. With the Tories having chosen to follow the American model of social Darwinism, nobody should be surprised to an American-style proliferation of violence and brutality.

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# New Moon And Diamonds

I

David wandered restlessly about the platform, amid growing herds of frustrated commuters. Three trains had come and gone, but none for Richmond. He wished he had obeyed his impulse and hopped aboard the Concord train, taking his chances on making the connection at MacArthur. Now, even if his train turned up in the next minute or two — and the overhead sign boards, with their endlessly repeating advertisements for banks, newspapers, and insurance companies, gave no indication that was likely to happen — the 11-mile trip to Berkeley was for the third time that week going to take over an hour.

On the brightside, he thought, he would arrive home too late for Athelia's call, which with ritual-like precision came every evening between five and six o'clock. Unlike most people he knew, David was unable to use his answering machine as a screening device. If the phone rang when he was at home, he had to pick it up, even when he was nearly certain that the caller would be someone he had no desire to talk to.

He wondered why Athelia, who displayed no shortage of cleverness in most areas, was so predictable in her calling patterns. She must have noticed by now that it was increasingly rare to find him in between five and six, but however desperate she might be to talk to him, something prevented her from trying a second time later in the evening, or from catching him in the mornings before he had gone out for the day.

Now, in what was becoming a predictable routine, he would play back her message, which he could recite virtually by heart: "David, I really need to talk to you, it's really important, please call me as soon as you get in." Then he'd shrug, push the rewind button, and turn his attention to other matters.

Those other matters, mostly to do with his increasingly precarious finances, were starting to rival Athelia as the most unsettling factor in his once placid life. He would devote five minutes to the help wanted ads in the afternoon *Examiner* — fully aware that they were identical to the help wanted ads he had perused in the morning *Chronicle* — before deciding that there was nothing suitable for him. Then, if the day hadn't left him unduly exhausted, he'd make a stab at one of his writing projects — a book of poems, the best of which had been written ten years ago, a novel that consisted of one complete (and completely bad) chapter and fragments of three or four others, and a short

story containing ten pages of scene-setting and one and a half paragraphs of plot. On the best days, he'd seldom manage more than a half hour of sustained effort before concluding that he just wasn't in the mood for writing. He'd try again in the morning, bright and early, when his energy was at its peak. He wouldn't set foot out the door before noon, or at least until he'd put in a good three hours at the computer.

In reality, of course, he'd rationalize that he couldn't get started until he'd had a morning cappuccino — that was only civilized, wasn't it? — and once he'd left the house, it would be too nice a day — or too dismal — to go back and face the rising tide of undone work. So it was up to Telegraph Avenue, where he could lose at least two or three hours in bookstores or a cafe, or around the University of California campus, giving him an opportunity to sneer at the sheeplike students so devoid of purpose.

Eventually, though, no matter how long he delayed, he'd find himself on the train to San Francisco. He'd curse himself all the way there for spending money he couldn't afford; each day that he laid out \$3.80 for the round trip brought him that much closer to destitution. Some days he'd assuage his guilt by getting off two stations early and walking the rest of the way to the Mission, thus saving himself twenty cents.

He hated San Francisco anyway. It always left him feeling depressed, and the Mission was the worst of it, beggars and muggers, frightened old ladies and smug yuppies slumming, the whole rancid stew often made him vaguely sick to his stomach.

Not so sick that he couldn't manage a burrito at Pancho Villa or La Cumbre, but even that pleasure had begun to pale. He hated running the gauntlet of spare changers who clustered around the doors of both places; how could he justify spending five or six bucks on a burrito and a beer that he didn't really need or especially desire, while ignoring some poor bum's request for a quarter? He couldn't, so he tried not to think about it at all, which only put him in a worse mood, a mood that typically led him to squander another joyless three or four bucks on coffee and cake at Picante.

There wasn't much else in the Mission to hold his interest, so no matter how long he'd try to put it off, usually no more than an hour would have elapsed before he'd find himself climbing the stairs to Epicenter, the punk rock record store and hangout. When the place had first opened, he'd quite enjoyed it, even though he was hardly part of the in

crowd that always seemed to cluster around the front counter or the tables that lined the wall. The music, while sometimes annoying and played at unlistenable volume, was different from anything he'd heard elsewhere, and the punks he'd met had a perverse sense of humor, shot through with several layers of sarcasm and irony, that genuinely appealed to him.

But now even the pleasures of Epicenter were beginning to pale, and not only because he always felt compelled to buy something, even if it was only a fanzine or a 7" record. He figured his average expenditure to be around \$30 a week; by now he had amassed a collection of well over a hundred punk rock records, only about a quarter of which he'd actually listen to. He reasoned that he could always sell them if times got really rough, but meanwhile his budget — if his haphazard habit of spending whatever money he had without any regard for the consequences could be considered a budget — was being devastated.

Something would turn up, he kept telling himself. He hadn't gotten to be nearly thirty years old without ever holding a steady job by playing the normal working class game. Maybe he'd get a band together, or he'd finally be able to get serious about his writing, or some as-yet-to-appear benefactor might offer him a couple thousand bucks for transporting a suitcase of dope out to the East Coast.

For a year and a half, through 1989 and part of 1990, David had done just that, amassing savings of over twenty thousand dollars before unaccountably losing a shipment when he'd lingered too long in the airport lounge and the plane had left without him, the suitcase already safely checked aboard. By the time he got to New York on the next plane, the authorities had already opened the unclaimed bag and found papers, which David had thoughtlessly and inexcusably left inside, enabling them to trace its intended recipient. He was now serving five to ten years in federal prison, which gave David at least until 1995 before having to worry about how to pay him back.

Besides, David reasoned, the guy hadn't been honest with him, telling him that the shipments were only worth \$50,000 when they would easily fetch twice that. Since David had been paid on commission — five per cent of wholesale value — he reckoned he'd been cheated out of another twenty thousand bucks. So if the guy had had to go to prison, well, that was just his bad karma, as the hippies used to say.

But now David's savings, which he kept stuffed in an old sock at the back of his closet, were down to less than a thousand dollars. His rent was cheap, and aside from records, coffee, and a few beers, he indulged in few luxuries. Still, even if he gave those up, which he couldn't seriously imagine himself doing, he'd be broke by the beginning of summer, about ten weeks away.

Whenever David found himself thinking such gloomy thoughts, his instinctive reaction was to spend more money. Today he'd picked up two albums and two singles, all by bands he'd barely heard of. The total had come to \$22.71.

"That Shudder to Think album is really great, isn't it?" Fred said as he took David's money.

"That's what people say. I haven't really heard it yet." David tried to think of something else to say, but Fred was already waiting on another customer. While waiting for Fred to finish, David read the posters of upcoming shows and events for the third time that day.

That gave him an idea for something to talk about. When Fred finally looked at him again, half quizzically, half expectantly, David abruptly asked, "So, are you going to that Fugazi show next month?"

"Of course; I got my ticket the day they went on sale. You got yours yet?"

"No, I figured I'd just pay at the door."

"Dude, you're crazy, that show will be sold out weeks in advance. You should buy your ticket right now. We've only got about a hundred left."

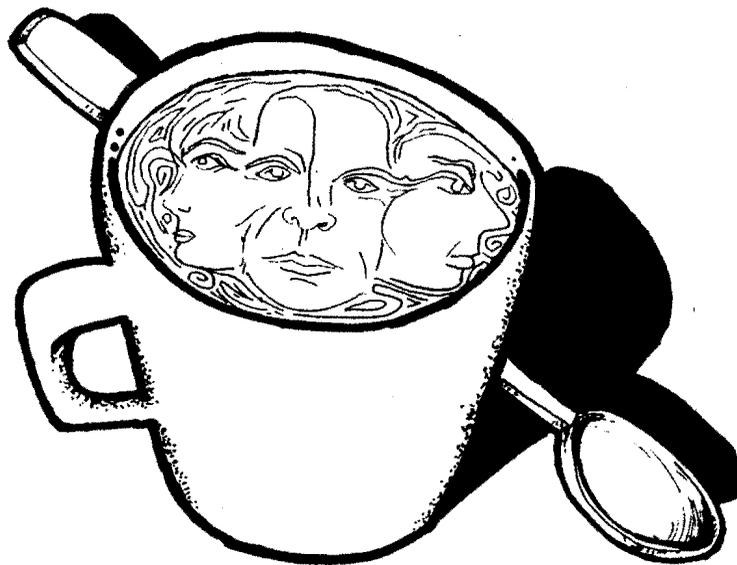
David agreed. There went another five bucks. But at least it would give him the opportunity to ask Fred if they could go to the show together. "Dude, I don't know, I'll probably go with a bunch of people from my house. I'm sure you can come too, if you want."

"Yeah, okay, well, it's not till next month anyway, we can talk about it then."

Fred had two more customers to wait on, and then someone else started talking to him about whether records pressed on colored vinyl had lower sound quality. Fred seemed to find the subject fascinating, but after about five minutes David had had all he could take, and he signalled his goodbyes.

"Yeah, catch you later," Fred called without missing a beat.

These were the scenes that replayed themselves to varying degrees of dissatisfaction as David's long-delayed train made its way through the transbay tunnel. By the time he got to Oakland, he had lost all track of where he was, his mind dancing along the thin line that divides idle daydreams from deliberate fantasy. The next thing he knew he was at North Berkeley, one stop past his station. He considered waiting for the next train to take him back to downtown Berkeley, but realized it would be quicker to



walk. He had no sooner stepped out of the station than it started to rain.

## II

The cat mewed and rubbed against his leg as he tried to open the door; he scowled and pushed her away with his foot. The room smelled stale — as usual he'd forgotten to leave a window open — but not entirely unpleasant. The close, dank atmosphere was comforting in a way.

The blinking red light on the answering machine assured him that Athelia hadn't neglected her evening call. He ignored it for a while, but eventually his curiosity — about what, he asked himself, she always said the same thing — got the better of him. But the first message on the tape wasn't her at all; it was the even less welcome voice of his landlord informing him that his rent would be going up by fifty dollars on the first of the month. It was David's second rent increase in a year, and made him so mad that he kicked the answering machine halfway across the room. Somehow it didn't come unplugged, and Athelia's familiar recitation played almost all the way through before David switched off the machine and headed back out the door.

He wondered whether to go for a double cappuccino at Firenze — which meant that he'd be up till at least three or four in the morning — or to drown his sorrows with a couple of large beers. He opted for both, and guzzled down a 21 ounce Sapporo before he got to Firenze. The place was almost deserted, the way it usually was at night, so he decided to sit in the back room for the warmth and seclusion, though he normally avoided it during the day because it was always filled with people smoking cigarettes.

Tonight there was no one at all back there, or so he thought until he turned the corner, and found himself face to face with Athelia. Sitting alone, she looked as if she'd been crying, but then she always looked like that. He tried to think of some excuse for just saying hello and leaving, but could come up with nothing plausible. With a sigh of resignation that he hoped wasn't too obvious, he sat down across from her.

"David, you never return my calls." This had become her standard greeting, having replaced "Hello" or "How are you?" months ago.

"I've had a lot on my mind, I guess."

"How's the writing going?"

"It's not, really, or if it is going, it doesn't seem to be going anywhere in particular."

"It'll work out eventually, don't you think? I mean, you are really talented. Sometimes it just takes time for things to take shape. You shouldn't be so hard on yourself."

In a hurry to get away from her, David tried to swallow too large a mouthful of the still-scalding coffee. Faced with a choice between spitting it out onto the floor or suffering in silence, he struggled to maintain a calm expression on his face while his tongue sizzled in its own juices.

"David, I need your advice. What should I do about Fred?"

While Athelia rarely said anything of interest to him, she must have noticed by now that he was always willing to talk about Fred. It was the one weapon she had against him, and he resented her so readily using it. Still, once the topic of Fred was on the table, he was hooked and he knew it.

"What do you mean? What do you want to do about him?"

"He just won't leave me alone. He calls me every day. Says I'm only rejecting him because I'm afraid of real intimacy."

"Well, are you?"

"No, of course not, but not with him. Look, I'm sorry, I know you like him, but basically I think he's a real dork."

All this was familiar ground, the traditional beginnings of the only protracted conversation they were able to have.

"I don't know what you think is so bad about him. I mean, maybe he's not as educated as you, or all tuned into the art and drama scene..."

"You know that's not what I mean. He's a dork when it comes to relationships. He just can't get it through his head that I'm not in love with him and I'm never going to be in love with him."

"I don't know, there's a lot of girls who'd think you were crazy to pass up a chance to go out with Fred."

"Yeah, well, then they can go out with him. I can't understand why he's so obsessed with me."

Neither can I, thought David. But instead of that, he said, "Isn't it a bit much to call someone obsessed just because he's got a crush on you?"

"It's not just a crush. He even says things like he wants to marry me. He's completely out of touch with reality."

"Love does that to people."

"Love? It's got nothing to do with love. He's just a horny little boy frustrated because there's one girl who isn't beating down his front door begging to sleep with him."

"I never noticed that Fred was exactly overwhelmed with female admirers."

"You don't notice much, do you? I bet if you collected all the women in Berkeley between the age of 15 and 30 who haven't had sex with Fred, you wouldn't be able to fill this room."

"Get serious. I've only ever seen Fred with a girl once or twice, and then it seemed like they were just friends."

"Oh, it always seems like that, until he gets them behind closed doors. Suddenly he's like a whining little puppy dog who won't give up till he's got his way. Then the next day, it's like nothing ever happened. Ask almost any girl that knows him. The only reason he's interested in me is because I'm not interested in him. It drives him crazy that there's one girl who doesn't turn to jelly at the sight of his big brown eyes. If you ask me, the only thing those big brown eyes remind me of is an especially dull-witted cow."

I should be writing all this down, David thought. This would make a really good story.

"Just what do you find so attractive about him, anyway?" Athelia was asking. "Sometimes I'd almost think you were in love with him."

"Yeah, right," said David, with a halfhearted effort sarcasm. "Besides, so

what if I was?"

"Nothing, I guess. It's just that it would be kind of funny, with him being so heterosexual and all. Anyway, you're way too intelligent to fall for someone like him. Face it, he's just your basic male bimbo. Not to mention the fact that you're not gay, either. Unless I've been seriously missing something."

"Look, Athelia, I'm not like you. I don't break everything and everyone down into neat little categories. There are more important things about a person than who he does or doesn't like. But just because I suggest that I might have a special feeling of closeness for someone who happens to be the same sex as me, you're right away going, 'Oh my god, you must be gay.'"

"I didn't say anything of the kind. So are you?"

"I can't stand it. It's hopeless even trying to talk to you."

"You are, aren't you? And you're in love with Fred, too. Let me guess, does he know about this?"

"You really do insist on trivializing other people's emotions, don't you?"

"No, no I don't. But you're no one to talk. You've been trivializing mine for the past year."

Leave it to her, David thought. Sooner or later she could turn any conversation around to the topic of their nonexistent "relationship." One drunken party, where they'd somehow ended up making out in an upstairs bedroom. He honestly couldn't even remember if it had gone farther than that. And now, a year later, she was still hounding him, as if calling up and whining at him every day was somehow going to make him suddenly jump up and realize what a fool he'd been and that he really had been in love with her all along. God, it was like the Chinese water torture to hear her talk, just drip, drip, drip, and there was no way to shut her off.

"Well, you have, haven't you. It's like I don't have any feelings at all. The minute I want to talk about anything that's important to me, you clam up or disappear. What's wrong with you? You're willing to sit here and gossip for hours about Fred, but as soon as something serious comes up, it's as if I didn't exist. My God, you're almost 30 years old, and you still act like you're 13."

Things were getting ugly, and David knew they'd have to get uglier before he'd be able to extricate himself from this little scene. "Look," he said, "you've got a lot of nerve trying to foist your problems off on my alleged lack of maturity. If I don't act my age, that's my choice and my problem, but being grown up doesn't necessarily mean getting involved in a neurotic love affair just because some woman tells you you should."

"Maybe not, but it does mean responding with intelligence and compassion when somebody shows they care for you, not treating them like they must be mentally ill for being so weird as to actually like you. God, you must have about zero self esteem."

"Oh yeah, that's it. If I don't love you, it means I hate myself."

"It's not whether you love me or not, it's whether you're able to love at all."

"Yeah, well I am, don't worry about that."

"Having hopeless schoolboy crushes on someone like Fred is not what I'd call love. It's more like a way of avoiding love. You know, I'm starting to think you're just as bad as him."

"Yeah, maybe I am. He and I are both superficial male bimbos. We'd be perfect together."

"Get serious. Fred would never be interested in you as a lover, or any guy, for that matter."

"Fine, I get your message. Now why don't you just leave that to me and Fred, and find someone else to act in your psychodramas?"

It was getting late, and they were the only customers left in the cafe. The waiter eyed them wearily.

"I guess we'd better go," Athelia said. "Would you mind walking me home?"

"Can't you take a bus? It's almost a mile in the opposite direction."

"But I'd still have to walk the last three blocks, and that's the part I'm worried about. A woman was attacked there just last week."

If only I had more money, David thought, I'd send her home in a taxi. I'd send her home in a goddam chauffeured limousine if I thought it would get her out of my hair. But there was no getting out of it, he'd have to walk with her. Annoying as she was, she didn't deserve to get raped. He gathered up his coat and said, "Let's go."

### III

They made a funny pair, like two linked gears trying to turn at different speeds. He walked as fast he could without making her have to run to catch up; she strolled along as if she wanted to savor every lingering moment of the journey.

They passed the black Vietnam veteran who sat babbling behind the "Homeless, will work for food" sign, passed the blind man with the 70s shag haircut who pounded the side of the building with his cane and called out for help in a voice that echoed all the way across Shattuck Avenue, passed the old woman with her three shopping carts full of cardboard and ribbon. A regular Champs d'Élysée, David sneered to himself, remembering a fatuous history professor who

used to claim that Berkeley was like Paris with cleaner streets and more civilized people.

They had only gone half a block. For civility's sake they'd stopped talking about themselves and had returned to the one safe topic they had in common: Fred. Just as they reached the Berkeley BART station, Fred himself appeared at the top of the escalator.

"I thought I heard my name," he said with a grin. "Let me guess, you were talking about how rad I am."

"Yes, that's exactly it," said Athelia, "you're oh so very rad." Athelia detested words like "rad," and even having to pronounce them left her lips puckered, as if she had bitten into a persimmon.

David looked at her condescendingly, and then at Fred as if to say, I think you're rad, and what does that silly girl know anyway? But Fred didn't notice; he hovered over Athelia as if he were expecting her to any minute sigh breathlessly. "Take me, I'm yours."

Athelia, on the other hand, treated him as if he were an insect that persisted in buzzing around her head. When he'd ask her a question, she'd wait as long as possible before quickly glancing at him while delivering a one-word answer. It was usually some variation of "no."

David casually changed places to walk alongside Fred, who took no notice of him at all. Athelia, who'd been trying to make conversation with David, now couldn't do it without having to look past Fred. Soon they were all looking straight ahead, and walking uncomfortably fast.

They turned down Oregon, and walked

as far as Martin Luther King without saying another word. There was still the faintest of orange glows in the sky ahead of them, but the first stars were already appearing. In the middle of the block, they found their way obstructed by a middle-aged man with a large telescope. He was peering intently at the western horizon.

As he heard them approach, he jumped away from the telescope. David thought they must have frightened him, but he was practically hopping around with excitement.

"Look!" he said, "Look through the telescope! Never mind, you don't need the telescope, just look at the sky."

If this was a typical Berkeley street crazy, David thought, he was awfully well dressed, and considerably out of his territory. He cast a polite glance at the sky. He noticed nothing out of the ordinary, just an extremely thin crescent moon and a few stars. Athelia and Fred were staring in the same direction, saying nothing.

"Don't you see?" the man demanded. "In a perfectly triangular formation around the moon. It's Mars, Venus, and Jupiter. They only line up like that once every fifty or hundred years. It's as if the moon was a bow, and the planets are its string and arrow!"

David, who'd never been much good at seeing shapes in the sky, nodded, realizing as he did that he really could see the bow and arrow, and that it was pretty amazing. He looked over at Fred, whose mouth hung open the way it always did when he was at a loss for words.

Athelia craned her neck ever so slightly, managing as she usually did to convey the

image that whatever was happening in the sky certainly wouldn't have happened if she hadn't given her prior approval. But her tight-lipped smile relaxed a little.

They stood there for maybe ten minutes, first silently, and then listening while the amateur astronomer told them some elaborate story about reading Plato while on an LSD trip and understanding for the first time what the Greek gods were all about. He was getting ready to fetch some book to illustrate his point when David said, "Maybe some other time, but I've really got to get going now."

As if he were their unacknowledged leader, Athelia and Fred followed in his footsteps. Fred started babbling again how some new record he'd heard today, and Athelia resumed trying to ignore him. David stayed in his own thoughts, reflecting how a momentary pause in the unrelenting course of things only made it all the more obvious that his life, all their lives, were still spinning wildly out of control. What could it possibly be, then, that kept the planets so firmly in their tracks?

Outside Athelia's door, they stood mumbling inconsequentialities for a minute or two longer than was necessary, then scattered in three more or less symmetrical directions. Athelia would try to read a book but end up watching television and feeling guilty about it. Fred would fall asleep on the floor while listening to records, and David would walk like a man possessed through the winding streets of north Berkeley until nearly dawn.



## Notes From All Over

**FRANCE** It's possible that people are making more than they need to out of the strong showing of Jean-Marie LePen's neo-fascist National Front Party in the recent by-elections. LePen, whose ultra-nationalist message revolves largely around deporting nearly three million North African immigrants so that "real" Frenchmen will have more access to jobs and housing, saw his party capture 14% of the vote, just behind the 15% posted by President Francois Mitterrand's alleged Socialists.

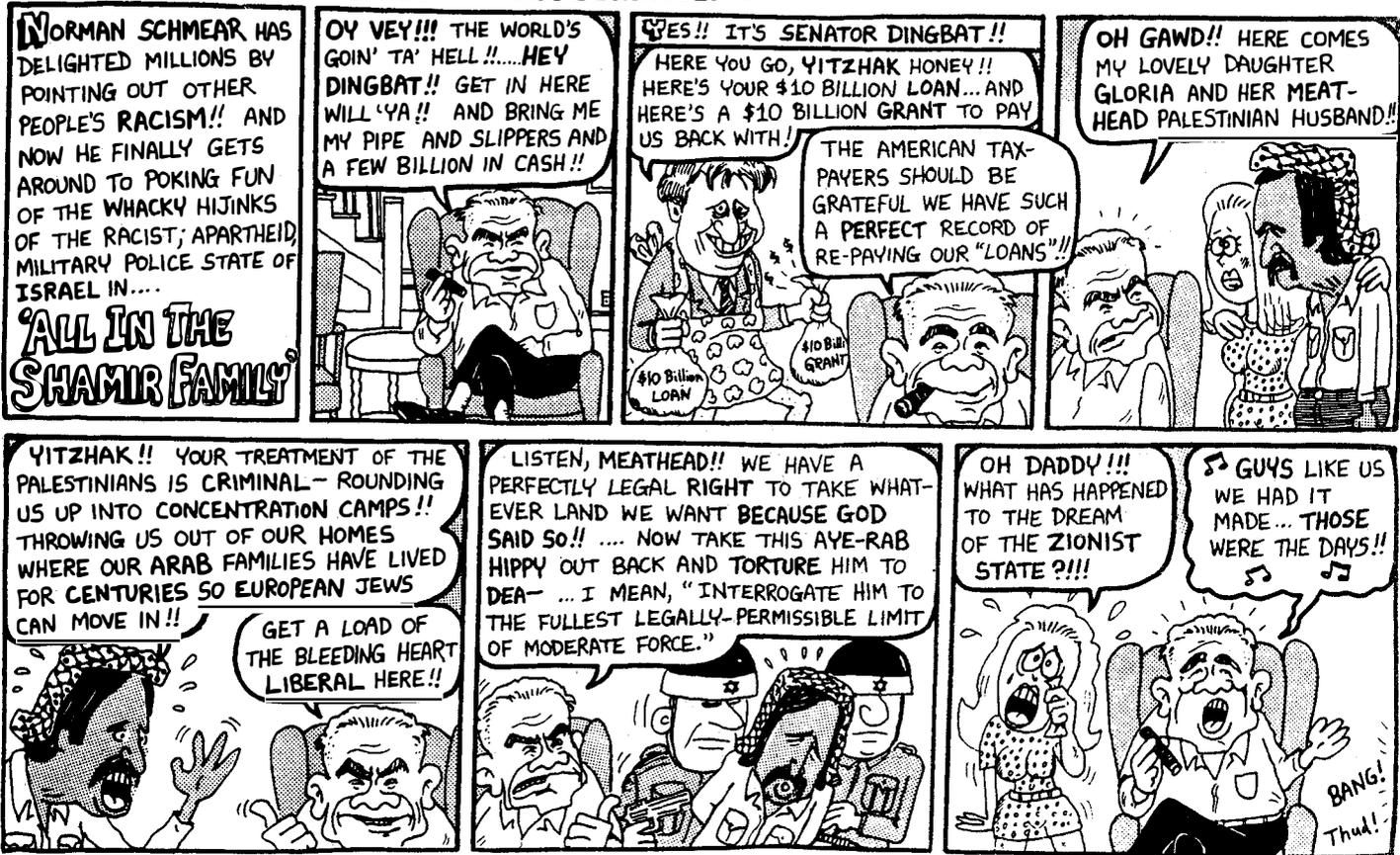
While France has a long history of xenophobia and national chauvinism, it's not nearly so intolerant a place as many Francophobes would have it. Africans have gained acceptance, and integrated themselves into the population to a degree that would hardly be possible in most parts of the United States. Furthermore, France has historically been a haven for political and cultural dissenters from more repressive countries; it wasn't just for the wine and food that writers and artists from all over the world, not least of all the United States, gathered in Paris in decades past.

LePen's success is more likely the result of what many persist in calling his charisma (his stump speech bears a striking resemblance to that of the Italian fascist Benito Mussolini), of increasingly grim economic conditions, and of President Mitterrand's near-complete abandonment of his socialist principles. People on the low end of the totem pole can easily be persuaded to follow any leader who promises radical change. If that sort of leadership isn't forthcoming from the

left, they'll look for it on the right.

Mitterrand's Socialists have made some efforts to counter the rising tide of racism that LePen is encouraging. But they have had little success, partly because those efforts have been so half-hearted for fear of compromising their own electoral chances, but even more so because the Socialists have lost nearly all credibility as a result of turning their backs on the values that got them elected in their first place. Some Socialists have even attempted to pander to racist forces to steal the far right's thunder.

On the bright side, LePen is not likely to get a whole lot bigger, if only because outside of the race issue, he has very little in the way of a coherent program to offer France. The biggest danger he poses is that more mainstream politicians will hop on the racist bandwagon, as most of the establishment right has already done. With Mitterrand and his hopelessly compromised version of socialism on their way out, France's best hope is that a more principled leader will emerge who is capable of uniting the two green parties (who between them captured approximately the same percentage of the vote as the National Front) with a revitalized left. Environmentally sound socialism looks to be the wave of the future in western Europe, and judging from the platforms of England's Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, is even making inroads into the EC's less socially developed states.



**ISRAEL...** Credit needs to be given where it's due, and though I never thought it would happen that the *Lookout* would agree with George Bush on anything, I have to hand it to him (or more properly to Secretary of State James Baker) for finally taking tentative steps toward reining in our rapacious and increasingly psychotic client state in the Middle East.

The Jews certainly have a word for it, but even *chutzpah* fails to fully describe Israel's attitude in demanding that the US provide it with \$10 billion in loan guarantees to finance its colonization program in the conquered West Bank and Gaza territories. The money, referred to by the far right Likud Party as "humanitarian" aid, is to be used to build houses for the Russian immigrants which Israel hopes to attract in order to keep the Jewish community from being swamped by a more rapidly increasing Arab population.

Israel's head terrorist, Yitzhak Shamir, campaigning for re-election on a platform of "Greater Eretz (Israel)" that bears remarkable resemblance to a German drive for more *Lebensraum* some 50 years ago, has been counting on the US to bankroll efforts to expand what is turning into an increasingly brutal theocracy. After hemming and hawing most of last year, Bush and Baker finally announced that Israel will get no additional money until it stops evicting Palestinians from their homes (often at gunpoint) and replacing them with Israeli Jews.

The Israeli government was predictably outraged that the United States was daring to tell it what to do with money it apparently feels it has a divinely ordained right to. The brief burst of lucidity displayed by Bush and Baker didn't, however, extend to cutting back on the \$3 billion-plus in US aid Israel already receives annually, and without which it couldn't exist. And Israel will still get the \$10 billion extra it's currently demanding if it's not used to build houses in the occupied territories.

Which leads us to ask why, if the US is so broke that it can't afford to provide its own citizens with housing, we are able to scrape up \$10 billion to make sure no one (no one Jewish, that is) goes

homeless in one small country on the other side of the world?

And although most *Lookout* readers are too intelligent to mistake criticism of Israel for anti-Semitism, here's a pre-emptive strike: if any of you are thinking of writing in to accuse me of hating Jews because I think that Israel is run by a dangerous and despicable government, go right ahead, because I will gladly take the opportunity to publicly ridicule your ignorance and religiously motivated bigotry. Being a good Jew does not require one to support Israel any more than being a good German necessitated loyalty to Hitler or being a good American means you have to show the slightest bit of tolerance for George Bush. As it's currently constituted, the Israeli government is the worst enemy Jewish people have; even the rabid Islamic hordes are starting to garner more public sympathy than the yarmulke-sporting military spokesmen who preside over mechanically organized outbursts of mass murder with the clinical precision and cold-blooded detachment of sanctimonious bureaucrats.

**HONDURAS...** A massive environmental disaster was averted when grass roots protests forced the Honduran government to cancel plans to turn over much of Central America's largest rain forest to a US cut-and-run pulp merchant. The Stone Container Corporation, which has already racked up a disgraceful record in the US for its toxic waste dumping and its devastation of any forest holdings it's been able to get its mitts on, was offering a ludicrously paltry \$40 million - \$1 million a year - for 40 years of unlimited rights to Honduras' most valuable forest land.

The Honduran government, strapped for cash to maintain its heavily armed military - as in most Latin American client states of the US, a large military establishment is needed to protect the country's rulers against a desperately impoverished populace - was set to accept the offer, which would have placed no requirements at all on Stone to replant the forest or to safely dispose of wastes. North Coast residents will have an idea of how drastically a pulp mill can befoul the surrounding environment, even when operating under government

regulation - though pollution rules are enforced at the Eureka pulp mills about as rigorously as the 55 mph speed limit; it beggars the imagination to visualize the effects of a completely unrestricted pulp mill.

Over 6,000 Hondurans laid siege to government HQ in Tegucigalpa until the country's president agreed to cancel the deal. Now if only we could get a few thousand of them to come up here and teach Californians how to stand up for and the future of their forests...

**HONG KONG...** As one of the most mercenary and capitalistic regimes on the planet, the partially autonomous British colony of Hong Kong fails to inspire a great deal of admiration or devotion.

Nevertheless, one's sheath has to go out to its 3.5 million inhabitants as they watch the clock tick inexorably toward the day when they will be incorporated into the world's largest police state. Already the Beijing dictatorship is making noises about the "excessive" freedom enjoyed by Hong Kong's media and citizens, and putting pressure on the Hong Kong government to restrict criticism of mainland China's brutally repressive policies.

If the citizens of Hong Kong were allowed to vote on their future, union with China would almost certainly be rejected by 80 to 90% of the population, but they have been given no choice; Great Britain has, with US support, signed a treaty with the Beijing regime that gives it full control over the colony in 1997. Those with money or connections are pouring out of Hong Kong to any country that will accept them (not, in most cases, Britain). The rest can only wait for the sentence that has been passed on them to be executed.

After all the shameless foofaraw heard last year about defending "democracy" in the Middle East, it's galling to see Britain's John Major and our own George Bush cozying up to the butchers of Beijing as if they were somehow legitimate rulers of a legitimate state, rather than mass murderers presiding over a gigantic slave labor colony. But then, as has been remarked in these pages before, George Bush has shown himself to be such an avid fan of what used to be called "Red" China that we can only suppose he sees it as an appropriate model for a low (or no) wage forced labor society in the US. Britain being a wholly owned subsidiary of USA Inc., it's safe to assume that anything its government does has first been cleared with Washington.

**UNITED NATIONS...** With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the balance of terror that maintained for the most part some element of geopolitical stability, the UN is in a position to become the planet's most reliable guardian of the peace.

While the USA is pushing hard to retain and even reinforce its own role as global policeman, there's little reason to trust the declining superpower to pursue anything but its own interests. The UN, itself far from perfect, is a far more appropriate forum for resolving differences between countries, and, even more importantly, for fostering international cooperation in the face of the worsening environmental crisis that is replacing war as the greatest threat to life on earth.

The UN has dispatched peacekeeping forces to a number of the world's hot spots, sometimes with considerable success. At the same time, it's pushed hard for solutions to the crises posed by the dissipating ozone layer and global warming. Unfortunately, the single biggest obstacle to the UN's efforts of late has been none other than the United States.

For much of the 1980s, the US has refused to pay some or all of its financial obligations to the UN, and has also been the only major power to resist efforts at slowing ozone depletion and the carbon emissions that cause global warming. In the wake of evidence that the environmental situation is worsening more rapidly than previously supposed, the Bush administration is finally softening up on the ozone issue and declaring itself willing to at least talk about the greenhouse effect. But it still refuses to cooperate in most UN peacekeeping efforts. Meanwhile, as the world's largest arms merchant and with the

aid of a newly revitalized CIA, the US is doing a great deal to destabilize global politics and promote further conflict.

The most likely, and chilling, explanation for US recalcitrance is that policymakers can foresee a time when a bankrupt and crumbling USA will have no option other than using its now unchallenged firepower to impose its will on others, as illustrated by George Bush's hubris-laden statement that "We are now the undisputed leader of the world." In other words, the "new threat to global stability" that the Pentagon warns against in its pitch for continued overfunding is most likely to come from our own country. World War III, long expected to be the final showdown between the US and USSR, is now more likely to result from either a United Nations coalition or a Europe-Japan partnership to restrain an increasingly dangerous USA.

**MEXICO CITY...** The world's most polluted city set a new all-time record when ozone levels were measured at nearly four times the concentration deemed safe for human habitation. Schools, factories, and businesses were closed, and severe restrictions were placed on automobile use.

But with a shifting wind that reduced pollution to more or less normal, i.e., about twice the acceptable standard, business as usual resumed in the immense urban disaster area which is now home to 20 million people. 80% of the emissions befouling Mexico City's air are produced by private automobiles, which are much less strictly regulated than in the USA, Europe, or Japan. The city does have a public transportation system, but it is so crowded, and dangerous, that anyone able to afford even the most rudimentary of automobiles generally chooses to drive. The result, in addition to smog believed responsible for thousands of death and severe long-term health problems for tens or even hundreds of thousands, is an increasingly crippling chaos on the capital's roads and highways.

Proving that First World right wingers have no monopoly on birdbrained bizarre schemes, the local leader of the left wing Democratic Revolutionary Movement is pressing the city to tackle the pollution problem by investing a \$100 million in a system of wind towers that will suck up bad air and expel it into the more sparsely populated countryside. Los Angeles civil engineers are already salivating at the prospect of a similar program. "That empty, useless air sitting out there in Nevada," as one city planner put it, "could absorb all our auto exhausts well into the next century. And after that, there's still Wyoming and all those, what do they call them, the Plains States? You know, where they grow all the corn?"

**LIBYA...** By the time this issue goes to press, George "The Mad Bomber" Bush may have already found himself a new target in the less than entirely popular Moammar Qaddafi's hapless Libyan state. Together with Britain's John Major, another tough-talking, ineffectual politician facing uncertain re-election prospects, Bush has been threatening Libya with dire consequences if it does not turn over two alleged intelligence agents who Britain and the US claim masterminded the bombing of a Pan Am jet over Scotland two years ago, resulting in the deaths of some 500 people.

The crime was obviously heinous, and if the two accused are guilty, they should certainly be punished. But it's understandable why Qaddafi should be less than enthusiastic about extraditing two of his countrymen to either Britain or the US, neither of which has racked up a particularly impressive record in the fields of human rights or criminal justice in recent years. Qaddafi has offered to let either the Arab League or the World Court try the two, which seems to make a lot more sense. Naturally the United States, which has consistently ignored any World Court directives with which it didn't agree, is not enthusiastic. After all, the two agents might get a fair trial there. How many votes would that garner for Bush or Major?

# U.C. Bits...

In a few weeks, barring unforeseen calamities, I'll be the proud owner of a diploma from the University of California at Berkeley. It took a long time, but it was worth it. I'll probably hang it up on my wall; I might even frame it.

But there's one little adjustment I'll have to make to it first. I'm going to take a thick black pen and blot out the signature of Governor Pete Wilson. It won't look pretty, but there's no way I'll have his name affixed to a symbol of my accomplishment.

Oh, I know I didn't do it all by myself, but by a long shot. The long-suffering taxpayers of our state and nation footed far more of the bill than I did. My parents not only paid their taxes like the rest, but took on a double burden in sending me to a parochial school because they thought I'd get a better educational foundation there. And even more important than sending me to school, they endowed me with a sense of the immeasurable worth, and yes, the joy of learning. They made sure that I learned to read and figure sums, and they shared with me their own accumulated knowledge and experiences.

The same went for many teachers and other adults along the way. Without downplaying the importance of my own efforts, I can truly say that the opportunity to obtain the education that I have is an illustration of society functioning at its best.

But Pete Wilson deserves no credit. The presence of his name on my diploma is an insult, an insult to my years of work and sacrifice, and far worse, an insult to the millions of California children (and adults) who will never enjoy the opportunities I have. Wilson's governorship has been a protracted attack on California's once-excellent system of public education. He has reduced higher learning to a privilege reserved for the children of his wealthy Republican clients, turned it into a litmus test separating the rarefied ranks of a greedy elite from the vast and rapidly growing underclass.

If I had waited only two or three years longer to return to school, it probably wouldn't have been possible, because tuition fees will have nearly doubled in that time. And I'm relatively well off, at least in the sense that I don't have a family to support and my rent is extraordinarily cheap. I know there are many potential students not that fortunate, and a disproportionate number of them have the added burden of coming from minority communities and being the victims of substandard primary and secondary educations.

And while the cost of a Berkeley education has skyrocketed, its quality has seriously deteriorated. If you owned a beautiful home, or even a magnificent old car, you'd be outraged if someone started hacking away at its basic structure. As one of the world's truly great universities, Berkeley is, or at least was, a treasure created by the people of California out of their faith in the future, their commitment to their children, and in the belief that a just society is one which places wisdom among its highest values.

I'm not naive; I know that the University has not served exclusively as a repository of knowledge, that in fact much of its *raison d'être* was to perform scientific research for the nuclear war apparatus, and to serve as a think tank and recruitment center for the corporate establishment. Furthermore, through most of its history it systematically discriminated against women and racial minorities, and did its best to stifle free expression and diverse thought. But despite all that, a great deal of value was achieved as well. It's no coincidence that movements for radical social change have long found a home on and around the Berkeley campus. Even as administrators and politicians tried to steer the university toward their strictly pragmatic ends, idealistic professors and students have

continually sought to broaden the intellectual horizons, not only of their own academic world, but of the world at large.

That's how an institution of higher learning should function, not as an elaborate vocational training school, but as a social laboratory where tomorrow's realities can be modelled, embellished, adapted, and implemented. That's why short-sighted attempts to save money or mean-spirited attempts to rein in the human spirit are so destructive in the long run. What I have learned at Berkeley has enriched my entire life, and, I think I can honestly say, the life of the society around me. That any deserving citizen of this state or this country or this planet should be denied the same opportunity is an outrage.

Last fall the Daily Cal was sending heartfelt love songs to retiring UC President David Gardner. Now they're singing a different tune, declaring with the sort of ingenuous shock displayed by Claude Rains when he found gambling going on in Humphrey Bogart's Casablanca gin joint that Prez Gardner was vamoosing with a cool couple million of the taxpayers' bucks.

Regular Lookout readers will recall that this publication was not nearly so enthralled by the Gardner mystique, and in fact lambasted him for being a pliant yes-man to the efforts of Governors Deukmejian and Wilson to dismantle the once-great University of California. Yet we must admit that the boundaries of even our own legendary cynicism were sorely tested by Gardner's parting flimflam job.

Those not associated with the UC system might need to be reminded that under Gardner's stewardship, student fees have nearly doubled, while at the same time instructors have been laid off, veteran professors pressured into retirement, and thousands of classes cancelled. All this, of course, for the usual reason: the money just isn't there.

But the money is there to pay a useless sycophant like Gardner \$243,500 a year, far more than any other public "servant" in the state of California and not that much shy of what the President of the United States rakes in. Apparently our magnanimous Board of Regents (aka a collection of extraordinarily wealthy Republican Party hacks and businessmen who bought their way into controlling America's largest and at one time most respected university system) felt that Gardner would suffer such undue hardship trying to scrape by on his \$130,000 a year pension that out of the goodness of their heart they voted him another million bucks in fringe benefits to take with him. Gardner, at the ripe old age of 58, isn't really even "retiring;" he's actually moving into another job which will pay him about \$200,000 a year on top of all his taxpayer-supported subsidies.

Look, not to be uncharitable or anything, but anyone who can't manage on \$130,000 a year, or for that matter, \$30,000 a year, is too damn stupid and/or dishonest to be running his own household, let alone a major university. Gardner's vicious little con job is a rude slap in the face to every student and every parent who had to come up with hundreds or thousands of extra dollars these last couple of years, let alone the truly poverty-stricken students who had to postpone or abandon their educations because sleazebags like Gardner see the University of California as little more than their personal cash cow.

No, the few millions that Gardner and his ilk pocket wouldn't be enough by themselves to see the university through its current difficulties. But they speak vividly of Gardner's and most of the Board of Regents' utter lack of concern for serving the educational needs of the State of California. If Gardner and his fellow "educators" possessed a shred of integrity, they would volunteer, like the prosperous

businessmen of the New Deal days, to work for a dollar a year as long as the university was in crisis, and use the moral authority they would acquire thereby to pressure the morons in charge of state government to properly fund the university. In that case, the citizenry would be solidly behind them, and Governor Wilson would resist at his peril.

Speaking of Governor Pete, that bleach-brained apostle of incarceration and illiteracy celebrated the continued dismantling of the University by appointing yet another Republican bimbo to the Board of Regents. The new guy, a corporate lawyer named John Davies, just happens to be a good buddy of the governor, and does it strike anybody else as odd that out of a population of 27,000,000, the only Californians deemed intelligent to preside over the University seem to be personal friends or cronies of Pete Wilson?

Next year's student fee hikes haven't been voted in yet, though it's rumored that they'll "only" be in the 20-30% range. New president Jack Peltason (fresh from that hotbed of culture, UC Irvine) claims he doesn't want to raise fees again, and will only do so if it's necessary. He hasn't, however, volunteered to relinquish any of his \$243,500 salary, and who wants to bet that when he waltzes away from his duties in a few years, that he won't take with him a bag of loot rivaling Gardner's?

Meanwhile, back here at UC Berkeley, there's apparently no shortage of cash, except for minor details like hiring professors and offering classes. But everyone knows that students don't come to Berkeley these days to go to class or listen to boring old professors, right?

Of course not; they come here to play volleyball and basketball! And not just ordinary volleyball and basketball, but volleyball and basketball in People's Park, where our far-sighted administration has just squandered at least a million bucks to erect volleyball and basketball courts that no one except perhaps some testosterone-crazed administrator on steroids wanted, and which couldn't survive for a single day without a round-the-clock police guard. Then again, maybe the whole thing is simply a work-study project of UC Berkeley's rapidly growing Department of Criminology.

Next step: the east end of People's Park to be walled off to create a model prison project, where recalcitrant street people can be incarcerated under the watchful gaze of UC fraternity boys earning \$4.25 an hour plus academic credit toward their degrees as correctional officers. Classrooms? Heck, who needs reading and writing? Just show 'em how to pull a trigger and turn a key in a lock. It's the wave of the future, and besides, not everyone can work at Burger King.

And it's not just the University of California that's being floated up the creek in a rancid barrel of pork. Darryl Cherney, via KMUD's Environment Show, informs us that Barry Munitz, the new chancellor of the California State University system, has been racking up \$250 per night luxury hotel bills and room service charges of similarly stratospheric dimensions while attending those phony baloney "conferences" modern educators have grown so fond of.

The tab, of course, will be picked up by the taxpayers, while meanwhile classes are being cancelled, professors being laid off, and student fees hiked drastically. Munitz, of course, was previously employed as a frontman for the Charles Hurwitz-Michael Milken-Ivan Boesky combine that used criminal stock manipulations to grab control of north coast redwood forests and to decimate them for a quick profit at the cost of thousands of local jobs and permanent devastation to the environment, so his less than sterling behavior in the public service should hardly be surprising. If California's state government weren't so firmly in the hands of corporate bagmen like Pete Wilson and Willie Brown, Munitz would more likely be serving a long term in prison along with his former employers instead of

enjoying such an exalted position at the public trough.

And even our community colleges, which more and more function as recovery rooms for victims of our public high schools, don't seem to have their priorities straight. While they're having to massively cut their budgets as well, some birdbrain in the Laney-Merritt-Peralta-Vista complex that serves the East Bay saw fit to dump a half dozen glossy-covered catalogs on every doorstep in our neighborhood.

Don't get me wrong; I have no objection to informing people about the educational opportunities available to them. But as someone who's been in the publishing business a good while, I can attest that a glossy cover roughly doubles the printing cost of a magazine. And they're hell on the environment, too.

I love nearly all the professors I studied with in my years at Berkeley, so I hope they won't take this the wrong way. Nonetheless, I think for the kind of money they get, it wouldn't be too much of a burden to ask them to teach three instead of two classes a term.

Many, in fact, teach only one, and frequently take sabbaticals to do the research that we're told is essential to upholding the university's reputation. But the first priority of a university, if I may be so obvious, is teaching, and that means on the undergraduate as well as the graduate level.

Granted, if I were a professor, I'd be hard pressed to muster much enthusiasm for upping my work load 50% while the university prez was salting away five times as much as me for prancing around making speeches about how terrible it is that we have to cut the budget and lay off all those professors. But how about a deal where the profs collectively agree to take on an extra class on the condition that administration takes (at least) a 50% pay cut?

That was UC Professor Harry Edwards on Ronn Owens' KGO talk show opining that the media and the public should cut convicted rapist Mike Tyson some slack because they "don't understand" the kind of pressures that black male athletes are subjected to.

Edwards is a favorite with the media, especially when they're in search of controversy, but there's no polite way of saying that he's really got his head up his ass on this one. No doubt a young black man raised in desperate poverty who suddenly finds himself with millions of dollars and hordes of sycophantic admirers pushing drugs, sex, and twisted material values at him is under a good bit of pressure. But it hardly equates with the kind of pressure faced by black men who remain mired in poverty, who instead of worrying about how to fend off unworthy or unwholesome advances, are mainly concerned about whether they'll be able to collect enough aluminum cans or panhandle enough change to survive for another day. Not to mention those black men trying valiantly to maintain not only themselves, but a family as well.

Nor, in our efforts to understand the problems of black men, should we forget that black women often have it far worse, faced with the double whammy of being black and female in a society that is both racist and sexist. But give me a break! Mike Tyson is a pathetic character, no doubt, and in many ways a victim himself. But I can think of about half a billion more people, of every color, gender, and nationality, who are far more deserving of sympathy than he is. The phenomenal wealth he gained through his success in athletics could have given him a chance to break the cycle of violence and ignorance he was caught in a youth. Many athletes who rose from humble origins did just that.

But Tyson, whether through his own shortcomings or the bad advice of others, just pursued the same old patterns on a more glorified scale. I can't think the reverential and uncritical attentions of the sports world's professional jock sniffers, Dr. Harry Edwards among them, had something to do with the unhappy result.



# Berkeley Beat

Those trees on Telegraph Avenue (see *Lookout* #36) were in fact dead. Don't ask me why. Bad vibes from Jerry's tie-dyed bastard offspring? An excess of auto exhaust? Yet another University defoliation program?

At any rate, they've now all been removed and replaced with hapless little baby trees, most of which will be lucky to survive a year or two on the increasingly mean sidewalks. The result: despite its sometimes colorful human detritus and its plenitude of new age junk vendors, Telegraph's sun-blached asphalt ambience looks more like southern California every day.

## Take The Bus? What Bus?

A-C Transit has been steadily deteriorating for years, more rapidly even than San Francisco's Muni. The beginning of the decline can probably be traced to the opening of BART in 1974, when A-C Transit service to San Francisco was halved on the assumption that everyone would want to ride the newfangled electric railway.

In the ideal transit world that never arrived, A-C Transit and BART were supposed to complement each other; instead they entered into a half-cooperative, half-competitive relationship from which neither benefitted. Efforts to integrate the services were half-hearted at best, and if representatives from the two agencies ever sat down to figure out how they could work together to transport East Bay residents with the greatest efficiency and convenience, there was little evidence that they had any success.

In recent years A-C Transit's decline has become precipitous, with its future now in serious question. Fares have climbed to \$1, plus an additional 25¢ for a transfer, and as per usual in such cases, ridership and service have declined. Despite widespread (and no doubt expensive) advertising campaigns suggesting that riding the bus is the sensible, ecological, even patriotic thing to do, only the truly desperate or stubbornly green-tinged (I happen to fall into both categories) regularly subject themselves to the misery of public transit in the East Bay.

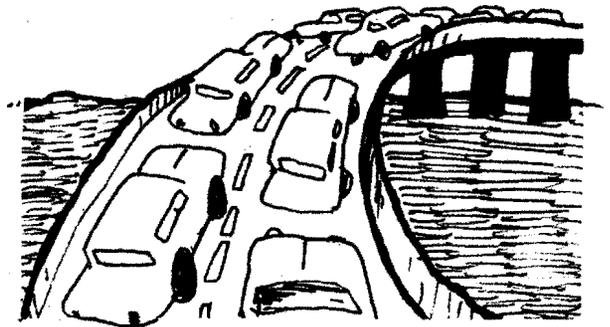
The result, predictably enough, has been increasing gridlock and pedestrian-unfriendly streets, even in traditionally anti-automobile Berkeley. While drivers here haven't yet descended to the homicidal level commonly observed in more backward cities, one increasingly throws caution, and possibly one's life, to the winds by venturing out into a crosswalk in the face of traffic. MLK Way (Old Grove Street), Shattuck, Telegraph, University, Ashby, all are now miserable car-clogged pollution chambers which thoroughly discourage the vibrant street life that is fundamental to civilized urban dwelling.

Now A-C Transit, faced with declining tax revenues due to the recession, is planning still more service cuts, including the draconian measure of eliminating nearly all weekend service. Presumably this is on the grounds that people too poor to have their own cars have no business going out on the weekend in search of fun, but instead should stay home and husband their resources for the coming work week. The reality, of course, is that many people, especially young people and part-time employees, have to work weekends, and no public transit available to them, are effectively shut out of the work force. In a relatively compact city like Berkeley, that's not quite so much of a problem, but what about a kid living in East Oakland, or the outer

reaches of Richmond? With no buses on weekends, he or she might as well forget about a job.

The net effect is to confine hundreds of thousands of people to their own neighborhoods except at such times as their betters, i.e., the administrators of the Bay Area's patchwork of transit systems, deem it necessary to transport them to and from work or school. That the directors of A-C Transit (or for that matter, BART, Samtrans, or Muni) could casually deprive so many people of one of the necessities of modern life should come as no surprise when you stop to consider that few if any of those who administer our transit agencies ever have to use them. Most are provided with company cars, and in a few egregious cases, limousines.

Requiring all public transit administrators to use public transit themselves has an obvious visceral appeal, but it's only a token step, akin to restricting congressional salaries or recycling one's own trash. Far more essential is the integration of every Bay Area transit agency into a single organization, and the creation of a unified fare and schedule structure. Equally essential is the imposition of heavy taxes on gasoline, parking, and road use, with every penny thus raised going to upgrade public transit. Thirdly, once viable alternatives are in place, people who persist in driving private automobiles unnecessarily should be seen as selfish and anti-social, and their motoring lives made as miserable as possible. Not only is it time that Berkeley erected a whole new set of traffic barriers of the sort that set suburban commuters so on edge, but we should seriously consider narrowing our streets, removing parking spaces, and in some cases tearing up pavement altogether.



## More Freeways: No Way To Go

On a closely related subject: a combination of state government, construction firms, and the automobile industry is pushing to widen the already wretched Interstate 80 by another couple of lanes. Most Bay Area communities have gone along with this bit of lunacy on the grounds that I-80 as presently constituted has become nearly impossible to traverse during a typical commute period.

As of this writing, Berkeley has not yet given its approval, on the perfectly reasonable grounds that widening highways will only worsen our long-term transit crisis, and postpone the action necessary to resolve it. Pouring billions of dollars into more pavement at this point puts one of mind of LBJ promising that a few more divisions of American troops would somehow accomplish what a few hundred thousand had been unable to accomplish. A major construction project would tie up traffic for years, by which time the area's

automobile population would have expanded more than enough to clog every bit of new lane space finally created.

Certain self-styled "pragmatists" are urging that Berkeley go along with the majority on the assumption that trying to stave off further highway construction is a quixotic battle that we can't possibly win. But such an attitude is defeatist and very possibly unrealistic. The fact is that the tide is beginning to shift, that an awareness is steadily growing that the automobile can not continue to be allowed to ride roughshod over every other aspect of life in America. By digging in its heels now, Berkeley may be able to stall the gigantic I-80 boondoggle long enough for more sane minds to find their way into positions of power. One thinks back to the time of Governor Jerry Brown, when his appointee as head of Caltrans, Adriana Gianturco, steadfastly refused to approve nearly every new highway project on the grounds that state funds could be more effectively applied to public transit. She may have been twenty years ahead of her time, but no doubt we will see such a government again. Hopefully soon. In the meantime, Berkeley should join wholeheartedly in the national movement for a moratorium on all new paving, and demand that state and national resources be used to meet our real transit needs.

## Why Can't They Sell Apples Or Shine Shoes Or Something?

Berkeley's increasingly neo-lib city government has moved to protect hill-dwelling yupsters from being solicited by down and out, usually African-American men who offer to wash their car windows in exchange for a donation. The window washers, now banned, had been a fixture in city-owned parking lots in downtown Berkeley for the past couple years, and were in general not at all aggressive and considerably more pleasant than the beggars who line Shattuck, University, and Telegraph Avenues at approximately fifty-foot intervals.

Of course our hearts go out to the prosperous commuters and shoppers who must bring their smogmobiles to our shabby little downtown area, only to be importuned by these unpleasant characters who may not even have had a bath or a manicure recently. The experience must be particularly difficult for those timid souls who may have never encountered a Negro not employed as a domestic servant. And since even the *Lookout* is only capable of maintaining sarcasm at that arch a level for brief intervals, I must interpose here to present my solution to the problem: anyone who can not give substantial evidence that his or her trip to downtown Berkeley absolutely had to be made by private car instead of public transit or other more socially acceptable means must give a substantial donation to every single beggar or homeless person within a three-block radius. Penalty for failing to meet these conditions: all four tires flattened, all window glass broken out, and car pulverized into a 2' by 2' metal cube which will then be immediately recycled. Proceeds to benefit the needy, natch.

While we're on the subject of undesirable forms of commerce, why is that window-washers, who, I'll admit, can be annoying, can be so readily banned, while all over the city businesses which are not only annoying, but overtly offensive and even destructive, are tolerated and even welcomed into the community?

Does anyone seriously believe that a 7-11 or a McDonald's is an asset to Berkeley? Or that the automobile traffic they generate, the tons of waste they produce, or even the foul smells and carcinogenic "food" products they purvey enhance the quality of life in our community?

It's relatively easy to say no to a window-washer or a panhandler, but what, short of a substantial amount of plastic explosives, can purge Berkeley of the blight of fast food dumps, smelly "beauty" parlors, boutiques full of preposterously overpriced clothing that only a lobotomized mannequin would be caught dead in, or that architectural wonder, the high rise parking structure. If we as a city are going to start imposing our esthetics on the kinds of businesses permitted within our boundaries, I can think of better places to start than with the weakest and most put upon members of society.

## Autos Of The Upscale Radlibs, Part II

You may have read in this space last issue about the KPFA honcho who insists on hogging a parking space for his Mercedes (License number 94KPFA1) on our quiet residential street, evading tickets for overstaying his welcome by rubbing chalk marks off his tires and apparently intimidating meter maids with his importance in Berkeley's "radical" community.

We wondered why he couldn't maybe walk or bicycle or use public transportation, as would seem to befit someone devoted to saving the world, as we're assured all KPFA staffers are every time they stage a marathon requesting our donations to keep the station going. But I did feel a little guilty that I might misled people with the implication that KPFA staffers are nothing but limousine liberals; to be fair, the Mercedes in question is an old model, probably worth no more than two Toyota Corollas.

My guilt vanished the other day though, when I discovered yet another KPFA *grand camembert* parked out front, this one with a very sleek indeed Porsche coupe (license number 94KPFA), and this one was definitely no cheapo. Now perhaps you suspect me of merely being jealous that people who work at KPFA have better cars than I could afford, but you must trust me that this is not the case. In fact I have long held that Porsches are among the most useless pieces of junk ever devised by the usually efficient German industrial system, as well as subscribing to the viewpoint expressed in the Zen riddle, "What is the difference between Porsches and porcupines?"

And in fact I suppose that I (all of us, in fact) should be gratified that the wealthier among us are willing to give of their time and energy to keep a valuable resource like KPFA on the air. But I have an inherent distrust of people who display flamboyant bad taste, and in my mind people who drive Porsches are right up there with leisure suit-wearing, gum-chewing, television-watching, cigarette-smoking, lottery-playing devotees of Vanna White and the Republican Party. But I think decency dictates that I advise the driver of said Porsche that I have invited my spray paint-wielding punk rock friends over to my neighborhood to redecorate all excessively priced vehicles with the anti-capitalist legend, "Money is shit."

## UC's Bad Neighbor Policy

Having a world-class university in one's midst may do wonders for a community's prestige, but in the case of the University of California, many Berkeley residents have begun to wonder whether the price they're paying is too high.

Essentially the university is a power unto itself, virtually immune from most city laws and regulations, and, not content to wield its influence on its own extensive territories, it has adopted a policy toward the surrounding city that could best be described as imperialistic, and bears a striking resemblance to the United States' treatment of its

what, for an economy as developed as ours, are essentially dinosaur industries.

Japan has a big advantage over the United States in adapting to changing market conditions. Its economy is not the anarchistic and often chaotic free-for-all that right-wing theoreticians advocate in the US and UK. It is carefully managed by a business-government partnership best exemplified by MITI (Ministry of International Trade and Industry), which exerts, very effectively, the sort of central planning that *laissez-faire* economists will swear on a stack of Adam Smith tomes can never work.

One reason Japanese industries have prospered is that they haven't engaged in the ruinous, and often superfluous competition that has wrecked so many American companies. Not necessarily because they're better corporate citizens, either, but because they're simply not allowed to. MITI decides how many companies are necessary to meet demand in a given field, then backs them to the hilt with loans, development capital, training programs, and favorable legislation. Anybody else who wants to start up a company and get in on the action is free to try, but they're up against it; MITI can stop banks from issuing loans, can insure that export licenses or building permits for new factory sites become impossible to obtain.

This may rub freedom-loving Americans the wrong way, but it works. No Japanese automobile company is likely to go bust, but Chrysler Corporation is in imminent danger of doing so. In America, such a development is likely to be seen as a victory for the two remaining manufacturers, but in Japan it would be seen as a disaster for all. That is the fundamental difference between Japanese and American economics, and it's where we have the most to learn from our supposed competitors.

While there is a strong strain of competition running through Japanese society, there is, unlike in America, a countervailing worth placed on cooperation. American corporations are encouraged to grow by increasing productivity and cutting costs, which too often means abandoning vast numbers of workers to the none too tender mercies of a depressed marketplace. Japanese corporations, on the other hand, would consider it a mark of disgrace to fire employees to accomplish short-term savings.

Americans often sneer at the loyalty of Japanese workers to their employers, but it's not the loyalty of a mindless race of drones, but rather of an intelligent and well-educated people secure in the knowledge that they won't be treated as disposable commodities. As a result, Japanese workers don't feel the need to constantly change jobs in search of a better deal, just as Japanese companies aren't constantly casting about for new suppliers to shave a couple yen off their costs. The long-term, cooperative, almost familial relationship is valued far above short-term (and often short-lived) gain.

But what can America do to meet the Japanese challenge, if indeed it should be seen as a challenge, rather than an opportunity? One thing it should not do is to try and become another Japan, although it would be foolish for us not to introduce applicable parts of the Japanese model into our own economy. It would be equally foolish to try and recreate the America of decades past with ill-considered plans to rebuild this country as a center for heavy manufacturing.

As economies reach maturity, they must put away the things of a child, and primary industry is, if not childish, certainly no more than adolescent. We've achieved wealth and relative stability on the strength of the First and Second Industrial Revolutions; rather than jealously guard the status quo, we should cede those opportunities to the world's developing nations and turn our interest to the technological and informational revolutions still to come.

Americans should not be ashamed to buy their manufactured goods from Asia or South America than New Yorkers should feel bad that they have to buy their citrus fruits from Florida and California. Certainly New York could set up gigantic heated domes and grow its own oranges and lemons, but it would be patently stupid; other

regions can do the same job much better and cheaper. The same principle applies to all forms of trade, national or international. For each country, or section of a country, to have its own steel, auto, electronics, agriculture, etc. industry is profoundly wasteful. Lots will get done, but in far too many cases, superfluously and badly.

To use an information age analogy, developing countries should provide the hardware, developed countries the software. Example: while the overwhelming majority of CD players are Japanese, the music played on them is overwhelmingly American. Japanese corporations may have bought up our film studios and record companies, but they'd be broke next week without American artistry. Japan is still largely in the business (though this is rapidly changing) of exporting *things*; America increasingly maintains itself by exporting culture.

Sounds a little intangible, though, doesn't it? Are we to become a nation of tap dancers, movie stars, and rock musicians perpetually singing for our supper on the doorsteps of the world's new industrial powers? There is that danger, but not if we also develop the many other areas in which we have special talents and expertise. Until the Republicans took power in 1980, America was by far the world leader in alternative energy technology, thanks in no small part to hippie environmentalists and back-to-the-landers, as well as the active encouragement of the much-derided "Governor Moonbeam," Jerry Brown.

If that level of development had continued, we would be in an outstanding position today: far more self-sufficient, with a favorable balance of payments, and with an open-ended market of nations desperate to counteract global warming and pollution. Instead, subsidies for alternative energy were slashed or eliminated, enabling the Japanese to virtually corner the market on many forms of solar technology. But that needn't be a permanent setback; one of the advantages of alternative energy, and other environmentally-friendly development as well, is that it often requires only mild encouragement or tax incentives instead of the massive capital investment needed for conventional or nuclear power plants.

Just as we should concentrate on software while ceding hardware production countries with greater needs and motivations, so we should also shift our focus from quantity to quality. UC Berkeley's Susanna Barrows makes a valuable point about how France underwent its industrial revolution with much less dislocation and suffering than was experienced in other European countries. Instead of engaging in crash programs to catch up with its neighbors in heavy manufacturing, France specialized in hand-made, labor-intensive products like wine, lace, and *haute couture*. As England grew rich from turning its green and pleasant land into a series of smoky hellholes, it provided an ever-widening market for the uniquely French goods that could never be supplied by mass production.

Signs of a similar trend, albeit a century late, are emerging in America. While the foul (and probably cancer-inducing) brew of Anheuser-Busch dominates the American beer market, consumers have shown that they will gladly pay three or four times more for the high-quality product of the many new micro-breweries. Gallo uses ultramodern agribusiness techniques to generate enormous vats of fermented grape juice suitable mainly for inducing cirrhosis and alcoholism, while tiny, owner-operated vineyards produce California wines that match or surpass even the French.

Of course there's no need for America to completely abandon industry in favor of becoming a sort of global entertainment and service center. In addition to the already-cited opportunities in alternative energy (hardware as well as software), the field is wide open for us to lead the coming revolutions in transportation and communications. While much of the world squanders resources and energy trying to duplicate the discredited American model of private automobile-based transportation, we could be leading the way in developing high-speed trains and reconfiguring cities to minimize

convinced they could win, not by conquering the United States, but by moving quickly to occupy every strategic location in Asia and the Pacific, creating a presence that the Americans would find too difficult to dislodge.

Japan's defeat, completed when the US military obliterated two major cities with the only atomic bombs ever used in warfare, again produced a crisis of confidence, and, understandably, a deep distaste for war. The new government, essentially installed by the United States and operated according to a constitution written by the victorious General Douglas MacArthur, set about rebuilding. At the same time, it set out to accomplish through economics what militarism had failed to do.

Ironically, American efforts to prevent Japan from again becoming a military power while at the same time preventing it from falling into the Communist bloc were what ensured the Japanese economic miracle that transformed it into the world's second largest economy. When, 50 years after Pearl Harbor, President Bush barged into town looking like Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, his tough talk and bluster couldn't conceal the fact that America, having bankrupted itself through insane levels of military spending, was coming, hat in hand, to beg its former adversary to ease up.

Because the Americans had forbidden Japan from spending more than one per cent of its Gross Domestic Product on its military, capital flowed instead into productive industries and technology. At first the Japanese contented themselves with making bargain basement knockoffs of American cars and electronic equipment, but while the US was compounding its troubles with the disastrous Vietnam War, Japanese technology surged ahead. While America alienated its young and long-standing racial and class divisions festered, Japan educated its young and maintained at least the illusion of a homogenous and stable society.

Today things have in many ways come full circle from 1853. Americans find their own national confidence severely undermined by the realization that a tiny, upstart nation has bested them at nearly every game they once prided themselves on. In the 19th century we used military force to compel Japan to trade with us; now we're threatening everything but military force to stop them. There is even talk in both countries, and particularly in the United States, about the possibility of trade war between the two countries escalating into a military conflict.

While Japanese public opinion remains overwhelmingly anti-militaristic, there remains a small coterie of Japanese ultra-nationalists (or, to use a less polite term, fascists) who would like to return to the methods which in their view nearly won the last war for Japan. But they are a fringe element, while, as recent events have shown, it's not at all difficult to whip up pro-war sentiment in the United States. Japanese politicians are, at least publicly, remarkably complacent about the possibility of war with the United States. As one put it: "The USA would be very foolish to start such a war. Their missiles won't even fire without our electronic components." And he's right; during the Gulf War, the Japanese infuriated the American government by refusing to shift its civilian factories to the production of high-tech weapons circuitry. Japan's increasing activity in outer space could give it parity or superiority over anything the United States could toss at it, doing to American missiles what the Patriot missiles (using substantial Japanese technology) did to Iraqi Scuds.

But whoever would win such a battle (probably no one) the spectre of the world's two most powerful economies (the two second most powerful, once European unity is achieved) lobbing bombs at one another is too monstrous to be entertained by any rational person. It's especially unattractive to Californians, who would be on the front lines, and who tend to take a more benign view of the Japanese "threat." As the balance of power in America has shifted from East Coast to West, California increasingly finds itself looking to the nations that ring the Pacific for its identity. Asia provides us with

more of our trade than Europe, and with more immigrants as well.

In many California communities, Japanese cars far outnumber Detroit models. In consumer electronics the Japanese completely dominate the market, and computers and high-tech development are in the hands of multi-national partnerships that could no longer be identified as either Japanese or American. California is not a poorer place because of this; though it may be in temporary recession, the California economy is richer than all but a handful of nations. The United States needs California far more than California needs the United States.

So what about this stuff that dim bulbs like George Bush, Pat Buchanan, and most of the Democratic presidential candidates are saying? Is it true that the Japanese are engaging in unfair trading practices, that they're deliberately stopping their citizens from being able to buy fine American products, thus robbing fine American workers of their jobs?

It's a complicated question, but with a simple enough answer: not really. There are abuses on both sides, and on balance, I'd say the Americans have if anything been more unfair. But during all the years that America sold more goods to Japan than it imported, I don't remember anyone seriously questioning our trade policies. It was simply assumed that our goods were better.

And that's the more than obvious explanation for why the situation has reversed: Japanese goods are better. If that offends your knee-jerk sense of patriotism, too bad. But look at it this way: a Toyota costs at least a couple thousand more than a Ford or GM product, yet Toyotas continue to become more popular while the onetime US auto giants teeter on the edge of bankruptcy. Why is that? Because American auto buyers are inherently stupid? Or because even at a higher price, Toyotas are a better bargain because they last twice as long and require only a fraction of the maintenance costs?

As one who's driven both American and Japanese cars, and would probably never buy another American car, I don't have any hesitation about answering that question. And before you suggest that I've been brainwashed by Japanese propaganda, let me point out that I know a little more about how Detroit builds its cars than the average consumer; I put in a couple years on the assembly line when the Motor City was still in its heyday.

Ditto for electronics: the recording and reproduction of music is vital to me because it is at the heart of the business I work in. And nearly every piece of equipment used at every step of the process is Japanese made. I don't personally care if it was manufactured in Upper Volta or Outer Mongolia; what I'm concerned with is what works best.

People who want to throw up trade barriers and re-invigorate our own automobile and electronics industries miss the point. They're fighting yesterday's battle, which means they'll surely lose tomorrow's. Heavy manufacturing was at the core of this country's economy in the 19th century and the first two thirds of the 20th, but that's changed forever now. There's no way we can compete with countries who have far cheaper labor forces and much more willing workers, and there's no reason we should try. The Japanese are learning this, and are doing a much better job of adapting; already South Korea is threatening Japanese domination in automobiles, and a whole raft of Asian nations are producing TVs and stereos that match Japanese models in quality and are significantly cheaper.

That's why the Japanese are diversifying and moving into new fields, and, not incidentally, why they're investing heavily in the United States. With a massive government-led effort, and protectionist legislation that will destabilize the world economy, the US could eventually catch up to Japan in some areas of manufacturing where we now lag. In the meantime, however, half a dozen other countries will have passed both of us up, the difference being that Japan will have also left us in the dust in more crucial areas like banking and finance, for example, or computer software, leaving us attempting to subsist on

Latin American neighbors. Illustrative of the university's attitude was a recent incident in which an unruly crowd trying to get into a sold out fraternity event at the Student Union was chased off campus by UC police, resulting in a mini-riot on Telegraph Avenue, damage and looting to a number of shops, injuries to Berkeley police officers, and considerable expense to Berkeley taxpayers.

The UC cops made no effort to coordinate crowd control with city police; they simply chased the troublemakers off university property and more or less said to the city: "Here, you deal with it." While this particular incident was relatively minor, the university's bullheaded approach to People's Park was anything but. The university, not content to squander a million dollars of its own money on a pointless confrontation over building volleyball and basketball courts on the controversial site, touched off several weeks of often-violent protest that have already cost the city, by various estimates, between \$600,000 and a cool million bucks.

But that's how things have historically been done in Berkeley: the university does what it wants and expects the city to clean up its mess. The same principle applies in growth issues. While Berkeley long ago decided to carefully control its growth, the university has consistently been expansionistic by almost any standard. But while campus area, number of students, and density of construction has steadily increased, it has largely been left to the city to deal with the housing and traffic congestion issues that have resulted.

The university's main contribution to Berkeley's housing problem has been to enter into a legal subterfuge with private landlords that enables them to circumvent the city's rent control laws. Unscrupulous property owners can charge students upwards of \$400 apiece to share a room that under rent control might fetch only half that. Nonstudents who don't enjoy parental subsidies are of course displaced, and Berkeley's rent control ordinance, already under constant attack from wealthy real estate interests, is further weakened.

As someone who's enjoyed the benefits of a University of California education, I might be suspected of having divided loyalties, but I was a resident of Berkeley long before I was a student, and I think the community has to come first. The university is already in danger of being perceived (often correctly) as an elitist institution primarily serving the needs of excessively privileged children of the upper middle class. The gap between town and gown appears to be growing, with arriving freshmen being counselled by dormitory personnel to avoid interacting with the "dangerous" elements that allegedly frequent Telegraph Avenue.

The city's position vis-à-vis the university is not a comfortable one, since UC has legal immunity from many Berkeley laws and zoning regulations. Nonetheless, our politicians could show a little more spunk in standing up to the colossus on the hill; the university needs Berkeley just as much as Berkeley needs it, and it couldn't hurt to remind some of the more arrogant administrators up there of that fact.

## Keep Vista College In Berkeley

It's not much as colleges go, but there are those of us who love it... Actually, I've never had strong feelings one way or the other about it, but it recently came to my attention that Vista College, the two-year community institution that exists, almost invisibly, in downtown Berkeley, is in danger of losing its home

The lease on the school's main building, located at Addison, and Milvia, is expiring (is there anywhere but America where colleges get evicted but there's always room for one more 7-11?) and the Board of Directors of the Peralta Community Colleges is considering moving the whole kit and kaboodle to some shopping center in Emeryville.

A couple problems, though: while the current "campus" is situated only a block from BART and AC Transit, its new location is



hardly served at all by public transit. Presumably this shouldn't be such a problem, since every red-blooded American worthy of receiving an education of course has his or her own car, but still, one would have thought traffic and air pollution were already bad enough without making an effort to worsen them.

Equally important, Berkeley voters originally agreed to finance Vista College with the understanding that it be located in, guess where, Berkeley. Not that we're greedy or anything, but not everyone can or wants to go to that big university up the street, and almost nobody wants to go to Emeryville. Besides, downtown Berkeley is already in dire enough shape without removing one of its few useful enterprises.

A professor of mine, in a florid burst of rhetoric, once likened Shattuck Avenue to the Champs-Élysée of the West, but these days it's looking distinctly more like San Francisco's desperate and depressing Market Street. If even the decidedly downmarket J.C. Penney's can't make it in downtown Berkeley, I think we might be well advised to give up our hopes of attracting a new Nordstrom outlet (and while we're at it, stop granting permits for those idiotic mini-malls like the one currently going up on University between Milvia and MLK.

There's already more than enough vacant office and retail space, and a good way to fill it would be with an expanded Vista College. There's no reason all classes have to be confined to one or two buildings; having students wandering around the downtown streets couldn't be any worse than the uneasy aggregation of beggars, yuppies, and lunatics that inhabits them now. Despite the preceding complaints about the expansionist-minded UC campus, education is still a good business for a town to be in, and I rather doubt we have to worry about little Vista College running roughshod over the community any time soon.

## Gentrification, North Oakland Punk Style

It's not the sort of sweeping trend that the mass media pick upon, at least not yet, but there's been an increasing influx of white punk rockers, as well as other artsy, counterculture types, into previously all-black neighborhoods of North Oakland.

This has long been the case closer to the Berkeley border, but continued housing shortages in Berkeley, natural habitat of this breed of bohos, has pushed the invasion farther and farther to the south. A veritable colony of lower middle class punks seems to have sprung up between 50th and 60th streets.

Some of them have been there for years, but others are new arrivals, many fresh from the suburbs where they've previously had little contact with black people. Still, there hasn't been a great deal of racial friction, despite occasional reports of hurled epithets (or more

substantive missiles) and one or two stray bullets. But there's no reason to expect wholesale violence; North Oakland has long been a fairly solid working class area having little in common with more notorious areas of the city.

There are a couple of potential problems with gentrification that we've previously observed in areas like San Francisco's South of Market, Lower Haight, and Western Addition, or for that matter, Emeryville. But Emeryville was always a hellhole, no matter what race or class of people lived there - though the current breed of yuppies rushing to infest it may well have taken it to a new low.

But aren't we rushing to conclusions here? Isn't it perhaps even a bit racist to assume that the punks moving into North Oakland are "gentrifying" it when in fact they probably make no more money and are often considerably less respectable than the black people already living there?

Yes and no. As has already been observed in a *Lookout* of long ago (no, I don't remember what number, and I don't feel like going to the trouble of looking it up), punks and artists make up only the shock troops of gentrification. Their main, perhaps only, criterion for moving into a neighborhood is low rent. But usually without intending to, they commit the fatal offense of making that neighborhood trendy, which means they are soon followed by galleries and cafes and boutiques, which are bad enough, but even worse, by stockbrokers and lawyers and dentists who want to impress their girlfriends or boyfriends with how with-it they are.

Pretty soon the artists are sent packing, just as the neighborhood's original inhabitants were, and North Oakland will have turned into another nightmare scene to rival, say, North Berkeley. No, it won't happen overnight, but then I'm old enough to remember a time when you could stroll all the way along Shattuck Avenue nearly to Solano without encountering a single head of radicchio, let alone hordes of horribly misshapen mid-life baby boomers in unattractive jogging shorts.

In that old issue of the *Lookout* our solution was a full-fledged ban on art, the reasoning that artists were responsible for initiating this

whole dismal cycle. But what are we to tell the punks, some of whom are not only our friends, but are integrally involved in producing this very piece of art you now hold in your hands?

A more reasonable solution might be to replace the current money-based criteria for who gets to live where and replace them with radness quotients. For instance, anyone desirous of living in a designated artists and intellectuals area needs to show evidence of having recently produced something at least resembling art or an original idea. That alone should free up an awful lot of space in the more pleasant neighborhoods of Berkeley and SF. Anyone earning over \$50,000 per year should be required by law to live in a glass and steel condo on the wrong side of the Berkeley hills, i.e. Walnut Creek and environs, and there's no reason certain districts couldn't be set aside as well for those individuals who enjoy shooting one another, listening to heavy metal music, gazing at crystals, or having weighty conversations about wine.

And as for the punks, who even if they do inadvertently produce art, would vehemently deny it? Well, I have mixed emotions on that one. They conduct their weekly soccer games (no, I'm not making this up) in Ohlone Park, only two blocks from my house, and as far as I know haven't frightened any neighbors to death yet. On the other hand, they'd probably be happier in the warehouse district of West Berkeley, close to their beloved Gilman Street and surrounded by all sorts of post-societal desolation.

But they probably don't belong in North Oakland, if only because all the cafes where they "measure out their lives in coffee spoons" (I'm probably a marked man now, because if there's anything punks hate worse than poseurs, it's poetry) are at least a half-hour commute away. It's a massive squandering of energy which most punks don't have to begin with. Actually, maybe the best solution would be to tow away all the drab sections of South Berkeley - up to at least Ashby, or maybe even Russell Street - and put them somewhere down by the Marina. Then North Oakland would pretty much be in Berkeley, and nobody would have to be put to too much trouble.

## Japan Bashing: Good Politics, Terrible Economics, Even Worse Foreign Policy

Pissed off at the Japanese? Want to put America first? Annoyed that those slanty-eyed little rodents won't buy our fine Fords and Chevrolets? Wanna buy a bride?

The anti-Japanese hysteria that the media and opportunistic politicians are doing their best to create is at best idiotic, and could be downright dangerous.

There's much to be said against Japan, but there's a lot to be said for it as well. One thing can't be denied, though: modern Japan is very much a creation of the United States. Until 1853, Japan was a semi-feudal state, cut off from almost all contact with the outside world. American businessmen, hungry for new markets, sent the US Navy into Tokyo harbor and imposed, at gunpoint, a trade agreement opening Japan up to the West.

For Japan the short term result was social and political disaster. Any country suffering a stinging military defeat suffers a loss of confidence, but to the Japanese, it was a more serious matter. As in China, which had similarly been bested by foreigners it considered "barbarians," faith in the fundamental tenets underpinning Japanese society crumbled. The ability of crude and uncultured Westerners to impose their will on what had been thought, superior civilization caused Chinese and Japanese alike to question the validity of their traditional way of life.

The two countries reacted to the crisis very differently, however. China disintegrated into warring factions, and continued to fall farther behind the West. Japan, which had spent most of its history deeply submerged in China's shadow, resolved to acquire the industrial expertise of the westerners and use it to defeat them.

Following a civil war which toppled the feudal system, but left it with little more than some trappings of democracy, Japan embarked on a crash program of modernization. American and English experts were imported to teach the Japanese how to make steel, build railroads, and administer a modern state. Universal education was established, and a centrally controlled economy grew rapidly. Always, the aim was expressed in the maxim, "Rich country, strong army."

It wasn't until the 1930s, when the Japanese started rampaging around Asia, that the United States had serious misgivings about what it had set in motion. Still, trade of many sorts, including strategic materials, continued until the last few years before World War II. In fact, it was American action in 1941 to cut off Japan's oil supply that is generally considered to have triggered the attack on Pearl Harbor.

As startled as they were by the sneak air raid that overnight landed them in the biggest war in history, most Americans found it hard to believe that such a tiny, and, it had been thought, backward country could pose a serious threat. The Japanese, however, were

extraneous travel. Instead we're dithering about how to get even more cars onto the highways and will probably end up having to buy our trains from Japan or France.

Living up to our potential, whether in quality or quantity, means above all paying attention to the most important software of all: the intellectual and creative resources of our people. It means massive investment in education of all kinds; it also means ensuring the health and stability of individuals and communities. Unfortunately this runs directly counter to prevailing public policy, which is little more than a glorified (and expensive) version of "every man for himself" combined with "women and children last."

## Through The Friedman Looking Glass: Turning Institutional Brutality Into Economic "Science"

One of the few sources of intellectual legitimacy for the through-the-looking-glass pastiche of illogic and systematized brutality known as Reaganomics was a one-time University of Chicago professor named Milton Friedman.

Friedman, now ensconced at a California loony-right asylum known as the Hoover Institution (as in Herbert Hoover, the blithering dunderhead who presided over the American government's disastrous non-response to the first three years of the Great Depression), still maintains an aura of respectability in certain uncritical circles, largely due to his having received the 1976 Nobel Prize for Economic Science (and yes, you wouldn't be out of line to point out, as numerous pundits have, that economic science is more often than not a self-cancelling term). Nonetheless, Friedmanism has by now been almost completely discredited as the catastrophic results of 11 years of Reaganomics become clear to even the most unsophisticated observer.

Still, just as witch doctors and shamen continue to flourish well into the Age of Reason, Friedman occasionally re-emerges to rattle his shibboleths and beat upon the talismanic drum of free markets and unfettered capitalism. His increasing non-involvement with reality has not denied him access to a mass audience such as that provided by the *New York Times*, his most recent contribution to which reveals him to be either a gibbering idiot, or a cynical and corrupt front man for organized theft and thugery.

Given my generally benign view of human nature, I prefer to assume the former. Indeed, Friedman's article, which blames America's economic troubles on George Bush's alleged betrayal of orthodox Reaganomics, contains enough delusional material to warrant a quick check to see whether the walls of his Hoover Institution quarters carry sufficient padding.

Friedman begins his flight of fancy with the still partially accepted notion that Ronald Reagan became President because "the voters" wholeheartedly supported his economic program. As has been pointed out again and again, but insufficiently emphasized by the major media, no more than one in five adult Americans voted for Reagan, and a significant number of them were voting against the ill-defined and inadequate policies of Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale, rather than for the even more poorly defined, but far better packaged theories of the Reagan right.

Friedman goes on to claim that Ronald Reagan, regardless of what you think of his policies, was a leader with "strong principles." Does anything about that statement strike you as a bit jarring? We are speaking, are we not, of the man whom history now shows to have been the most corrupt President of the twentieth century, alongside whom Richard Nixon looks like a bumbling small-time hood with delusions of grandeur. "Principles" rarely enter into critiques of Reaganism, be they laudatory or damning; it rather goes without saying that a man who supported himself for most of his adult life by

Japan is hardly a paragon of virtue or modernity. They lag decades behind the United States in women's rights and race relations, not to mention the ability to write a good pop song. But just as we have much to teach them, they can show us a great deal about how to maximize the potential of individuals operating within a society. The more exchanges we have with them, whether commercial or cultural, the faster vital ideas and information will be transferred back and forth. That is why trade wars, and the atavistic nationalism that drives them, hurt everyone. There is no longer such a thing as a national economy, only regional subdivisions of a global one. Ignoring that ever more obvious reality can only lead to disaster.

hawking soap, cigarettes, or right wing politics for anyone willing to pay his fee was not overly burdened by them.

Provided, however, that you're willing to suspend disbelief long enough to suppose that Reaganomics involves anything resembling principles, Friedman enumerates them, shows how they succeeded under Reagan, and were betrayed by Bush. They are, ostensibly: "lower tax rates, restraint in government spending, deregulation, and noninflationary monetary policy."

When it comes to the question of taxes, my charitable view of Professor Friedman's honesty as opposed to his sanity is severely tested. No one possessing a marginal degree of economic literacy can believe the much-ballyhooed Republican claim that taxes went down during the 1980s. Oh, of course they were slashed, drastically, for the wealthiest one per cent of Americans, and cut substantially for the top twenty per cent, into which Friedman almost certainly falls. But the overall tax burden has not decreased at all; in fact it has increased slightly. Reagan (and Bush) tax policy simply transferred it from the richest to the poorest members of society.

This was done by dramatically reducing the top rate of income tax, while lowering that paid by middle and lower-class taxpayers slightly or not at all. At the same time, Social Security taxes, which apply only to the first \$20,000 or so of income, were raised drastically, and used, in a bit of spurious bookkeeping that would land anyone less well connected than the federal government in prison, to offset ballooning fiscal deficits. The net on a taxpayer earning \$20,000 a year (and paying the same amount of Social Security tax as one earning \$1,000,000) was a hefty tax *increase*. Sound fair? In the wonderful world of Reaganomics, it is, and if the disciples of Friedmanism had enjoyed sufficient majorities in Congress, they would have made it even more fair by allowing the wealthy to opt out of the Social Security system altogether, i.e., pay no tax at all.

The transfer of the tax burden to the poorest classes was also accomplished by gutting social programs, forcing people to pay out of their own meagre incomes for services that had formerly been financed by a more broadly based public sector, and by transferring responsibility for many programs to state and local authorities, which paid for them by imposing new, and usually regressive taxes. California is a prime example, where sales taxes, which again hit poor people hardest of all, rose by as much as 40% during the Reagan-Bush years. So did a laundry list of other consumption-oriented taxes (the state's Republican administration steadfastly refused to touch the fairest way of raising new revenues, the state income tax).

Republicans were thus able to claim, with at least a shred of plausibility inflated by a compliant media into an airtight shroud, that taxes did not rise under their administration, at least not until George Bush reversed his "no new taxes" pledge with a new set of levies again falling overwhelmingly on those least able to pay.

And why was it that Bush had to eat his words on the subject of taxes? In the view of Friedman, it was simple perfidy, an unconscionable rejection of Reaganomics that, in the professor's dubious frame of reference, was working just fine. The real reason brings us, of course, to the second of Friedman's cardinal points, "restraint in government spending." While it has been repeated *ad nauseam* that the past two Republican administrations have devoted themselves to cutting public spending, nothing could be further from the truth. Reagan and Bush have produced the largest budgets and the most bloated deficits in the entire history of the United States (or for that matter, the world). Eleven years of Republican "restraint" has produced a national debt totalling a nearly incomprehensible \$4 trillion, quadruple that inherited from the allegedly irresponsible Democrats.

The scholarly Professor Friedman glosses over this fact, preferring to note that government spending as a percentage of national income declined under Reagan and is now once again rising under Bush. But lest he overtax his apparently selective economic skills, allow me to point out for him that both budgets and deficits rose rapidly under Reagan as well. If government spending as a percentage of national income appeared to temporarily decline, it was a one-time result of the redistribution of public funds into the coffers of the richest elements of the private sector. It was this same horrendously inequitable transfer that enabled conservative economists to claim during much of the 1980s that prosperity reigned throughout the land.

Certainly average income rose substantially, just as the average income of Boonville would rise if its five or ten richest inhabitants suddenly received a windfall of \$10 million apiece from the government. But it wouldn't do much for the Mexican day laborer earning minimum wage, especially if his taxes went up to help pay for that windfall. The same is true on a national scale; every reputable set of economic statistics show that real incomes of lower and lower-middle class workers steadily declined throughout the 1980s.

Which brings us to "deregulation," which supposedly helped produce the illusory prosperity of the 1980s "boom years," while at the same time benefitting consumers through increased choice and more competitive prices. In reality, deregulation not only functioned as another linchpin in the Reagan-Bush strategy of wealth redistribution from the poor to the rich, but has produced economic disaster which ordinary citizens, in their roles both as consumers and taxpayers, will be paying for for decades to come.

The American airline industry, to cite just one obvious example, is self-destructing, and when the dust has settled will leave us, if we're lucky, with two or three super-carriers with an unregulated monopoly on both routes and prices. That's small potatoes, of course, compared to what's happened in the savings and loan debacle, and may still happen in the American banking system. Ruinous and often pointless competition resulted in taxpayers having to finance a bailout of wealthy and well-connected Republican speculators in order to stave off (we are assured) a complete collapse of our financial infrastructure.

The lion's share of the hundreds of billions squandered by the savings and loan industry went down another newly deregulated rathole, the leveraged buyout. Junk bond wizards like Michael Milken and Ivan Boesky were able to wreck industries, plunder resources, and sell off assets they did not own thanks to enormous subsidies from the American taxpayer and the active complicity and encouragement of the Reagan and Bush administrations. Still, Friedman wholeheartedly applauds deregulation in any and all forms, and carps that Bush is insufficiently zealous in pursuing it.

A "noninflationary monetary policy" is the last of Friedman's attributions to Reaganomics. Certainly inflation has slowed markedly during the Reagan-Bush years. But then inflation not only halted, but in fact reversed itself during the years of the Great Depression, years which are seldom regarded as among the more stellar moments of modern economic science. And just as the deflation of the 1930s

required massive public expenditures (and borrowing) which had to be repaid in later years by inflation (and, one could plausibly say, war), the deficits of the 1980s and early 1990s, which dwarf those of the "big-spending" New Deal Democrats, will send prices soaring if or when we get around to paying them off.

Friedman finishes his impassioned plea for Reaganomics with some faint praise for the incoherent gobbledygook recently presented by George Bush under the guise of an economic recovery program, and complaints that it does not go nearly far enough. What one analysis of fascist economies of the 1930s called "a triumph of ideology over reality" is at the heart of Friedman's proposals. He shrugs off the current recession, by most measurements the worst since the Great Depression, as "relatively mild, despite the contrary public perception." Cuts in the capital gains tax, which primarily benefit the richest one per cent of Americans, should get the economy rolling again; he also recommends reducing the amount of revenue available to Congress for social programs. As is invariably the case in Republican prescriptions, wasteful military spending, often little more than a welfare program for corporations, is sacrosanct.

Friedman's final flight of fancy is to reiterate the Nicene Creed of *laissez-faire* capitalism: that any attempts by the state to ensure that its citizens can obtain the goods, services, and quality of life commensurate with a modern civilized society amount to a pernicious form of socialism which "experience throughout the world, from the United States to the former Soviet Union" shows will never work.

His reassurances would be more, well, reassuring if Friedman showed some evidence of knowing what he is talking about. His linkage of Soviet and US economic policies, probably the most diametrically opposed of any in the industrialized world, leave one to wonder where we might find a non-socialized economy that demonstrates the principles of Friedmanism successfully at work.

In his past writings, Friedman's showpiece has often been Japan, whose economy and social structure he either knows nothing about, or chooses to ignore. In addition to being one of the world's most successful economies, Japan is also, as any casual student of its policies knows, one of the most intensively managed and regulated ones. The 19th century variety of cutthroat capitalism much beloved of Friedman and his admirers would be regarded as a profoundly antisocial act in Japan, where a familial cooperation between industry, workers, and government is championed and destructive competition discouraged or even prohibited.

Or what about the case of Germany? Here again, Friedman's theories have been flagrantly flouted, yet Germany has risen from utter ruins to become the world's third most successful economy, providing its citizens with a markedly higher standard of living than the ostensibly richer United States. Friedman dreads the "nanny" state, which extends its concern for the well-being of its people into "every nook and cranny of life." Yet in Germany no one goes without health insurance, the minimum wage is nearly \$10 per hour, homelessness is almost unheard of, the unemployed receive 80% of their normal pay plus retraining, and all workers are guaranteed six weeks of paid vacation per year.

A quarter to a third of all Americans might think they had died and gone to heaven if they were to find themselves in similar circumstances, but such extensive social programs, put in place and overseen by a classic "nanny" state have hardly wrecked the German economy. In fact it has steadily expanded throughout the post-World War II years, while the American economy, perhaps the least managed and regulated of modern industrial states, has been in more or less constant decline since at least 1973. One of the few countries managing an even worse performance is England, where Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives assiduously followed the American model and the Friedmanite blueprint.

If Friedman were ever to personally attempt to implement his theories by entering government, he'd be out on his ear in a year or

two, and mobs would be hollering for his blood. By remaining beyond the fray, in an academic sinecure and cloaked in the media-conferred aura of "economic expert," he can continue to ghost-write crackpot schemes that vary from the naive to criminal, and have them put into place by hired pitchmen of the Reagan ilk. When they inevitably fail, Professor Friedman can solemnly intone the mantra of "free enterprise," and suggest that the real reason for failure was that his theories were not followed closely enough.

As one of Adam Smith's greatest modern misinterpreters, Milton Friedman sees human beings as, above all, economic animals whose primary motivation is to buy and sell things. That being the case, we can assume that in the halcyon days before big governments and intrusive social programs, life in, say, the stone age or 8th century Europe was one big happy market place. History does seem to indicate otherwise, however.

By the same token, capitalism had an almost completely free hand for the first hundred years or so of industrialization. Unemployment insurance, welfare, public education, national health care, and a host of other programs which Friedman derides as socialistic were not imposed by bungling big governments to address needs already being met by the free market. In fact, they were necessary to protect people against the ravages of the "free" market, and, not incidentally, to quell social unrest caused by widespread suffering that would eventually have prevented any market from functioning.

The (very) mild elements of socialism in most western European states have worked well for their citizens; they have also worked well for business, a fact which Friedman's perennial tub-thumping for a bankrupt ideology can scarcely obscure. By way of direct contrast, the more closely Friedman's theories have been followed in America, the closer this country finds itself to disaster.

## Church and State

Democracy is one of those catch-all concepts, like freedom, or brotherhood, or loyalty, that enjoys a nearly unchallenged reputation for goodness. Except for unregenerate dictators, mostly of the third world variety, few are willing to go on record as opposing democracy.

What do you say then, when people use democracy to destroy democracy, when the majority quite literally votes it out of existence? It's an old problem, and a modern one as well. No one could deny that the United States and the United Kingdom, long considered among the world's strongest bastions of democracy, have been showing some markedly undemocratic strains in recent years.

But the changes in those countries have been gradual and subtle compared to this winter's events in Algeria. Here an attempt to open up the democratic process led instead to the people voting to abandon it. And not just abandon it, but to replace it with one of the most undemocratic systems imaginable, a fundamentalist Islamic theocracy.

True, just as in recent US and UK elections, the voters were not presented with a broad range of choices. The main alternative to the the fundamentalists was the corrupt and historically repressive ruling party. Faced with an unpalatable decision, the voters, like their western counterparts, stayed away in droves. Less than 28% of potential voters actually endorsed the Islamic ticket.

Still, by all the rules of the game, the Islamists won fair and square (there were fairly well substantiated charges of vote-rigging, but probably not on a large enough scale to have altered the result). This produced near-panic among millions of Algerians, especially women, who under the Islamic system would lose not only their jobs, but their rights to education, travel, or even the simple freedom to walk about the streets without being wrapped from head to toe in the veils dictated by radical Islam for its women. In short, they would be cast

back centuries, and returned to the status of a piece of property.

While liberal and westernized Algerians stewed, Europeans dithered. Was it their place, they wondered aloud, to tell a sovereign nation how to conduct its affairs? Did the democratic process become illegitimate if it were used to subvert or destroy democracy? When the Algerian army stepped in, cancelled the elections, and banned the so-called Islamic Salvation Front, the sighs of relief were distinctly mixed with tut-tutting over the "undemocratic" nature of such a move.

England's mildly leftist *Guardian* expressed editorial regrets, opining that democracy should be allowed to take its course, no matter how unpleasant we personally might find the result. On the other hand, the *Guardian's* editors were not the ones who would have to live with the result; it goes without saying, of course, that a paper like the *Guardian* would not survive a single day of Islamic rule.

While few Europeans were prepared to openly endorse the military coup, many no doubt thought it the best of a crop of bad solutions. And whether it will work in the long run is in some doubt; the possibility of civil war still looms large in Algeria, with fundamentalists receiving encouragement and aid from their brothers in other North African and Middle Eastern states.

Westerners find it easy to be appalled by the obvious excesses of Islam, but they have no business assuming that their own culture is immune to such collective madness. It is not so many centuries since the notion of theocracy, administered by self-appointed representatives of God on earth, began to disappear from Europe. In some quarters, most notably Ireland, it has yet to vanish completely, and a significant and vocal minority of Americans would apparently like to see it re-instituted on our own shores.

Then of course there's Israel, which while not completely a western culture, could not exist without the wholehearted financial and military support of the United States. While its trappings are not nearly so alien to most Americans as are those of Islam, the murderous fanaticism and intolerance, justified by ancient and obscure texts supposedly handed down directly from God on high, hardly differ at all.

While I would never argue that people shouldn't have the right to subscribe to whatever rituals or beliefs give them comfort against what often appears to be a cold and even irrational universe, I do argue, passionately, that religion of any kind has no place within the workings of democracy. That's not to say that a political leader isn't entitled to believe in spirits, fairies, talking shrouds, burning bushes, or a vision of God as a merciless tyrant who demands slavish tribute and casts little children into perpetual lakes of fire for the slightest transgressions. I simply insist that the workings of the state should never be used to curtail my right to see such stuff as unredeemed and unredeemable nonsense.

In a world which regularly endures profound crises of identity - and it seems to be undergoing an especially pronounced one at present - there is always a danger that magic or mysticism will be seized upon as a catch-all solution to seemingly insurmountable problems. That's why it's essential to establish democratic mechanisms to guard against the subversion of liberty by charlatans able or willing to manipulate the often too readily offered faith of the people.

It means, of course, as absolute a separation of church and state as possible. Americans might smugly congratulate themselves that the inhuman excesses of Islamic fundamentalism could never occur in a country so civilized as their own, but they would be ignoring the equally fanatical vision of Christian fundamentalists, who are not merely tolerated, but indirectly subsidized by the American government. The extreme right wing evangelists who command audiences of millions and view with equanimity, even enthusiasm, such seemingly un-Christian concepts as nuclear war and mass starvation, would never have attained their positions of power and prominence without the tax-free status conferred on them by an

# Last Train To Brixton

Walthamstow, six minutes after midnight. The 0008 train to Central London, last of the evening, is nowhere in sight. Worse, the electronic signboard indicates that the next train "Terminates here" with no indication that there will be another train at all.

Unconcerned, at least half a hundred passengers mill about on the platform with the placid, almost bovine assurance of the English that London Underground would never leave them stranded for the night in "bloody fucking Walthamstow", as it is often affectionately known. Vindicating their faith, the train pulls in at 0010, and as it does, the signboard explodes into an electronic "CORRECTION", informing us that the train on Platform 1 is indeed bound for Brixton, via central London and Victoria Station. Over the tannoy comes an official announcement that the train on Platform 2 will be the last train to Brixton. A few passengers toss a concerned glance over at the deserted Platform 2, but by and large, people settle for the train that is here over the one that is not.

No more than four or five minutes late, the doors close with a sigh of resignation and the train goes shrieking into the night. At Blackhorse Road ten or fifteen passengers climb aboard. Most of them are refreshingly nondescript, but a few look as though they've been patronizing some rock club, the sort that features lots of leather, studs, and big hair, i.e., a downmarket, slightly suburban and distinctly English version of Hollywood's Sunset Strip.

The last couple to enter the coach look every bit a part of that world, even if they are a bit old by its standards, by ten or even twenty years, it would seem. But a closer examination reveals that but for minor concessions to shifting fashion trends, the couple have probably been dressing very much this way since at least the mid-1970s; fate has, as it so often does, made what is old new again, and the two embody the height of rock style.

Actually, he more than she; and the fact that he was toting an electric guitar didn't do anything to harm his youthful image. His slightly thinning but still adequate blond ringlets cascaded to his shoulders in the manner, though with considerably less panache, of T-Rex's Marc Bolan and similar 70s glam/metal rockers. Only his distinctly grey sideburns and his puffy but not yet sagging face spoke too loudly of years knocking about second-string rock clubs to no great effect.

His leather jacket, motorcycle style, but shiny and very thin, was more suited for hot stage lights than deep-throated Harley-Davidsons. It was covered in chromium studs which caught the light and refracted it, an effect that must have been far more impressive in the coloured flashes and blinding strobes of a night club than it was in the bare fluorescence of a London tube train. He cradled his guitar between his legs, then gently leaned it against the facing seat. Take away the unusual costume, and he was an everyday English workman on his way home, albeit with a lunchbox of unusual size and shape. His face revealed no desire or concern greater than to get somewhere where he could put his feet up and reflect with dim satisfaction on another day's labour uselessly spent.

The woman beside him showed no such contentment. She flounced into the carriage, hurled herself into her seat, and sat there with her arms rigidly folded across her chest. Her face was a frozen mask of bitterness, disgust and contempt. Her expression alone, heightened as it was by thickly drawn, purplish-red lips set against a foundation of layered powder that was one or two shades too white to be flattering, had drawn the attention of nearly every passenger in the carriage. She seemed determined to project an unblinking look of absolute and abject misery, and she was well succeeding.

He stared at the catches on his guitar case before beginning a careful examination of his fingernails. She simply stared, baleful and hostile, as if the world and everything in it were an enormous,

disgusting insect which only her squeamishness stopped her from crushing beneath her boot heel.

Her face provided such a study in unrelenting fury that it was difficult to look elsewhere, but eventually one's eyes strayed to her long, straight hair, bleached but not heavily, which except for some angular hacking and crazy-colour highlights near the temples, could have come down to us direct from Beatles-era Carnaby Street. Her shocking purple cloak, too, owed everything, and perhaps its actual vintage, to London's Swinging 60s. That, combined with her foul expression, made her look several years older than her companion, but her pout, no doubt practiced for several decades, was that of a barely adolescent girl.

We had already passed Tottenham Hale when he realized, or acknowledged, that her mood was not likely to change without some effort on his part. He asked some mundane questions, probably something along the lines of, "D'ya fancy watching that video when we get home?"

She answered in monosyllables, half again as loud as necessary to be heard. Two "No!"s and a "Yes!", the latter, I assumed, in answer to his belated, reluctant inquiry as to whether something was wrong, then another "No!", which I guessed was her response to his offer to talk about it.

He didn't like the way things were going, it was clear, but either out of genuine concern, an unwillingness to ride the rest of the way home in silence, or simply masochism, he pursued the issue. I couldn't hear exactly what he was saying, but each time she answered, she increased her volume, daring him to create a scene.

She had already induced plenty of covert glances, English people being mostly too polite, or shy, to stare. I myself lack that compunction, but wary of displaying too much interest, I settled for watching their reflections. I knew I risked looking a bit odd by staring so intently out the window of an underground train, but I could see them quite clearly that way, and by now both their voices had reached a level where I could hear everything they said.

So, in fact, could everyone. All other conversation ceased, and I'm sure I wasn't the only one who watched and listened with the same morbid fascination that draws people to the scene of bloody automobile crashes. The crux of the argument seemed to be who had said what to whom in the ladies' toilet. Eventually I sorted out that when she had visited the toilet, so-and-so had told her that he had earlier been in there committing unspecified crimes with another party.

It was "disgusting," she repeatedly declared, before entering into a litany of "How dare you?"s building to a thunderous "How DARE you?" that momentarily silenced him. But not for long; he plodded ahead, asking her to specify exactly what he was supposed to have done. "You know," was all she would answer, "you bloody well know."

He pressed her on this point, searching, it seemed, for any details he could plausibly deny. Until now I hadn't thought about who might be the guilty party, but it became obvious from his unwillingness to simply deny everything that he had been up to something. Or more likely, several somethings, which was why he was so determined to find out what exactly she had on him, lest he blurt out a confession to another crime that she hadn't even suspected.

They reached, very loudly, a stalemate. It was the point where, in America, one began to fear that guns might be drawn, but from there, the argument tapered off into futility. They would go home, they would undress in silence, they would crawl sullen and uncomprehending into opposite sides of a cold and uncomfortable bed. In the morning they would have mild hangovers and vague memories; they would eat greasy eggs while wondering whether the afternoon's television programmes would be sufficient to distract them from renewed fighting. I left the train at King's Cross, and just caught the last Hammersmith & City train to my single bed in a warm council flat where the hallways reek of cooking odours from several continents. They carried on southward, all the way, I felt quite sure, to Brixton.

# The Luck of the Irish

On a bone-chilling January night in the deserted streets of Derry, it's easy to imagine that one has reached, if not passed, the outer limits of western civilization. A Roman visiting a dingy provincial capital walled and shuttered against marauding interlopers in the Empire's declining days might have felt similarly.

By day Derry maintains a semblance of normality. The people are pleasant, at least by Northern Irish standards, and they go about their business in intertwining streets that careen over hillsides with a casual abandon that might be charming if one could ignore the abandoned and bricked-over buildings, and the ubiquitous sectarian graffiti that adorns them.

At nightfall, though, the steel shutters come clanking down over nearly every shopfront in town, and the crowds melt away. By seven o'clock, one could roll the proverbial bowling ball down Main Street (not its real name) and have a good chance of hitting not a single car, let alone a pedestrian. Aside from pubs, which by Irish or English standards are surprisingly few, I count two fast food joints and a minicab office as the only establishments still open.

I've only got a few hours in Derry (or Londonderry, as Protestant diahards persist in calling it), and despite the freezing temperatures and depressing desolation, I mean to see something of it. I wander along the top of the old city walls, which in 1689 held off the armies of James II. The siege mentality is nothing new to Derry.

It's always tempting to rehash history, and in the case of Ireland it's easy to pick out points where if only the English hadn't been so greedy or brutal, if only a certain battle had gone the other way, centuries of suffering and struggle could have been avoided. The Battle of the Boyne, still celebrated by Ulster Orangemen as a sort of Independence Day, sealed Ireland's fate; Britain, following its well established imperial imperative, set in motion the deadly chain of events that 300 years later appears to have no end in sight.

It's a rare day in Ulster that doesn't see at least one bombing or killing. This January has been especially bloody; only yesterday, eight Protestant day laborers were killed and a dozen others seriously wounded while on their way home from work. Their crime, according to the IRA, which set off the bomb under their bus: doing construction work for British security forces.

This particular carnage was only remarkable on account of its scale. Individuals are routinely killed on far flimsier grounds, and at least twice this month the IRA has had to issue official apologies because it had mistakenly killed the wrong men.

But no apology was forthcoming this time. The IRA insisted that the workers were legitimate targets, that anyone cooperating in any way with British forces did so at the risk of their lives. Republican purists, few of whom are willing to stand up publicly and be counted, argued that the men knew what they were doing, and should have been prepared to accept the consequences.

In a land, however, where unemployment is endemic, with as many as 60 to 70% of young people jobless in Belfast and Derry, it might be expecting too much for workers to rigidly examine the ideological purity of their employers. And of course most Protestants do support the British occupation of Northern Ireland, if anything would like to see more troops, not less. Loyalists, or Unionists, as they call themselves, seek permanent and irrevocable inclusion in the United Kingdom.

But most people, Republican or Unionist, Catholic or Protestant, want nothing so much as to be left alone to get on with their lives. The

prospects of that happening any time soon are slim. While the actual campaigns of bombings and shootings are carried out by no more than a few hundred fanatics on either side, they have the tacit support of thousands more in the working class and sub-working class ghettos. There's little doubt that the overwhelming majority are sick of the bloodshed, but few are willing to openly speak out against it. Some of those who did have paid with their lives.

Outsiders often describe the conflict in Northern Ireland as "religious warfare," and liken it to the struggle between Jews and Arabs, or Hindus and Muslims. That both overstates and understates the case. Lines between the warring factions are drawn very closely along religious lines (though any non-Christian not well-versed in theology would be hard-pressed to delineate the crucial differences between Protestantism and Catholicism), but the most militant barely give lip service to the ideals of their supposed faiths.

Clergymen have been among the most outspoken opponents of the slaughter; their status usually protects them from the retaliation that often befalls laymen who speak in favor of peace. Yet both churches harbor some genuine hatemongers as well; a young Presbyterian minister seen on the BBC evening news displayed the implacable fury of an Islamic imam calling for wholesale *jihād*.

While the roots of the Irish conflict are more extensive than simple religious differences — the former editor of the Derry Journal went so far as to insist that Protestants and Catholics represent "two different races" — it's impossible to gloss over the role religion plays in perpetuating the situation. The church wields power in Ireland to an extent not seen in any other industrialized democracy. In some respects, church-state relations in Ireland have yet to leave the Middle Ages.

This is especially true in the Republic of Ireland, independent from Britain since 1949, and into which, if the IRA ever got its way, the six counties of Northern Ireland would be incorporated. Little of importance happens in the Republic if it fails to meet the approval of the Catholic bishops.

Divorce is still illegal, as are most forms of contraception. For the past year there has been an ongoing debate over whether condoms should be made more readily available to stem rising rates of AIDS infection. At present only pharmacists are allowed to sell them, and then only to those over 18; many pharmacists refuse to handle them for fear of incurring the wrath of the local priest.

Not only is abortion illegal, but even providing information about it. Recently the Dublin Public Library had to remove copies of *Our Bodies, Our Selves*, the well-known women's health care book, because it explained how women could go about obtaining abortions in England. The following week, the country's attorney general obtained a court injunction to block a 14 year-old rape victim from travelling to England (as over 4,000 Irish women a year do) to obtain an abortion. The *Irish Times*, no hotbed of radicalism, declared that the action showed: "The last place a woman who has been raped should go is to the police."

The popular press regularly, without comment, reports various miracles and visitations of saints and demons. One of the leading young people's programs on national radio is a music and call-in show hosted by a priest whose advice to troubled teens is generally of the take-a-cold-shower-and-say-a-Hail-Mary variety. Even the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) is not above dragging Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and all the saints in heaven into routine political discussions.

Historians of the industrial revolution generally agree that the breakdown of mysticism and superstition is a precondition for modernization. This provides a tempting explanation for the backward state of the Irish economy: the country has yet to experience its Enlightenment. But as would be expected of any place with several thousand years of history, there's more to it than that.

Enlightenments don't just occur as part of a natural progression; witness the many cultures far older than our own that have yet to advance much beyond barbarism (for that matter, look at our own). They require conditions of material prosperity and security, they require literacy and an ease of transportation and communication that enables people with differing ideas and values to come into peaceful contact with one another. Ireland has been tragically denied these conditions, and while power-hungry churchmen have been quick to exploit the ignorance and isolation that resulted, it is England which did most to create and perpetuate them.

The ships that enabled Britain to rule the waves and the great cities it constructed as monuments to its Empire were built with timber from the now-vanished forests of Ireland. The native Gaelic language, now preserved only through great effort and expense on the part of the Irish government, was nearly wiped out by British restrictions on education and literacy, strictures which wiped out much of Ireland's culture and history as well.

Perhaps the greatest crime, one that would rightly be called genocide if Anglo-Americans hadn't so completely dominated the writing of 19th century history, was the systematic starvation and expulsion from their native land of millions of Irish during the 1840s and 50s. Most Americans have heard of the Potato Famine; it's often been attributed to Irish pig-headedness in refusing to grow any other crop but potatoes, a crop virtually wiped out by a blight that struck in the "hungry 40s."

What's not so commonly known is that a) the Irish relied on potatoes because they were the only crop that could be produced in sufficient volume to sustain them on tiny plots of land, and b) the reason the Irish were forced to derive their subsistence from tiny plots of land was that the British had displaced them from much of the eastern part of the country in order to make room for vast estates and game parks for the expanding English gentry.

Not only did the British forbid the importation of food from England to aid the Irish (on grounds that it might cause British food prices to rise), but throughout the famine, meat and grain from British-operated estates in Ireland continued to be exported, often within sight of Irish men and women dying of starvation.

The net effect was an extraordinary depopulation, through death and emigration, of the Irish countryside. Ireland, believed to have once had around 18 million inhabitants, now has barely 5 million, of whom only 3.5 million live in the Republic. With few other assets, Ireland has survived by exporting its people. England and the United States have profited immensely, but the resultant "brain drain" has crippled Ireland's own development.

The Irish educational system is one of Europe's best, generally considered second only to Germany's, but its most talented graduates, faced with unemployment or underemployment at home, often see little choice but to emigrate. In a sense, the Irish are thus subsidizing inferior educational systems in England and America.

"I think we're the only family we know who doesn't have someone in America," a middle class mother in the Dublin suburb of Dun Laoghaire told me, but that may not be true for long. Her youngest son, an honors graduate in history, has been unable to find more than a few hours part-time work at the local liquor store. Nearly a quarter of Ireland's young people have never had any kind of job.

They survive, not always badly, because of Ireland's generous welfare system. As with education, Irish social standards resemble those of western Europe more than increasingly Americanized Britain. Homelessness and truly desperate poverty are far less visible than in London or any large American city. But the costs of maintaining a decent standard of living have driven Irish taxes to astronomical realms, resulting in prices that are, except for Scandinavia, among Europe's highest.

But while Scandinavia is rich, Ireland is one of Europe's poorest countries. Along with Spain, Portugal, and Greece, it receives billions of dollars in redevelopment money from the richer countries of the European Community. EC funds build water and sewage systems, highways, factories, and housing developments. One of the latter, offering three-bedroom detached houses at reasonable prices to working-class families, would make millions of Americans wish their own country were eligible for EC membership.

EC aid, over a billion dollars a year and due to double soon, is still a drop in the bucket. Rural Ireland continues to export its young people to Dublin, which in turn is a way station to England and America. The capital city, apart from the quaint and cheery world of pubs and local color that so enchants tourists, is a grimy and depressing place. Ten minutes walk from the city center takes one to dismal and dangerous blocks of public housing that, however well intentioned their builders may have been, closely resemble those of East Berlin.

Crime rates are soaring, to the extent that the tourist industry, one of Ireland's major sources of foreign exchange, is worried that prospective visitors will be frightened off. Having experienced Dublin at the midsummer peak of the tourist rush and then again at midwinter, I personally prefer the relative tranquility of the latter. But while empty shops, restaurants, and hotels made it easier and more economical for me to get around, they also made it clear how dependent Dublin is on its tourists.

Tourism has been compared to prostitution, in that the more clients it attracts, the less desirable the goods on sale become. Ireland risks becoming a gigantic theme park, with its inhabitants expected to burst into jigs and "sure and begorra's" whenever a flotilla of foreign visitors heaves into sight. While Ireland remains among the most beautiful places on earth, and is a relaxing and pleasant (if expensive) holiday destination, such a heavy reliance on the kindness of strangers can not help but have a demoralizing effect on the populace.

Having said that, perhaps the most striking thing about Ireland is that for all its troubles and poverty, it maintains a quality of life that could be the envy of more prosperous countries. Especially in the south and west, there is a conviviality and informality that, if it ever existed, vanished from more developed economies decades ago. Outside Dublin, violent crime is rare, and men and women alike feel free to walk about the streets at any hour. There is a very relaxed attitude about authority; while pubs are required by law to close at 11:00 p.m., hardly a one in Galway began to wind down before midnight, even the ones in plain view of the police station. The one beneath my room in Galway didn't even begin to quiet down till 3:00 a.m., and members of the local constabulary regularly stopped by to join in the singing.

Ireland is famous for its music, and growing up in a family of partly Irish ancestry, I'd heard my share of it. But none of it prepared for me for the first night I sat in a traditional pub in Galway and listened to a trio of teenagers run through old favorites accompanied by guitar, flute, and accordion. It suddenly hit me that my great grandfather could have listened to, or joined in singing some of these very same songs as a teenager in the 1840s. I got a faint glimmer of what it must be like to be uprooted from the land where your family

has dwelt for more generations than anyone has bothered to count.

Galway is prosperous by comparison with most of Ireland, but I began to grasp that even in the poorest parts of the country there's a wealth that has sustained the people through centuries of hardship. There's a sense of knowing how to live, a sense of community, an appreciation and genuine love of the land in all its stark and lyrical and sometimes even frightening beauty.

And yet you come back to the troubling question: how could this friendly land where total strangers readily drink and sing and converse together be the same land where neighbors sneak about in hooded garb planting explosives and gunning one another down? How could this be the same land where young people are driven from their homes by hypocrisy, religious repression, and socially enforced conformity, where beneath the happy veneer alcoholism, incest, rape and child abuse are frighteningly common?

The backroads of Counties Mayo and Donegal lead through some of the most desolate and beautiful scenery on earth. There are stretches many miles long with no houses at all, and even where there are houses, they are as often as not abandoned, their thatched roofs having long since caved in and rotted away, leaving only stone walls standing. Some looked to have been untouched for the better part of a century.

The people have gone to Dublin, or to London, or New York or San Francisco. I've met many of them, especially in London, where there are districts containing more Irish men and women than nearly any city in Ireland. Nearly every one of them loves Ireland passionately, and hardly one of them expects to ever live there again. Women, especially, tell me that it's not so much the lack of money or the troubles in the north, as the narrow-mindedness and resistance to social change that makes them certain they can never go home again.

And it's true that while rural or small-town Ireland must be a wonderful place to raise an old-fashioned family according to the precepts of church and tradition, it must be hell for someone determined to live life on his or her own terms. Unmarried mothers, homosexuals, punks and artists, exist in Ireland, but very schizophrenically. There's even a Queer Nation chapter in Dublin now; all night discos and acid house raves mimic, if weakly, the social life of the larger European capitals. But there's little escape from the sense of gloom and futility that pervades so many young Irish lives.

There is a sense of change afoot, a feeling that Irish culture may finally have reached some sort of watershed enabling it to leave behind the superstitions and prejudices that have dogged its path for the past few centuries. The power of the Church over the hearts and minds of the young appears to be waning, though its influence over governmental and social institutions remains, for now, relatively undiminished.

Just as European aid is one of Ireland's best hopes for overcoming its economic difficulties, so may Ireland's growing incorporation into the European Community help it to overcome its hidebound traditions. Never a particularly nationalistic people, the Irish, especially the young, are beginning to acquire the more cosmopolitan attitudes of modern Europe. The government, too, is showing some signs of change; the famously corrupt Fianna Fail party is losing its once solid grip on power, as evidenced by the forcing from office of Prime Minister Albert Haughey in a Watergate-style wiretap scandal.

Ireland's troubles being centuries old, their resolution is not likely to come quickly. Yet I would judge Ireland's future to be brighter than appearances might indicate. There is a growing consensus, especially among the young, for peace and tolerance. In the recent elections, Gerry Adams, an IRA supporter several times chosen to

represent West Belfast in the British Parliament, was voted out of office, most likely for his refusal to condemn this year's wave of bombings and killings. Both the IRA and its counterpart, the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) are increasingly earning the contempt of the great majority of their countrymen. Many young people no longer identify themselves in terms of religion, and many who do are joining peace marches instead of paramilitary organizations.

Yet some images remain frighteningly fixed in my memory, making me question whether things can ever change. Last summer I wandered into the Catholic ghetto of West Belfast at sunset, and while I was never personally threatened, I've seldom been so terrified in my life. On street corners gangs of teenagers brandishing clubs and bottles eyed me suspiciously; on the motorway that curved beside a dilapidated housing project, children as young as six amused themselves by dancing in front of oncoming traffic and pelting cars with rocks and bottles. Even on quiet residential streets, the toys of choice appeared to be sticks and rocks, and the predominant method of play involved hitting and throwing things. Some of the young children wore bandanas and headgear in imitation of their big brothers.

And while this was not an ordinary night - it was near the beginning of the "marching season" when gangs of Protestant and Catholic youths attack each other's neighborhoods - there was no conflict going on. The teenagers on street corners were preparing to defend themselves against a possible invasion, but it seemed that the young children had absorbed violence as a way of life. The brickwork fortifications surrounding Catholic social clubs, the cascading rivers of razor-sharp wire that covers churches and other public buildings like a perverse array of Christmas tinsel, seem to have rooted themselves in the national consciousness. Sitting by a warm fire in a pub filled with laughter and song, it's easy to forget the dark underside of the outwardly joyous Irish character.

Meanwhile, back in Derry, with the streets even colder and more deserted than before, I stopped, alone in the heart of the city, to read a poster announcing a peace march on the coming weekend to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Bloody Sunday, when British troops opened fire on a crowd of nonviolent demonstrators, killing 13. On the same kiosk was another flier announcing a benefit concert for the march around the theme of "Celtic unity." Unbelievably enough, it was scheduled for that very Tuesday night, not a hundred yards from where I stood.

And sure enough, as midnight approached, I found myself in a packed hall above a pub where no one was asking questions about religion or ideological orientation, and a band called Anrhefn sang songs of freedom and defiance in their native Welsh. The same music in most other places would have roused the crowd to wild dancing, but here they mostly sat and drank, big smiles on their faces, but hesitant to show too much emotion. One drunk German, his clothing adorned with anarchist symbols, thrashed about wildly, crashing into people in his blind exuberance, but nobody showed any real irritation; instead they moved deferentially away.

Once again it's that two-sidedness that makes the Irish character so hard to fathom. For all I know, some of the young people in this room might plant bombs or wield machine guns on another evening, but here they're shy and reticent. I get the feeling I could walk through the room shoving people out of my way and receive no more than cross looks. There's something ineffably sad, yet inexpressibly joyous about this room and this country. It's little wonder that so many people around the world wish they were Irish. It's also little wonder that so many Irish wish they were anything but.



## Hinckle Gets His Way: Frisco Back In The Hands Of The Good Old Boys

I almost don't even want to write about San Francisco this issue, it's so depressing. I predicted last issue that Frank Jordan being elected mayor would be disastrous, and while this once I would have delighted in being proved wrong, Jordan appears well on his way to being one of the worst calamities to befall the city since 1906.

While I knew Jordan had almost no integrity, was willing to do or say anything to get elected, and would probably be at least as bad a mayor as he was police chief, I must admit that in his first three months in office he has already exceeded my worst imaginings. I predicted a new era of pork barrels, patronage, and plunder, but I thought he would at least employ some subtlety about it.

But in the immortal words of Bill, Ted, Wayne, Garth, and the generation of high school kids who originated the expression: Not. The *Bay Guardian* called him "Rip Van Jordan" and accused him of practicing "the politics of the 1950s," but that was being charitable. The seedy, shabby way in which Jordan has rewarded cronies and punished enemies, with utter disregard for the well-being of the city he ostensibly swore to serve, is more reminiscent of the pervasively corrupt machine politics of a Boss Tweed or Dick Daley.

One of the first warnings of just what Jordan was on about came when he dumped Robin Eickman as director of the San Francisco Film Commission and replaced her with a crony of his girl friend Wendy Paskin, who, like Nancy Reagan or Hillary Clinton, looks increasingly to be the real power behind the throne. Eickman, who by nearly all accounts has done an excellent job in luring film production business to the city, was well respected in her field, and her firing has already lost the city at least one major film. Her replacement apparently has no experience whatsoever, and is getting the job as a payoff pure and simple.

But while San Francisco can certainly manage to scrape by without Hollywood moguls tying up traffic and cordoning off whole city blocks to film their turgid epics and flatulent shoot-em-ups, one thing it can not do without is a well-functioning police department. Jordan was a lousy police chief himself, presiding over a department that was often out of control and regularly brutalized innocent citizens while doing nothing to stem the city's soaring crime rate. On one of the few occasions Jordan got out from behind his desk and happened across a crime in progress, he ran for help instead of trying to make an arrest himself.

Jordan was ultimately sacked by former Mayor Agnos and replaced by Willis Casey, who turned out to be a far superior chief. So it should have come as no surprise that one of Jordan's first major decisions as mayor was to fire Casey. To some extent Jordan was probably trying to exact revenge for having been shown up by Casey, but his deeper motives were almost certainly political in the worst sense. City Assessor Richard Hongisto, Jordan's choice for new police chief, is a decent enough liberal, though perhaps not overburdened with principles, but he's almost completely without experience in running a major metropolitan police department. Hongisto's only previous stint as a police chief, in the city of

Cleveland, ended abruptly and ignominiously when he was fired after about a year and a half. What's worse, San Francisco police officers for the most part can't stand Hongisto.

It's not that I think we should be catering to the reactionary and bigoted elements that everyone knows are present in the Police Officers Association, simply that for a police chief to be effective, he or she has to be at least on speaking terms with the rank and file. Hongisto's appointment speaks of behind-the-scenes machinations on at least two counts. It's widely suspected that Hongisto got the job at least partially as payment for not throwing his support to Agnos in the runoff, which amounted to a tacit endorsement of Jordan. What's more, by placing Hongisto in a thankless position at which he'll almost certainly fail miserably, Jordan has probably removed a potential rival from contention in the next mayoral election.

More importantly, removing Hongisto from the Assessor's office and replacing him with the relatively liberal Supervisor Doris Ward has allowed Jordan to appoint the completely unqualified Annemarie Conroy, a Republican corporate lawyer who just happens to be Jordan's goddaughter, to the Board of Supes. Conroy will be the first Republican in many years to sit on the Board, and while Jordan's supporters (rapidly diminishing in number) claim that he is merely trying to give representation to all sectors of the city, the fact is that there have been no Republican Supervisors for the very good reason that the people of San Francisco won't vote for Republicans. (And as for securing representation for all the city's interest groups, the best way of ensuring that would have been to keep the system of district elections which reactionary downtown frontmen spent a great deal of money to scuttle a few years back.)

The *SF Weekly* is already touting efforts at a Jordan recall, but the lopsided failure of a similar effort aimed at the equally corrupt Dianne Feinstein a few years back don't augur well for its prospects. Unless Jordan screws up even more flamboyantly and consistently than he already has, we're probably stuck with him for the full four years, by which time he'll have done enough damage to ensure that the next mayor will have to spend his or her whole term digging out from under the rubble. We hope Warren Hinckle, sitting on his besotted lardbutt in some New York City penthouse, is proud of what he's helped to for (or to) San Francisco.

Another bit of depressing fallout from the Jordan election: KGO is by far the city's most listened to radio station, yet you'd hardly guess it represented allegedly liberal San Francisco judging from the views of its news-talk hosts. They range from rabidly right wing to moderately right wing, with two exceptions: Michael Krasny, whose smarmy neo-liberalism is often more offensive than Jim Eason's drunken and racist rabble-rousing, and Ray Taliaferro, the late night leftist who I've been listening to off and on ever since I arrived in San Francisco in 1968.

My introduction to Taliaferro came when I heard him raging that the President of the United States was an idiot, a liar, and a criminal

who ought to be in jail. This was at the height of the Vietnam War, and while such sentiments were regularly being aired in the streets, I was startled to hear them on mainstream radio. It was then that I began to realize that San Francisco might be the home I'd been looking for.

In the years since, I've rarely had reason to disagree with Taliaferro, except for his rampant ego which doesn't allow him to accept any correction to his views, no matter how minor. Still, it's understandable how the very well-read and researched Taliaferro, being right about 95% of the time, could get sufficiently carried away with his own wonderfulness to believe that it was really 100%.

But for no discernible reason other than his personal dislike for Art Agnos (and possibly a desire to solidify his credentials in SF's Good Old Boy network), Taliaferro joined his KGO cronies in wholeheartedly supporting Frank Jordan, the final debasement coming when he MC'd Jordan's victory party, then rushed over to the KGO studios to gloat through the night over what a great victory it had been for democracy.

In Taliaferro's defense, talk show hosts are supposed to have opinions, and he's entitled to his, no matter how stupid they are. I can't help feeling, though, that he, like Warren Hinckle, was motivated more by personal grudges than by any interest in what would be best for San Francisco.

Far less defensible was the behavior of Bernie Ward, who does double duty as a talk show host and a "reporter." Ward's main beat is politics, and his coverage of the mayoral election amounted to little more than a protracted series of Jordan-orchestrated hit pieces directed against Agnos. Ward particularly gets my goats because KGO represents him as one of its token liberals. He's all right on some social issues, but like Hinckle, he's driven more by a convoluted, and often destructive sense of self-righteousness. What he represents more than anything else is the old school Catholic bully boy represented by the smiley-faced Irish priest who calls a not-so-smiley-faced Irish cop to bash your head in if you fail to show sufficient respect for motherhood and the Church.

What drives Ward appears to be pure and simple hate, the kind of sublimated rage that results from a lifetime of religious repression. It's particularly ironic to hear Ward playing the lovable, oh-so-tolerant moderator on his smarmy Sunday morning "God Talk," then pop up in the evening spewing vitriol at anyone appearing to be at cross purposes with him.

All right, I know what you're saying: if KGO is so stupid, why do I bother listening to it at all? Perhaps it's some sort of morbid fascination, the kind that draws people to gawk at train wrecks. What can be heard on KGO better than anywhere else is the unravelling of the social, intellectual, and moral fabric of American society. The ignorance of so many of the callers is terrifying, but what's even more terrifying is the way that the call-in hosts are ready to pander to or participate in that ignorance.

Perhaps ignorance is too charitable a term; in some cases what appears to be blind stupidity is really just a cloak for deliberate hatred and bigotry. Nowhere is that more evident than in the maanderings of weekend host of the self-styled "Dr." Bill Wattenburg (hasn't this guy realized that Ph.D.s are a dime a dozen in this over-credentialed but under-educated society?). Wattenburg, who actually has in the past been allowed to teach at UC-Berkeley when he wasn't helping develop bigger and better nuclear bombs at the Livermore Laboratories or designing the phenomenally incompetent Bay Area Rapid Transit system (has anyone ever tried taking a geiger counter to a BART train?) has one simple solution to nearly all of society's ills: more nuclear power.

He's also a prime exponent of the Japan-bashing syndrome that could ultimately drag us into a self-defeating trade war, if not a genuine shooting war, with the emerging Asian superpower. We can understand this kind of rhetoric coming from an unemployed auto worker with no knowledge of economics who's had a few too many

beers. But a university professor who's lived most of his life on the Pacific Rim?

And the latest addition to the KGO weekend lineup is even more frightening, although at least his ignorance lacks any credentials more substantial than an extremely aggressive manner and a readiness to immediately interrupt or cutoff any caller who begins to inject a note of sense or logic into the proceedings.

His name is Gene Rusko, or Hrusko, I'm not sure how to spell it, and he's an adherent of the fanatical school of libertarianism that merges a near-psychotic detachment from reality with an unhealthy streak of outright fascism. To him everything is the responsibility of the individual and the "free" market. Not satisfied to do away with all welfare programs (let those two year olds go and get jobs if they want to eat) and privatizing everything from the post office to prisons to public education (it's not his problem if those eight year olds don't have the get up and go to find themselves a good school), he thinks that all of society's needs can be met by private charities and that the only legitimate purpose for taxation is to maintain large armies to go around robbing the rest of the world (the ultimate manifestation of the free enterprise system).

I have news for him and fellow "libertarians," however: your system has already been tried, and found drastically wanting. It was called the 19th century, and its grim results are recounted in horrific detail in the works of Dickens, Gissing, and numerous other chroniclers of Victorian industrialism run amok. The workhouse, Fagin's gang of juvenile pickpockets, and the pervasive, continuing depredation of the physical and social landscape, are some of its more distinctive manifestations. And the willingness to substitute an ideology for reasoned thought and pragmatic experience is a prime characteristic of the economics of fascism, a fact documented by commentators far more knowledgeable than myself.

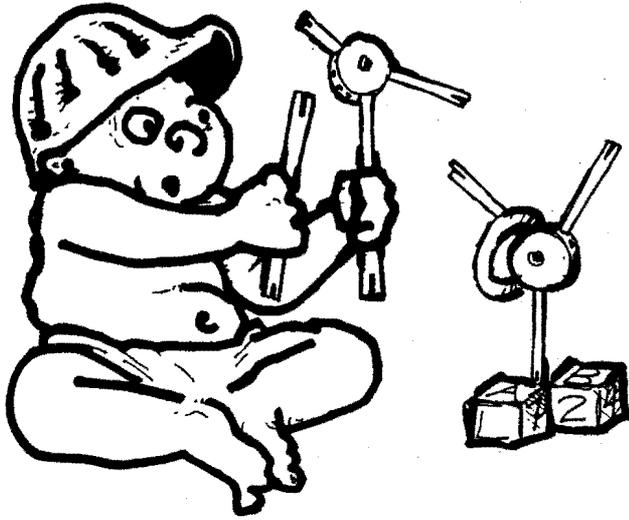
## Bye-Bye Bobby: Good Riddance To Lurie's Losers

Apparently San Francisco has lost its baseball team, with the Giants choosing to move down the Bay to Kansas City-by-the-Sewage-Treatment-Plant, or, as it's sometimes known, San Jose.

This is supposedly because San Francisco voters, displaying more sense than they did in the most recent election, refused to tax themselves to build a multimillion dollar stadium for mega-rich Giants owner and dingbat about town Bob Lurie. We suspect the real reason is that the Giants, one of the sorriest collection of losers, whiners, religious kooks, and jock-brained no-hopers ever to stumble onto a professional playing field, actually find the cultural climate of San Jose, with its mini-malls, Dairy Queens, and styrofoam-and-vinyl housing tracts, more to their liking.

And lest someone mistake our drift, let's put it another way: good riddance. In over thirty years of shambaling around San Francisco, the closest the Giants ever came to a championship was getting blown out four games to zip in the 1989 World Series, and even that none-too-near brush with greatness was so unsettling to the natural order of things that it resulted in the Loma Prieta earthquake.

I can imagine only one more suitable fate for the inappropriately named Giants (Pygmies? Dinks? Doodletwits?): if San Jose voters also decline to waste badly needed public money building a playpen for a bunch of spoiled millionaires, and the worthless Giants franchise is forced to move somewhere where they'd really fit in, say, Omaha, Nebraska, or Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. As for all you guys who will no longer be able to waste your summer afternoons and evenings following the misadventures of Bob's Bums, my heart really bleeds for you. I guess you could always read a book or... nah, forget I mentioned it.



## Boys With Their Tinkertoys: He Calls It Architecture

Alan Temko, the *Chronicle's* architecture critic, provides that dismal paper with one of its few consistently literate and entertaining voices. Even when Temko is dead wrong, he manages to put across his mistaken views in a form that's worth reading and thinking about.

But dead wrong is what Temko was when, a few months ago, he railed against new Planning Department standards for San Francisco skyscrapers. The rules are aimed at stopping the proliferation of faceless glass boxes that have turned most American center cities into embodiments of *anomie* and alienation, and require that new buildings incorporate "traditional" San Francisco motifs in their design.

Temko argues that this represents a bureaucratic restriction on innovation and expression, and will result in a post-modernistic jumble of ersatz Victoriana and pointless ruffles and flourishes. Such an argument would carry a good deal more weight if the city's architectural establishment had displayed any of the creative innovation Temko claims is being stifled.

Instead, ever since the downtown business lobby installed Dianne Feinstein in office and were given unrestricted access to the city's skyline, we've had our senses assaulted with hundreds of monster office blocks, nearly every one of which represents an antisocial atrocity, and which have collectively worked to strip the city of its vitality and beauty.

Temko's point of view amounts to free-market aesthetics, suggesting that artists left to compete among themselves will produce, *à la* the Invisible Hand, the greatest good. His idea is fatally flawed, however, when it assumes that architects in general are moved by artistic considerations. While many young people who enter the field do so in pursuit of a vision, those most likely to succeed owe more to accountancy than art. A further mistake is to treat the skylines of our cities as if they were little more than experimental canvases to be altered at will by whatever corporation has been able to put together the biggest financial package.

Cities should be visually exciting, it's true; it's equally true that most American cities are decidedly not, unless you find yourself transported into ecstasies over sheer bulk and the ostentatious display of excessive and ill-spent wealth. Architects and corporate chiefs who are might better indulge their tastes by collecting garish tailfined

1950s automobiles in the privacy of their own estates rather than using cityscapes which by any logic belong to all citizens to erect hulking phallic monuments to their own fatuous sense of self-importance.

But architecture is about far more important issues than pleasantness of appearance. As numerous studies have shown, even a single skyscraper can have a devastating effect on its environment. It can turn human-scaled crossroads of business and culture into sterile, people-less plazas, create fortress-like barriers that inhibit social interaction.

It can also compartmentalize the life of a city, leaving huge sections of it idle and useless outside of working hours, and forcing people to make long, wasteful, commutes. Skyscrapers even have the power to alter the climate, creating wind tunnels and stealing sunlight until the streets threading their way among them are so uninviting that people resign themselves to an air-conditioned, pre-stressed life behind walls of concrete and glass.

Temko argues that planning department commissioners, not being trained in the principles of architecture, have no business advising professional architects about how to do their work. This smacks of the "expert" theory of specialization too common today in all the arts; the notion that ordinary people are not qualified to decide what does or doesn't constitute good art. But a ditchdigger, or even a wino, is perfectly capable of looking at a building and saying, "That thing is one ugly monster," and there's no reason for dismissing such an opinion out of hand. Considering the track record of the "experts" over the past fifty years or so, it's well past time that ordinary citizens be given a voice in how their cities should be designed.

Otherwise, we're likely to be subject to an endless proliferation of hideous boxes devoid of social conscience, the legacy of, among others, the soulless Philip Johnson, who has, to his own great profit, done for urban design what Alaric the Visigoth did for civilization. The likes of Johnson should be consigned to their own private sandboxes and not allowed to muck about in our cities. If it takes government bureaucracies to accomplish that, so be it, although a preferable approach would be to re-invigorate the classical values that produced so much great American architecture in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Anyone who seriously argues that San Francisco's buildings of the 1970s and 1980s belong in the same city, or even on the same planet, with the Victorian masterpieces of a century earlier needs to be sent back to the drawing board, preferably with a hefty supply of finger paints.

## Hey Buddy, If You Can't See This Is Art, You're Probably Too Stupid To Be Looking At It Anyway

In a related field, we find the *Chronicle's* Kenneth Baker (I can't help wanting to call him Ken, because I just know it would get up his oh-so-sniffy nose), who in his capacity as art editor, completely lacks Alan Temko's wit and cleverness, preferring to promulgate his bizarre, self-involved form of culture in the guise of a full-bore Philistine.

In general, Baker sees no value to a work of art - indeed doesn't consider it art at all - unless it fulfills the dual criteria of being ugly and useless. To call a painting beautiful would be damning praise from Baker, and to suggest that it possesses a coherent point of view would imply that is should be relegated to the role of wallpaper.

In sculpture, Baker's tastes run to the south-of-Market, cobbled together junkyard school, albeit less structured. Were a new Michelangelo to turn up in our town, he'd have to content himself with carving tombstones under Baker's regime. Unless, that is, he proved adept at attaching rusty doorknobs to a "found" piece of acrylic

surfacing, in which case Baker would be transported into raptures over the young artists "ability to manipulate interspatial relationships and comment subtly but tellingly on the dynamically multilinear qualities of the art-vs.-*artiste* contretemps."

Give it a rest, Ken, and let's hope the *Chronicle* gives you one soon as well. Definitely another candidate for finger paint therapy.

## What's Your Hurry? If You Had Any Place Important To Go, You'd Have Your Own Car And Driver

### I

I see where the long-overdue electrification of Municipal Railway lines has been stalled by the lack of trolleys equipped with wheelchair lifts, and that the Muni is going to have to lease equipment from Seattle for a year or two until new ones become available.

I had occasion to think about this tonight while waiting at somewhere between five and ten minutes while an A-C Transit driver struggled to get his wheelchair lift to operate, and then strap in the rider, who, as it turned out was only going about eight blocks, at which time the whole process had to be repeated.

Travelling by bus already takes at least twice as long as driving, especially when one has to allow for the increasingly infrequent service. I don't say this out of any mean-spiritedness toward disabled people, but there has got to be a more efficient way of getting them where they need to go than by further slowing the already famously inefficient pace of public transit. What's more, installing elaborate lifts on every city bus costs millions of dollars that could better be used for new equipment and better service.

It's been calculated that the disabled could be transported more rapidly and cheaply by specially equipped vans that could provide door-to-door service on request. Disability rights groups are against this, however, because they claim it singles out disabled people for special treatment and prevents them from feeling like a normal part of society.

Leaving out the question of whether a minority group should object to special treatment if that treatment is in fact better than it would normally get, the more important issue is that the first and foremost responsibility of a transportation system is, obviously enough, transportation, not the redressing of real or imagined social inequities. While people confined to wheelchairs or otherwise restricted in movement are entitled to the same rights as all other citizens, only very fuzzy-brained ideologues could argue that having the same rights means treating them as if their disabilities did not exist, or, conversely, requiring all non-wheelchair-bound citizens to slow the pace of their own lives down to match that of the disabled.

At any rate, the majority of citizens drive their own cars rather than take public transit, and if the quality and speed of public transit continues to diminish, that will be even more the case. Hindering the free and efficient movement of those conscientious (or simply poverty-stricken) people who currently use public transit in order to make some vague social point is to no one's advantage; the disabled suffer just as much as the rest of us when the quality of public transportation diminishes.

### II

Just when we were nearly certain that Mayor Jordan had no sense of vision for the city, in fact no plan at all other than to appoint as many of his cronies as possible to office and re-institute the grand old San Francisco tradition of flamboyant corruption at every level of

government, he comes along with a genuine forward-looking program which if carried out successfully should go a long way toward ridding the city of two perennial problems: sick people and pedestrians.

Everyone agrees that sick people are depressing and often unsightly, yet nobody ever does anything about it. Politicians only perpetuate the situation by appropriating just enough money to keep massive numbers of people from dying, which would look bad, but never enough money to cure them or keep them healthy in the first place, which would look good, but would take too much money away from more deserving programs like new jails and nuclear-powered flamethrowers for local police forces.

Fortunately, Mayor Jordan appears ready to show the necessary political courage by slashing yet another twenty million dollars from San Francisco health services, a move which should keep doctors and nurses too busy running sidewalk bake sales and spare changing on street corners to spend much time healing undesirable indigents. Waiting times at San Francisco General's "emergency" room have been averaging from five to ten hours; perhaps the new cuts will lengthen them to the point where many patients will die before they are seen, thus greatly reducing work loads for those few medical personnel who haven't left for greener pastures in Yuba City or Angola. For greater efficiency, the Coroner's Office could move its offices into the hospital lobby, or perhaps a certain portion of that overly luxurious lobby could be converted into an auxiliary morgue.

A similar cut of \$20 million is planned by the far-thinking Mayor for San Francisco's notably overindulged Municipal Railway. The Muni has been riding roughshod over the decent people of SF for years, its big ugly buses and streetcars taking up space that could be used by respectable car owners from Marin and San Mateo. How, after all, do you suppose someone who has spent \$60,000 on his new Mercedes feels when he finds his way blocked for a minute or two by some clunky public transit vehicle stopped to pick up a gaggle of indigents and deadbeats who are probably on their way to the welfare office, the race track, or the liquor store?

What's worse is that the problem doesn't end there. Sooner or later all those people will get off the bus, too, which means they'll be walking every which way on streets and sidewalks that every right-thinking person knows are meant for cars. Just imagine how much better the traffic would flow in downtown San Francisco if cars weren't forever having to stop to make way for pedestrians.

Some might argue that raising Muni fares to \$1.25 or more and eliminating many bus lines will create more pedestrians, not less, but they obviously don't comprehend the sheer masterfulness of the Mayor's strategy. True, walking will increase in certain neighborhoods, but only in those dismal poverty-stricken quarters of the city where nobody goes anyway. The Mission, for example, may be colorful and a source of cheap lunches for downtown office workers, but aside from that, who cares what goes on there? No doubt the more enterprising burrito joints can arrange delivery services for the high-rise brigades.

But the important thing is that in the parts of the city that matter, i.e., downtown, west of Twin Peaks, Hillsborough, and Walnut Creek, people will increasingly be able to hop into their cars and drive, unobstructed by public transit vehicles or pedestrians, straight to the garage or parking lot adjoining their place of employment. Now won't that be a whole lot neater for everyone?

## Let's Tear Down The Bay Bridge

The last time I saw the Jeanette MacDonald-Clark Gable film *San Francisco* must have been around 1972 or 1973, when I was still in the throes of a passionate love affair with the city. It was being shown to a packed house at the Castro Theater, who cheered at every other line, especially the one about San Francisco being, "the wickedest,

most godless city in the west."

Today being a cold, windy, and otherwise unappealing day in London, I stayed in and watched *San Francisco* again, and the memories came flooding back about the times when the very idea of San Francisco was thrilling, when almost everyone I knew could unashamedly sing along to a corny old movie with perhaps even a tear coursing down their cheeks, feeling a swelling pride that more conventional sorts might reserve for some silly thing like the national anthem.

There are still some people who can wax rhapsodic about San Francisco, most of them, unfortunately, being politicians or real estate agents. But much of the life has gone out of the city, and I'm sure regular readers of this column will be well familiar with my litany of reasons why: high rises, corrupt government, Dianne Feinstein (who you would think fits into the previous category, but in reality deserves one all of her own), yuppies, transplanted New Yorkers (or more specifically, transplanted New York attitudes), the strangling effect of automobiles and the dismantling of the public transport system, etc., etc....

But at the end of *San Francisco*, I had a sudden insight into one big and relatively easy change that could significantly improve the quality of life not only in San Francisco but in many surrounding communities: tear down the Bay Bridge. As you may recall, the movie ends (in its one embarrassingly bad scene) with Clark, Jeanette, and a pack of sheep-faced, google-eyed San Franciscans singing Glory, Glory Hallelujah, our God is marching on as tribute to that personage for His brilliantly executed destruction of their city. Then some yobbo, probably a plant from the Chamber of Commerce, jumps up and hollers, "We'll build a new San Francisco!"

The smoldering ruins dissolve into a shot of 1930s Frisco, looking much the way it did until Joe Alioto and his cement mixer gang got their hands on it at the end of the 60s. The last lingering image of the film focused lovingly on the Oakland-San Francisco Bay Bridge, then probably considered the bee's knees in modern transport, even if it was already well on its way to putting the lovely old ferries out of business and turning the Jewel of the West into one more smoggy, auto-ridden American metropolis.

The Bay Bridge possesses almost none of the romance attached to the Golden Gate, although I must confess a soft spot for the view coming down the home stretch into Frisco, especially when the fog is beginning to eat the hills, or it's a perfect night with just a hint of orange left in the western sky and all the lights of the city come shimmeringly alive.

But for the most part, the Bay Bridge is a workingman's bridge, eminently solid and practical, and with very little concern for esthetics. Which of course made it all the appropriate that it, not the delicate, airy Golden Gate, was the one to cave in during the 1989 earthquake.

Except for the death of one unfortunate soul who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, that collapse was in my book one of the best things to come out of the earthquake. The streets of Berkeley and Oakland hadn't been so peaceful in years. The same was true over in Frisco; although there were plenty of people moving

around on foot, automobile traffic was noticeably lower. Despite the disaster that had just happened, there was a calmer, more relaxed air on both sides of the bay.

And I can speak about both sides of the bay because I found myself visiting Frisco more often than I had in a long time, at least partly because public transport was temporarily improved to compensate for the loss of the bridge. BART ran twenty-four hours, and ferries were re-introduced. It was an all too brief taste of what life could be like if we ever have the sense to abandon our self-destructive reliance on the private automobile and rebuild a transit system that genuinely serves the needs of the region.

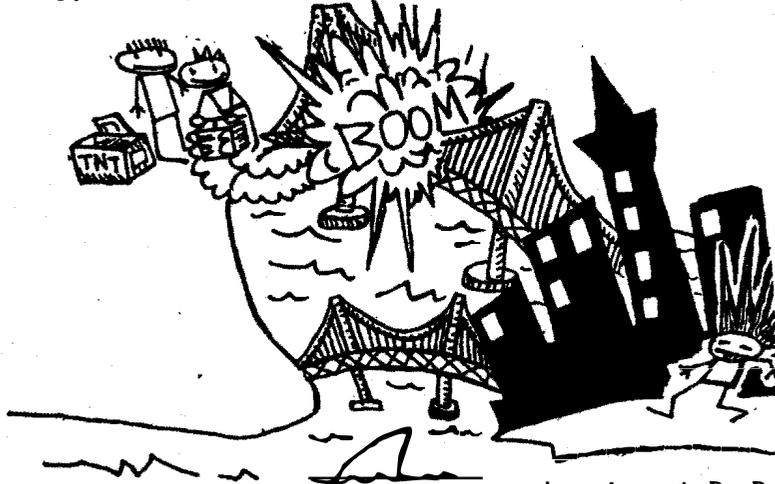
A lot of us East Bay types amuse ourselves by constantly heaping abuse on our West Bay neighbor and raising the altogether too touchy hackles of its inmates. Most of it is in fun, although there's a serious element of frustration and disappointment at how drastically the city has been allowed to deteriorate. But San Francisco, even under strained circumstances, is still the heart and soul of the Bay Area. If it can regain even a portion of its past glory, we'll all benefit, even if I personally have no plans to move back over there until they speak to someone about those Arctic winds that make spring and summer such a singularly unpleasant experience (fog I'll suffer gladly).

But how will people get back and forth without a Bay Bridge? Expanded BART service, which could start with running trains every two minutes the way we were promised they would. A second transbay tunnel, carrying only rail freight and intercity passenger trains, would be an excellent idea.

And for anyone or anything else not in a big hurry, well, there should be ferries galore traversing one of the world's most beautiful waterways.

What about neurotic yuppies and other obsessive characters to whom life just wouldn't be complete without spending hours every day driving from Walnut Creek to San Francisco? Well, they could always go around by way of San Jose. In fact, they'd have to, because as soon as my

campaign to destroy the Bay Bridge is successful, I'll be starting in on the Golden Gate. If there's one thing Frisco needs less than insurance clerks from Concord and Lafayette, it's overprivileged, undertaxed morons from Marin. On the North Bay route I may even vote for abolishing the ferry as well. If Mill Valley meatheads and Sausalito sybarites simply must come to the city, let 'em swim. Give the sharks something to chase.





# Once Upon A Time In The Mountains

## Part III

Melissa opened the window, and a blast of hot September air swooshed into the room. It carried with it the din of car horns, racing engines, and yelling voices. She could hear a girl in the next room babbling about some fraternity party she'd been to over the weekend. "Everyone was so drunk! It was raging!"

Melissa sneered, then remembered the party at the warehouse where she'd gotten drunk. That was different, wasn't it?

The traffic lights had changed, and for a minute the street was empty of cars. In the sudden silence she could hear the Campanile strike once, and a bird, from god knows where, let loose a little burst of song.

Did she even want to be here anyway? She was surprised, even shocked, to hear herself asking a question like that. Coming to the University of California had been her dream, ever since... ever since Mrs. Radner had put it in her head, telling her, "Dear, if you ever want to do something aside from living on this mountain, you must be educated. Education opens the whole world to you, while ignorance is a prison that can trap even the best-intentioned of people."

Back when she had thought of Mrs. Radner as the wisest and most wonderful person in the world - when had she stopped thinking that? - she accepted those words as absolute truth. Now she was hearing other words as well - like Danny, saying "I think education is great. That's why I wouldn't set foot inside a college."

She looked at the letter from the university again. She had until Wednesday to turn in the forms signed by her parents. That gave her just today and tomorrow. Even if somehow she could convince her father to sign, there wasn't time to do it by mail. That meant the only solution was to go up to the mountain. Just the thought of it made her sick to her stomach.

Besides, she didn't have any money. The only way she could get there would be by hitchhiking, which she was afraid to do by herself. She wondered if Danny would be willing to go with her...

What was the use, anyway? Her father would never sign the papers unless someone was holding a gun to his head. She briefly fantasized about just that, then went back to cursing the whole rotten system that let an idiot like her father have such control over her life just because... because why, she demanded of the empty room? She was legally an adult, well, she would be in a few weeks, and her parents weren't contributing one dime to her support. Why should they have power to disrupt her education, to deny her an education?

"It's a pretty sick country we live in," she remembered Danny saying the other night. It had stuck in her head because her father often

said something similar. She decided to go find Danny. Maybe he'd have some idea about what to do.

Clutching the papers in her hands, she walked over to Sproul Plaza. Danny wasn't there, but some of his friends were. There was Jesse, who was one of the singers in that band Blatz that she'd seen at Gilman Street. And there was a boy named Joe, from New York City, who with his red and purple mohawk and zippers and chains and spiked boots looked more like an old fashioned punk rocker than a student. He scared her, in fact, even though he was very soft spoken, almost shy, and seemed very intelligent. There were some girls, too, but Melissa only knew one of them, a 16 year-old with very short green hair named Janelle, who went to one of those progressive high schools where it seemed like she only went to class when she felt like it.

Janelle also published her own magazine, a paste-up and xerox thing that all the punk kids seemed to read, and which Melissa was secretly jealous of. She wished she could start her own magazine, too, but she wasn't quite sure what she could write about. Janelle knew practically everyone and everything, and Melissa couldn't even remember the names of all the members of Blatz, or even who exactly was a member.

But still, Janelle had always been nice to her, and so Melissa felt confident enough to approach her and ask if she knew where Danny was. Janelle sort of hemmed and hawed, and looked over at the blond girl sitting next to her on the steps.

"Um, I don't think he's around. I think he might have gone over to San Francisco," she said. The blond girl stifled a giggle. What was that supposed to mean, Melissa wondered?

"Look, I really need to talk to him. Do you know when he's coming back?"

"It's kind of hard to say."

"What do you mean?" Melissa wasn't sure if the girls were teasing her or trying to keep something from her, but they definitely knew more than they were saying. "Please, if you know how I can get in touch with him, tell me. It's really important."

Janelle looked doubtful, but she finally asked Melissa, "Did Danny ever tell you about Leah?"

Melissa felt unpleasantly queasy.

"Uh, no."

"Well, I don't want to give you the wrong idea. I mean, I don't know exactly what's going on with Leah now. But Danny used to

like... go out with her."

Melissa was irritated, mostly at herself for being irritated. "I didn't expect him to never know any girls before me," she said, more sharply than she had wanted to.

"Yeah, well anyway," Janelle said, "It's not like he's still with her or anything, it just that, well, when her and Danny were breaking up, she got all depressed and started doing drugs, and now she's kind of a junkie, and Danny feels sort of responsible."

"Why? Did he used to do drugs with her?"

"No, I don't think so. It's just... that's the way Danny is. I mean, you know him, don't you? If you got in trouble, do you think he'd tell you to get lost?"

Melissa's face was flushed, and her eyes were stung by a late afternoon breeze that had started to pick up.

"No, I guess not," she answered. "So where is he?"

Janelle looked at the blond girl, who seemed like she was waiting for her turn to talk.

"He heard that Leah OD'd last night and was in the hospital. So he went to see if she's all right."

"So he's at the hospital? What hospital?"

"No, they already let her out. People are always OD'ing in San Francisco. She's probably home, or else out looking for more heroin. If Danny's not with her, he'll be back here soon."

"Where does she live?"

"Lower Haight. But you probably shouldn't go there. It'd be pretty weird for everybody. Like if she thinks you're Danny's new girlfriend, she might totally freak out."

"I am Danny's new girl friend, and she'll have to deal with it." Melissa didn't recognize the words coming out of her own mouth. She felt like a different person, like she was watching herself on TV.

Nobody could talk her out of going, and a few minutes later she was on a bus headed for San Francisco. She'd only been there a couple times before, and never by herself. By the time she got off the bus and was walking over to Market Street, the heat of the day had been replaced by a chilly west wind that blew scraps of paper in her face and tossed her hair around so that strands of it kept getting caught in her mouth.

The Haight Street bus was full of yuppies and trendies coming home from work, and she had to stand all the way. Someone was wearing patchouli, and it reminded her of the mountains. She got off at Webster, like she'd been told, and started searching for the address she'd been given.

The neighborhood was noisy, and a little scary. A couple of men leered at her, but no one seemed interested in bothering her. The place she was looking for was only a few doors off Haight Street. It was a grey, old-fashioned wooden house with bay windows that hadn't been washed in a long time. She rang the doorbell, and when nothing happened, pounded on the glass.

Danny appeared, looking not so much surprised to see her as simply exhausted. He looked as if he hadn't slept in a long time.

"I need you to help me," was the first thing Melissa said to him.

He looked even more tired. "You're not the only one."

"I heard about your friend Leah. Is she all right?"

"I don't think she'll ever be all right. I'm just trying to limit the damage."

"How long are you going to stay here?"

"I'm not sure. I was hoping she'd go to sleep, but she doesn't want to sleep, she wants to go out and look for more drugs. She says the only thing that'll stop her doing more drugs is if I stay here."

Melissa got an uncomfortable feeling. "She could keep you here forever that way."

"It wouldn't surprise me if that's what she's thinking," Danny answered.

A ghostly apparition, pale, bleached blond, and unsteady on its feet, appeared in the gloomy hallway. "Who are you?" it asked.

"I'm Melissa, a friend of Danny's. And you must be Leah?"

"What kind of friend? What are you doing here? Who is this, Danny, your new goddam girlfriend? What the hell did you bring her here for? Can't you at least keep your bitches over in Oakland?"

This was more than Melissa had bargained for. She hadn't heard that much abuse since the last time she saw her father.

"Uh, I just had to ask Danny about something. I didn't mean to bother you."

"Well, you are bothering me. You're bothering me a lot. So why don't you just get the hell off my porch and leave me alone."

Melissa tried to ignore her and speak directly to Danny, but Leah was having none of that.

"If you want to stand around talking to your East Bay whore, then do it somewhere else," she snarled. Danny looked confused.

"I really need your help," Melissa tried to tell him, "I'm in big trouble at school."

For the first time Danny seemed as if he found Melissa just as annoying as Leah.

"School? You came here to talk to me about school? What, did you hand your homework in late?"

"No, don't joke about it, I'm going to get kicked out if I don't do something. You've got to go with me to Willits and help me get my father to sign these papers."

"I don't know what you're talking about, and I can't go anywhere now. I haven't even slept for the last day and a half, and your father would probably kill me if he ever saw me anyway."

All this time Leah was tugging at his shirt trying to pull him back in the house, and now she started whining, almost screeching at him. Danny looked around, anxious to end this confrontation.

"Look, go back to the East Bay," he told Melissa. "I'll come back as soon as I can. You can wait for me at my house if you want."

He gave her a look that said, please, don't argue with me now, and started to disappear back into the house. Melissa was left standing on the doorstep, her heart feeling as if it had been wrenched out of her chest and wrung dry. All the way back to Berkeley she could see Leah's face sneering at her as she steered Danny down that dark hallway.

She tried to study for a while, but couldn't concentrate for more than a couple minutes at a time. At about ten o'clock she took the bus over to Oakland, but Danny still wasn't home. She went in his room to wait, and though she didn't think she could, fell asleep at about one.

When she woke up, Danny was standing there looking at her sprawled across his bed. "What's the matter with you," he said, "didn't you even want any blankets?"

Melissa looked up at him. The first rays of sunlight were bursting through the window behind him. They hurt her eyes. She moved her head into the shadow cast by Danny's body. It was like a giant silhouette, and try as she might, she couldn't see his face. She realized she couldn't even remember what it looked like.

"Why didn't you tell me about her?" she asked suddenly.

"It didn't seem like there was anything to tell." He stopped, seemed to understand that he wasn't making sense even to himself. He scratched his forehead and rubbed his eyes.

"I used to like her... love her, I guess. She's probably going to die. Sometimes I almost wish she would." His voice sounded like he wanted to cry but knew he couldn't.

Melissa wanted to hug him, but she also wanted to rush out of his room and never see him again. She had no idea if she could trust him, but she also knew that she had no one else in the world that she could count on. She felt horribly lonely, even lonelier than on those long nights back on the mountain hiding under the covers while her father and his drinking buddies roared and cackled till dawn. She could almost imagine herself back in her room again, and it felt strangely comforting. Maybe it hadn't been so bad, when all there was to life was making sure tomorrow's homework was done and staying out of

your father's way when he was in a bad mood.

She buried her face in Danny's blankets. After a minute he sat down beside her and ran his hand awkwardly across the back of her head. She wanted to turn around and bite his face off.

"What were you talking about, you have to go to Willits?"

Melissa tried to ignore him, but knew she was being stupid. No one else was even remotely interested in her problems, let alone possibly willing to help her. She told him the whole story.

"But I don't understand. Your father sounds like a total psycho. Why would he sign your papers just because you showed up and asked him to?"

"I don't know. I don't know if anything will do any good. But what else can I do? If I get kicked out of school, I won't even have a place to live, I don't have any money, I don't know what would happen to me."

"I guess you'd have to join the punks then," he answered, sounding only half sarcastic.

"I don't want to join the goddam punks," she shot back. "Staying up all night drinking and dying your hair weird colors is fun, but it's not enough to base your life on. Only one kid in a thousand gets a chance to go to the University of California. I don't want to lose my chance."

"I still think you get stressed out about a lot of dumb stuff," said Danny, "but I've been thinking it was time for a road trip anyway. Let's go see this hippieland of yours. Isn't it about time for the pot harvest?"

"Harvest time isn't till October. And my parents are anything but hippies. More like white trash, except I hate to insult white people and trash like that."

Even Danny, who was about the most cynical and smart-alecky person Melissa had ever met, raised his eyebrows at the harshness of Melissa's statement, or maybe it was the tinge of sheer hate that clung to her voice. She even scared herself, enough so that she was quiet all the way down to the freeway.

It didn't take them long to get their first ride, all the way to the Old Redwood Highway just north of Santa Rosa. Someone offered to take them to Guerneville on the Russian River, and Danny was all for it, suggesting that going swimming would be a lot more fun than hiking up some mountain and fighting with her father. She couldn't tell if he was serious, but she gave him a look that told him he'd better not be.

Another ride took them to Healdsburg, and then a farmer driving a pickup truck full of chicken manure brought them to the outskirts of Ukiah. It was about 100°, long lines of cars with their windows rolled up and mean faces glaring out of them crawled in and out of shopping centers and fast food joints, and Melissa thought that if there was anything to all those religious stories, this surely must be something what hell looked like.

She'd always heard that Ukiah was one of the worst places to hitchhike, but luck must have been with them that day, because they hadn't even waited an hour when a carload of heavy metal kids pulled up. They were going all the way to Eureka, so they could drop Melissa and Danny right at the bottom of her road. She had an uneasy feeling, though, that these kids had only stopped because they were looking for trouble. When they started making comments about Danny's hair, which this week was green and orange, she was sure of it.

But if Danny realized that he was being picked on, he didn't show any sign of it. When someone made a stupid joke about the way he looked, he'd not only laugh, but say something to insult himself worse than anything the heavy metal kids could think of. By the time they were descending the Ridgewood Grade into Willits, Danny and the metal kids seemed like fast friends, and Melissa drifted off into her own world, watching familiar sights appear and half welcoming, half dreading the memories they brought with them.

Melissa's road was even drier and dustier than when she'd last

journeyed down it a few weeks earlier. There was no traffic in sight; with harvest time approaching, people tended to stay close to home. She thought they should just wait there at the bottom, since almost anyone who came along would give them a ride up the hill. But Danny was having none of that; he wanted to start walking. She got the idea that he thought it would be a great adventure to walk the whole fourteen miles.

After a while it looked as though he might get his way. They'd already been walking an hour when a car finally approached. It slowed down, and Melissa was sure she recognized the family inside, but instead of stopping, they merely stared at Danny and Melissa and then sped up again. Danny made faces and waved at them as they drove away.

He thought it was hilarious. "Did you see the way they looked at me? I bet they'd show more affection for a dead skunk on the side of the road."

Melissa wasn't feeling so lighthearted. "Danny, we have to get a ride. It'll be midnight before we get there if we walk all the way."

"Really? Cool. Do you think there'll be a moon out tonight?"

Two more cars passed them, and then it was dark, with no moon. Melissa reckoned that they were about halfway there. They slept underneath a Ponderosa pine, huddled together for warmth. The ground was thickly carpeted with needles that pricked at their flesh. Owls and coyotes and a breeze from the faraway sea filled the soft night air with their cries.

Morning was luminous, and even Melissa could not, at least for the moment, harbor bad thoughts about her mountain. Yes, her mountain, for despite all the sadness and hurt she had known here, she was more a child of this mountain than of her parents. She saw how it had shaped her, how its rigid contours and constantly changing face were mirrored in her own life. She thought for a sleepy moment that she could embrace the entire mountain in her arms. Then she was terrified, and wanted desperately to get away from here before the mountain swallowed her up forever.

"Come on, Danny," she urged, "we have to get going." Still groggy, he smiled and tried to kiss her.

"Why would you ever want to leave this place?" he asked a moment later. "This is so great. I don't care if I ever see the East Bay again."

"Maybe you can stay up here with my parents, then. I'll ask them. Come on! Today's Wednesday. If we don't get back these papers back to Berkeley by this afternoon, I'm kicked out of college. Then maybe we will have to stay up here."

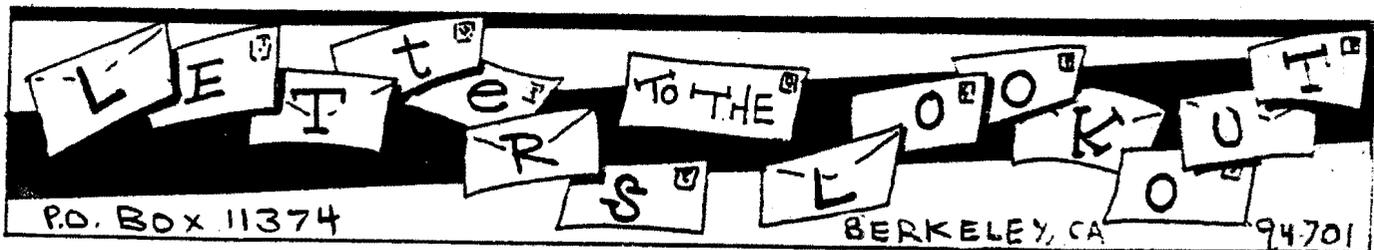
"Yeah, we could build a little cabin right here and..."

"It doesn't work that way. Come on."

They walked at least another three or four miles, and by now had come to the most scenic part of the mountain. Danny was impossible, stopping to look at every homestead, every little stream or waterfall, even running up to hug particular trees that struck his fancy. "Why couldn't we live here?" he kept asking. "We could grow our own food, and maybe some dope, and all our friends from the city could come up and stay with us and maybe build their own little houses..."

"After I graduate from college," Melissa said to humor him. Just then a pickup truck came along and offered them a ride the rest of the way. The first thing Melissa saw as she and Danny climbed out of the back was her father standing in the doorway of his tarpaper shack. Her mother stood in the yard, frozen in the act of hanging something on the clothesline, like a deer in the headlights of an onrushing car.

*To be continued...*



Some facts:

Q) I had CDs before I ever met you.

A) Name drop score: "Music can make you stupyd":

Green Day	7
Fifteen	2

B) Sleep S.B. are perfectly aware of Sleep UK. When notified of the two bands with the same name, the persyn who puts out Sleep UK's records merely laughed. How about Lawrence Livermore? Original name, eh?

D) I sold Plaid Retina CDs for \$7 ppd. Somehow this did not appear on the "friendly comparison chart." (in *Maximum Rockroll* — Ed.)

K) Revolver USA is a completely separate company from Revolver. Revolver Europe has only carried 100 copies each of the *Very Small World* and *Econochrist* LPs. They took none of the 13 other releases. Revolver USA buys some Mordam stuff, and, in fact, resells it to stores for less than Mordam does. It is three full time people in a warehouse and me (part time). Please take a few seconds and find out the true story just once.

M) I've only sold 600 23 More Minutes/Logical Nonsense split LPs. Is this not very small?

X) I'm only doing one (countem) CD at this time, and I'm lending my name to it. I'm investing nothing but time.

B) "Unavailable on MC/CD/DAT means don't look for the [*Very Small World*] comp in those formats. Lookout CDs still sell for \$14 in stores. I've seen them on tour.

David Hayes  
Very Small Records  
Emeryville

Dear David,

Q) That's cool.

A) Thank you for compiling that data for me, but actually our computer can do it faster and more accurately. If you'd like, in the future I can print a table at the beginning of the music column, à la *BAM*, telling how many times each band is mentioned.

B) I didn't mean to slag on Sleep or suggest that they were clueless. I just thought they might not know about Sleep UK. I didn't until I went to England last summer. Do you know anybody else named Lawrence Livermore?

D) We considered including the Plaid Retina CD in the chart, but finally decided against it because it wasn't a *Very Small* release. Sorry. Attention, everybody, David has Plaid Retina CDs for \$7 ppd.

K) Did I mention Revolver Europe? (I'll save you the trouble of looking it up; I didn't.) Professional means doing it as a business, which Revolver Anywhere does, I think. Three full time and a half employees is more than Lookout has, and we seem to take our share of flak for being a big sellout corporation. If Revolver is selling Mordam stuff cheaper than Mordam does, good for them.

M) We have records that don't sell, too. So does Warner Brothers.

X) Lookout started out with one CD too. How is "lending your name" to a bigger label that's putting up the money different from Nemesis lending/selling its "hardcore" name to Cargo?

B) The only reason I made that unnecessarily snide comment is that I think you're a little hypocritical for criticizing, either directly or by implication, other record labels for being somehow more commercial or less punk than yours, when in fact you're following the exact same course as any other punk rock businessman. Remember when *Very Small Records* was called *Fuck Twelve Inch Records* and you were only going to do 7" and 10" records? Remember when you refused to

have anything to do with cassettes? Or when you wrote that you supported yourself as a bicycle mechanic when in fact you were living off your punk rock record label? Yes, you're entitled to change your mind and to learn from your experience. It just seems that you apply more rigid standards to everyone else than you do to yourself.

As you well know, once records or CDs leave our distributor's hands, we have very little control how much stores in East Bumfuck charge for them. I saw *Very Small LPs* selling for \$16 in London. So what. I know you didn't have anything to do with that, and that you're not getting any of that extra money. For that matter, I heard that the President of your country was a lying, thieving, homicidal maniac. That proves you're fucked, OK?

Z) Now that we've yelled at each other about a bunch of inconsequential nonsense that will serve to amuse the readers but do nothing to further communication and understanding, how about agreeing to cut each other some slack and recognize that while we have some differences, we're not really very far apart at all in our values? If either of us needs to fight, I'm sure we can find more important enemies.

LL

P.S. For those who are new to this controversy, David and I were co-founders of Lookout Records, and operated the label together until the beginning of 1990 when he left to begin *Very Small Records*. Although you may not be able to tell from the verbal sniping above, I have a great deal of respect for him, and I hope he feels similarly about me. There were some hurt feelings in the process of splitting up the label and the different directions we followed, but I hope most of those are behind us now. This exchange of letters took place last year, and is reprinted here primarily for entertainment purposes.

Ed. Note: The following letter was not corrected for spelling or grammar, which is one of the privileges of editors who receive letters from imbeciles:

Lookout,

Was reminded by my first journey thru an issue of yours, Lawrence, of how dangerous a little knowledge can be, in the hands of a "chosen few..."

Like the Bible-pounding fundamentalists of the world who's chief interests lie in condemning and passing judgement rather than learning how to change and transform themselves into something of style and real grace. A truer kind of human being are rare, that choose to do more than just be quick to judge and slow to change; condemning as they go, miserable unto their self-righteous selves.

Theirs is clearly a hell I want no part. I do take a sly and amused comfort in seeing history repeat itself in the form of ever-new crops of human beings that choose to be all-knowing, self-righteous, and condemning, believing less in wisdom and truth, than their barely formed, half-assed outlooks. I find you and your mag fall neatly into this catagory very neatly, as well, as there is more to reality than meets the eye, kiddo...!

Thru all the negativity and passing judgement in your articles, the incessant noise and lack of intrinsic music in the message of the art and presence pervading these articles, of a mind self-absorbed with seeing nothing more than your own headlong rush to suicide. This tendency is very evident in adolescent folk swallowed up in their own pride and insufficiency to do anything more creative than play the hipper-than-thou games with other messed-up sibling peers.

With amusement and no particular concern though, I could enjoy

many of the sophomoric and lightweight meanderings of the articles, given how they reeked of weak little flashes of brilliance of an immature reactionary radical (he thinks), who took the three Rs at College of the Redwoods and UC Berkeley. Wow man! I'm impressed!

Lawrence, your beautiful man, just beautiful! But what a petty little victim and casualty of this society and environment you are. Though I can imagine Warhol's prophecy coming true, even for you. One real act, stemming from wisdom, before you pass from one chaos to another. You might find fame, perhaps, if you stop pontificating long enough and worrying about fraternities and sororities, and quit laying in your own vomit, and do something positive, though I doubt it!

Just wonder why you think you know it all, dude? There's more to wisdom and truth than one life time can know.

Being 5th generation Berkeley/Oakland boy who does remember (being 40 years young) a lot more the sacrifices and exciting times before, have led me to the present; still positive and creative. Through music I've learned patience, but you've tried mine today. In 1965 my sister helped start the Vietnam Day Committee, I was hanging out with Steve Kupka of Tower of Power and John Newcomb of the Loading Zone. By 1969, I was with Quicksilver as sound engineer, the Dead, onto the Doobie Brothers, War, Graham Central Station, Joni Mitchell. I was and remain one of those little fugitives who never get caught. Unlike your petty bourgeoisie "Berkeley ass," I've continued to change, payed very few taxes, traveled, expanded, and continued. The heavy dudes who trained me early on, stressed a low profile.

With pleasure and a low profile I dumped over a 100 copies of your negative mag in the garbage today. Although I agreed wholeheartedly with your surmise of the Peoples "Scumbag" Park fiasco. But you are another kind of fiasco, Lawrence!

It was a displeasure to wade through all the negative, meaningless "pap" and come to your feeble, shallow effacement of Bill Graham, after the fact of his death. Seems many of the great Tribes of the Indian Nation shared commonly the great Taboo of speaking ill of the Dead. After 1000s of years of living and surviving, they all universally saw a wisdom in this, there might be something to it, Dude!

Suppose it pisses you off that George Lucas has made millions, or one of my contemporaries from Berkeley High, Warrn Franklyn, has generated millions over-seeing Industrial Light and Magic. Or some other brothers and sisters successful in many areas to gain a foothold and create something new and deal with things as they get bigger without losing vision or original purpose. You're the "sell-out," punk.

Bill Graham managed the San Francisco Mime Troupe before forming the Fillmore. The Mime Troupe remains today the finest street-gorilla theatre yet today. But it's not my place to go on to teach you any history, baby. You went to UC Berkeley and took some classes.

Wow! There's much that Uncle Bill began that will still be going strong, long after you degenerate totally. Maybe after your mommy and daddy stop paying your way.

I can't waste any more of my time with this letter, Lawrence. There's more I'd love to share, than you'd care to consciously try to fit up your know-it-all punk ass. It's a waste of time trying to teach you any history, but next time leave alone, the dead, baby.

I'll take pleasure and without hesitation to dump any and all of your worthless, meaningless rags, whenever I encompass them. What a waste of paper and ink. Hope you and all your "real" hip friends live long and prosper!

Aarron Grant Owsley  
Emeryville

P.S. Couldn't even find anyone who needed any paper to line their birdcages with before I dumped your LookOuts! As modern dance/dramatic arts major at the illustrious UC Berkeley, can assure you that

you're no Gerry Cavanaugh, having known the man, many years before you. Take care, idiot.

Dear Aarron,

*I suppose justice would dictate that I give your letter the same treatment you gave my magazine, but because I have this antiquated devotion to "wisdom and truth," and feel secure enough about my own ideas to let them be compared to others, I'll happily print your barely coherent letter for the amusement and/or edification of about 10,000 more readers than you've ever had or likely will again.*

*To say that you've "known" Gerry Cavanaugh is just one of many misstatements. You might have met him, or even taken a class from him (though I doubt it; your illogic is too rampant), but I feel safe insaying that Gerry Cavanaugh would never countenance the attitudes of a nazi book burner, which, regardless of how you decorate it with your airhead hippie burnout rhetoric, is exactly what you are.*

*If you'd attempted or were capable of more than a superficial reading, you could easily have discerned that I am not some kid supported by his parents, but an old hippie, older than you in fact. Your "history" certainly comes as no news to me; much of it has been covered more accurately and in greater detail in past issues of the Lookout. You, or rather the fevered ravings of your too-long stagnant mind, serve as perhaps the best object-lesson I could present in why I long ago stopped feeling part of the 60s counterculture. It became profoundly anti-intellectual, virulently self-indulgent, and consumed with the sullen hostility portrayed by generations of know-nothings whenever confronted with something they couldn't understand. Your recitation of musical affiliations is a textbook display of the cultural degradation presided over by the Bill Graham monopoly.*

*If by the way, I thought myself to be any kind of "know-it-all," why do you suppose I undertook the difficult work and financial sacrifice (I paid every penny of the cost myself) of studying at UC Berkeley? I know a little bit about a number of things, and I try to share what I've learned with my readers. I'm think I'm pretty open to new ideas; at least I don't feel so threatened by them that I have to destroy the books or magazines they're printed in.*

Lawrence -

If you're going to gossip to your readers and throw names around, get them right. You mention *Finster* as being produced by "major league chyx Erin and KJ," when in truth we (Mary and Rebecca) did more than half the work. I guess we're not "major league" enough, or is that punk enough? Or maybe we went to the "nicepunk" show, or Lank's practice, instead of to whatever party you were at.

The other problem is that we've been doing our zine since last spring, when we distributed our first issue at the No Means No show in March at the Armory in Eureka. You showed no interest in our zine at that point, maybe because you didn't know who the two of us were, and obviously still don't (regardless of the fact that you came to our house later in the summer). It just took us until August to get our second issue together (if we're throwing our punkness around, maybe it should be mentioned that it was put together at the "de facto punk headquarters" where Mary was living; one reason for the lapse of time between issues). They did not both just magically appear this summer!

Also, Erin was only involved in issue #2, "IDig Chicks", and has her own mini-zine, *Feeding the Fowls*. The other three of us did *Finster*, so if you're going to gossip, get the facts right or else leave it alone.

Sincerely,  
Mary  
Arcata

*Geez, what do you think this is, the New York Times? I cite the above letter as further proof, if any was needed, that not only do I not know everything, but that about some things I know very little indeed. On the other hand, I don't know where you get off being so harsh,*

Mary; most people would be happy to have their magazines mentioned at all. And while I wish that I'd given out more accurate information, has it ever occurred to you that in the process of creating a 32-page magazine which contains about as much text as a couple hundred pages of Finster, I might not be able to track down every piece of information with perfect accuracy? But believe me, it was an honest mistake; I'm not out to destroy your reputation or assassinate your character. Why should I, when in fact I don't even know you?

LL

Lawrence Livermore -

I fully subscribe to your anti-auto position in the winter issue of *Lookout*. Any economic system or transportation infrastructure that forces human beings into a \$10,000 smogmobile that costs over \$1,000 in "insurance" and thousands more in gasoline, maintenance, Gulf Wars, ecological destruction, etc., etc., not to mention countless deaths just to get a job, get food, and visit other human beings is inefficient at best, insane at worst.

But I think you erred in your "Around The Emerald Triangle" piece. There, in an otherwise flawless diatribe against Highway 101's creeping auto-culture, you talk about the rail option, and state that "if the tracks were improved, we could have high speed trains like they do in Europe and Japan which transport people at twice the speed of automobiles with only half the environmental damage."

I agree: we need more trains! But why move 300 miles per hour? You may wish to go to Humboldt County in less than one hour (at bullet-train speed), but why not take the train all day? Not only would it be more leisurely, but you might learn something as you look out the window, stop outside and look around, meet people, organize, make love, whatever. (Isn't it enough that you can talk to Humboldt County at 186,000 mph?)

But Larry, more is at stake than just a leisurely train ride in the woods to Humboldt. The transportation industry, like all modern capitalist enterprises, exaggerates the importance of speed, making our lives and livelihood dependent upon ever increasing increments of speed, until there is nothing left in life but constant motion and its coincident, motion sickness. The instantly forgettable blur-out-the-window that the politico-corporate bounty hunters create is in their interest. Imagine if more of us moved slowly through the woods or the cities, taking time to actually notice all the shit going down and then tried to do something about it!

That you can't "afford" to move slowly because, for example, you work for a living and need to get somewhere quickly, illustrates clearly how trapped we've become. Speed, rather than bringing people together, actually keeps people apart by isolating them into tiny compartments that move, move, move. Speed, though a temporary stimulant to our senses (it feels good to move quickly; see T.E. Lawrence's moving elegy to motorcycle riding at speed), distorts our perception of the environment by blurring it, which is a common side effect of stimulants.

So, less autos on California's Highway 101 is the right way to go. But a bullet train is disingenuous. Radical change can be pursued only if we say no to the speedmeisters and yes to feet, bicycles, or trains that move no more than, say, 25 mph. I look forward to your next piece: "Say No To Speed."

Sid Que  
San Francisco

People, including myself, are often in a hurry to get things done, and I don't think it's all a capitalist plot. If I want to visit a friend in another state, I may want to move very slowly indeed during the precious hours that I'm with that friend, but please forgive me if I fail to see the charm of staring at Nevada for 16 or 24 hours on the way there because you think the experience of traveling across it at 25 mph will be good for me.

There's a time for speed and a time for slowness; neither is

intrinsically evil. If you were being disembowelled by barbarian hordes, I don't suppose you'd see anything terribly wrong with your rescuers travelling as fast as they could to help you. Likewise, if someone has to commute from Eureka to Ukiah (i.e., from hell to nowhere and back) every day, the chances are slim that you'll be able to entice him out of his car with a train that takes two or three times longer to make the same journey. Greyhound buses routinely travel on Highway 101 half empty for the same reason.

For that matter, I could be typing this on an old-fashioned typewriter and taking my time to savor the "process" of imprinting meaning-laden characters on paper, but I'd rather use a computer and do it in half the time because there are other things I'd much rather do than sit around typing. Apparently you feel the same, since your letter was processed on the same sort of split-nanosecond machine that I use. Technology can (must) be used wisely; it certainly won't go away just because we turn our backs on it.

Dear Lawrence,

I'm sure at the end of this letter, in your inevitable rebuttal, you will admonish me for writing a letter about your punk rock news when I could be doing something infinitely more constructive. However, here goes anyway...

The slagging of such bands as Mudhoney, L7, etc., I believe is unfounded in the "it's precisely what punk originally rebelled against" criticism. This is true to an extent. Yes, the Ramones and the Sex Pistols were the antithesis of 70s cock rock, I agree, yet are Mudhoney, L7, etc., really in the same boat as Bad Company? I just don't see the similarities between Deep Purple's music and that of Mudhoney. Sure, everyone can hear the blatant Led Zeppelin influences of Soundgarden or the watered down 70s funk influences of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, but from what band or sound from the 70s is Mudhoney stealing? Since we have only one alternative radio station here in the Nashville area which is often off the air, I am frequently forced to listen to "classic rock" stations. Yet I have never heard anything on these vaguely resembling "Touch Me, I'm Sick."

The eternal fanzine question of "What is punk?" also relates to this. Everyone has to decide for themselves, I suppose, so if Mudhoney or Tad isn't punk to you, why can't it be as punk to me as Bad Religion or Green Day?

On the whole, Lawrence, I find your magazine to be one of the best things I ever bought for a dollar. The Melissa piece is really cool, and your commentary is inspired. George Orwell often comes to mind when I read your writing. I hope you find that statement to be a compliment, because that is how I mean it.

Josh Reynolds  
Murfreesboro TN

How could I upbraid you for not finding more constructive things to do when I seem to find time myself to dispense many pages of wisdom on the fairly arcane minutiae of punk rock? You've never heard anything else vaguely resembling "Touch Me, I'm Sick"? Count your blessings. Why can't Mudhoney or Tad be punk to you? For the same reason that Winger can't be rap to me, or Madonna can't be grand opera to anyone.

Larry -

Hey, finally got them buyers here at Ben Weenie's favorite distributor, Important, to order the glorious mag of heart, soul, and the occasional snide asides, *Lookout*. The men's room library will never be the same, and the opportunity to hip some of these record stores to one of the smoothest readin' rags around will certainly be something I will count as a pleasure. I was amazed, somewhat sadly, to find that very few folks I was attempting to sell it to were familiar with the pleasure a good *Lookout* read can bring, but who am I to begrudge myself the pleasure of being the bearer of glad news. I just tell 'em it's the mag put out by the guys who have given the world Operation

Ivy and Green Day, and it's the easiest sale around.

Belly laughs a-plenty when I told my stores about the "Get Rich Quick World of Punk Rock" issue of *Maxi Rocker*. The common response, outside of guffaws and groans, of course, is "Who do I send my letter to, who do I thank for the BMW I bought with the profits I made on the Noam Chomsky/Bad Religion single?" When propaganda hits the cold hard reality of the market place, well, I don't think the response is quite what old T.Y. (*Tim Yohannan*) had in mind. My response is if so much cash is to be made in pee-rock, why are distributors the world over of this incredible source of untold wealth collapsing quicker than a Mykel Board hard-on? Typical of "us-good-them-bad" chop logic from the Timmy Core crowd. Someday I gotta regurgitate that Pope of Punk cartoon I did for Touch and Go 8 or 80 years ago. The fellow is still trying to set himself up as the moral authority of the underground. And like so many moral authorities, he is sadly lacking in many of the qualities he demands in others. I think it's called hypocrisy. Amazing how the Timmy Cores point fingers at everyone else and yet never raise the possibility that the ad-choked *Maxi Rocker* must be amongst the most financially rewarding cash cows in the biz. After all, we all know how much money is to be made in punk. Chop logic, right?

I've been living here in the Golden West for an entire year, and I've come up with a highfalutin' theory about a basic difference between east coast and west coast folks. It seems to me that west coast people have a strong need to be right (i.e., correct) on the important matters in life, and have a need to have this correctness recognized by others. East coast fellows, such as my warm and caring self, seriously doubt the concept of rightness or the ability of those about them to be the confident possessors of an untainted correctness. One day, as an example, as I sat munching a rather tasty ham sandwich in the lunch room, I was informed that many of those around me were being made uncomfortable by my enjoyment. When I asked why, I was told I was in the company of vegetarians! My response was, "Cool, so now you all have something in common with Adolf Hitler."

Turns out no one was aware Der Dolph was a cabbage muncher, nor did they find the comparison all that amusing or appropriate. Now back east such a comment to the veggies would have been met with equally obnoxious abuse, but here people seemed, well, bothered. It's a very distinct cultural difference, I think. The same reason a Touch and Go record or *Forced Exposure* never appeared on the west coast or a *Maxi Rocker* on the east.

Anyway, it's time for me to head on home. Some day I'll head up to the Bay Area in hopes I'll be privileged to buy you a beer.

John Crawford  
Torrance CA

*Few readers will be aware of the Tim Yohannan-John Crawford feud, which dates back to the early 80s, and even fewer will recall what it was about. I will say nothing here to enlighten them or to perpetuate said feud, except to note that nobody wants to know, guys. As for MRR being a cash cow, it's true, but it's also true that much of that cash goes back into very worthwhile projects. And while I have many criticisms of my own of the way Tim and MRR conduct business, I'd still have to say that they come closer to living up to their own principles than do most people. Yes, they're often self-righteous, but they're also often right, and I think that irritates people as much if not more. I think the same goes for Crawford, the creator of Baboon Dooley; his lampooning of hypocrisy and pretentiousness wouldn't drive people up the wall if it weren't so often right on the mark.*

Hello Larry, Epicenter, and everyone at MRR...

...and all you staunch feelers of deep compassion for the beleaguered human race, from all of us hapless, ignorant, under-educated, non-Michelob drinking, drug-addled, penniless yuppies (whew!) or "da punx" (a subconscious attempt to connect us to Huelsenbeck?)

Yes, Larry, this is about your column (*in MRR, I don't know what issue; but essentially I said that many punks were just yuppies with less money*). Now I'm in between copping and I'm out of booze (excuse me, I just chanced upon a swallow) and I have only a roach to my name. This condition may cause me to ramble and smudge the script a lil' (seems I don't have the ominous privilege of a word processor).

First of all, your attempt to rip Asian history out of context was a tad bit amusing, I'll have to admit (*I compared the inability of traditional Chinese civilization to adapt to the challenge posed by Western industrialism and imperialism to the innate and self-constricting conservatism of the punk subculture - though it's probably true of subcultures in general, because their tininess and marginalization tends to make them very defensive*). But if it was meant to substantiate your gross generalizations and attack on myself and my friends (yes, we took it personal) then I feel, in all your fairness, Tim You should pinch your little, soft cheeks and take away your phone privileges so your small-minded compadres can't validate your little scene elitist diatribes. We don't really care that much that MRR has dissed the "picnic" events that Pete Scum and Chelsea have been putting on the past several months, being that your competitive attitude would naturally make you unsupporting of any D.I.Y. event that you were not asked to be involved in (even though you were welcome to become involved on the same level as all other participants). But we do disliked being stereo-typed as a single-minded group that adheres to some archaic fashion trend just because most of us exhibit self-abusive behaviour in public with regard to outsiders that attend these "picnics." You are mistaken, sadly, to perceive this as an attempt at "radical" behaviour. It is, in fact, a trend that was established within most of us at an early age; a need for self-medication, a self-therapy of auto-terrorism, if you will. If you could overcome your disdain for this tendency we exhibit and speak to us face to face (and not through your word processor) you might find us to be a group that places more (much more) value on individual autonomy than conforming to stereotypes for more social validation purposes.

But I guess for someone who was cool enough to be "punk" like in 1956 your tolerance is probably much more diminished these days. Now that is unreasonable, but it is a good example of your "journalism" in the column. How do you know anything that doesn't confirm what we don't want to "know anything that doesn't confirm what we already know"?! We ask lots of questions, constantly, about ourselves in relation to this world and the circumstances that we have to deal with on a daily basis. I don't need a fucking "fanzine" to tell me how harsh the world is. I fucking live here to you little snob. Just because you pronounce human experience as trivial just doesn't make it so. I think I'll hold out for the final word on that one, Mr. God Fucking Alternative Hierarchy Man. Keep writing from your lofty, masculine perspective. I'm glad you finally tired of your "counterculture," I am too. It alienates me as much as the "mainstream culture" and I'm going to keep drinking and smoking and shooting until I can finally stop choking back my fucking useless tears. Please, the last thing any of us need is another judge.

Razor XIII  
SF Bulldogs  
Minneapolis Gutter Punx  
Chaos Through Beer  
Bacchus Forever

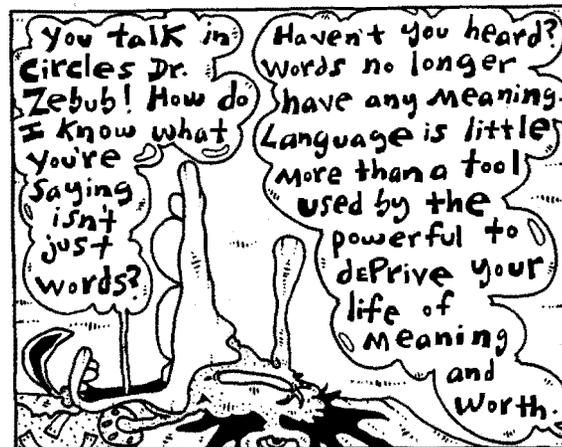
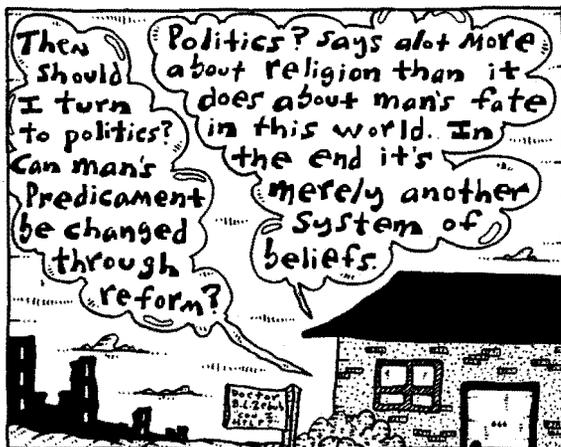
P.S. Our position is that of warriors between two worlds, one of which we do not recognize and another which does not exist. We must precipitate the crash. Hasten the end of the world.

—Raoul Vanegm, 1961

*A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.*

LL

**Baboon Dooley Spends another Fruitless Hour of Therapy with Dr. B. L. Zebub, Head Shrinker - Bud Drinker!**



# MUSIC CAN MAKE YOU STUPID?



Well, I guess I was wrong and I owe **WALTER GLASER, MIKE LAVELLA, JEFF BALE,** and the other progressive scenesters at *MRR* a big apology. Seems they were right all along, and the Seattle **SUB POP-NIRVANA-MUDHONEY-SOUNDGARDEN** etc. etc. blah blah scene really is what's happening. How, after years of carping that the whole thing was one more chapter in the endless saga of major label retro-70s commercial pap and sludge, did I arrive at this realization? Why, I read it in *Rolling Stone*. That bible of ultimate hipness not only had a cover story on Nirvana, but devoted several pages to pronouncing Seattle the "new Liverpool." (Liverpool, for our younger readers, is a city in England.)

The same ultra-cool ish featured a story, replete with photos of his many tattoos, on our favorite stand-up comedian, **HENNY ("Call Me HANK") ROLLINS**, wherein the the screaming, screeching, grunting and groaning one allows that the most exciting musical things he's seen in recent years are **JANE'S ADDICTION** and **PUBLIC ENEMY**. We weren't sure what exactly Henny admires about JA, whether it's singer **PERRY FARRELL's** love of heroin or his adulation of pit violence ("I love to see people beating the shit out of each other while we're playing," he once told me; "it makes me feel like we're really connecting.")

But as for PE, Mr. Rollins professed himself to be agog over singer **CHUCK D.'s** brilliant insights, such as the fact that America practices a form of apartheid. I was staggered to realize this too; all these years, I'd been thinking that the United States of America was a haven of perfect racial equality and justice. I sure am glad that Mr. Rollins and Mr. D came along to straighten me out. Next: Chuck D and Henny R together in one of those Calvin Klein pouty-faced butt-bumping black-leather underpants ads.

(Not so far-fetched, actually; Rollins is a male model for The Gap, and Chuck D is launching his own line of designer clothing called "Rapp Style.")

Yet credit where credit is due: Rollins recently donated his efforts to a major AIDS fundraiser down Hollywood way. While the lineup of "entertainers" sounded excruciatingly unpleasant (**RED HOT CHILIPEPPERS, BEASTIE BOYS, PRIMUS,** and Perry Farrell's new band, **PORNO FOR PYROS**, in other words, the usual whitebread MTV garden slugs), \$150,000 was raised for a good cause. And Henry, who has been, shall we say, less than supportive of the homosexual community, did his bit to redeem himself.

So, by the way, did vociferous moron **AXL ROSE**, who no doubt helped his homosexual admirers feel less guilty about the **GUNS 'N ROSES** discs stashed at the back of their closets by performing at the gigantic **FREDDIE MERCURY** memorial concert/AIDS benefit at London's Wembley Stadium. Axl topped off his appearance by dueting with pudgy follower of football and fashion **ELTON JOHN**, a pairing that must have been nearly as thrilling as the recent exhumation of brain-dead **BEATLE GEORGE HARRISON** (note: "Beatle" attached for identification purposes only) at a benefit for Britain's loonycentric Natural Law Party, an event graced, she told us in her usual breathless manner, by Berkeley's own **GINA ARNOLD**.

Speaking of the East Bay's favorite "rock" critic, **ERNST** of **JACK ACID** has been printing **KILL GINA ARNOLD** T-shirts, now seen on various punk backs about town. I've also had a couple of apparently quite serious people urging me to take over Gina's chores at the *Express* on the grounds that the only way she would ever write

anything about the East Bay (her alleged beat) is if the **REPLACEMENTS** or that other band that begins with **F** and has a bald singer who's like Jesus Christ, only nicer, happened to play here.

Not likely, though. I couldn't sit through most of the events the *Express* deems newsworthy, and besides, I don't think even the clueless *Express* would be foolish enough to turn Gina out to pasture. She's the best thing they've got going for them, the one writer people consistently read and react to, even if it's only to babble in incoherent rage. Besides, Gina is a competent, even good, writer when it comes to putting words together in a way that the reader knows what she's talking about. Now if only *she* knew what she was talking about...

Some things never change, no matter where you are. For instance, here in London there's *Time Out*, the glossy mass-market equivalent of the *Express* or *SF Weekly*, where we find **LAURA LEE DAVIES** (read: **GINA ARNOLD**) pontificating about **PUBLIC IMAGE LTD**: "With a solid core of...blah, blah...PiL is as relevant as ever. You can't say the same thing of any other punk product."

Without delving into the question of whether **JOHNNY "ROTTEN" LYDON** was ever relevant, and if so, to what, the author coos and gurgles for a couple pages about how "Johnny", who appears to be trying to outdo his aesthetic mentor **MALCOLM MCLAREN** as London's most noted merchant of self-referential schlock, "didn't surrender his social beliefs when he walked away from the **SEX PISTOLS**." Unfortunately, she doesn't bother to clue us in on just what those beliefs might have been. Gee, just when I thought I'd found a new source of inspiration for how to live my life...

Of course if history and culture continue to observe their awful symmetry, **LL Davies** will soon follow in the footsteps of Our Gina and be bludgeoned into the blinding revelation that some "punk product" is indeed relevant, i.e., moves units (*shifts* them, as they prefer to say here in the country that converses as if it were part of that *Reader's Digest* feature called "Toward More Picturesque Speech.")

Speaking of shifting those units, **NIRVANA** (though I still refuse to consider them as having ever had anything to do with punk) are doing as good a job of it here as back in hot-dog land, even if **GINA ARNOLD** (yes, her again; she dogs my path) thought she was ever so clever for stumping a London busker with a request for that underground classic that only the hip in-scenesters know about, I think it's called "Sells Like Teen Shit" or something. But then they do that with all sorts of American crap, Hmmm, it must be after midnight, the radio is playing "God Save The Queen." No, not that one.

It's 12:15 now, and I finally got up and changed the radio station, realizing that Radio 4 (station of choice for neurotic intellectuals and people who take politics seriously; you tell me which one I am) really was going to bombard me with blank-air static indefinitely. I got about a minute of **PATSY CLINE** warbling "Walking After Midnight" on BBC2 before the standard prat announcer started telling us her life story in one of those North Midlands accents that says, "Jolly good thing I made it to London before my brain completely atrophied."

Then into **RAY CHARLES**, among my short-listed candidates for most contemptible creature in show business, sort of the **CLARENCE THOMAS** of phony soul music, all shuckin' and grinnin' and "Let me lick up those boots for you massa." Fer chrissake, this twentieth-century Stepin Fetchit sang "America the

Beautiful” at the Republican goddam convention. Don’t get me wrong, I think America’s just as beautiful as the next guy, but I find that beauty seriously marred by things like Republican conventions. I’m funny that way; I didn’t care much for the Nazi rallies at Nuremberg, either.

Though as I recall it, those fun-loving goose steppers didn’t have Jewish tap dancers enlivening their festivities. Ray Charles singing for his supper before the most powerful organization of white racists in America didn’t exactly warm the cockles of my heart. It had an inspiration quotient similar to the spectacle of JAMES BROWN hugging RICHARD NIXON as he endorsed the mad bomber of Indochina for president.

(Zowie, another radio station off the air, and it’s not even two a.m. Now I understand what MICK JAGGER (he used to be in this hippie comedy act called the ROLLING STONES) was moaning about when he crooned, “I’ve got silence on my radio” in that cocaine classic “Moonlight Mile.”)

While we’re on the subject of radio, who should turn up on BBC’s Radio One the other night but STEFAN CHIRAZZI, heavy metal critic for one of the Bay Area’s leading cultural organs, *BAM*. Stefan was full of gossip about Frisco’s hottest new headbangers, most of whom I admit having never heard of, and in-scene gossip about rad groups like FAITH NO MORE and GUNS N’ ROSES. Stefan confided that he had finally figured out GnR’s lead singer, AXL ROSE. “See, he’s got all this power, but he’s a total loon. Like he could order everyone in his crew to wear underpants on their head, and they’d *have* to do it. I think that’s beautiful, man.”

Yeah, well, Stefan dude, perhaps you’ve forgotten that numerous loons throughout history have had or sought the power to make people do idiotic and useless things. (Besides, TRE COOL wore underpants on his head in downtown Eureka the first time the LOOKOUTS played Humboldt County, and nobody even had to tell him to.) But seriously, Stefan’s interplay with the program’s host, a jovial dingbat called CRUSHER, illustrated much of what’s wrong about heavy metal.

The songs the duo played weren’t all bad (save NAPALM DEATH, who sounded as ridiculous as ever, only louder), but the guys talked about music like sportscasters at a football match. It was all how high a song was charting, how many million pounds the new album was costing, how many groupies turned out for the show in Houston. Nothing about meaning or content, nothing to indicate that the music was anything different from the corporate product that’s been clogging the brainwaves of the world’s youth ever since media conglomerates sussed out how to co-opt hippie rebellion at the dawn of the 1970s.

Stefan, who once wrote in *BAM* that his roots were in punk, made it clear that he never got much out of his connection to the safety-pin-and-mohican brigades. The raddest he got on the radio was the likes of DISCHARGE and BAD BRAINS, two ersatz punk bands who moved into metal as soon as they figured out enough guitar licks, and whose attitudes were right in line with metal moronicism all along.

Speaking of metallic matters, the February issue of *Maximum Rockroll* brought us JEFF BALE’s long-awaited exposition of (I

quote): “Why GUNS N’ ROSES are more important than 50 average punk bands.” Jeff, the punk world’s leading revisionist historian, informs us that punk has always been about rebellion, and since GnR can induce thousands of testosterone-ridden teenagers to punch the air with their fists, therefore they *rock*. Or something like that.

We’ve heard this before, going back at least a century or three. Rebellion for the sake of rebellion, etc. But rebellion, like other aspects of reality, doesn’t exist in a vacuum. People rebel for or against things. And what is the *cause célèbre* of the Guns N’ Roses crew? Primarily, it would seem, the right to PARR-TEEE, not to mention the right to call women bitches and hos, slag off immigrants and racial minorities, and in general to play to the hilt the role of *Americanus ignoramus dingbaticus*.



Yeah, a bit of rebellion is good for the soul and for society at large, as Thomas Jefferson, among others, cogently argued. But that doesn’t make rebellion in itself a good thing. Maybe it’s an extreme example, maybe not: someone who burns a cross on a black family’s lawn is rebelling both against the law and the normal standards of decency. Does that make it an admirable act?

Growing your hair long, taking loads of drugs, playing your guitar very loud, and screaming a lot may have been subversive acts 25 years ago. Today they mean nothing; any 16 year-old suburban brat can switch on his MTV and learn all there is to learn about rock/metal “rebellion” in an afternoon of couch potato-dom.

What Jeff also misses in his idealization of unstructured revolt is that one person’s freedom to be obnoxious and aggressive often involves the curtailment of another person’s freedom. One rock-n-roller’s “right” to play music as loud and as often as he likes could mean a lost night of sleep and a miserable next day at work or school for dozens of others. The

freedom to drive one’s car wherever and whenever you want means subjecting everyone along the way to noise, pollution, and the danger of being squashed into a pancake. Bands who use their freedom of speech to pander to sexual or racial hatred help create a climate where millions of people, especially women, lose the freedom to walk down the streets of our cities without fear of being harassed or assaulted.

Is that wholly the fault of Guns N’ Roses or Jeff Bale? Of course not. But anyone who sings the praises of unchecked individualism is living in a dangerous dream world. This is not the Wild West; there isn’t limitless space for every person to indulge every fantasy without thought for the consequences on others. We live in a crowded, complex society, and everything we do has multifarious impacts. How to make those impacts as benign as possible while curtailing personal freedom as little as possible is the sort of question any worthwhile artist should be concerned with.

The championing of absolute freedom or absolute rebellion is socially irresponsible and logically indefensible. Never mind that Jeff Bale says, “I spend all week doing research and study; the last thing I want to do when I go out is be “smart.” Smartness and stupidity can’t be compartmentalized anymore than life can. There are professors with Nobel Prizes who live monumentally stupid lives, and toilet scrubbers with eighth-grade educations who live profoundly intelligent ones. In imagining that his years of work and study toward a Ph.D. can be arbitrarily switched off for a recreational night of acting stupid, Jeff shows enormous disrespect for the mental ability that got him as far

as he is.

And lest you think I can only criticize others without putting forth constructive proposals of my own, here's my own contribution to the debate: **WHY GREEN DAY ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN FIFTY MILLION IDIOTIC GUNS N' ROSES CLONES**. Because Green Day's music is a zillion times better than all of them put together. And why is it better? Because it makes people feel good without pandering to their stupid and violent instincts. Sure, I imagine Guns N' Roses leave their audiences feeling good too, but what kind of good? I can hear someone defending his years in the Hitler Youth with: "No, dude, there was nothing political about it for us; we just got off on all raw power of it, you know like 50,000 of us all marching and chanting together. It was just a way of channeling our agressions."

One more item on Professor Bale: when I concocted the idea of smart punks, I said that a big part of my motivation was to see if people would seriously argue that it was punk to be dumb. My expectations were not disappointed, as many erstwhile punks tried to prove their superior punkness by redoubling their efforts to be stupid.

But one charge I wasn't prepared for was that smart punks were "upper class," as Jeff "Champion of the Working Class" Bale put it. As founder and president of the smart punks, you can only imagine how thrilled I was to learn of my sudden elevation in social status. My father, who raised four kids on a postal clerk's salary and was never able to afford a car less than five years old, was even more overjoyed. He was curious, though, about why he had to spend his upper-class retirement years in downriver Detroit instead of a more appropriate villa in the south of France. Perhaps Jeff will clarify that issue for us?

Still more excited at his promotion into the aristocracy was smart punk **CHRIS APPELCORE**, raised by a single mother on welfare. While the Boy Blunder was indeed born with silver spoon planted firmly in his mouth, it was a constant source of stress to him when mom had to pawn it to buy cornflakes.

Amazing how much devotion the now-defunct **CRINGER** inspire here in England. The San Francisco politico-pop-punksters, who played their last show in October or November 1991, were finally starting to catch on in California when they broke up. But in England, you'd think they were the next **L7** or something, even if most people do pronounce their name "Crin-ger."

Guitarist and (?) singer **LANCE HAHN** and bassist **GARDNER FUSHIHARA**, who originally formed Cringer in Hawaii some six years ago, have gone on to their next big thing: **J CHURCH**, which non-West Bayers might not know is also a streetcar line, the one, trivia buffs, that comes closest to the Maximum Rocknroll penthouse.

Also defunct, or kaput, or depunkt: **BLATZ**, who for most of their two storied years seemed so on the brink of imminent collapse that no one was prepared for the end when it finally came. I was out of the country, so I have no inside information about who did what to whom and who's suing whom over lost royalties, but suffice it to say that Gilman Street's longest-lived conceptual art statement has reintegrated itself into the underlying chaos of the universe.

**JESSE** and **ANNA BLATZ** are working on something called **GR'UPS** with **DEB D.**, and **MATT OP IV DOWNFALL MDC GENERATOR RANCID**. **BIG SEAN** of **WAT TYLER** had staff and customers of Portobello Road's **VINYL SOLUTION** in stitches with his one-man imitation of one of their practice sessions.

**SEAN** himself of is still gloating wildly over being pictured on the cover of Maximum Rocknroll, removing the last obstacle to his unchallenged status as self-proclaimed King Of The Punx (UK division). His only remaining rival, **DAVE-FERGUSON-AND-HIS-DOG-GIRO** (a giro, non-Brits might want to know) is an unemployment cheque), was disqualified when it was learned that Dave, whose classic Sid-with-a-purple-quiff looks have been adorning

the scene since before some current punks were born, had never seen the **SEX PISTOLS**. Sorry, Dave. No, Sean has never seen the Sex Pistols either, but he has shaken hands with both **TIM YOHANNAN** and **MALCOLM McCLAREN**, and if you ask him nicely, he'll use the very same hand to shake yours.

Back in the USA: I caused some hubbub in the burgeoning E-town (that's Eureka to you outlanders) scene by identifying burgeoning new cult faves **SISTER PLACEBO** as **PLACEBO EFFECT**. In my defense I can only say that it was late at night, just before deadline, and there was a punk band by the latter name at one time or place, I'm pretty sure. Anyway, Placebo Effect is long gone, as far as I know, and Sister Placebo is still kicking, which is the important part.

We're hearing good things about another Eureka band, **MY NAME IS CHRIS**, featuring, among others, the rather uniquely named **UTRILLO WIND POLARITY BELCHER**. And his mom claims she was never a hippie, either, just a member of the "art elite." Her other son is called **LUTA RAIN DAKOTA**... I heard about a ten-second snatch of a **MNIC** practice tape over the phone and thought it sounded like **GREEN DAY**, then a few weeks later got the chance to see the band at the Eureka Power Station, opening for... Green Day. The highlight was drummer Utrillo's debut as a guitarist, covering a **SISTER PLACEBO** song; unfortunately, he ignored my suggestion to dress up as Sister Pee's guitarist **BRYAN SPINAS** (his real name; say it fast and don't think about it). Speaking of tying everything together, the other opening band was a **BILLY CHILDISH** cover band (I'm **JOKING**, no death threats, please) called the **NE'ER DO WELLS**, with GD's original drummer, **AL SOBRANTE**. The group, also includes **JOHN D.** and **CHRIS I.** of **BRENT'S TV** and the **DUKES OF BURL** and **JESS** of **ARCATA** (not a band, at least not yet).

I've been to a couple shows now at the Power Station, which boasts the charming (I'm serious) decor of a disco situated in a suburban shopping mall, and I still haven't gotten over the sensation of hanging out on the sidewalk in the middle of downtown Eureka as if it were the front of **GILMAN STREET**. I mean for so many years, Eureka was the semi-urban equivalent of the Phantom Zone, and now all of a sudden it's becoming the cultural mecca of Humboldt County. The newly arrogant Eureka scenesters are even beginning to sneer at the elderly "poseurs" in neighboring Arcata, long unchallenged as Humboldt's oasis of all things punk and rad.. "It's like Eureka=East Bay, Arcata=West Bay," said zine publisher and man-about-town **LEUMAS NONNED**, and he may be on to something. Not that I want to promote intra-scene rivalries or anything (ha ha, what else would I write about if I didn't?).

Humboldt is definitely becoming trendy, though, with jaded East Bay fux (why are you looking at me like that?) beginning to make regular odysseys there in hopes of getting in touch with something or other (green bud?). A whole posse followed **NUISANCE** there for their sold-out Power Station gig, after which renowned ska-boy **JOEL WING** showed the naive Eureka punksters how to be stupid EB-style by breaking bottles at the Pulp View Pier and drawing the attention of the Eureka police, who so far have been relatively tolerant toward local punx. I am resisting, but only barely, the temptation to print the home addresses of Joel's home address so visiting Eurekaans can break bottles on his doorstep to show punk solidarity.

A more poignant case was posed when East Bay resident **THADDICUS BUMBLESCRUMP** tried to re-establish his Eureka roots by making a marathon journey (piloted by ubiquitous scenester **ERIC YEE**) to catch Green Day at the Power Station. Trouble was, T and E didn't leave Berkeley till 5 pm, and the show started at 7. Luckily Green Day broke a couple of strings, which delayed things enough so that the E. Bay travelers actually got to see two songs before turning around for the five and a half hour journey back to hell (budding smart punk Thaddicus had an eight a.m. class). Actually, he hung out at Denny's for a while, and I almost felt guilty for tormenting

him about no longer being true blue Humboldt. Almost.

Humboldt expatriate, JOHN "KWITTY" QUITTNER, now of Olympia WA, was in Berkeley recently. PAT. H and THADICUS BUMBLESCRUMP, of the FUCK CALVIN JOHNSON AND ALL OF HIS WORKS KLUB, tried to take the opportunity to pump Kwitty for damaging info on their arch-antihero, but Kwitty wasn't talking, not much, anyway, though he did give a damaging demonstration of Mr. J's come-hither disco dance style.

It was like seeing "the STONES at the Coliseum in '76," was how *BAM's* LORRY FLEMING put it. That doesn't sound like much of a recommendation to me, since by 1976 the Rolling Stones were a pathetic, bloated, depressing replica of their once-great selves, going through the motions for audiences of suburbanites who would pay any price or bear any burden to feel like they were part of the 60s rock culture of their big brothers and sisters.

But Lorry was of course speaking of PUBLIC ENEMY's recent appearance at San Francisco's Warfield Theater, and while PE haven't been around nearly long enough to reach the grotesque and putrefying state of the latter-day Stones, neither did any accounts of the event make it sound like much more than a not particularly significant spectacle for the LOLLAPALOOZA crowd.

My disdain for Public Enemy is no secret, of course; I've long thought they were overrated and the beneficiaries of a form of reverse discrimination wherein woolly-brained liberals are willing to overlook shoddy thinking and careless ignorance on the grounds that "it's a black thing; we're too lame to understand." What's gratifying is that some writers, both black and white, are beginning to at least wonder whether there's less to the PE phenomenon than meets the eye.

The *Bay Guardian* featured four separate reviews of the Warfield show, and each of the critics raised one or more of the questions that have been bothering me. The most to-the-point, I thought, was SUSAN GERHARD, who notes that though:

"...the back-turned, b-ball-capped white boys in front of me...weren't down with MICHAEL FRANTI [of opening act DISPOSABLE HEROES OF HIPHOPRISY] preaching against gay-bashing, when it came time for the Haywardians in the house to voice solidarity with PE, they hollered 'Yo!' right on cue.

"But solidarity with what? With a guy's right to shake his fist at the establishment and get respect? I thought straight white boys already had this privilege. Yes, it was the *boy* thing that I couldn't understand."

And that goes right to the heart of the matter in a way that the other reviewers touched on, but not so directly. PE's crowds are overwhelmingly male, and I'm not talking demographics here, but about testosterone overload. The repeated exhortations to put your fists in the air, the chanting of slogans until they have lost all meaning, the gruff in-your-face manner, and the casting of every emotion in terms of hostility, confrontation, and power: these are distinctly male things which can be observed at any Sunday afternoon football match. They are also distinctly not-new things, recastings of the same old non-solutions to misunderstanding and oppression we've seen through the centuries.

"Oh, so what do you want?" I can hear you asking. "For black people to keep smiling and singing and dancing while Euro-American society commits genocide on them? And besides, you're white; what business is it of yours to tell black people how to frame their culture?"

To that I'd answer that while I'm a critic and feel it's my responsibility to evaluate the arts by my own esthetic and moral standards, I think I'm less guilty of trying to impose cultural standards on black people than are most of the trying-to-be-trendy white libs who unquestioningly suck up anything dished their way by a black artist as long as it's sufficiently harsh and confrontational. When

some mushbrained white boy (or girl) excuses the misogyny, the homophobia, and the barely contained violence that pervades so much of today's rap music as being "an expression of black culture," *that's* racism, as far as I'm concerned.

Millions and millions of African-Americans don't beat up or rape women, don't bash homosexuals, don't sell drugs or join gangs, don't participate in drive-by shootings, and are deeply ashamed of and angry with the members of their race who do. But because those images cater to the wet dreams of sensation-starved white folks who dominate the media, they're put forth as being the most important expression of black culture available to us today.

What's a young black man to do? He sees and hears it everywhere: the most successful culture heroes of our day are talking mean and tough, calling women bitches and hos, bragging about how much gold they got and how many niggers they smoked. Not only are the guys in his own hood copping that style, even the white suburban kids are. You know how famously insecure teenage boys of any race or place are; the last thing a young black man in today's inner city is going to want to appear is sensitive or gentle. Not only does it bring his continued survival into question; it virtually guarantees he'll never be seen on MTV.

OK, I'll admit I'm ranging a bit afield from Public Enemy. Nobody's claiming that they're engaging in the idiotic gangster rap of, say, NWA, ICE CUBE, or TOO SHORT. While PE have been apallingly casual about violence against women and homosexuals, they haven't glorified gang warfare or racism the way many groups have. But even when they're talking about positive things, like people of many colors uniting to fight the powers that be, they're couching it in a way that appeals to thoughtless and violent emotions, not to constructive reason or action. DANYEL SMITH, one of rap's greatest local apologists, wouldn't agree with that statement, but she does acknowledge that:

"...it's great that all these people come to PE shows - that differing nationalities mix - but there is no real purpose to our gathering except to hear the music. It's not as if we're planning the revolution in the lobby afterward..."

And then she wonders what whites see in PE. She guesses that they

"...identify with PE's rebel yell, I guess, but what are they rebelling against? Living in a country where everything is designed with them in mind? Where they are always considered first and best?"

What Danyel doesn't get is that whites, even white males, especially lower middle class white males, have plenty to be pissed off about too. No, of course it's nothing like the problems faced by young black men. But the quality of American society is dangerously deteriorating for nearly all people. It's understandable that a black person might not feel too much sympathy for the badly educated and emotionally scarred white kids stuck in soul-killing dead-end jobs when millions of black kids have no jobs at all, but we're talking matters of degree here, not of substance. The fact is that America is not "designed with them in mind" either. Yeah, white kids in general have it better than black kids. That's not the same thing as having it good.

More importantly, in terms of gender relations: no matter how bad a black or white man has it, chances are he'll still have a woman waiting at home whom he can knock around or emotionally abuse. Does that make him better off than the woman? Not hardly; it just makes him one kind of victim and her another. The answer is not for women to recast themselves as militant, man-hating gangsters - though I admit the temptation must be powerful - but to oppose the aspects of masculinity that are harmful and to support those that are beneficial. The same principle applies in race relations. Blacks and whites both have many things to teach each other. Unfortunately very little of it is going to be heard if the discourse is dominated by nonstop PE-style yelling.

In the case of Public Enemy, the problem is not so much what

they yell - many of their songs do contain powerful and fundamentally correct social commentary - but the way in which they yell it. It's yet another case of the medium becoming the message; those who carefully follow Chuck D.'s lyrics can get a lot out of them, but the millions more who are attracted to PE because it's the latest thing on the hit parade are more likely to pick up on the aggression and hostility and gangster style, because those things are more immediately visible.

What's missing from most rap music is sensitivity, vulnerability, a willingness to admit one's own uncertainty or fear. Just once I'd like to hear Chuck D. admit he *doesn't* know the answer to something, to admit that he's just another scared kid who covers up his insecurities with superficial bluster. I don't know if it would sell as many records, but it would be a hell of a lot more honest. One more thing, and I think this is especially relevant in light of the recent tragedies in Los Angeles: while Public Enemy doesn't overtly advocate violence, many of their songs easily lend themselves for use as soundtracks to urban riots. Worth noting: Chuck D is no inner city ghetto youth; he comes from a middle class suburb where's he unlikely to be touched by the consequences of those who interpret or misinterpret his attitude and lyrics as a call to insurrection.

Chuck D at least deserves respect for trying, but KRS-ONE, the self-proclaimed "teacher" and professor of "edutainment" made it clear that the dope he's dealing is 100% uncut stupidity. At one time active in the "Stop the Violence" coalition, KRS displayed his principles in action by attacking a rival rapper on stage because the latter had accused him, obviously correctly, of being a phony. Asked to explain his actions, KRS rambled incoherently about how no one could come into "my kingdom" (New York, apparently) and diss him like that, and that his new release had shifted into generic sex-and-violence territory because "education doesn't sell." Bye, KRS.

**ALTERNATIVE TENTACLES RECORDS** is celebrating 13 years in show business and their hundredth release, a sure-to-be-massive blast featuring many of the label's most successful performers like **NO MEANS NO** along with a slew of major label success stories like **FAITH NO MORE** and **SEPULTURA**, all doing Dead Kennedys' covers.

But while AT deserves hearty congratulations on maintaining a genuinely independent and successful label through all these years, staging the record release party at San Francisco's Kennel Club is kind of a sad commentary on what's happened to the once-vibrant Frisco scene. In the first place, the Kennel is an over-21 bar, meaning that many of the young people who've been the heart and soul of punk rock and who faithfully support Alternative Tentacles won't be able to attend. Secondly, the Kennel is a major-label oriented rock dive, populated mainly by burnouts, drunks, and black-leather clad wannabees who haven't yet gotten it together to move to Seattle (maybe we could take up a collection?).

We realize that a lot of Frisco scenesters don't like coming to places like Gilman where there's no bar and all those annoying squirmy little kidlets are constantly getting underfoot, but surely some other sort of venue must be available. Maybe they could rent a hall, like in the old days? Naaah, probably too much trouble. So the in-crowd oldsters will have their own private party, and the rest of us can just send our best wishes and hope that when Jello B. and Co. celebrate Virus 200 things will be more open. Those of you hoping to attend the Kennel Club show, should jump on it, though; the lineup of bands should make it one of Frisco's hottest tix this year.

Anything to the rumor that **BEN ECONOCHRIST**, San Francisco State student, has joined a fraternity?? He denies it, and we have no reason to disbelieve him. One thing we know for sure is that Ben has given up his legendary studded leather jacket, and it now adorns the back of **LINT**, who along with **MATT MACALL**, his bass-playing partner from **OPERATION IVY**, is playing guitar and singing for the new three-piece punk rock band called **RANCID**, and no, they

don't play ska.

Lots of new record labels springing up locally; sometimes it seems at the rate of one per punk. One of them is Owen's **HOMEMADE RECORDS**, which already has a 7" out by **JABBERJAW** and another one upcoming from **GRIMPLE**, who seem to be getting the hell hype, or at least enough to land them a full LP (and CD?) on **MURRAY BOWLES** and **ERIC YEE**'s **M&E RECORDS** before the 7" was even released. I haven't seen or heard Grimple yet, so I don't know what to say about them, except that some people claim they're the next **OPERATION IVY**. I sort of doubt it.

Sleazeballs of the year award has to go to **FLIPPER**, or at least what's left of that legendary SF punk outfit. I never cared much for what was essentially a bunch of sorry junkies playing long monotonous very badly, but a lot of people liked them. Before you rush out to buy their "new" **DEF AMERICA** releases, be advised that the tapes for them were **STOLEN** from longtime San Francisco indie label **SUBTERRANEAN**. Not content to simply rip off Subterranean, major label scumbag **RICK RUBIN** is now doing his best to completely put them out of business by taking out court injunctions preventing them from selling any more copies of Flipper records that Def America stole. None of this could have happened without the active participation of Flipperoid **BRUCE LOOSE**, and is your heroin habit really worth stabbing your friends and the record label that backed you way back when everyone else thought you were a bad joke? Guess so.

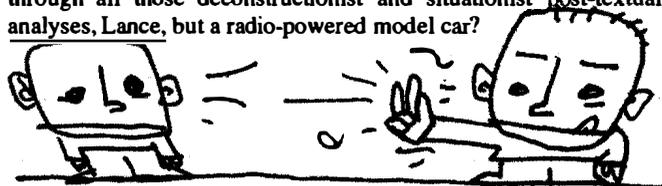
It must be going round, because a very similar thing happened to **SYMPATHY FOR THE RECORD INDUSTRY**; just after they released a new record by the **POOH STICKS**, said band turned around and sold the same LP to **EPIC**. Result: high-priced lawyers, court orders, and **LONG GONE JOHN** is stuck with a massive pile of Pooh Sticks CDs that he's not allowed to sell.

I owe an apology to **SHREDDER RECORDS** mogul **MEL CHEPLOWITZ** for my inaccurate account of his **G.G. ALLIN** interview on **KALX**. Contrary to what was reported here, G.G. never said "the bitch deserved it" about the woman he was convicted of assaulting in Michigan, and actually said very little about the subject, except to slough it off. The quote I attributed to him was actually an approximation of things I'd read in other interviews. It was sloppy journalism on my part, and I'm sorry.

I've long complained about how the West Bay scene has degenerated into a bunch of burnouts hanging around in bars recalling the good old days of the early 80s. Now, if firsthand accounts are to be believed, the East Bay is developing its own watering hole, where as **BUMPLESCRUMP**'s **PATTICUS H.** puts it, "the punk rock dinosaurs go to die." It's called **YOUR PLACE, TOO**, and if you're longing for a hefty dose of cigarette smoke and Budweiser, along with pool-playing and nostalgic conversation about the glory days of **FANG** and **SPECIAL FORCES**, it may be the place for you.

On the other hand the same joint is offering live shows every week, and despite Patticus' snide comments, **BUMPLESCRUMP** hasn't hesitated to play there on two occasions already.

Was that noted anarchist and **J CHURCH** guitarist/vocalist **LANCE HAHN** seen looting on Market Street during the recent civil disturbances? I know you probably need some relaxation after poring through all those deconstructionist and situationist post-textual analyses, Lance, but a radio-powered model car?



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