

strenuously propagandized? His history is always being revised. From billboards and by broadcast media, he is instructed on the seemly sentiments and wholesome thoughts of the hour. But how different is it here? Our history too is revised, and even

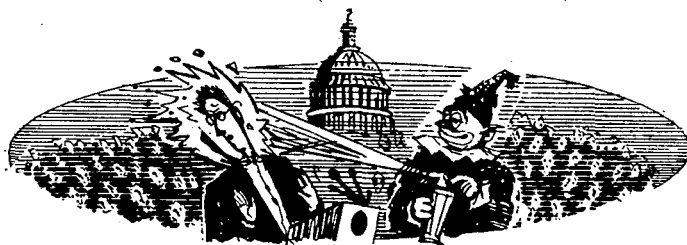
our language is now tampered with. Boys are taught women's ways. Girls are taught manliness. We bus our children. We engineer their society. We send them to the school shrink. We keep them from the dangerous influence of prayer. They are our lib-

eral autocrats' favorite guinea pigs.

Yes, I believe it is arguable that the ordinary Yank is as heavily propagandized as the ordinary Ivan. Yet, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn tells us, in the Soviet Union no one really believes the Marxist-Leninist uplift.

In America our liberal elite believes. With the ardor of missionaries, its members inculcate their visions and their values into us. A Kent State Massacre is one of those visions. Questioning its accuracy is an assault on dogma. □

C A P I T O L I D E A S



IN DEFENSE OF DIRT

by Tom Bethell

For a few days following the election of President Reagan the liberal-left observed a respectful silence, the better to conjure up in the rest of us the illusion that they too are lovers of democracy and are only too happy to abide by its electoral verdicts. But within a week or two we began to hear the familiar, restless rustling of cockroach wings, the renewed stirring of the termites, the death-watch beetle patrolling once again in the national heart-of-oak.

How to strike back at the superannuated actor, who wanted to do the unforgivable thing—reduce the size and role of government—without too conspicuously expressing resentment of majorities? The appointment of Al Haig as Secretary of State at first seemed to present an opportunity. Epithets were experimentally rolled across the opinion columns, or ventriloquized onto the front page: "Militaristic . . . NATO . . . warmonger . . . Nixon White House . . . Watergate . . . *Watergate!*" But someone replied: "Watergate? All right, let's do that one again." No takers. Senator Bobby Byrd, the West Virginian "populist" who had originally objected to Haig, huffily applied a pomade to his blue rinse, adjusted his scarlet waistcoat, and made a dignified retreat into the wainscoting. Haig sailed through unscathed.

Tom Bethell is The American Spectator's Washington editor and a Washington editor of Harper's.

Then Reagan appointed James Gaius Watt to be Secretary of the Interior, custodian of the nation's federally owned 400 million acres, the great majority of them west of the Mississippi. (87 percent of Nevada is federally owned, 67 percent of Idaho; the highest percentage east of the Mississippi, 12 percent, is in New Hampshire.) Watt was president of the Mountain States Legal Foundation in Denver, a public interest law center "dedicated to bringing a balance to the courts in the defense of individual liberty and the private enterprise system." The foundation was established with money from Joseph Coors, the Colorado brewery president. Watt declared himself

opposed to environmental "extremism."

Here, then, another opportunity presented itself: "A goat to guard the cabbage patch," said John B. Oakes, the former senior editor of the *New York Times* who detected early on that environmentalism, if co-opted by the right (left) people, could unobtrusively advance the cause of socialism. "A fox in charge of the henhouse," echoed reliable old Tom Wicker, the *New York Times* associate editor who left North Carolina and Grew. "Apostle of Pillage," shouted a *Village Voice* headline above an article co-authored by trendy-trotsky

Alex Cockburn, *Wall Street Journal* columnist and heiress-admirer.

Mindless cartoons, attacking Watt as a despoiler of the environment, were drawn by Oliphant, Herblock, Auth, and others. The Herblock case was instructive, because he is normally careful to depict a state of affairs which is at least a reasonable inference from the facts. But Herblock showed a crazed Watt gouging out the entire U.S. topsoil and environment, under the caption: "If we get rid of all this stuff on top, there must be a lot of fuel underneath." Reagan looked on admiringly. Clearly, Herblock felt that, when it came to Watt, extremism in the defense of environmentalism was no vice.

Mary McGrory said Watt's mind was "chrome bright." The *New York Times* called Watt's appointment "the worst." The *Washington Post* called Watt "an indiscriminating advocate of private development interests." William Turnage, executive director of the Wilderness Society, called Watt "a joke," and "a caricature of an anti-environmentalist." One of the *Times*'s anti-Watt editorials made the interesting comment:

What is so puzzling about his appointment is its apparent political insensitivity. There are many conservatives whose appointment would not so inflame environmentalists.

When Watt was finally confirmed by the U.S. Senate, however, the political sensitivities had a curious



geographical location. Twelve senators voted against Watt, all from states east of the Mississippi. How come not one of the Western senators came forward to defend the West (where 95 percent of the public lands are located) against this environmental pillager? Why did the Western Governors' Conference also support Watt?

One possibility, not even considered by the Eastern liberals, who regard the West as a place where one occasionally goes skiing or backpacking, is that the changes desired by Watt would actually improve the environment.

The great issue here, not even touched on by Watt himself in his confirmation hearing, is the question of who best protects the environment: private, or public owners? It is automatically and unthinkingly assumed by most people who don't actually live on or near public lands that public ownership is, of course, best. On the other hand, those westerners who constitute the Sagebrush Rebellion would like to return federal lands to state ownership. This in turn would probably soon lead to private ownership.

The prevailing view seems to be that when land is public, wise bureaucrats who have nothing but the "public interest" at heart will shape it into a veritable Eden. But

when it is privately owned, oil derricks will replace trees, streams will become polluted, and a forest of "No Trespassing" signs will grow.

Propaganda has encouraged many of us to believe that public property is owned by all. Government officials endlessly promote the false idea that "the state" means everyone. For example, the Federal Trade Commission describes itself as "your FTC" in a booklet I recently came across. DC Metro drivers ingratiatingly welcome passengers to "your Metro." Questioning Watt at his confirmation hearing, the somewhat gullible Senator John Chafee of Rhode Island asked: "Don't you feel that these federal lands belong to *all* the people?"

No, senator. When land is federally owned, it is owned by no one. Custodial rights to this no-man's land then devolve upon park rangers and federal bureaucrats who are empowered to tell private citizens exactly what they can and cannot do. It is *then* that the *Verboten* signs start appearing. When land is publicly owned, it becomes the property not of you and me but of *The State*. Men in uniform start showing up, driving vehicles with sirens and flashing lights. They may not *own* the land exactly. But they act as though they do. As in the Soviet Union.

But, you may respond, they will at

least do a good job of looking after the environment. Not according to people who live out west. John Baden, a contributing editor to *Bureaucracy Versus the Environment: The Environmental Costs of Bureaucratic Governance* (University of Michigan Press), points out that the U.S. Forest Service does not know how to manage timber production because political pressure causes it to maximize expenditures without having to think about cost-effectiveness. Unnecessary roads are expensively bulldozed into low-yielding timber stands high in the Rockies. Wildlife habitats are destroyed. Soil is eroded. A thousand dollars is spent to recover a hundred dollars-worth of timber. Forest Service officials are under bureaucratic pressure to advocate more funding for *their* region, regardless of ecological suitability. On the other hand, Weyerhaeuser's forests are not only profitable but well kept.

Unlike the senators who voted against, and the left-liberal journalists who howled at Watt, Baden lives out there amid the bureaucratic wreckage. He is director of Montana State University's Center for Political Economy and Natural Resources. Richard L. Stroup, Baden's co-director, and the co-author of an excellent economics text, *Economics: Private and Public Choice*, points out that the Bureau of Land Management's practice of "chaining"—

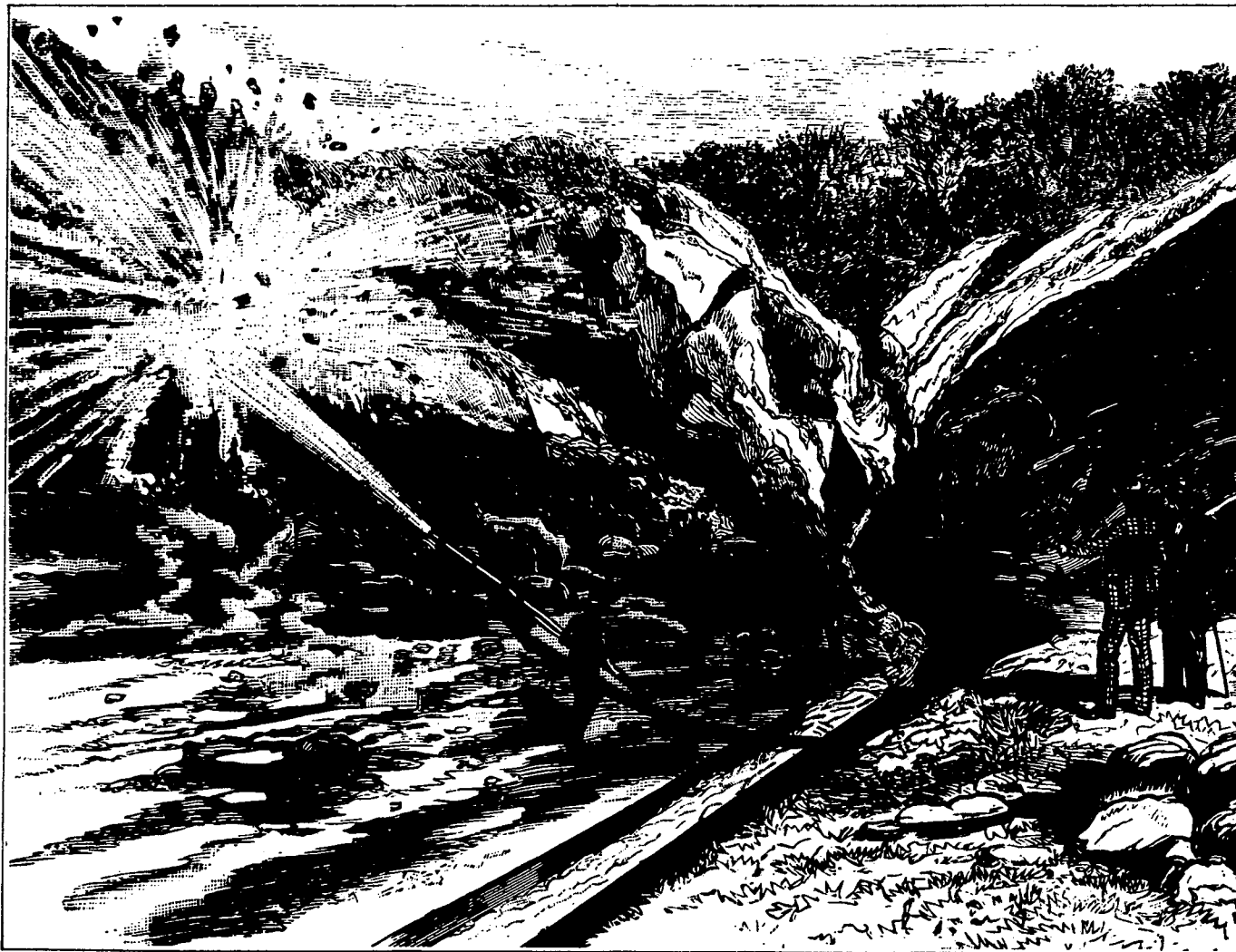
hauling a 600-foot anchor chain between parallel tractors, mowing down juniper forests with a view to creating grasslands for cattle—does immense damage to the environment. But it does build up political support for the Bureau among cattle ranchers.

Baden and Stroup point out that the bureaucrat's incentives are haywire. He tends to regard the federal budget as a "common pool resource." This is an economist's term best understood by visualizing an oil field owned by several people each of whom has sunk a shaft into the well. He who pumps out oil first and longest profits at the expense of his co-owners. Similarly, the bureaucrat who fails to tap the federal budget on behalf of his agency will lose this common pool resource (taxpayers' money) to more aggressive bureaucrats in rival agencies. Thus, not ecological perfection, but bureaucratic competition, tends to determine the behavior of those with responsibility for public lands.

What about the polluted streams and oil derricks of the private owners? Again, Baden points out, when various individuals *own* different segments of a stream or river, then they have rights in it—riparian rights. If someone does something which harms the rights of others downstream, then they are likely to sue him. But when no riparian rights exist, the incentives to prevent pollution don't exist either.

As for oil drilling, it is a strange fact that it only seems to offend people when it takes place on public lands. Actually, drilling seems to give maximum offense, somehow, at the planning stage. But when individuals or companies drill for oil and gas on privately owned land, protesters vanish and everyone seems to be happy. Consider the recent exploration for natural gas on school grounds by Wells College, a fashionable girls' school in New York state. They found natural gas, too—right next door to the gym, as it were. The Eastern Seaboard press cooed with delight. Now those nice old schoolmarmes won't be so dependent on the oil companies. But can you imagine the cries of outrage if the same Wells capital had been used to prospect for gas a few miles away on public land? Ouch! "Pedagogues of Pillage!" our headlines would have proclaimed.

So let's sell off our public lands as soon as possible. My only objection to James Gaius Watt is that he has not already proposed this, and is most unlikely to do so. He merely wants to *rein in* the land bureaucrats. It would be better to get rid of them entirely. □





Arch Puddington

LECH VS. LEONID: STRIKING OUT AT THE KREMLIN

From Szczecin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic
a picket line has descended upon the continent.

Until the Polish upheavals of the past summer, few Western observers took seriously the idea that the working class might trigger major reform within the Soviet bloc. Many, especially those who had persuaded themselves that life in the Soviet Union was not so very different from life over here, never entertained the possibility that a workers' opposition could escalate into a regime-threatening force. It was, of course, universally acknowledged that the Soviets had failed to create anything resembling a "workers' paradise," in their own country or in the satellites. And it was never doubted that the tattered slogans about the proletariat playing the "leading role" in Communist society were regarded with anything but contempt and derision by the proletariat itself.

Such contempt and derision, however, were seen as reflecting a kind of hard-hat cynicism common to industrial workers everywhere, rather than a desire to upset the existing order of things. As our popular culture often reminds us, American workers are known to share such sentiments, and it was not so long ago that blue-collar workers here were pronounced an intolerant, even reactionary, force fully capable of supporting any authoritarian government which provided full employment for white males and repression for everyone else. If American workers have such little respect for democratic values, why should things be different for their Russian or Polish counterparts? As for the dissidents' claims that the official, government-controlled "trade unions" in the Eastern bloc are despised by the workers for their unwillingness to represent proletarian interests, we had an answer in the eminent convergence doctrine (as enunciated by John Kenneth Galbraith) which assured us that

Soviet labor organizations functioned "much the same" as unions in the democratic West and thus enjoyed the same general acceptance among the rank-and-file as our unions do.

For those who were unpersuaded by the convergence theory, or by its complement—the notion of a moral symmetry between the Communist and democratic worlds—the major obstacle facing restive workers remained the special ruthlessness which Communist regimes reserve for the anonymous men and women who dare to challenge the official system of workplace repression. Here we are reminded that it was during the most liberal period of the Khrushchev thaw, a time when Solzhenitsyn was given official sanction to publish revelations about the Gulag, that upwards of 300 unarmed workers were massacred in the industrial city of Novocherkassk during a strike over a wage reduction and major increases in food prices. More recently, the Soviets have bundled a number of worker dissidents off to institutions for the criminally insane, and it is generally believed that worker dissidents are treated more harshly than those seeking changes in the artistic or intellectual spheres.

No one would deny that deploying tanks and troops to enforce labor discipline, or snatching workers from assembly lines and packing them off to mental hospitals for

"drug therapy," are more effective than lockouts or injunctions in handling worker unrest. But the willingness to employ such extreme measures suggests a conclusion very different from the one drawn by most Western experts about the potential impact of a workers' movement. We may not consider workers a likely source of liberal ferment; but the Communists obviously do, which is why literally millions of police agents, management officials, and, not least, "trade union" leaders have been assigned the task of indoctrinating, controlling, and, if necessary, punishing the workforce.

It is a matter of historical record that Communism, wherever it has been imposed, has wiped out all vestiges of free trade unionism. In the earliest stages of the Bolshevik government the "trade union question" was the focus of a long and bitter debate whose resolution sealed the fate of Communism's lingering democratic impulses. But the decision to subordinate trade unions to the Communist Party was not alone responsible for the system of workplace terror which evolved under Stalin and was later reproduced by Communist governments in Eastern Europe, Cuba, and, more recently, Cambodia and Vietnam. Trade unions have been made into the appendage of governments or political parties in various non-Communist societies, but workers have not generally been subjected to the elaborate system of repression and control which is the distinctive feature of Communist labor policy. Nor, in fact, is the totalitarian subjugation of the working class a Stalinist aberration. Stalin simply inherited an existing system which had been built and given ideological legitimacy by other Bolshevik leaders, most notably Lenin and Trotsky. Lenin had no regrets about his government's repression of the class which had presumably brought the Bolsheviks to



Arch Puddington is Executive Director of the League for Industrial Democracy and Editor of New America.