

THE CONTINUING CRISIS



•November passes, and the Christmas season approaches. It is the time to give, and—far more important—the time to receive. Some will scoff at this as excessive materialism, but let not the goody-goody Liberals be among the scoffers. In theory and in practice they are the historic extollers of receiving. It is they who exalt the recipient while depreciating the giver. It is they who have made receiving a right to be insisted upon and revered. To the recipient they compose poetry and song, growing ever more rhapsodic in proportion to the amount he takes in, while his benefactor is increasingly suspect and harassed by dozens of vulpine government agencies, including the IRS. This Yuletide heave aside all the cant about the joy of giving. Follow the Liberals' counsel. Approach friends and family alike with hands outstretched and palms up. Intone the anthem and refrain, "More! More!"

•Ms. magazine has again published its catalogue of ideologically acceptable gifts. Among the requirements are of course "top quality," but vigilance must be shown toward proper packaging—"does the box show boys and girls of different races equally at play? and does it give an accurate presentation of the product inside? Disappointingly . . . I saw mainly blond, blue-eyed boys engaged in active play." Nonetheless Ms.'s Red Guards did find some tolerable children's toys, for instance: a Four Alarm Fire Engine, "Hurray for a riding toy decorated with pictures of both boy and girl firefighters (though the boy is driving and the faces are all Caucasian)," and an Anatomically Correct Male Doll, "Movable joints, pliable body, drinks and wets. . . . Let's hope that Sebino, the Italian manufacturer that already markets black and Oriental dolls, will continue to expand in those directions." Moreover, *à propos* the war against stereotypes, there are palmy portents: "Tired of toy stores that separate girls from boys?" Ms.

sings. "Some people in Boulder, Colorado decided to change all that. The result: Play Fair, a nonsexist, multicultural collection of kids' toys. . . . Set in its own small house it's a feminist fairy tale come true." And while on the subject of feminist fairy tales come true, Ms. has found the perfect gift for all its *engagé* readers: "Know someone with headaches? Send them [sic] the Anti-Headache Bio-Feedback System. Its audible biofeedback signals help cure headaches by teaching one how to relax tense face and neck muscles." The cost is a paltry \$159.50.

•On November 10, Mr. Geoffrey Prime, a British linguistics expert, pleaded guilty to passing secrets to Soviet agents. Papa Brezhnev went off to bring Marxism to the worms. And San Franciscans continued to chuckle and slap their thighs over the fact that in the November elections they almost raised to their absurd Board of Supervisors Sister Boom Boom, a.k.a. Mr. Jack Fertig, a red-haired professional astrologer and part-time sports-center attendant at the San Francisco Jewish Community Center. Listing his profession as "nun of the above," Sister Boom Boom attended all candidates' events attired in a miniskirted nun's habit and came in ninth in a field of 24—less than ten percentage points short of winning one of the five contested seats. What is more, in a post-election interview Sister Boom Boom manifested a modern political instinct that could make him a national performer. "Going in drag has taught me a lot about the oppression of women," he admonished. "If every legislator had to wear heels, a corset, fake eye lashes and a zipper up the back, we'd have the Equal Rights Amendment passed in a week." Watch for Sister Boom Boom to be on the podium at the 1984 Democratic Convention!

•No sooner were the early November elections over than pols began to choke on their dinner—make of it what you will. Secretary of State

George Schultz was rushed to a hospital choking on his lunch, and an undownable piece of lobster almost killed Rep. Richard Bolling. The mystery even crossed the Atlantic where the Queen Mother was rushed to a London hospital with a fish bone lodged in her throat. In Miami authorities have located the missing body of the late Mrs. Emilie Spaeth. Apparently it had been interred with that of another woman after being left in the Dade County medical examiner's office where funeral home workers, arranging the burial of a woman who wanted to be interred with her pets, had picked up the wrong bag.

•In Santa Clara County, California, Mr. Robert Weigle, the new chief probation officer, alarmed civil libertarians and offended naturalists by suggesting that criminals could be allowed to live outside prison if they would agree to have homing devices attached to their wrists or implanted in their brains so that police might monitor their movements. According to Officer Weigle, the plan would be "similar to air traffic control." Mr. Weigle is a former television anchorman. The Iowa Council on Social Services has decreed that inmates in the state's hoosegows may read hardcore porn so long as it is not too expensive or difficult and does not include texts dealing with bestiality, sadomasochism, child nudity, or child sexual activity. A West German television audience watching a talk show whose topic was "The New Nudity" was rendered aghast and probably ill when a porcine 61-year-old mother of seven rose up before the camera and stripped while shouting, "It's my cosmic love energy!"

•Female fickleness has landed four Minneapolis doctors in court. The quacks are being sued by Christine Lynne Oliver for injudiciously performing a sex-change operation on her while she was *non compos mentis*. Christine was originally Mr. James McQuiston, a divorced father of three, and she now insists that he

was suffering "short-term delusions" when he presented his manhood to the bodyshop. Miss Susan Liptrot of Miami, Florida is suing a young dandy for \$100,000 claiming that in a blatant breach of contract he gave her Herpes Simplex #2 on the libidinous evening of November 22, 1980, the 163rd anniversary of the birth of George Eliot. And in Northampton, England those two Salvation Army sisters who went on an orgy of sex and black magic were given two- and five-year sentences respectively after admitting to lewd conduct with young girls between the ages of 12 and 15.

•In mid-November Mr. Yuri V. Andropov became the Woodrow Wilson of the Soviet Union, American sanctions against companies doing business on the Soviet pipeline levitated, General William C. Westmoreland led an incongruous band of Vietnam Veterans down Pennsylvania Avenue, and Mr. Lech Walesa was returned to his Gdansk home 11 months after Poland's progressives arrested him and broke up Solidarity. In China, Mr. Zhang Shaoxue, president of the recently established Student Ethics Committee of the Chinese People's University, solemnized the death of a medical student, Mr. Zhang Hua. "Zhang Hua," he declared, "has provided an answer to what we've been discussing and thinking about—What is life's purpose and value. What is it that we are seeking?" The young man had expired in a vat of fermenting excrement.

•Finally, at the end of the month the first Ku Klux Klan rally in the Nation's capital since 1925 led to near-riot when a crowd of almost 500 anti-Klan demonstrators began hurling bricks and bottles and stealing bicycles. Police Chief Maurice Turner described the outburst as a "blind and senseless rage," but then he obviously does not appreciate the thrill of riding a brand new bicycle. Reason resumes its sway.

—RET



John Samuels

AFGHANISTAN: THE BREZHNEV DOCTRINE LIVES!

... with the tacit support of the American Coolhead community.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 marked a turning point in the Cold War: it was the first time since World War II that Russian troops—not simply Russian advisers—entered a country that did not belong to the Warsaw Pact. So argues Gérard Chaliand in *Report from Afghanistan*.^{*} Written in 1981, Chaliand's book is less important for the information it provides on the current struggle in Afghanistan than for the author's analysis of the significance of the Soviet invasion, a significance that the West by and large has been loath to realize. On last October 20th the *New York Times Magazine* ran a story about an American journalist's travels among the Afghan freedom fighters at the same time it ran a story about a feminist's despair that women of the postfeminist generation are not nearly so exercised about "the woman's question" as she is. No doubt because the *Times* assumed, probably correctly, that its readership is more interested in the struggle between men and "liberated" women than in the struggle of the Afghans to be liberated from the Soviet Union, it chose the feminist's autobiographical meanderings as the cover story.

This is not to say the war in Afghanistan has not been covered by the American press. From time to time a story crops up in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*—rarely on the front page—about how the Afghan freedom fighters are doing, but events in Afghanistan have not received the press coverage given to the events in Poland. To some degree, this is understandable. Poland is accessible, Afghanistan is not. Not only is it difficult and dangerous for reporters to go to Afghanistan, but once they get there they don't

necessarily come up with a good story. For the freedom fighters cannot schedule battles to provide exciting copy for visiting journalists. A protracted struggle waged over an enormous expanse of generally desolate territory, the war in Afghanistan is often a very dull affair that gives reporters little in the way of hard news.

The relative inattention is understandable for other reasons as well. Western journalists cannot travel in the urban areas of Afghanistan because they are held by the Russians, who feel no obligation to let them snoop around and find out how repressive and savage they have been. As Ben Wattenberg has said: "Communist countries can wage long, brutal wars and pay very little for them. . . . After all, if you can't get television cameras into a country to witness the poison gas, the dead

civilians, the maimed children—then what can you show on television? No access; no horror." Are the Russians winning—or, more likely, terrorizing—the hearts and minds of the people in Kabul, Herat, and Kandahar? Who knows?

But even if Afghanistan were more accessible, it is doubtful that the Western press would rush to cover the war. The country is simply not of compelling interest to the West. In the United States there are few Afghan-Americans, and it is difficult for Americans and Europeans to take an interest in a people who seem, in their strange clothes and peculiar beliefs, to belong to another world. The West may coo over the freedom fighters' bravery, but does it not think that their courage derives from an allegiance to Islamic fundamentalism? From an allegiance to a way of life that is backward, xenophobic, and intolerant of change? The subhead of the *Times Magazine* article suggests as much, for it speaks not of freedom fighters but of "Moslem guerrillas"—that is, men of the same fanatical spirit as Khomeini's hordes. This view of the freedom fighters is unfair, since many of them reject Islamic fundamentalism. Nevertheless, it is not a total distortion, for one of the major resistance factions is headed by Gulbudin Hekmatyar, an admirer of Khomeini. And, according to Chaliand, Gulbudin "is generally considered the most intelligent, ambitious, and ruthless resistance leader in Peshawar."

Torn between admiration for the extraordinary courage of the freedom fighters and distaste for their Islamic traditionalism, the West has offered them an ounce of sympathy and a pound of indifference, wistfully hoping that Afghanistan will become the Soviet Union's Vietnam. This mixture appeals to many foreign policy experts, who argue that there is little the West can do to influence events in Afghanistan—indeed, that to attempt to do more than give a weak cheer from the



^{*}The Viking Press, \$13.95 hardcover; \$4.95 paperback.

John Samuels is a free-lance writer living in Washington, D.C.