

Lewis H. Lapham

## THE LOVE SONG OF JAMES EARL CARTER

1982's worst book.

*This is very special. The winner of our J. Gordon Coogler Award for the year's worst book is a former President of the United States of America. The thing was inevitable. Jimmy was President. He wrote his memoirs. As Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel used to say, Timothy Dickinson tells me, what is had to be.*

*Yet you ask. Why have Lewis Lapham review this work? Why did I not take on the ceremony myself? In 1976, as editor of Harper's magazine, Lewis Lapham was present at the creation, so to speak, and for four years he was duly indignant. Few shared his insight. In point of fact, only one other editor and one other magazine approached his astuteness and persevered in abominating the ignoble high jinks of Jimmy Carter throughout the rogue's brief and absurd public life. Humility and good taste restrain me from mentioning the editor and his magazine.*

*Though Lyndon Johnson's presidency may have been the most disastrous of the century, it is now irrefutable that Jimmy Carter was the century's worst President. Nonetheless through all his shabby pratfalls only Harper's and that other magazine that I shall not mention continued to jeer and to gasp. Others came to Lapham's position, but slowly; and few maintained the watch to the end. Most pundits remained silent, and they remain silent still. Toward the end, Lapham and that other editor who must remain anonymous were frequently being rebuked by the mature adults among the intelligentsia. "Come, come," they would be told. "He is the only President we have," or "He is sooooo smart," or "We all know about Carter. Pick another ax to grind." Well, if everybody knew about Jimmy's pathetic presidency, why is no one writing about it today? Why to the contrary do so many persist in rolling out the same dubious*

*Lewis H. Lapham is the former editor of Harper's and a columnist for the Washington Post, who is also engaged in writing a book about the superstitious worship, especially virulent in the United States, of money.*

*conventional wisdoms about the scamp? In the New York Times Book Review's assessment of Jimmy's memoirs, the Times's former White House correspondent even repeated the tired myth that this transparent fraud is "an enigma."*

*Well, of course Jimmy was the Times's candidate. In fact, he was the candidate of all polite pundits, and by endlessly repeating the old fables about his prodigies they can spare themselves the pain of self-indictment. The pundits live in a fantasy world where all is bliss and gorgeous celebrity. The jolly times never end. Thus when Jimmy shambled out from the boondocks the giants of our time would not see him for the fantastic figure he was. He intoned their platitudes, and they were reassured. To this day the giants of our time cannot and will not recognize the damage he did. Mr. Lapham, it is your show.* —RET

During his four years in the White House Jimmy Carter kept a faithful diary. An eager and voluminous diary. A lover's diary five-thousand pages long and bound in eighteen precious volumes. He made so many notes that it is a wonder he had time



to do anything else. Apparently he was forever writing in a corner, jotting down his thoughts and observations, preserving his impressions of historic moments. An idealist or a Republican might say that this was not a proper occupation for the President of the United States, but so stern a judgment would fail to make sympathetic allowance for the Wagnerian magnificence of Mr. Carter's passion. He was writing about himself, and the subject so captivated him, so consumed him with the fires of love, that he abandoned himself to it in the way that lesser men abandon themselves to their enthusiasms for stamps or butterflies or Civil War cannon.

Now that Mr. Carter has made a book of his diary, an adoring memoir entitled *Keeping Faith*,\* the notes read like a collection of letters sent from scout camp. Arranged in chronological sequence, they tell the story of a boy and his mirror. The young and upright Jimmy Carter goes north to Washington, and there among the cruise missiles and the cherry blossoms, he has a wonderful time. He meets wonderful and important people; he thinks wonderful thoughts (some of them statesmanlike, others merely warm and human); he travels to romantic, far-off lands; he lives in an old and famous house; sometimes he is sad, but most of the time he is happy and brave. Once or twice he saves Western civilization.

The book continues in this voice for 596 pages, and except for Jimmy Carter's mother I don't know who could bear to read the whole of the correspondence. Presumably it is his mother that Mr. Carter has in mind as his perfect reader, and I'm sure that she also enjoyed looking at the candid snapshots (Jimmy in the Oval Office, Jimmy at Camp David, Jimmy among dignitaries, etc.) stuffed into the pages like blurred photographs of the camp baseball and swimming teams. For the purposes of a review, it is enough to read the first sixty-two pages (all of them introductory and advertised under the heading, "A Graduate Course in America"), and then

\*Bantam Books, \$22.50.

to look at random through the rest of the collection. The tone never varies, nor does the scout's unfailing ability to achieve a subtlety of perspective comparable to that seen on a postcard of the Lincoln Memorial.

The scout concedes in his preface that he has no wish to write "a history of my administration." Not only would this be too difficult and boring a task, but, even worse, it might interrupt the diarist's elegiac contemplation of himself. Instead of a history he writes what he calls "a highly personal report of my own experiences" because he wants to share (certainly with his mother and maybe with a few other ladies in Plains, Georgia who wonder how he's doing up there in Washington) the "feelings of gratitude and pleasure" that he has gathered as keepsakes during his visit to the nation's capital.

The opening chapter is meant to be a dramatic account of Mr. Carter's last few hours in office. It is the morning on which his agents arrange to transfer almost \$8 billion through the Bank of England in return for the release of the American hostages in Teheran. Given the events in question, another writer might have endowed the scene with liveliness and force. Mr. Carter reduces it to dullness by the simple expedient of staging the action in the theatre of his emotions. What is important is the play of the scout's feelings, not what is happening in Algeria, England, Germany, or Iran. Nobody else in the room attains the status of reality, and before he has gotten to page eight, Mr. Carter has reverted to extensive quotation from his beloved diary. At 1:50 a.m. he begins "jotting down some rough notes." The presidential stenography continues unabated for four pages until 10:45 a.m., when, "from Rosalynn: 'Jimmy, the Reagans will be here in fifteen minutes. You will have to put on your morning clothes and greet them.'"

During the intervening eight hours and fifty-five minutes Mr. Carter has jotted down twenty-five dutiful notes, and the reader is left to ask who, if Mr. Carter was serving as recording angel, was acting the part of President? The notes reveal the temper of the scout's mind. As for example:

7:55 a.m. . . . I am personally receiving reports on radio traffic halfway around the world—between the Teheran airport control tower and three planes poised at the end of a runway. The airport is on the outskirts of the capital city of Iran, and only a few months ago it was one of the busiest in the world:

I would like to think that Mr. Carter revised this entry when getting it ready for the printer, augmenting the excitement of "I am personally receiving reports" with the geopolitical dimension provided in the phrase, "The airport is on the outskirts of the capital city of Iran," but I'm afraid that

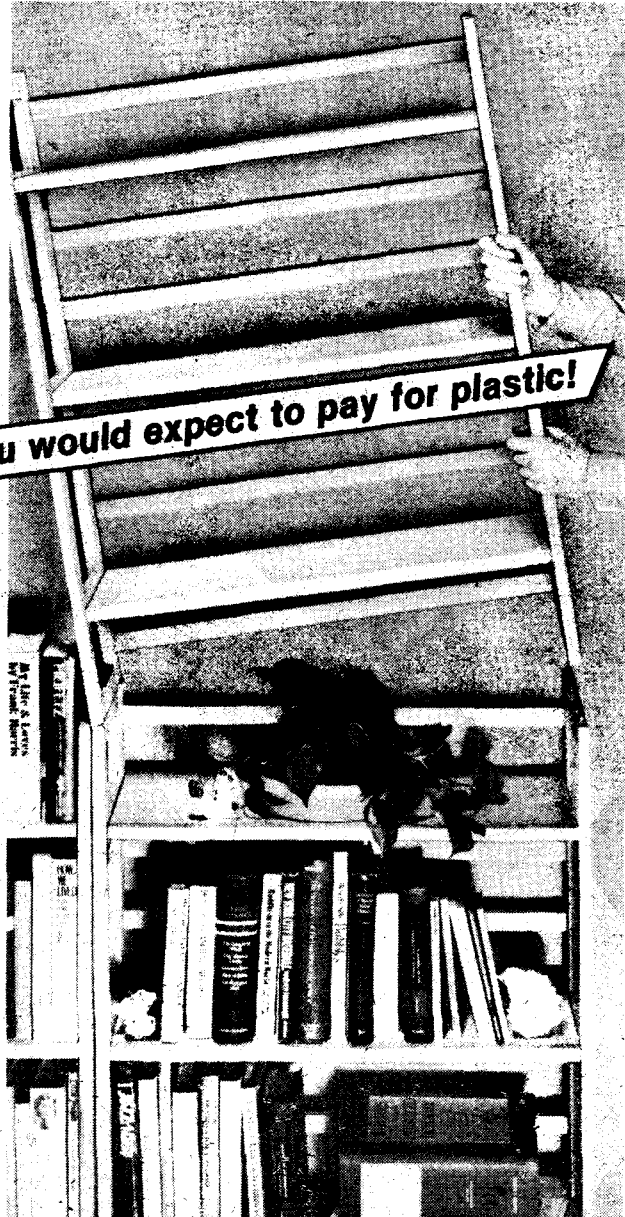
the notation appears as Mr. Carter wrote it that morning in the White House, holding the telephone in one hand and scribbling notes with the other in order that his mother should be apprised of momentous events until the very end, until finally Rosalynn had to come and tell him that scout camp is over and that it is time to go home.

I quote the passage at length because it offers a fair example of Mr. Carter's

method as well as the sound of his complacency. Whenever possible, he mistakes the novelties of technology for the substance of diplomacy; because he can listen to an air traffic controller "halfway around the world," he thinks he has become fully informed across the entire spectrum of Islamic affairs.

On page 19 the scout establishes the major key of pious self-approbation in which he composes the rest of his ballad to

## Sturdy, Stackable Natural Beechwood Bookshelves



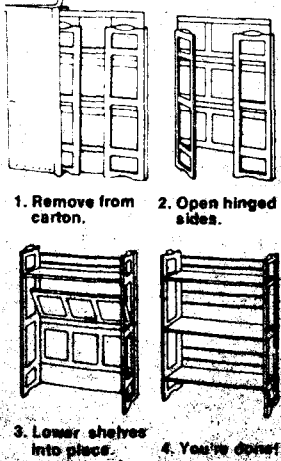
At a price you would expect to pay for plastic!

**Perfect for books, records, display or storage**

This quality shelving system is made of natural European beechwood. A hard wood tough enough to be used for flooring and beautiful enough to be used for fine furniture. Do not confuse this item with "wood tone" or plastic imitations. Our low price is made possible by volume purchases, not by inferior material.

**Sets up in seconds... without tools!**

No tools, screws or glue required. Just take it out of its flat carton, fold the sides out, and the shelves practically fall into place. And natural beechwood is attractive... even unfinished. So the unit can be used immediately. Of course, you can also stain, varnish, or paint them if you prefer.



**NEW LOW PRICE! NOW ONLY**  
**List Price \$59.95 \$39.95**  
**AVAILABLE BY MAIL ONLY**

**BARNES & NOBLE**  
BOOKSTORES INC.  
Mail Order Dept. H 73  
126 Fifth Ave., N.Y. 10011

Dear Barnes & Noble:  
Please send me sturdy beechwood shelf unit(s) at your special sale price of \$39.95 (plus \$6.95 shipping and insurance per unit). N.Y. and N.J. Residents: Please add sales tax.

**Check One**  
☐ Payment enclosed  
☐ I prefer to charge this purchase to:  
☐ ☐ ☐

☐ Mr.  
☐ Ms. Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
No P.O. Boxes Please

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Account# \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Offer good only in the continental U.S.A.  
 © 1983, Barnes & Noble Bookstores, Inc.

**SOLD WITH FULL 30 DAY MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE**

THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR MARCH 1983

19

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



the lost loveliness of the Carter Administration. He is describing his wonderful, wonderful inauguration day, and as he and his wife "approached our new home," he remembers the following colloquy:

I told Rosalynn with a smile that it was a nice-looking place. She said, "I believe we're going to be happy in the White House." We were silent for a moment, and then I replied, "I just hope that we never disappoint the people who made it possible for us to live here." Rosalynn's prediction proved to be correct, and I did my utmost for four solid years to make my own hope come true.

On page 23 he completes the sentiment:

As we walked through the living quarters on my first day as President, we were properly awestruck—but comfortable, and at home.

Within the span of the next 39 pages the scout effectively destroys his credibility as a witness to anything other than his own innocence. He compares himself, flatteringly, to President Wilson, and then, a few pages later, he expands the comparison to embrace Presidents Jefferson, Madison, and Jackson. He confides to his diary the thrilling experience of seeing his first movie in the White House; he admires his humility as exemplified in his wanting a policy of "no Ruffles and Flourishes or honors being paid to me"; feeling slightly sheepish, he confesses to the pleasure in hearing the military bands play "Hail to the Chief." The technological luxuries available to the President move him to little cries of wonder and delight. He is as pleased with "the quality of the notes" (i.e., the memoranda prepared by the household clerks) as he is with "the procedures for responding to nuclear attack." The same Christmas shopper's mentality animates his discussion of the men whom he chooses to serve on his staff and in his Cabinet. Into none of their characters does he evince the least glimmering of an insight. Ham and Jody and Charlie and Bert, of course, he knows from the old days in Georgia; these wonderful

fellows professed their belief in Jimmy Carter before he was elected President, and so obviously there can be no question about their worth and talent. His Cabinet officials he looks upon as items of elite merchandise. He chooses them because of their titles and credentials, because he has seen them advertised in the pages of the *New York Times* and the catalogues published by the Trilateral Commission, the Aspen Institute, and the Council on Foreign Relations. The scout collects the ornaments of the policy-making establishments in the way that twelve-year-old boys collect the portraits of baseball heroes found in packages of bubble gum. He thinks of them as giants, as leaders, as Very Important People who have been to NATO and the Bohemian Grove. It never occurs to him that he is dealing, almost without exception, with the personifications of the same toadying mediocrity that distinguished the administrations of Presidents Nixon and Ford. Impressed by the merit badges sewn on the sleeves of the older scouts, the diarist marvels at their sophisticated banter with the camp counselors. He conceives of Zbigniew Brzezinski as "a first-rate thinker" and a master of expository prose. Mr. Brzezinski undoubtedly possesses many talents, but thinking and writing, at least in English, are not among them. To the scout this is unimportant. He believes what he reads on the labels, and it is enough that Brzezinski can find Czechoslovakia on a map.

By the time he comes to page 54 the scout has persuaded himself that he knows most of what needs to be known about "history, politics, international events and foreign policy." He tells his diary that he likes nothing better than to sit around with "Ham and Jody and Zbig," talking wonderfully important talk about the fate of mankind. He's been at camp for little more than a month, hardly time enough to unpack his catcher's mitt, but already he can "disagree strongly and fundamen-

tally" on questions of state; already he has become the peer of Kissinger and Castle-reagh, and guess what, Mama, these Very Important People, these veteran scouts who can read a menu in French, they nod and smile and listen to what he has to say. All of it is pretty big-time stuff, Mama, for a boy who, before coming north, thought that history was for girls.

"Next to the members of my family," he explains in one of his letters home, "Zbig would be my favorite seatmate on a long-distance trip; we might argue, but I would never be bored."

And then, of course, there was Fritz and Cy—the most expensive objects displayed in the catalogues. Wonderful, wonderful Fritz Mondale who was a man of such stature, and Cy, good old decorous Cy. About Cy, the scout can't say enough.

Among all the members of my official Cabinet, Cy Vance and his wife, Gay, became the closest personal friends to Rosalynn and me. He and I were to spend many good times together—talking, fishing, skiing, playing tennis—as well as the less enjoyable hours negotiating a Middle East settlement and praying for the hostages.

Later in the camp term the scout humiliates Cy in a particularly nasty and mean-spirited way, but this is Cy's fault, and by that time the scout has taken to referring to him simply as Vance.

On page 39 the scout briefly addresses the dilemma of nuclear war and responds with his customary self-satisfaction:

I wanted to understand our defense organization . . . and my myriad special responsibilities in the control and potential use of atomic weapons. This is a sobering duty of the chief executive of our country, and every serious candidate for this office must decide whether he is capable of using or willing to use nuclear weapons if it should become necessary in order to defend our country. Under those circumstances, I was ready to perform this duty.

That's about as far as the scout gets with the question, which, fortunately for all concerned, doesn't exceed the moral capacities required of a first-year camper. Nor does the scout have much trouble making decisions. On page 57 he explains that once he had found his way to the lake and athletic fields, he felt pretty confident with the camp routine.

I realized that my ability to govern well would depend upon my mastery of the extremely important issues I faced. I wanted to learn as much as possible and devoted full time to it, just as I had done as a young submarine officer, a businessman, a governor and a political candidate running against enormous odds to be elected President.

Because he "devoted full time to it," the scout assumes that he has reached complete understanding. How could it be otherwise? The scout believes that his time is not like other men's time, that he has been blessed with omniscience and grace. He also enjoys a close and long-standing acquaintance with God, to whom he "prayed a lot—more than ever before in





# V. S. PRITCHETT on The Folio Society

A year or two ago I overheard a bibliophile mutter 'Reader' with disappointment as he sniffed along my chaotic bookshelves. Of course! Not only a reader, but a re-reader, for a writer's books are the tools of his trade. Most of my books are serviceable: there is the occasional gleam of an elegant production, but there is a lot of the reach-me-down bought out of my wages when I was young, and some – like my French and Spanish, though not my Russian – are getting tatty and my eyesight is not up to the grey print of modern replacements. The sharp decline in so much of our present printing and our binding seems to me one more sign of the decline in the honour in which a literary culture was once held. It is because The Folio Society restores this honour to literature and its authors that I am more than eager to speak for them.



Drawing by Quentin Blake from *Scoop*

When I think of getting a new copy of a book that has been pinched from my shelves – Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* or Helen Waddell's *The Wandering Scholars* for example – I know now where to look for a distinctive edition worthy of the author and of my trade. I am no bibliophile. I do not chase first editions. I want to do the authors honour because they have lasted, whether they are major, minor or eccentric figures. All are links in the chain: no minor writers, no major writers. We learn from one another at random.

My stolen Lermontov, that marvellous Russian short story, *A Hero of Our Time*, seminal to the Russian and indeed European short story, was school-bookish. In Folio it is elegant but not arty: like all Folio's editions it is intelligently introduced and in this case lithographs by Dodie Masterman evoke the romantic Byronic tale. The Folio volumes have revived and reconsidered the Victorian art of illustration. My Turgenev's were good but small and worn. The Folio edition of his *Fathers and Sons* is graceful, suited to the delicate master of Russian prose, who was above all a man of taste himself: here again the lithographs of Janos Kass add their comment on the manners of his society. There is also a collection of six



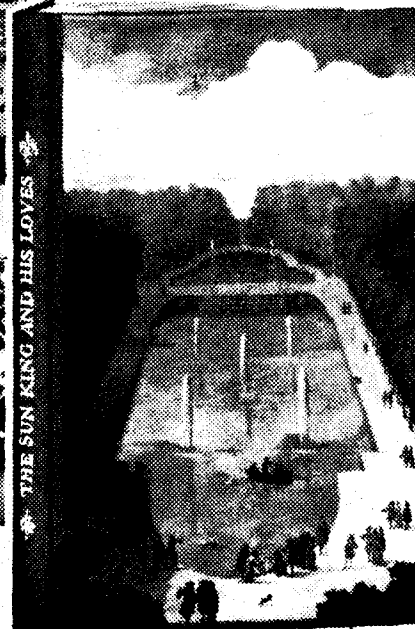
Turgenev stories. Five are certainly his best: *The Superfluous Man*, *Mumu*, *King Lear of the Steppes*, *Asya*, *First Love*. The sixth, Turgenev's last tale, *The Song of Triumphant Love*, has irritated or bewildered many critics, including Richard Freeborn the present translator, who speculates on Turgenev's 'elderly experiments in the occult and Oriental. To my ear this tale has chiefly a biographical interest: I suspect it of starting as one of those fanciful operettas he used to write as a doubtful compliment to the singer Pauline Viardot who tormented him.

There are finds. Two years ago I needed to look at one of Trollope's short stories, particularly *Lotte Schmidt*, so well spoken of. Impossible to find a copy outside the British Museum, but here it is in the Folio *The Two Heroines of Plumplington*, introduced by Julian Symons. At last, too, I can get Bewick's *My Life*: there is an incurable amateur naturalist in English readers, but I want it for the exquisite engravings. And then there are books one ought to have known and which I know now I shall never read but which some younger maniac might jump at. One tantalises me with the memory of an irrecoverable impulse. I was mad about the Fall of Granada when I was thirteen. I even wrote 150 pages of a novel on the subject at that time. Why didn't I know of Diego Hurtado de Mendoza's eyewitness report *The War in Granada*? How sad.

But Folio does strike a balance between the old and the new, the solid and the esoteric. Classics like *Pickwick Papers* and *Our Mutual Friend* need to look new to the taste of later generations; and the great English gift for comedy and satire has its moderns like Stella Gibbons' wicked fun with the rustic novels of the T.F. Powys period, *Cold Comfort Farm*. Like Waugh's *Scoop* and *Black Mischief*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*, they deserve their commemoration. In the Twenties, privately-printed editions played an important part in drawing attention to new writing and the established. Folio does this for us now.



The Sun King & his Loves  
by Lucy Norton.  
Normal price: \$16.75 –  
FREE to members.



## Your passport to an unforgettable age...

The coupon below will bring you a copy of the elegant Presentation Volume for Folio members: *The Sun King and his Loves*, together with the full 32-page Folio Prospectus for 1983.

If you pick as few as four books from the 120 beautifully made (and modestly priced) titles described, and send us your order, *The Sun King and his Loves* remains yours absolutely free.

Specially commissioned by the Society from Lucy Norton (translator of the Saint-Simon Memoirs), this glittering portrait illuminates what Voltaire called 'an unforgettable age'... through the character of Louis XIV of France, the absolute monarch whose relentless pursuit of glory bequeathed to his heirs Versailles – the grandest palace in Europe – and the seeds of the bloodiest revolution in history.

### BEAUTIFUL BOOKS FROM THE FOLIO SOCIETY

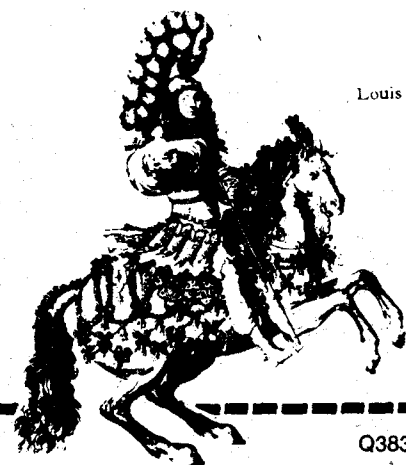
The Folio Society is a unique international society of book lovers. Based in London, England, it sells its books to every country in the world. And sends them free of all shipping charges!

Folio Books are based on ideals of quality, not quantity. They are individually designed, strikingly illustrated, carefully produced: set, mainly, in hot metal, printed on special makings of paper, and properly bound in the traditional way.

The Folio choices give you a wide selection (over 120) of books of permanent, not passing interest. Major and minor classics from literature and history: the well loved and the half forgotten. Books worth reading and re-reading. Editions that often go up in value as the years go by.

Folio methods mean you choose. You order four books only once a year in advance from over 120 listed in the fully descriptive 32-page prospectus. No monthly cycle of publicity to respond to; and so no parcels you didn't mean to order.

Find out more... To try this small and beautiful system, simply mail us the coupon below. It commits you to nothing more than sight of our full list, plus *The Sun King and his Loves*, which is yours to keep if you decide to join.



Louis XIV

Folio Books Ltd,  
c/o Expeditors of the Printed Word Ltd,  
527 Madison Avenue (Suite 1217),  
New York, NY 10022.

To: The Membership Secretary. I am interested in joining The Folio Society, and would like to see your Presentation Volume of *The Sun King & his Loves* by Lucy Norton, together with the 1983 Prospectus. I will send my order for a minimum of four books promptly, thus taking up membership on the terms described, or else send back the Presentation Volume. As a member, I understand I can return any book if not satisfied.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Mr \_\_\_\_\_

Mrs \_\_\_\_\_

Miss \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Q383

Please print all information below.

my life." The alliance between his own sublime competence and God's political tips removed from his mind "any possibility of timidity or despair." Thus he could make quick work of the business of state ("option papers describing the choices I had to make rarely stayed on my desk overnight") and get back to the more urgent and poetic task of writing bulletins to his diary.

It isn't that Mr. Carter perjures himself in the first sixty-two pages of his memoirs but rather that he shows himself so incapable of self-knowledge that his words lose all hope of relation to the events he chooses to describe. Except as the odd expression of mind afflicted with terminal narcissism, how is it possible to accept the testimony of a man who believes that the White House is a fun and comfortable place, that Zbigniew Brzezinski is a first-rate thinker, that the arts of government devolve automatically, with the desk and the telephone system, on the occupant of the Oval Office?

If any doubts remain as to Mr. Carter's delusions of moral grandeur, he puts them to rest with the repeated references to himself as "a populist," i.e., a humble man of the people winning the prize of the presidency against the all but insuperable obstacles raised against him by the northern and eastern establishments. This is so ludicrous a misstatement of the facts that it changes the venue of Mr. Carter's self-serving fictions from the arena of political chicanery to the amphitheatre of clinical pathology. As a populist, Mr. Carter was a fraud. In the campaigns of 1976 he enjoyed the full faith and backing not only of the northern media but also of the eastern financial interests. He was the candidate boomed by the *New York Times*, by *Time* magazine, by David Rockefeller's Trilateral Commission, by the entire apparatus of eager Democratic office-seekers who hoped for nothing better than a chance, after eight years of eating nuts and berries in the Republican wilderness, to return to the picnic tables of federal patronage. The Democrats that year lacked the moral and intellectual energy to go to the trouble of staging even the pretense of debate. What difference did it make? What was there to say except that it would be nice to be back in Georgetown? Against Gerald Ford, the heir presumptive to Richard Nixon's disgrace, the Democrats figured they could win with any candidate willing to spend the required period of time in Holiday Inns. Carter would do as well as anyone else, largely because the media had become enchanted by a fairy tale of their own invention in which Jimmy Carter appeared as the avatar of the old-fashioned rural virtues believed (at least among city folks) to reside in small towns. It was the bicentennial year, and the media were in a mood to listen to homespun sermons and country

guitars. To the editors of *Newsweek* Jimmy Carter looked like the political analogue of the Beverly Hillbillies and the Nashville Sound. The scout passed his preliminary examinations with people like Cyrus Vance and Douglas Dillon and Paul Austin, persuading those fine gentlemen on the admissions committee that he possessed the traditional southern qualities that William Faulkner attributed to the Snopes family—small-minded and mean, only too eager to do what he was told in order to protect the Yankee investment in the cotton fields. Two years later, after it became painfully obvious that the scout also believed his Sunday-school nonsense, the media turned away from him in scorn and disgust. By the autumn of 1979 Mr. Carter had become so peripheral a figure in American politics that he had to push his way into the locker room at the end of a World Series game in order to attract the notice of the television cameras. In November of that year he was rescued from oblivion by the divine intercession of Allah.

The chapter headings of *Keeping Faith* indicate that beyond page 62 the scout discusses China and Bert Lance and human rights and the energy crisis and the Panama Canal and Camp David and God knows how many other topics of pressing concern. I couldn't force myself to read the text. Neither would I willingly listen to a narrative of the Wilderness Campaign told to me by some poor soul imagining himself to be Ulysses S. Grant.

Glancing at the diarist's notes that continue throughout the book, I see that the scout persists with his relentless discovery of the obvious. Sometimes he marks the spot with an exclamation point. He learns that the press is irresponsible, that the Congress puts its private interests ahead of the public interest, that the Arabs and the Jews don't like each other, that the Russians have a lot of guns. Whenever something goes wrong, it is invariably somebody else's fault. Sen. Edward Kennedy prevents him from giving the country a wonderful, wonderful health-care program; Walter Sullivan, the American Ambassador in Teheran, causes him to suffer the agony of the hostage crisis; the Ayatollah deprives him of re-election in 1980; the American people fail him throughout his Administration because they concentrate too much on their own selfish interests and refuse to understand

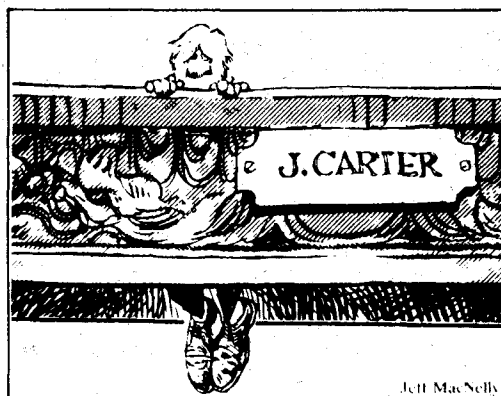
that he had come among them as their saviour and redeemer.

All in all, despite the world's ingratitude, the scout still manages to have a wonderful time. Toward the end it gets a little hard to find enough people who properly appreciate the gift of his person. During his last week in the White House he presides at a banquet for the happy few who remain loyal to his vision of a world that might have been. The evening is a wonderful, wonderful success. After dinner the guests go into the ballroom to listen to John Raitt sing hit songs from *Carousel* and *Oklahoma!*; several of the guests come forward to whisper compliments into the scout's eager ear. Of these flatteries "the most memorable of all" is presented by Slava Rostropovich, the cellist recently arrived in the United States as an exile from the Soviet Union. The scout thinks the phrasing especially fine because Rostropovich is "a courageous man . . . and special friend of ours" who has suffered the cruelties of a police state and therefore knows what life is all about. The praise of Rostropovich is worth ten thousand times the praise of the *Washington Post*. So delighted is the scout with the music of the cellist's "heavily-accented" voice that he must have found it difficult to wait until everybody left before rushing upstairs to tell his diary the wonderful, wonderful news. The entry deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

Slava Rostropovich gave an excellent little speech at our table, pointing out that the masses of people were often wrong—that what was significant was the personal relationship that developed between leaders or performers or artists and others. He said that we had meant more than anyone in the United States to him and his family when they came here from the Soviet Union. He pointed out that the masses made a mistake on November the 4th, as they had when they rejected Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, rejected *La Traviata*, and in the first performance of *Tosca* the audience reacted against it so violently that they couldn't even raise the curtain for the third act. He said history was going to treat my administration the same way they did Verdi, Puccini, and Beethoven. It was beautiful.

Diary, January 13, 1981

This notation all but ends the scout's reverie; it appears on pages 593 and 594, in the place that a musical composition would reserve to the coda. Nothing more needs to be said about the deranged melody that Mr. Carter plays on his two-string banjo. I'm told that the book was accorded respectful reviews in the *New York Times*, the *New York Review of Books*, and a number of other journals supposedly interested in the direction of American politics. If this is true and not merely a vicious rumor put about by right-wing extremists, then the nation probably can look forward within the next few years to the election of a President capable of composing even crazier music for drums, cymbals, and atomic bomb. □







## A NEW PLAN FOR EASTERN EUROPE

by Arch Puddington

This past fall an event took place that was unique in the annals of recent American foreign policy. Under the official auspices of the State Department, sixty or so academics, government officials, journalists, human rights advocates, and trade unionists were brought together at a conference designed, in the words of its sponsor, "to identify and develop means to promote democratic development under communist regimes." The conference was unique because, conventional assumptions to the contrary, the question of precisely what strategies might influence liberal change within the Soviet Empire has not been seriously considered by our government for many years.

To be specific, the goal of encouraging democratization in countries within the Soviet orbit was virtually abandoned after the failure of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. As many here saw it, the uprising might not have come to so tragic an end had not the freedom fighters taken to heart the bold statements about roll-back and liberation enunciated by Secretary of State Dulles. In the crunch, no military aid was forthcoming from the democratic world; only expressions of sympathy, futile protestations in the United Nations, and sanctuary for refugees. Compounding the feelings of American shame was the fact that several irresponsible broadcasts over Radio Free Europe led the Hungarians to the mistaken belief that American troops were being dispatched to ensure the rebellion's success.

This unhappy experience gave rise to what has been called the Budapest Syndrome—a conviction that open American support for East European liberation movements will inevitably provoke massive Soviet retaliation. The attitudes enshrined in the Budapest Syndrome dominated the thoughts of our policymakers during

the next East European outburst, the 1968 Prague Spring. Neither the Johnson Administration nor, for that matter, human-rights organizations gave much in the way of support to the reformist forces around Alexander Dubček. It is true that the American people were preoccupied with various domestic traumas, one of which, the tumultuous Democratic convention, coincided with the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops. Nevertheless, it is useful to recall, especially for those harboring lingering nostalgia for the sixties, that Eugene McCarthy explained his refusal to issue a forthright condemnation of Soviet aggression on the grounds that the Johnson Administration "had responded to the invasion as though it was a great international crisis" with an eye toward exploiting the Czech developments to consolidate support for its Vietnam policies. For McCarthy, then the champion of enhanced democracy at home, Soviet military action in its "sphere of influence" did not constitute a particularly noteworthy event.

As a French official put it, Czechoslovakia was a mere "traffic accident" on the road to détente.

Détente brought a new dimension to the debate over our relationship with the Communist world. To the notion that the United States could do nothing to stimulate reform through strategies predicated on unrelenting hostility to Communism was added a theoretical justification for a policy amounting to benign neglect. According to this thesis, the traditional image of Communism as a failed and despised system was badly flawed, and deserved to be jettisoned along with other relics from Cold War mythology. The people of Eastern Europe (and the Soviet Union), by and large and with the exception of a handful of intellectual malcontents, had come to accept their "socialist" system. A form of social contract had been forged between the Communist rulers and their subjects: no longer would total ideological conformity be demanded; economic growth and the

improvement of living standards would be the chief goals of the regime; workplace regimentation would be eased; religious, cultural, and artistic restrictions cautiously relaxed. In return, the people would refrain from questioning the Communists' monopoly of political, police, and economic power.

Moreover, so the détenteist perspective had it, if we were really interested in accelerating the pace of liberalization, the best thing we could do was to strengthen détente itself. In this way, a Soviet Union less suspicious of Western intentions would feel more inclined to permit the satellite regimes to initiate measures of cautious change. The East European regimes, in turn, would evolve in a more humanistic direction if for no other reason than to guarantee the uninterrupted flow of détente's economic fruits in the form of credits and advanced technology.

If these views did not command a consensus among academics and policymakers, they nonetheless were embraced by a large and influential group within the foreign policy establishment. Meanwhile, those who might have been inclined to question détenteism's tortured logic found themselves in a state of demoralized retreat, shaken by the collapse of Vietnam and the general weakening of America's position throughout the world. They also had to contend with an atmosphere in the foreign policy fraternity decidedly unfriendly to the raising of pointed questions about the wisdom of prevailing policies. Simply to employ phrases like "captive nations," "liberation" (when applied to the Communist world), or "totalitarianism" was to risk being treated with amused condescension as one mired in the discredited dogmas of the past.

Although many interpreted the election of Ronald Reagan as signaling the death knell for détente, subsequent events, most recently the response among Soviet specialists to the elevation of Yuri Andropov, suggest that this is not at all the case. Yet the theories which provided the



*Arch Puddington is executive director of the League for Industrial Democracy and editor of Workers Under Communism.*