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C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

For Starters

The March 1983 issue was absolutely great. If you've ever published anything better than Tom Bethell's "Badlands Bolshevism," I can't remember it.

—John M. Ekeberg
Santa Rosa, California

Richard Grenier's "The Greatest Peace Movement of Them All" (TAS, March 1983) seems to me one of the most well-researched, stongly reasoned, skillfully written, powerfully disturbing, and plain damn important essays you have ever published. My most fervent congratulations both to you and to him. I hope and believe this superlative and compelling piece will have an enduring impact on the sorry history of our time. . . .

—Calder Willingham
New Hampton, New Hampshire

Cheap Shot

"I couldn't force myself to read the text." Those eight words cast a grey pall over both Lewis H. Lapham and *The American Spectator* (TAS, March 1983). My philosophy and/or politics aside, a reviewer who has not read the work to be reviewed is dishonest in the extreme: dishonest to his editor, his readers, the author and himself. An editor who knowingly allows publication of a "review" written by someone who has not read the book is worse. It is his job, especially in a publication attempting some semblance of intelligence and scholarship, to ensure honesty and accuracy. Otherwise the credibility of the entire publication is lost. And from an editor who sprinkles his own writings with phrases lifted from HLM one expects the Sage's honesty, if not his erudition and understanding.

No more cheap shots like this one, OK?

—L. Skutch
Westport, Connecticut

Lewis H. Lapham's piece on the Carter memoirs was interesting for the first couple of paragraphs but it does seem a shame to waste the author's obvious talent on such an unworthy subject.

Couldn't he have just said, "I read the book and I told you what to expect four years ago." That would have

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saved several hours of his time and three or four pages of your splendid publication.

I suggest that the subject deserved no more than a couple of sentences among the gems on page 47.

—E.L. Newton
Carson City, Nevada

New Enemies of Taki

The visceral sneer which appeared on page 16 of your March issue (Taki's "Politique Internationale: What Price Oil?"), committed under the influence of a brain fever or perhaps one ouzo too many, should have been deposited in either the circular file or the nearest convenience.

The author's point is as simple as he is; the Israelis are always right, as Ribbentrop thought Hitler to be, and anyone who dares to criticize them must be anti-Semitic. Never mind that other countries' interests may not always be identical to those of Israel. Those countries are in thrall to Arab oil and money (though curiously not to Jewish gold; "In London . . . the Jewish community is at full strength" " . . . the power of France's Jewish community . . . " conditions in America are self-evident). Further, the British government is infested with homosexuals and/or fellow travelers, and the Arabs are to be discounted because their leaders traffic with "blonde hookers." What are we to make of a writer who decries queers and prostitutes? Loyal husband? Don Juan? Prude? Maybe those stories about Greece, where men are men and sheep are nervous, have some basis in fact. In any event, were my surname Theodoracopulos, I'd hesitate to accuse even English public school alumni of buggery. . . .

—Robert Thomas
Bloomfield, New Jersey

It is sad that I, a U.S. conservative, should read the new year's prime piece of race-baiting in the March issue of your magazine.

There, your European correspondent, Taki, rationalizes Israel's "clean-up in Lebanon" with such proud clichés as, "the Arabs are like the Germans used to be: either at your feet or at your throat."

And, as history is re-written in a paragraph, Taki places the onus of the 1948 displacement of two million Palestinians from their homeland not on the Israelis who occupied it (nor nations of the West who made it

possible) but on surrounding Arab states who, he says, were provided terrorists from the "dreadful camps" to which the refugees fled, and who "stint" on compassion for these people, but "not on guns or blonde hookers."

Why, for expressing outrage at Israel's clean-up in Lebanon Margaret Thatcher's British government is denounced as anti-Semitic. Surely this is not what his contact, the Israeli publicist David Garth, had in mind. Mr. Garth is a pro, and Taki does not tell us that Mr. Garth, out of New York, has been a political consultant to Menachem Begin, and was recently retained by the Anti-Defamation League to soften the blow of Israel's clean-up in Lebanon on the U.S. public—mostly by blaming the media for its coverage of the clean-up.

But Garth is cited as explaining away the 1946 Begin-directed bombing of Jerusalem's King David Hotel on the wholly unproven assurance that Begin's people called before they came. What did Garth tell Taki about the Begin lynchings of British sergeants and the senseless massacre of the Arab village of Deir Yassin?

Like all such polemicists Taki invokes "the truth" about Palestine. But if any is there it is burned to a crisp in the fire of the author's hatred for the Arabs.

—Jack Angell
Park Ridge, Illinois

Dismay in Santa Clara

As a member of a small band of campus conservatives about to produce a newsletter, it is with some measure of dismay that I have followed the exchange over the last few issues between Tod Lindberg and the *Dartmouth Review* et al. I would venture that both sides failed to address some very crucial issues.

The current generation of college students has grown up in an era that has totally suppressed the conservative case. There is no discussion of Liberty; and the schools extol the virtues of democracy without mention of the principles of the Republic that made this nation great. In short, we are working in a vacuum of ignorance.

Yet our greatest enemies are the webs of distortion woven around young conservatives. Campus liberals invest a great deal of energy in the myth that people are conservative

(continued on page 37)

THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR.

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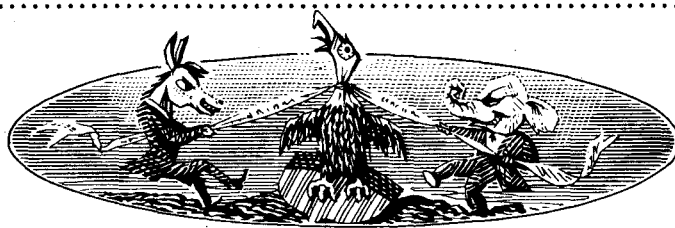
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UNDER ROMAN RUINS

by Tom Bethell

As we drove into Rome, past litter-strewn outskirts which would have made any American liberal feel proud of his Environmental Protection Agency, the guide in the front of the bus remarked that Roman shops were closed on Monday mornings. Then there was the lunch hour to consider (or was it two hours?) and of course there was the afternoon siesta. As best I could make out the time to go shopping was about five o'clock in the evening.

There were about twelve of us in the bus—"intellectuals," as Bob Tyrrell teasingly called us—and I think we all began working out simultaneously the public-policy implications of this news about Roman business hours. There were a few trained supply-siders in our group,

and it is well known that supply-siders do not miss opportunities to analyze the way the world either works or opts for leisure.

"It sounds like they need a tax cut," said Les Lenkowsky from the back of the bus. He works for the Smith-Richardson Foundation. I was about to correct him gently by saying, "You mean, tax rate reduction, especially the top marginal rates on income, with particular reference to rates on investment or 'unearned' income," which is my standard interruption on these occasions. But William Kristol, political science professor at the University of Pennsylvania, got in ahead of me by saying, "True, but it would spoil the charm."

We have just flown in from New York and have not yet put up at our first hotel, yet here we were already engaged in dialogue and a meaningful exchange of views. Could young Kristol be right, I worried? (We were all "young" on this trip, but some were younger than others.) By this time we were passing close to the Roman Forum, a "marketplace of ideas" in former times, and one or two other well-known sites of Imperial Rome. Bits of pieces of marble were lying here and there amidst the cat-littered grassy slopes, and old ruins were set elegantly amidst pine trees. We passed a small circular temple with a conical roof, said to be 2,300 years old.

Were there opportunities here for entrepreneurs—opportunities which could only be realized if there were a significant shift in the relative price (or "opportunity costs") of leisure and effort? Or was Kristol right to suggest that under certain circumstances and in certain societies fully depreciated ruins acquire a higher implicit value ("charm") than is likely to be attained by any alternative resource use?

A meaningful question, I think we'll all agree, but one to which there could be no simplistic answer. Perhaps it could be put on the table for

tomorrow's exchange of views at the USIS library.

Shunning sleep, I decided to inspect the Roman public transportation system in the afternoon. First I attempted to enter the Metro system at a station called *Repubblica*, but this proved to be difficult. Two uniformed guards standing by the entrance gate told me that I would have to go back outside to a certain *tabaccàio* where I could buy the necessary ticket. The *tabaccàionist* told me that he had sold out, but he directed me to another vendor even farther away from the subway entrance. Eventually I bought the ticket, returned to the subway, was admitted by the uniformed guards, and boarded a train.

Such a complex system must surely have strong "disincentives" built into it, I reflected, and the Roman citizenry evidently concurred. Only about nine or ten of them were on the train—this in the middle of the afternoon. Thus I felt I had established the significant point that Romans were incentivists and would so report to Prof. Laffer on my return to America. (With the following cautionary footnote: it could have been, of course, that ridership was sparse because the people were all still taking siestas as a result of other disincentives already mentioned. But this would not alter my generalization about the Roman disposition.)

As we rattled along underground it did occur to me that although the Roman metro system may not have been flawlessly designed from the point of view of incentives, it was surprising to find they had a metro at all. Imagine how difficult it must have been to excavate the tunnels without boring into long-buried Caesarean sections and so on.

I emerged at the station called *Colosseo*, which is near to the center of Rome. This would have been the equivalent of rush hour in America, but the station was almost deserted. I think I noticed only three or four people on the platform. I paused

briefly to admire the ancient stadium, 1,900 years old and today entirely nonfunctional (but as with the metro, of course, surprising to find it there at all). However, I did not let it distract me too much from my supply-side train of thought.

The siesta had ended after all. Dozens of small cars were rushing about madly in all directions, and the buses were packed to the bursting point. Roman buses, it turns out, operate on an "honor" system, as follows. Once again, you find a *tabaccàio* or some such authorized vendor, you buy your ticket, and you board your bus, which is operated by a driver who pays no attention to the passengers or whether they have tickets. You are supposed to push your ticket into a machine, which goes "clonk" and stamps it with the date. Once in a while a ticket inspector may come aboard and check up on everyone. You risk a

Tom Bethell is The American Spectator's Washington correspondent.

