

that? Many are mildly interested in politics, but think there's more to life than speculating about who's-going-to-run and who's-going-to-win. Is that so bad? I know quite a few who are deeply religious, born-again Christians even. Should they be faulted for this? Not on your life.

But the way the press writes about yuppies, they are good for only one thing, being sneered at. Which is what

a lot of political reporters did when covering Hart's campaign last year. I remember being summoned by another reporter before one of the primaries to attend a Hart rally and see all the yuppies. Naturally, we went to sneer at the well-dressed Hart enthusiasts sipping wine and cheering for Gary. These people might have lacked ideological commitment, but they sure were more attractive than a crowd at an anti-Chile

rally or a Helen Caldicott speech. Their politics were a lot less kooky, too.

My favorite bit of yuppie-bashing came in a *Washington Post* article about a 37-year-old woman who gave up her job as an administrative assistant in Washington to become an anti-war street person. She keeps a vigil at the White House and sleeps in alleys with husband William Thomas, a peacenik who attracted her to the street

life. She eats out of garbage cans and was even quoted as saying that leftovers from Hardee's are best. You may be getting the impression that this woman has gone around the bend, and that certainly was my reaction. But the gist of the article was that she had turned to a life of impoverished nobility. And it made this point in one sentence. It said: "Thus Ellen Benjamin, Yuppie, became Ellen Thomas, Activist." □

AMONG THE EDUCATIONALOIDS



TEACHERS' TABLOID

by Chester E. Finn, Jr.

Occasionally the values that guide an organization and the priorities that govern it emerge with special clarity from its communications with its own members.

The primary internal publication of the National Education Association is *NEA Today*, a tabloid that comes out

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eight times a year. All members automatically receive it; none but members may subscribe. Ranging in length from 24 to 32 pages, laid out with colorful graphics and many photographs, it is almost certainly the largest-circulation publication in the entire field of education as well as the principal means by which the NEA stays in touch with its legions. (State and local affiliates, of course, also have their own publications.)

One can spend an interesting evening rummaging through a stack of *NEA Today*, as I recently did with the issues published during 1984. Many of the articles are harmless. Some appear genuinely helpful to teachers. A good deal of space is taken up with routine organizational news, profiles of individual members, advertisements (especially by computer companies) and divers services and benefits—retirement planning, cut-rate travel, insurance, and the like. But hither and yon are discussions of education policy, domestic social policy, and foreign policy that are, as it were, revelatory. And everywhere is politics: organizational politics, local politics, state politics, above all national politics.

Granted, 1984 was an election year and thus perhaps atypical. But Walter Mondale's name appeared on the cover of five issues (and his photo on one). The only front page mention of the incumbent President said "New Reagan budget shortchanges education (again)." And the "President's Viewpoint"—a monthly column on page two by association chief Mary Hatwood Futrell—was devoted to the national elections six of eight times.

In January-February, she explained that Reagan's vaunted "niceness" is a myth and "we in the education community must not be beguiled . . . or mesmerized." In March, she attacked his interest in school discipline. In April, any members troubled by the Association's political activism were advised that "it is unprofessional and patently irresponsible for educators to abandon the political realm" and that the NEA's huge political action com-

mittee "could well be called our Educational Excellence Commission." The May column defended a congeries of federal programs such as bilingual education and the Women's Educational Equity Act against the "nonsense" and "brutal message" of the Reagan Administration. October featured a straightforward Mondale endorsement, coupled with the suggestion that NEA members, who like Reagan ought to listen to their consciences. November was a plea to get out the vote in order to elect "an Administration that's committed to giving schools the resources they need." On the facing page was a loving interview with Fritz Mondale's fifth-grade teacher in Elmore: "He always had a big grin on his face," she recalled, "and he was constantly helping people."

The electoral politics should come as no surprise, inasmuch as it's been obvious for about a decade that the National Education Association is first and foremost a political union. What was more remarkable, to me at least, in the pages of *NEA Today* during 1984 was the pervasiveness of ideology, both with respect to educational issues and to national and international affairs loosely cloaked in enough education to justify their discussion. Herewith a sampler:

January-February. This is the issue in which the NEA rates members of Congress according to their stands on selected "issues of concern to NEA." There were just seven key votes tallied in the House, including the Equal Rights Amendment; senators were also

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recorded seven times, including the bill to establish a Martin Luther King, Jr. national holiday. This issue of *NEA Today* contained the association's annual financial report, too, from which we see that it spent \$75 million in 1983, \$30 million of this sum for "organizational development" and another three million for government relations and political affairs. (The budgets of state and local affiliates, and of political action committees, are not included.)

March featured a famous debate on the pros and cons of continuing to teach English grammar in the schools—it was far from clear which side prevailed—and a scathing attack on the Reagan Administration's civil rights policies and practices, notably including the reconstitution of the Civil Rights Commission and the selection as its staff director of Linda Chavez, "a former top aide to American Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker."

In April, *NEA Today* took on Arkansas governor Bill Clinton for his proposal (agreed to by the state legislature) to require all teachers in the state to pass a test of minimum academic competency. The great Nestlé boycott, which the NEA had endorsed in 1980, was touted as a success, leaving only the crop of one non-union lettuce grower on the list of "products that NEA urges members not to buy."

In May, the association announced its board's endorsement of the "National Week for Peace with Justice" to focus attention on "the human costs of the arms race" and to "spur discussion on the importance of reducing military expenditures." *NEA Today* also reminded members of the union's steadfast support for bilingual education programs of the kind that are slow to move children into "total English" classrooms. The Supreme Court came in for criticism because of its *Grove City* decision, which an association vice-president termed "another Reagan Administration-engineered blow to women's rights." (The NEA had joined in an *amicus* brief on the other side.) Members learned of another friend-of-the-court brief in a case testing the validity and inclusiveness of "union shop" arrangements, a brief specifically urging the Supreme Court to dissolve limits on the use of "agency fees" (dues paid unwillingly by employees who decline to be union members) for "political and ideological activities unrelated to bargaining." May was also the month in which a special insert supplied the texts of amendments to the constitution and bylaws that would be considered at the NEA's upcoming annual convention. Included were proposals to bar from active membership anyone "serving in an administrative capacity" in the schools; to drop the

limit on the number of terms that an individual can serve as an association officer; and to perfect the NEA's already-elaborate system of ethnic quotas by requiring the board to "maintain twenty percent ethnic-minority representation" by filling any vacancies that arise between national conventions.

By June, the national political conventions were on the horizon, and *NEA Today* regaled readers with news of the association's role in drafting the Democratic party platform. This was not a trivial role: "As we go to press, 13 of the more than 100 Democrats serving on the platform committee are Association members." Also featured this month was an account of NEA efforts to enact a federal collective bargaining law for public employees, so that the dozen or so states that have thus far resisted teacher unionization would no longer have a choice. Included in the proposed federal law—support for which is now one of the litmus tests applied to congressional candidates seeking NEA endorsement—are "exclusive representation," the right to strike, and the power to exact dues from nonmembers. Not to neglect the rest of the world, the June issue takes readers on a brief visit to Chile where, they learn, "dogmatic 'free market' economists trained in the U.S. have effectively dismantled a once-thriving education system." Lest members not see the connection to the association's domestic political agenda, it is spelled out for them: "What would happen to our public school system if Ronald Reagan's most zealous rightwing supporters were given a free hand? There's a good chance it would become a carbon copy of Chile's."

After a summer hiatus, *NEA Today* reappeared in October with an issue devoted substantially to the upcoming presidential election, complete with profiles of five teachers who said they had voted for Reagan in 1980 but would not do so in 1984. An updated "legislative report card" gave members a timely reminder of which congressmen deserve support at the polls. An interview with Judy Blume, the author of myriad risqué novels for teenagers, makes her out to be a victim of "censorship" because some parents, school boards—and even librarians and teachers—do not consider her books suitable. The centerpiece of the October issue, however, was the report produced by the NEA's "Blue Ribbon Task Force on Educational Excellence," and adopted at the national convention in July. Its principal recommendation was that starting teacher pay across the country be hiked to a minimum of \$24,000. As for including any gauge of

Revolutionary Reprints Thomas Paine Would Distribute Proudly

(and the *New York Times* would not dare publish)



"The Befuddlement of American Catholicism" by William McGurn. In this reprint from the March 1984 issue, European editor McGurn traces the church's move toward a massive clerical intrusion into all aspects of secular life, from bishops embracing unilateral disarmament to disenchanted nuns excoriating the Reagan administration's moral callousness. With some of the bishops penning yet another socialist indictment of the American condition, this article provides an understanding of these New Age clerics. (\$1 for one, \$6 for ten, \$12 for twenty-five, \$45 for one hundred)

"Gay Times and Diseases" by Patrick J. Buchanan and J. Gordon Muir. This expose of the diseases that accompany the American homosexual lifestyle, and the health threat these diseases pose to non-homosexuals is must reading at a time when Americans are being asked to accept homosexuality into the mainstream of their culture. (\$1 for one, \$6 for ten, \$12 for twenty-five, \$45 for one hundred)

"Sanctifying Revolution: Protestantism's New Social Gospel" by Rael Jean Isaac and Erich Isaac. The Isaacs' research into the Marxist links behind various church movements first made headlines when it appeared in the May 1981 issue of the *Spectator*, and was followed shortly thereafter by coverage on *60 Minutes*. In the wake of the WCC's criticism of the Afghan freedom fighters, the Isaacs' documentation of how Church money is being spent in various countries is now more important than ever—makes an ideal gift for your minister. (\$1 for one, \$6 for ten, \$12 for twenty-five, \$30 for one hundred)



"The Counterfeit Peacemakers: Atomic Freeze" by Rael Jean Isaac and Erich Isaac. This 12-page investigative report appeared in the June 1982 issue and documents Soviet involvement in the nuclear freeze movement. This article was the subject of a White House Press conference, as well as numerous national newspaper articles and television shows. (\$1.25 for one, \$10 for ten, \$20 for twenty-five, \$75 for one hundred)



"Is Supply-Side Economics Dead?": a symposium. Although Carterites and other liberal intellectualoids tried to declare it DOA, Tyrrell assembled this collection of economic wizards for the November 1983 issue to find if supply-side economics still lived and breathed. Among the writers featured here are Messrs. Bartley, Forbes, Gilder, Kemp, Laffer, and Wanniski. This is truly important reading as President Reagan begins the second leg on his trek toward returning America to prosperity. (\$1 for one, \$7.50 for ten, \$12.50 for twenty-five, \$45 for one hundred)

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teaching prowess or professional merit in the calculation of individual salaries, "the NEA is unalterably opposed to so-called merit pay plans."

In November, the association deplored "increased emphasis on the so-called basics" because of the damper it places on high-school "electives." A summary of recent research findings on how school districts handle "incompetent" teachers located the onus squarely on administrators with nary a hint that the teaching profession ought to police itself. Worried teachers can relax, however, for most administrators don't know what they're doing, and the courts can be counted upon to protect teachers from dismissal.

At year's end, we discover that the

lettuce grower wasn't enough to satisfy the association's urge to boycott, so Coors beer is added, not only because of an unresolved labor dispute at the brewery, but also because Joseph Coors "is a substantial contributor to right-wing organizations," notably the Heritage Foundation, which "backs tuition tax credits and vouchers to 'promote educational excellence.'" Good gracious. The Texas legislature comes under fire for having passed a comprehensive education reform law—the one conceived by Ross Perot—that the NEA found "severely flawed," primarily because of its emphasis on merit pay and teachers' career ladders. (Texas governor Mark White has indicated that the state teachers' association was

a substantial roadblock on the route to school reform.)

The highlight of the December issue, however, at least for watchers of NEA's office of "Peace Programs and International Relations," is an account of a visit to Nicaragua last summer by twenty American educators. Two association members who were part of that delegation report in *NEA Today* that the "literacy campaign" being waged by the Sandinista government is going swimmingly save for one slight problem: U.S. policy toward Nicaragua. It turns out that the "contras" are not too fond of Sandinistan teachers. More to the point, educational resources are inadequate because "a major share of Nicaragua's resources is now diverted

to defend against the contras, the U.S.-backed insurgents." If, in other words, the United States would abandon its misguided support for the opposition and leave the Sandinistas to work their will in Nicaragua, literacy programs would flourish and, one supposes, Nicaraguan children would not be distracted from learning exactly what their government wants them to know. Presumably resources would also be freed up for the other domestic and international pursuits of the Sandinista regime. If the National Education Association of the United States has any reservations whatsoever about those pursuits, it has certainly managed to conceal them from its own members. □

THE TALKIES



SHAWCROSS ON SCREEN

by John Podhoretz

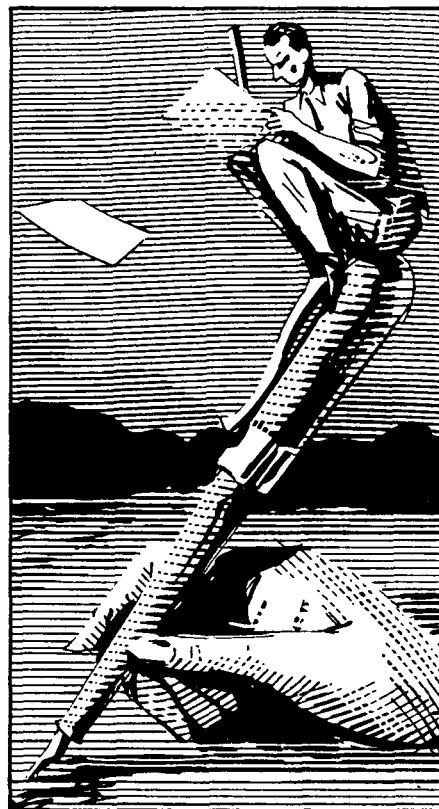
Movies delve into politics at their peril. There have been very few financially or artistically successful political movies, and justly so. The latest example is the highly praised *The Killing Fields*, an intermittently great movie about two journalists in Cambodia during the American bombings in the early 1970s and the takeover by the genocidal Khmer Rouge in 1975. Despite its force, and the indelible emotional authority of its best scenes, *The Killing Fields* destroys itself by attempting a portrait of a political situation too complicated for its makers to understand.

Movies work best when they deal with dramatic situations that raise interesting but relatively simple moral dilemmas that are easily and comfortably resolved. Each different movie genre has some such setup: the Western, with a man establishing order where there was chaos; the gangster movie, where the joys of crime are inevitably balanced by an early death; the romantic comedy, where the boy gets the girl, loses her, and gets her back again.

There is a very good reason for these simple formulae. When we watch a movie, we do know that the story is a

fiction, an invented series of situations. But that is not what we see. What we see is real: real people, real houses, real streets, an extraordinarily accurate representation of the world around us.

And more than that: Movies take the world we know and convert it into something quite beautiful. A good director and a good director of photography can make an ordinary



house look almost magical, can make a street corner that you pass by every day and to which you never give a second thought something quite different, quite unfamiliar, quite remarkable.

This is the particular power of the movies, and it is what separates them from the other art forms. It is the medium's strength and its glory. But that surface power conceals underlying weaknesses. In a novel, a writer can bring a reader inside a character's mind, reveal what he is thinking. So a novelist can devote pages and pages to thought alone, in which thought itself becomes a kind of dramatic action. That, of course, is impossible in a movie.

This may seem like a terrible flaw, and it is the flaw that makes film an art form considerably lower than the traditional forms with which it is competing. But the dramatic simplicity of the movies adds to their power. A simple, universal moral dilemma—which basically boils down in every situation to should I do right, which might not be fun, or do wrong, which would be fun but would hurt people—makes the movies the most accessible of the art forms, and the most populist.

But political dramas can never be that simple. They are, in fact, the most ambiguous of dramas, and raise insurpassably difficult moral questions.

The basic dilemma in a political

drama is about means and ends: whether an ultimately good end justifies immoral actions to reach it, or whether behaving well and morally in the short term will have unforeseen bad results later on. Should Pierre of *War and Peace* assassinate Napoleon? Is war just under any circumstances? Can the goal of reforming a political system justify terrorism?

And political dramas raise the problem of personal ambition in its starkest form. Anthony Trollope's Phineas Finn, a young and idealistic member of Parliament, must face the fact that he must sacrifice his ideas for the sake of his party and his own advancement in it. He must also face the fact that to make it in London, he needs to make a brilliant marriage, even though he has promised himself to sweet Mary Jones back home in Ireland.

Phineas does the right thing, but he basically forsakes his chances of ever becoming more than a secondary minister in a Parliamentary cabinet. And that is the ultimate sacrifice he makes, for he knows, and we know, that ultimately he would make a superb Prime Minister. So was his sacrifice worth it? There is no answer.

The Killing Fields, based on Sydney Schanberg's Pulitzer-Prize winning *New York Times Magazine* article "The

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