

# EDITORIALS



## NICE GUYS FINISH LAST

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

Americans are an amiable and sanguine people. In a word, they are nice. They are neither as rapacious as they are portrayed in cinema and song, nor are they as fetched by things *militaire*. Those moral colossuses whose sensibilities were shaped by the viruses of the 1960s will spot in these common-sense observations blasphemy and error, but let me direct them to a recent Gallup poll. It has made my fondness for my fellow Americanos all the more intense.

According to this poll, a majority of Americans now believe that their government has achieved nuclear parity, at least, with Moscow. Americans have not always held this dulcet assessment. In March 1983, 42 percent feared that the Soviet arsenal had surpassed ours. Only 35 percent slept secure in the delusion that parity was upon us, while 15 percent were patriots and insisted that the U.S. had remained on top.

This time around Dr. Gallup's wizards found that 24 percent hold that triumphant notion. Forty-four percent believe we have achieved parity. Only 23 percent fear that the "Evil Empire" is ahead.

In 1983 Americans had good reason to believe that we had slipped behind the Soviets in strategic capability. Our defense allocations had been diminishing for years both in absolute terms and as a percentage of Gross National Product. What is more, ever since *détente* put a smile on our faces in the early 1970s, the Soviets have been energetically increasing their defense budgets to the point that by 1981 the dollar costs of all Soviet military activities surpassed ours by 45 percent. From 1974 to 1983 Soviet military spending exceeded U.S. spending by some 40 percent, and on strategic forces the Soviets have been outspending us by almost 100 percent. From 1974 to 1983 they spent \$250 billion more than the United States.

Mr. Richard DeLauer, Under Secretary of Defense for Research and

Engineering, revealed all this gloomy news in testimony to the celebrated Ninety-Eighth Congress. Yet somehow, today the majority of Americans believe that the Reagan Administration has overcome the Soviet advantage in just two years while spending considerably less than Moscow. I offer this up as evidence of the Americanos' peaceful cast of mind. Americans are simply too nice a people to harbor grim thoughts.

Well, far be it from me to darken Ronald Reagan's Era of Good Feelings even a little. Spring is in the air. We have just sent a large and luminous delegation to arms control talks in Geneva, and now there is this splendid specimen of a man Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev—a man who with his lovely wife, Raisa, could become the JFK of the Soviet Union, a suave member of Parliament kept repeating on network news last March: *Kamelot in the Kremlin*. I shall relish each episode, but there is reason to doubt that even under our amazing President we have suddenly reached parity with Moscow.

In fact there is reason to believe that in strategic capacity we continue to fall behind. I have just finished reading a timely report that comes to this conclusion while putting the kabosh to the delusion of parity. The report's title, "Can America Catch Up?" is illuminating enough. It is the work of the estimable Committee on the Pres-

ent Danger, composed of some of the Republic's most distinguished students of the military balance. Several members are on leave to the government where they are active participants in our arms control policy. Max Kampelman, until recently the Committee's general counsel, is, of course, the head of the U.S. delegation in Geneva. I hope he does not forget the findings of this report.

Any analysis of the nuclear balance is, perforce, complicated and, owing to the secretive nature of the data, speculative. But let those happy citizens who can banish from mind America's

years of neglect and the Soviets' years of activity consider this: "Currently, the Soviet Union has a 4-to-1 advantage over the United States in deployed ICBM throw weight, the best single measure of force capability." The Soviets have over 980 sea-launched ballistic missiles to our 616, theirs carrying between 2,000 and 3,000 warheads while ours carry 5,536. Moscow also outnumbered us in heavy bombers by 400 to 325. Let those who would cut back on defense ponder this: "The gap between U.S. and Soviet military capabilities continues to grow." □

## UNSPEAKABLE HYPHENATES

If the news stories are accurate, Capitol Hill is now alive with budget-balancers, budget-cutters, revenue-enhancers, and other such hyphenated politicians, all avid to protect our economic well-being by lowering that mysterious deficit. Where did it come from? How can we rid the Republic of it? The answer is that we cannot rid the Republic of it, because Washington's other hyphenates, the multitudinous big-spenders and the heroic tax-cutters, are active too. The result is economic incoherence that is almost certain to leave us with still larger deficits. Senator Domenici's labors are in vain.

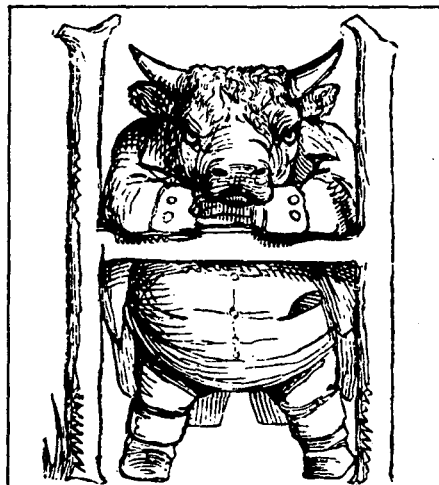
Yet the deficit is a serious thing. This year it will exceed \$200 billion, which comes to almost \$1,000 a head for every man, woman, and child. The deficit has reached nearly 5 percent of the Gross National Product. Until very recently that would have been an appalling figure. Republicans and conservative Democrats would have united in prophesying national bankruptcy. But that was before the advocates of big government in their wisdom gave so many Americans a stake in government spending, thus creating little mafias of special interests always helpful with suggestions for new programs, always vigilant for the first hint of budget cuts. These are people who believe that wealth comes not from enterprise but from government appropriations, and

they speak from personal experience.

If astringent measures are not taken, our yearly deficits will reach \$300 billion by the end of the decade. In 1960 the interest paid on the national debt was less than \$130 a head. Today it is over \$500 a head. By the end of the decade it will have risen to almost \$750. That kind of burden should put the brakes to economic growth.

Whether the hyphenates know it or not, they are muddling toward a substantial reduction in our standard of living. Continual high rates of government borrowing will, as the economists say, "crowd out" the private borrowing that is crucial for a rising rate of productivity and economic growth. Some of the hyphenates—mainly the revenue-enhancers and the big-spenders but also many budget-balancers—prescribe a tax increase to reduce government borrowing; but tax increases that seize personal savings also impede the economic growth by reducing private investment. Whether the government borrows funds or expropriates them, economic growth suffers.

Of all the hyphenates, then, it is the big-spenders who have brought us to this unenviable condition. Our fat and lazy government munches crapulently on too large a hunk of the Gross Na-



Adapted from RET's weekly Washington Post column syndicated by King Features.

tional Product, and no group on Capitol Hill has the power or the self-restraint to end the debauch. Martin Feldstein, formerly chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisers and a prudent fellow if there ever was one, has suggested modest cuts in the cost-of-living adjustments that engaud Social Security and Medicare, along with some additional taxes; but, of course, all the hyphenates led by the big-spenders let out an enormous howl.

Over the past two decades volup-

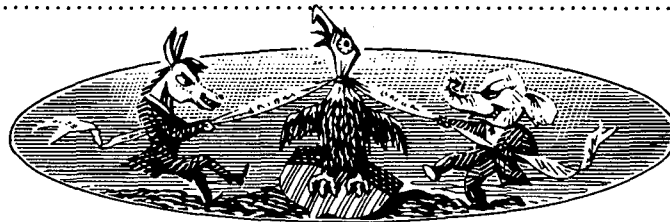
tuous increases in Social Security and Medicare have accounted for all of government's increased share of GNP. These expenditures have grown from 2.3 percent of the GNP in 1960 to 6.6 percent in 1984, while defense spending as a share of GNP fell by one-third, at least until 1980. During the 1970s Social Security's benefits to retirees rose by 50 percent in real dollars, though the average employee's earnings increased not at all. Yet let a budget-balancer or budget-cutter suggest, say,

a freeze on Social Security's cost-of-living adjustments, and the big-spenders shout as though orphans were being heaved into the street.

The big-spenders remain Washington's enduring force, despite the present alarm over deficits. In league with the special interests that their lush programs have created they exert continual pressure for more spending. Even in these days of budget restraint, they nip away with more money here, more money there. Now it is bilingual educa-

tion that is fattened, then it is the Rural Electrification Administration—up 579.4 percent in fiscal year 1984. Of all the hyphenates, only the tax-cutters save the citizenry from incessant fleecing. But can we amass these deficits forever? The average Americano knows. In a recent government poll 81 percent expressed their concern. Do you know what kind of hyphenated Americans they are? They are budget-cutters, but on Capitol Hill they are outnumbered and outshouted. □

## CAPITOL IDEAS



### HABEMUS VIGORBACHEV

by Tom Bethell

When the black smoke emerged from the Kremlin chimney, announcing Mikhail Gorbachev's victory in the latest power struggle, sympathetic vibrations were set up in the U.S. press. On the day after the great event, the *Washington Post* seemed positively festive, triumphantly proclaiming secular liberalism's *Habemus Papam*: "GORBACHEV BECOMES SOVIET LEADER HOURS AFTER CHERNENKO DIES AT 73." In somewhat smaller type, the *New York Times* suggested that socialism's latest Pope was already hard at work: "New Leader, 54, Loses No Time to Announce His Own Program."

The word "leader" itself suggests how widespread is the undeclared sympathy for small-c Communism among our patriotism pressies. The "leader" of a country whose subjects must be prevented from running away by barbed wire, walls, and guards might more appropriately be called a dictator or a despot. But such ugly labels are reserved exclusively for *anti-socialist* heads of state, as a check with the Nexis computer retrieval system will show.

The press corps showed a kind of subdued enthusiasm for the idea that the new Soviet despot would be able to crowd Reagan off the airwaves by sheer magnetism. "Now Reagan cannot count on having things his own way on the propaganda level," wrote *Newsweek*, apparently believing that its

coverage of Reagan has been doting, that of Chernenko and Andropov critical. And there was more than a hint of relish in Mary McGrory's observation that the "focused" and "plausible" Gorbachev had "enormous potential as a wedge-driver in the West."

One day I spotted *Washington Post* associate editor Robert Kaiser on the "CBS Morning News" doing a growly-voiced imitation of his boss, Ben Bradlee. A few days later, Kaiser wrote an astonishing article for the paper's "Outlook" section ("Now Russia Will Change") revealing that "our Great Communicator in Washington may finally have a serious rival."

Reagan need hardly worry on the image front, of course. The frail, white-thatched, out-of-breath Chernenko came across as about as harmless a Kremlin figure as we are likely to find. Gorbachev will soon be seen for what he is—the *capo*

*di capi* of the Kremlin Crime Syndicate.

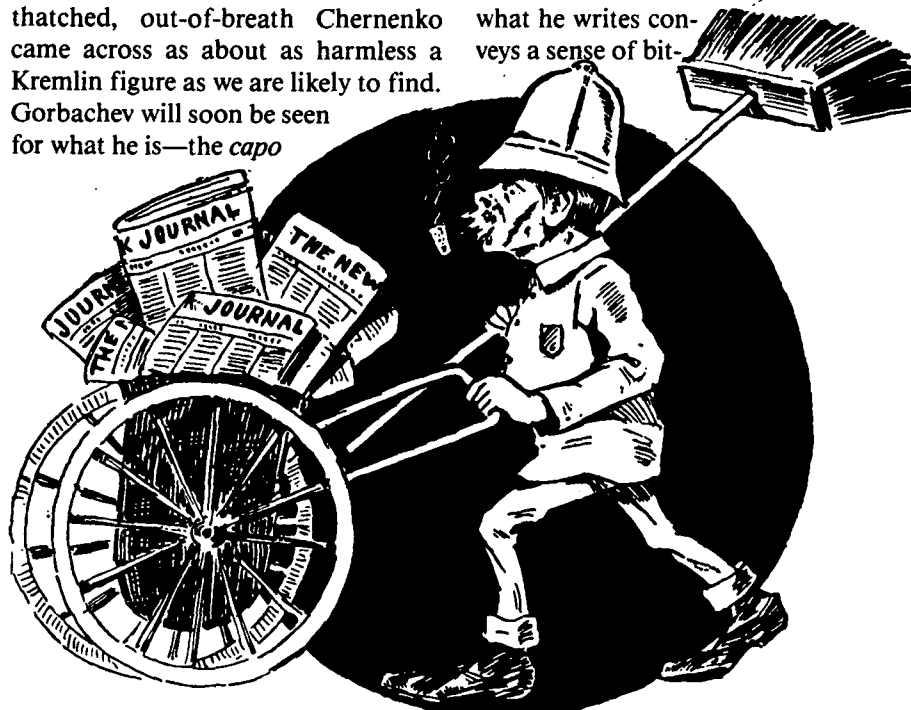
Several thoughts came to mind as I surveyed the media coverage of the latest Kremlin transition. No one mentions this, of course, but there is in the first place an amazing amount of power-worship among our senior media patriots. And hardly a word is whispered about the incredible brutality of the Soviet system of "government," which obviously is not really a government in the sense that we use the word.

I think it is the comparative powerlessness of leftist intellectuals that so drives them up the wall when they contemplate America. Kaiser in much of what he writes conveys a sense of bit-

ter resentment of America, and I notice that he at the same time urges us to adopt measures that would increase the power wielded by Washington over the rest of the country. The impression that he and some other journalists convey is one of utter frustration at the independence conferred by the decentralized American system—resulting in the most frightful ticky-tackies rushing about making millions without so much as having to get permission from Washington first.

In the Soviet Union, by contrast (let us not call it Russia, which does not exist, even though there are Russians; just as there are Palestinians but no Palestine), they really did make a huge effort to get everything under control: to centralize power, to set up a Central Planning authority, and to give the intellectuals their rightful role under the sun, namely, bossing everybody else about. Make no mistake, that is one of the main reasons why Communism is so tremendously appealing to Western intellectuals.

As Joseph Sobran pointed out a few days after Chernenko's death, the one thing you couldn't find anywhere in the media coverage was a word of criticism of the socialist ideology, which gives shape, energy, and direction to the Soviet "government." This is not merely a polite refusal to criticize others—to "impose our views"—as fierce and daily denunciations of South Africa tell us. It is, rather, a tacit recognition of the strong affinity between contemporary liberalism and Communism itself, which are in reality nothing more



Tom Bethell is The American Spectator's Washington correspondent.