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# EDITORIALS

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## REAGAN REMOTE

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

Historians set out to define the epochs of the past. Successful statesmen define the present. Ronald Reagan has made historic changes in policy and contributed to a vast change in the national mood away from pessimism and passivity toward optimism and self-reliance. He has, however, only fitfully defined the present. In domestic policy and in foreign policy he has allowed muddle to reign. Had the Great Communicator defined the national purpose more vividly he would not have been so painfully used as he was in Reykjavik. The world would have realized that the 1980s marks the dawn of strategic defense against nuclear aggression.

Of course, pol that he is, Ronald Reagan has usually benefited from muddle. By encouraging ambiguous interpretations of his deeds he has enervated his critics. By failing to illuminate his goals he has hobbled them with doubt and confusion. Though his break with the old order is as momentous as Franklin Roosevelt's, this Presi-

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dent has masterfully scotched controversy. Many of his friends have gone down in flames, but not the President.

Yet perhaps there are also benefits to be realized from clarifying one's goals. The muddle that Ronald Reagan courts has given his critics more influence in defining the issues of the day than they deserve. They have been able to insist that arms control is the goal of our time, though since March of 1983 the President's goal has most certainly been national security through "deep" strategic cuts and through the assured security of the Strategic Defense Initiative as opposed to Mutual Assured Destruction, the nuclear nightmare that has been the inspiration for so many decades of cheap art and puerile oratory.

Supply-side economics was a commonplace economic concept. Yet the President realized that repeatedly he would have to enunciate the connection between tax cuts and economic growth to make it a theme of the 1980s. Strategic defense is immensely more complicated, yet until his October 14 post-Reykjavik address the President never had given a nationally televised speech devoted to the Strategic Defense

Initiative. His original 1983 SDI proposal was tacked on to a statement on the MX missile. Thereafter he maneuvered in muddle. He allowed it to appear that SDI was negotiable for large cuts in the Soviet missile arsenal. As late as the week before his Reykjavik rendezvous the President was stressing that deployment of SDI was negotiable, encouraging many to doubt his devotion to strategic defense.

Through all the ambiguity that has confused the SDI debate the President has failed to make his goals clear, thus giving his critics unwarranted influence in defining his goals and SDI's problems. That is why in early October Congressman Jack Kemp and writer Gregory Fossedal mustered a range of SDI supporters both to publicize that recent technological advances make limited deployment of SDI feasible soon and to encourage the President to remain resolute on behalf of SDI at Reykjavik. The range of SDI supporters was broad, including such illustrious names as Zbigniew Brzezinski, Henry Kissinger, Alexander Haig, and Jeane Kirkpatrick. The President had failed to define a major theme of his administration and it fell to these and to others outside the White House

to defend the strategic concept of the 1980s, defense.

The President's failure in Reykjavik illuminated a far greater failure, one that will surely impair Ronald Reagan's impact on history. He does not support those who support him. When he pushed back from the conference table at Reykjavik for the last time, having finally impressed at least Mikhail Gorbachev of his devotion to SDI, he was absolutely alone. Even in conferring with his advisers in Iceland it seems he was practically the lone champion of SDI. The mystery of Ronald Reagan is why he is so often alone. He is the leader of a new political consensus, embracing old conservatives and liberals, but he does not work with them. Possessed of a deeply held set of political beliefs and fortified by the magnificent courage that allowed him to overcome all the treachery in Reykjavik, he remains always alone.

This undoubtedly allows him greater political freedom, but it weakens his capacity to define the present and to prefigure the future. Ronald Reagan's aloofness has enfeebled the champions of his policies outside the Administration, and when this mysterious man retires they will have more difficulty assuring that the legacy of Ronald Reagan endures than they should. □



## FAITH IN THE SYSTEM

Though the rest of the nation remains insouciant to its every lurid detail, in the august purlieu of Washington a ghostly controversy now whirls about the name of Faith Ryan Whittlesey; and as is so frequently true its perpetrators have got it all wrong. Nonetheless, they have performed a public service. I now realize that last spring Mrs. Whittlesey took me to the cleaners.

Mrs. Whittlesey, our Ambassador to Switzerland, has fallen victim to recent black cat news stories. A black cat news story is a Washington specialty, a news story—usually inaccurate—that is flung across the path of a public figure

to scare the hell out of him and to haunt forever his career, making him "controversial" at least and badly shaken. Thus the black cat news story is not strictly speaking a piece of news. It is not written to inform readers but to manipulate them into useful indignation.

The black cat news stories that have suddenly blighted the path of Ambassador Whittlesey were confected by a bevy of State Department fuddydud-dies. In their smallness they envy her ability to run a proper embassy. What is more, they disapprove of her pro-Administration positions on Central America and the Strategic Defense In-

initiative. Most foreign service officers are of modest means. When one is made an ambassador it is rare that he has the resources or contacts to put together a proper "representational" or promotional fund. Politically appointed ambassadors such as Mrs. Whittlesey can, and so in keeping with the pettiness of our era many at the State Department want to prohibit such funds.

To further this noble purpose they hornsoggled an artless *Washington Post* reporter into creating the aforementioned black cat news stories abounding with spectacles of Mrs. Whittlesey's intrigue and extravagance. Extravagance, my hoof. As the redoubtable *Post* reported in October, I was one of the reputed beneficiaries of the Ambassador's largesse. But the poor reporter did not know the half of it. I now do, and according to my calculations Ambassador Whittlesey

owes me an apology plus a check for \$155.18.

Before reading the *Post*, I did not know that she had raised a representational fund of "at least" \$83,000. Moreover, I thought I was rather special when she asked me to visit her in Switzerland "the next time you are in Europe." She had purchased fifty copies of my latest book, so I thought she admired my art. Now the *Post* reports that I was but one of dozens of individuals—for instance businessmen and pols—whom she lured to Switzerland, and she got me in the off season! Once I was there she admitted that she had bought my book "to explain the 1984 election to the Swiss." With \$83,000 she could have bought a lot more books. There have to be more than fifty Swiss in need of them.

Truth be known, the two days I spent

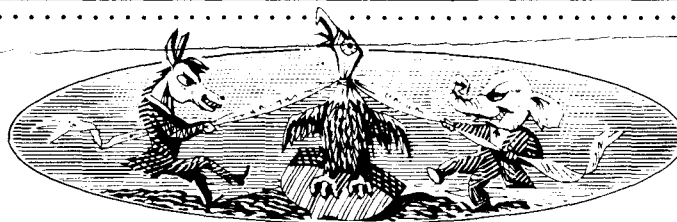
with Ambassador Whittlesey were arduous beyond the limits of the tolerable. When I travel in Europe life begins at 8:00 p.m. Mornings are spent *endormi*, and I speak only for my usual fee. Ambassador Whittlesey had me up at dawn's first light. She ruined two dinners by demanding that I speak, once to a polyglot crowd in a place called St. Gallen and once in Zurich at the elegant Dolder Hotel, where I was confronted by the Swiss press. On one unhappy morn, she forced me to hike for four hours up and down the inclines of scenic Appenzell with its governor as they talked of trade and dairy products. (I was photographed with a cow—my camera!) There is nothing I willingly do for four hours straight, save sleep.

After all this she insisted that I owed her \$155.18 for telephone charges. She had cozened me into giving free lectures in a mountainous country, most-

ly at my expense, and she would not even pick up the bill when I called my office for sympathy. I hope she treated her other guests more considerately. If news stories are to be believed, Attorney General Meese and Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perle got to see the inside of our embassy. She kept me on the road for two days.

I suppose Mrs. Whittlesey's fund sounded very sensational to our innocent reporter, but it had been examined and approved by the State Department, as were all contributions to it. That is the custom with such funds. The whole controversy puts me in mind of those lurid 1981 news stories of how Nancy Reagan talked patriots into buying new White House china. Again, no illegality was ever committed. The State Department fuddydiddies used a simple reporter much as Ambassador Whittlesey used me, admittedly in the national interest. □

## CAPITOL IDEAS



### CROSS CURRENTS

by Tom Bethell

I was at JFK Airport en route to a London conference on British taxation when news of the successful conclusion to the Reykjavik summit came over the airwaves. A television screen in the Eastern Airlines terminal showed a scowling Peter Jennings in a raincoat, crossly cross-examining a succession of witnesses, for all the world as though he were legal counsel to Mikhail Gorbachev. So automatically do media people these days take the Soviet side that I am sure Jennings had no idea he came across this way.

My first impression was disappointment that I would miss the media post-mortems in the following week. Poor old Lou Cannon of the *Washington Post* must be in a terrible tizzy, I thought. The White House correspondent has signed on to do a big biography of Ronald Reagan after he leaves office, and *this*, one suspects, is, in the imagination of Lou Cannon, the "verdict of history" that now supposedly animates Reagan's every decision. Meanwhile, of course, Cannon has campaigned tirelessly in the paper's

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news columns to get Reagan to make correct, history-approved decisions here and now—an arms control agreement with the Soviets being high on the agenda.

Now Jennings in his London Fog was telling us that Pupil Reagan had neglected to take the advice of Tutor Cannon, who would have to resume his Sisyphean editorial task all over again, no doubt with increased petulance and exasperation.

"Talks Are A Gamble For Soviet Leader," the *Washington Post* had tendentiously informed us on the day the summit was announced: this from the paper that complains about disinformation campaigns. Clearly it was a gamble for Reagan. I looked forward (and still look forward) to an explanation of how Gorbachev, having gambled in Reykjavik and come away empty-handed, is in trouble back home—perhaps under fire from *Pravda* for refusing to accept Reagan's generous offers. According to this October 1 *Washington Post* story (by Gary Lee in Moscow), by going to Iceland Gorbachev was "demonstrating his willingness to counter those critics in both Washington and Moscow who

want to block a rapprochement between the two superpower leaders." He gave us no clue as to the identity of such Moscow critics. Those in Washington presumably would include Howard Phillips, Richard Viguerie, the editorial staff of *Human Events*, and conceivably Patrick J. Buchanan of the White House.

But I must hurry on to London, leaving until later an exposition of the point that the so-called "arms control process" is a total fraud, does not result in a reduction of arms but an increase thereof, and is not even intended to reduce such arms. Its real but unstated purpose is to subject U.S. military procurement to Soviet consent. The only problem is that President Reagan doesn't seem to realize this. (Maybe he does, privately. In which case he's playing a risky game.)

The London Conference on Taxes and Growth, sponsored by the Manhattan Institute and the Adam Smith Institute, was a useful exercise in supply-side imperialism. So many Britons have for so many years come to America preaching the gospel of

soggy progressivism that it was indeed a pleasure for a dozen of us to give them some *sound* advice in return: the British must cut their tax rates if they are not to sink totally beneath the waves they once ruled.

I traveled from Gatwick to Victoria Station with Jim Gwartney, a professor at Florida State University, and the author (with Rick Stroup) of one of the few sensible economics textbooks. He commented as we rattled along through the London suburbs that you could tell from the buildings visible from the railway that England enjoyed a period of great prosperity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, extending perhaps through the 1930s. Thereafter, the architecture suggested, not much development had occurred in the country.

The architectural indicators are probably fairly reliable, reflecting political history. In 1945 Clement Attlee's Labour government was elected, whereupon the creation of wealth was subordinated to its distribution. And until Margaret Thatcher was elected in 1979, all conservative governments since 1945 have accepted in principle the postwar socialist advances. Only