

to read. Recently, a study from the National Assessment of Educational Progress demonstrated that television often has an adverse influence on children's reading ability, an embarrassing finding that the promoters of PLUS deal with very gingerly in their promotional literature.

The precise nature of how television misinforms can be seen in the gravamen of ABC's literacy campaign. Here the illiterate is presented as a victim of American society, a consequence of insufficient government spending. Illiteracy is, says one of the project's barkers, "the hidden disease that threatens the well-being of the country." Once again, TV sends reality down to the makeup room, and when it emerges it has been transformed into gaudy fantasy, all for an improved Nielsen rating.

Actually, illiteracy in America is a complicated matter. Both the Department of Education and the Census Bureau place illiteracy at 13-14 percent of the adult population, but this tells us little. Nearly a third of these people are not American-born, and many do not speak English at all. Doubtless many are competent in their native tongues, and advocates of bilingual education are disinclined to rush these people into English. In many immigrant neighborhoods they get along adequately. Many have no desire to speak English. These are not victims of government retrenchment. The U.S. Department of Education spends more than \$100 million on seventy-nine adult illiteracy programs and related research.

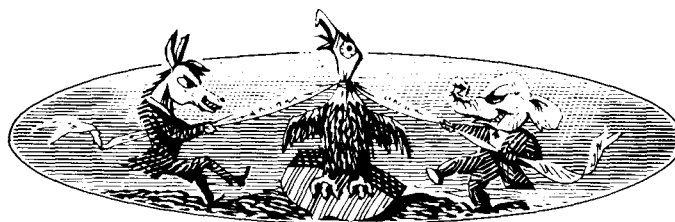
To be sure there are high school graduates entering adult life with inadequate

language skills, but 70 percent of our English-speaking illiterates never complete high school. The problem is not lack of remedial English courses for adults but that some students are not learning, and as Secretary of Education William Bennett observed in August in his report on elementary schools, this country does a rather good job of teaching students to read. Residual illiteracy in this country frequently is a consequence of inadequate motivation, and aside from coercion it is hard to think of any government program that can instill that motivation.

ABC's portrayal of illiterate adults as victims of failed programs is inaccurate. What is more, ABC's campaign is disingenuous. Broadcast media

have steadily diminished the importance of reading and writing. Fewer and fewer writers are welcomed into media to talk intelligently on serious matters. The venerable educator Jacques Barzun deplores the discontinuation, years ago, of media programs that stressed literacy and learning. Secretary Bennett challenges ABC to broadcast reading lessons before sports programs. I would be content if sports commentators would speak standard English and employ English subtitles to compensate for the defective elocution. The fact is, television is hostile to print. Its personalities recoil from mentioning books or a guest's books. How would ABC feel if one-fifth of its audience gave up an hour of daily television for an evening newspaper, a book, or a magazine? Television communicates with pictures, as did the caveman. □

## C A P I T O L I D E A S



### ASIA WATCH

by Tom Bethell

From the air Tokyo's outskirts looked as trim and orderly as a sunlit landscape in a child's picture book. It was a long bus ride into the city, past compact, economical pastures. To our left a Disneyland castle, then onto an elevated motorway, and so into the center of the awesome metropolis, spread out around us for miles like a gigantic Swiss watch. Office buildings teemed with toilers after 6 p.m. At the Tokyo Hilton we were greeted by deeply bowing kimono'd figures. Marion Magid said that Tokyo made New York seem like Calcutta.

Growing up I used to think that London was the big city of the world (having been born there). So I continued to believe until I arrived in New York in 1962. Now, as a group of us drove by taxi through the center of Tokyo, it dawned on me that this was the new New York, the world's leading city. I retained this impression over the next three days.

It's hard to say what provokes such emotional judgments. In Tokyo's case it had something to do with a sense of order, almost a tranquillity, pervading this immense industriousness. Such a

sense of order probably can only be felt when a country is at its peak, as one guesses must be the case with Japan today. Everyone seemed to be well dressed. The children in their straw bonnets seemed to echo an earlier and better time in the West. The Japanese will no doubt look back on this as their golden age.

As in Korea, the sense of a huge, middle class moving forward in unison was overwhelming. How long they can keep it up is open to question. If they take a wrong turn the whole country will tend to take it in lockstep. One senses the possibility that the Japanese could lose heart for some unpredictable reason. For one thing they have almost slavishly imitated so many things American. It's as though their national ambition is to outproduce us, and now that they have (I guess) succeeded in doing so, they may pause to wonder, fatally, what the point was. Then again, it occurred to me they just might go ahead and build SDI without waiting for us. That would give them something to do.

At the U.S. Embassy we were addressed by Ambassador Mike Mansfield, who spoke to us from behind a desk, like an old Presbyterian Sunday school teacher. He recited statistics

from memory, but his wisdom was of the conventional kind. Our \$50 billion-a-year trade deficit with Japan was "intolerable," he said. Why this should be I don't know. They send us cars and television sets and we send them pieces of paper manufactured at the Bureau of Engraving & Printing (called dollars). Why is this a bad deal for us?

Prices in Tokyo were a shock—buying anything at all made one feel like a rube in the big city for the first time. A newsstand offered a three-day-old *New York Times* for \$8. Next I saved \$5 by not buying a cup of coffee. I went to a very good record store, called Wave, in Roppongi, where they had American jazz records not available at any U.S. record store. Evidently they had also bought up stocks of records available in American stores in the fifties and sixties and were now selling them for \$50 each.

We must move on hurriedly to Peking. At the Sheraton Great Wall the *China Daily* was slipped under our hotel doors. It had stock market news ("Gold, Platinum Prices Soar on World Marts"), cricket scores, and no anti-American stories whatsoever as far as I could see; a big contrast to the

Japanese English-language papers.

There was a big Kodak ad in Tiananmen Square, where the masses used to mobilize at Mao's bidding, and many smaller ads on Democracy Wall. There's not much to Peking—no "there" there. Off the main roads were miserable miles of hovels hidden in the bushes. But there were lots of construction cranes in place, some of them working. The Chinese we met seemed to be pro-American, and Peking itself seemed far less repressive than Moscow. It is almost certainly the Chinese city where the Communist Party has retained greatest control, yet even here the sense of movement was to me palpable. It was also moving to see these poor people whose talents have been suppressed for so long but whose time of release may now be at hand.

We had fierce disputes about the future of China. "China is a big nothing!" said Arnold Beichman, the leader of the once-Leninist, always-Leninist faction—resolutely opposed to sentimental optimism about China.

But Alvin Rabushka of the Hoover Institution expressed a cautious optimism. →

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"Women squatting on their haunches selling screws and junk," replied Beichman. "Junk! Junk of junk, that's subjunk. *Shmattas* [rags]. They take big *shmattas* and they make little *shmattas*. From that you're going to get a consumer economy? C'mon Alvin!"

"They didn't even sell screws and rags five years ago."

"You're dreaming! They're not going to give up Leninism."

"You know how the Moonies call themselves Christians?" Jude Wanniski said. "That's how the Chinese call themselves Leninists."

"Leninism is a theory of power," Beichman said. "They cannot give up power." Later, as he was getting onto the bus, he said despondently, almost to himself: "The trouble is no one reads Lenin. They just hear about it."

Chinese bicycle flotillas floated silently down the street. I found a way to thread my way through them, and so came to the Beijing Hotel across the street. Disheveled, sunburned Scandinavians lolled in the lobby. Packs were unstrapped from backs; pipe-puffing Third World intellectuals were seated at tables. No doubt China made them uneasy, too. We went upstairs to a reception given by the People's In-

stitute of Foreign Affairs. Our ambassador, Winston Lord, came to the reception, as he did to our meeting with the deputy foreign minister. Lord, whose wife is Chinese, contrived to be diplomatic without being merely reserved, and he made a good impression on our group.

The hardliners on our tour had one unassailable point. China's draconian population control policy—one child per family—makes a mockery of the idea that the Communist Party has yielded power. If officials can check up on the menstrual cycle of tens of millions of women they can control anything. The policy is bound to have a destructive effect on China if it is implemented for any length of time. (Moreover, if China really does modernize it will need all the people it can get.) It crossed my mind that the Chinese might have adopted this atrocious policy at the behest of American population planners, and I was wondering whether one could discern the not-so-fine hand of Robert S. McNamara, the Rockefeller Fund, et al., when I was introduced to a refined Chinese who had been educated at the American school in Peking before World War II. I told him that I had grave misgivings about their population control policy . . .

"I was talking to McNamara about it only the other day," he said.

"Not Robert McNamara . . ."

Indeed. The same.

I assured him that Robert McNamara had been wrong about everything from the Ford Edsel to the Tanzanian development model, when the urbane gentleman interrupted me.

"He is a friend of mine," he said.

Actually, he added, McNamara had also suggested that the program seemed draconian, so I shouldn't grumble perhaps, but he also confirmed my suspicion that the Chinese had adopted this policy in the mistaken belief that Westerners Know Best. (Communism itself was of course an earlier Western import.) Alas, there is a certain logical difficulty involved in an American telling a Chinese not to listen to American advice. But I did my best with several people in the room. The answer I always received was that, if the population policy did turn out to be harmful, it would be abandoned. But by then immense damage would already have been done.

The Chinese, I believe, do sense America's spiritual weakness (epitomized by Reagan's recent Summit groveling). I gather they were privately appalled by our ignominious retreat from Vietnam, and they must wonder whether we have the will to do anything other than bully our allies. In short, the Chinese surely understand that if they are to withstand Soviet aggression they

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must do it on their own. The U.S. is totally unreliable (as I also told as many Chinese as I could lay my hands on).

Thus China will have to build up its own military strength quickly, which will require a modernized economy. There is only one way that can be achieved (as the Chinese know by now, having had the opportunity to observe their countrymen in Taiwan and Hong Kong): by permitting voluntary exchange, free prices, and contracts. All this can happen under the protective disguise of socialist labels and without sacrificing political power (as the Kuomintang showed in Taiwan). This, as succinctly as I can put it, is the case for optimism about China's economic liberalization.

We went on to the Philippines, and here we were recognizably in the Third World: rusted corrugated roofs atop lean-to sheds, drooping banana-plant fronds, great big modern building occupied by U.S. Agency for International Development in the middle of Manila. Here we dole out our destructive welfare. We went to the U.S. Embassy, where they were building anti-terrorist barricades at the gates. Inside Stephen Bosworth and the "country team" told us that we should support a big increase in U.S. foreign aid to the Philippines—to be mainlined like heroin directly into the Philippine budget.

Will these people never learn? I'm beginning to think it would be a good idea for the Filipinos to kick us out of Clark Field and Subic Bay. That's the only way Congress will be persuaded to shut off the foreign-aid spigot. As long as the dollars flow in, Mrs. Aquino & Co. won't be able to get an undistorted picture of the Philippine economy.

We were granted an "audience" with Mrs. Aquino at the Malacañang guest house where she has semi-democratically taken up residence, a few paces from the palace. The red carpet was curled up at the edges, almost tripping the accidental president on her approach. Standing about were medal-some military and an odd bevy of female aides de camp. "We want to instill in our people the desire for self-reliance," Mrs. A. said, a few weeks before coming to Washington on a begging mission for more handouts. "We can only help ourselves: with the assistance, of course, of other peoples."

We stood in line to shake her hand. Arnold Beichman was wearing his Adam Smith tie with the knot on a level with his breast pocket, the two top buttons of his shirt undone. His spectacles were attached to a chain and bouncing off his stomach.

Someone asked Mrs. Aquino if he

could "be of any help" when she came to Washington. She gave a dimpled smile.

"Have you noticed there's a kind of euphoria that seizes people in the presence of power?" Beichman said, as we moved away. "'Be of any help' in Washington!"

Waiting outside in the bus later, Neil Livingstone, a terrorism expert who was on the tour (and had noted the

minimal security of Peking's public buildings), had kept his eyes open in the Malacañang. "She's very exposed," he said. "Guards lollygagging; no sensors; no closed circuit TV; doors not heavily reinforced; nothing on top of the walls; when she came in no Secret Service equivalent. And look at those overhanging branches. You don't see that at the White House. Twenty men could take this. No surveillance of the

streets, it looks like. The question is how close a parked truck could get to the guest house."

The bus drove off, past the guest house. Neil noted how close it was to the wall. "A car bomb could level the whole building," he said. □

(Tom Bethell visited East Asia in August with the World Media Association. Part one of his report, "Seoul Searching," appeared in last month's issue.)

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Chester E. Finn, Jr.

## GIVING SHAPE TO CULTURAL CONSERVATISM

Tenets, anyone?

The most important political idea of the mid-1980's is cultural conservatism," wrote Paul Weyrich in the *Washington Post* in early May. Inasmuch as Weyrich and his colleagues at the Free Congress Research and Education Foundation appear to have coined the term "cultural conservatism," his high regard for it is readily understood. But let's also consider the possibility that such admiration is justified, indeed that cultural conservatism may turn out to be more than an important idea. It may also be an inspired strategy for sustaining what Ronald Reagan has begun, through unification of otherwise fractious conservatives around something more durable than shared contempt for a single opponent or mutual enthusiasm for the incumbent President.

I will not here attempt a conservative taxonomy. Readers already understand more or less how the "New Right" differs from the Old, what neoconservatives and paleoconservatives do and don't have in common, wherein libertarians can be distinguished from pre-modernists, and so forth. There are plenty of such differences, though they aren't always on public display. Sometimes they are masked for mutual advantage, sometimes cushioned by the convenient social reality that various conservative factions don't dine together all that often, indeed tend to assemble mainly when embarked upon a substantive project of mutual interest. But when differences are allowed to hang out, as at the recent, much-publicized meeting of the Philadelphia Society, they turn out to be deep-seated, even fierce.

*Chester E. Finn, Jr. is assistant secretary for research and improvement at the Department of Education. The author gratefully acknowledges the ideas, suggestions, comments, and criticisms of William J. Bennett, Patrick Fagan, William Kristol, William S. Lind, Bruno V. Manno, and Paul Weyrich.*

The Reagan phenomenon has tended to suppress those differences, as did the McGovern-Carter cycle that preceded it. But as we look to the future, it is altogether possible that conservatives (and the Republican party, now indisputably our party) will disintegrate into factions and fractions and internal interest groups. That, as liberals (and Democrats) have so clearly shown in the post-McGovern era, is a recipe for political disaster. It is also the surest way to lose momentum, abdicate leadership, and surrender public approbation. This will happen as soon as the not-very-ideological suburbanite says to his neighbor: those guys (read conservatives, or Republicans) are just a bunch of politicians, always bickering and horsetrading, standing for nothing in particular, greedily parceling out the spoils among their various pressure groups and constituencies when they aren't busy clobbering one another.

It must be assumed that liberalism will meticulously note, publicize, and exploit every crack, tension, and family

quarrel within conservatism. This began in the *New Republic* in mid-summer, in an issue the cover of which trumpeted "The Conservative Mental Breakdown." In one of several essays therein, John B. Judis recounted the Philadelphia Society events a few months earlier: "The traditionalists accused the neoconservatives of being social science technicians rather than philosophers, and of assisting in the very 'politicization' of society that conservatism had been pledged to resist. They also accused the neoconservatives of being welfare-state liberals and cultural modernists who had appropriated the term and spoils of conservatism for purely opportunistic ends."

As Judis aptly notes, "A movement's loss of a philosophical core is often the first sign of its decline." I don't know any conservative who yet foresees decline, but it's surely time to do what we can to strengthen the philosophical core, indeed to reformulate a core that most conservatives of various stripes can agree on.

Can the single phrase "cultural conservatism" furnish the basis for so ambitious a result? Not by itself, of course. But if the general idea gets elaborated into a credo, a set of principles or body of doctrine to which most conservatives can subscribe, then perhaps it can supply some of the glue previously furnished by having a common opponent (McGovernism, Carterism, defeatism) and more recently by having a champion in the Oval Office.

Weyrich characterized cultural conservatism in this way:

We believe that there is an unbreakable link between traditional Western, Judeo-Christian values and the secular success of Western societies. These values, which include definitions of right and wrong and ways of thinking and living, have brought about the prosperity, liberty and opportunity for fulfillment that Western societies have offered their citizens. These will be lost if we abandon those values.

Unexceptionable, no? But just the skeleton of a credo, not muscular enough or fleshy enough to rally round.

Weyrich adviser William S. Lind, one of the leading theoreticians of cultural conservatism, adds four "themes": that traditional Western values are needed not only to create a free and prosperous society, but also for individual fulfillment; that if traditional values and ways of living are necessary for societal and individual well-being, then many current cultural trends are deeply disturbing; that society, including government, must play an active role in supporting traditional values; and, finally, that we must take the long view, "looking back over the centuries" to find wisdom and "asking what the actions proposed for tomorrow will mean to our children, their children, and their children's children."

Lind thus attaches a few major muscle sets to the skeleton, but it's still too bony. We'll need vital organs, nerve

