

# THE CONTINUING CRISIS



•March came in like a lamb and left snarling with a gigantic drop in the stock market, a decidedly reactionary Supreme Court decision abundant with the flavors of 1976, and an Oscar for *Platoon*. Yes, *Platoon*. Apparently the very same people who brought the Vietnam war to fizzle and who spit on the soldiers as they returned are going to be rewarded for perpetuating their fantasies. They began by saying the North Vietnamese were liberators. They continued by saying that the war's tyrannical outcome vindicated them. And now they say simultaneously that they are the veterans' true champions and that the veterans were nitwits and psychopaths. No war in American history has been discussed so idiotically, and it is reassuring to note that only the opponents of the war and their left-wing colleagues have had much of a voice in the discussion.

•Mrs. George Shultz gave personal and unimpeachable testimony that her husband, the Secretary of State, does indeed have a tiger (*Panthera tigris*) tattooed on his posterior. The adornment could not be closer to where conservatives and other public-spirited Americans would like to see an imprint of Ronald Reagan's shoe. In Great Britain, notwithstanding all the exhortatory propaganda for safe sex, a British member of Parliament, Mr. Harvey Proctor, was arrested for allegedly engaging in spanking sessions with male prostitutes; and the March 22 edition of London's *Sunday Telegraph* reported that a 30-year-old female lawyer was held at Heathrow Airport for carrying condoms, formerly known as prophylactics, into the country. Assistant Secretary of Defense Mr. Richard Perle, one of the government's most effective proponents of peace, declared his intention to resign, and White House chief of staff Donald Regan did resign, but only as his replacement, ex-Senator Howard Baker, barged through the White House's swinging doors.

•There has been another AIDS-related biting incident. In Hobart, Indiana, Mr. David Scott, 44 and a victim of acquired immune deficiency syndrome, shot and bit Mr. Eugene Fischer when Mr. Fischer resisted Mr. Scott's attempt to mug him. Mr. Fischer's wife, Sharon, an unwilling spectator to the violent ex-

change, suffered a mortal heart attack upon hearing Mr. Scott declare his infelicity. Prince Philip praised Thailand as a member of the fraternity of progressive nations for making prophylactics, now known as condoms, in different colors to suit varying moods. Indonesia's President Suharto opened Southeast Asia's largest and most efficient condom factory in a lovely setting surrounded by volcanoes and not far from the famed university-city of Bandung, site of the Bandung conference of 1955. Rumors percolated through the world of high culture that Leonard Bernstein, the gifted conductor and composer, has begun work on a Safe Sex Mass, and the rock group Fat Boys intends to record a "rap song" titled "Protect Yourself" in praise of rational sex.

•Spain may be taking another bold step into the modern world. After years of sportive rooster-stoning, chicken-decapitating, and general bull abuse, an animal rights group has sprung to life to put an end to donkey-squashing. The enlightened movement has been catalyzed by enormities committed against donkeys in the historic town of Villanueva de la Vera, where the town's fattest layman—religious notables are ineligible—rides an old donkey in the Mardi Gras fiesta until the creature collapses, thus encouraging other fat people to trample it. Spaniards in the Association for the Defense of Animals argue that the practice violates donkey rights, though others of a progressive cast of mind could argue that donkey-squashing finally recognizes the moral worth of fat people and their numerous contributions to society. Fashion designers, dutifully following the ar-

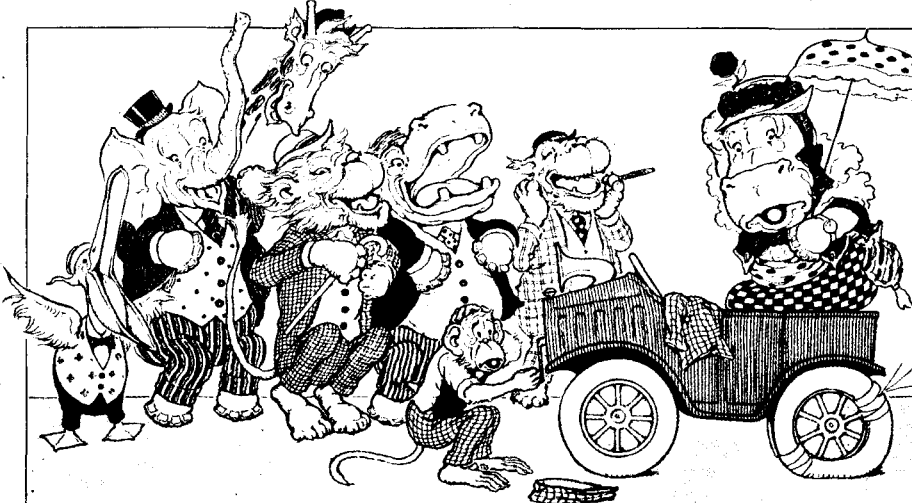
tifacts of television news, have concluded that Mrs. Nancy Reagan's favorite color has shifted from red to blue. A survey published in *U.S. Catholic* magazine reports that nine out of ten American Catholics believe that gossiping is a sin, and virtually no Roman Catholic steals hotel towels though many neglect to fold them before replacing them.

•One month after former President Jimmy Carter acknowledged that he watches starving Ethiopian children on television—odd!—and computes how many amount to one Amy Carter in the "eyes of God"—very odd!—Brown University put Miss Carter on limited probation for participating in obstreperous protests; and court officials in Providence, Rhode Island tagged her as a common scofflaw for neglecting \$305 in parking fines. The Tower Commission heaved up a 300-page report on the Iran-contra connection, placing blame about equally upon the President and his aides and apparently encouraging the President to hold his first press conference in four months, much to the discomfiture of Washington scribes who adjudged the press conference dull. The President told three jokes, the press zero. (See p. 56.)

•A Kenyon College anthropologist, Professor J. Kenneth Smail, evoked visions of sugar plums at a symposium on war and peace at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science by proposing that superpower tension might be mollified if the United States and the Soviet Union would swap at least one million citizens in a "peace hostage deal." According to Professor Smail's plan, the 15- to 35-year-old hostages

would offer services needed in the other country. Americans shipped to the USSR could become jailers, secret police, and alcoholic counselors and Soviet citizens shipped here could take the place of the idiotic professors whom the Reagan Administration in its wisdom would surely ship over there. In Danville, Indiana, Mr. Wesley A. Smith was acquitted on narcotics charges after a jury heard the testimony of Mr. Smith's pet bird. In the wake of allegations that several Marine guards were compromised by KGB cuties in what may be the most damaging security breach since the melodious Walker family, the Marine Corps is ordering a thorough review of the six-week training program that Marine embassy guards receive, and never was there a greater need for a course in safe sex. •Messrs. Randolph Scott, Danny Kaye, and Robert Preston expired as did one of the last representatives of the traditional German school of conducting, 84-year-old Mr. Eugen Jochum, a simple man whose only vice was the work of Anton Bruckner. He actually served as president of the West German Bruckner Society. Voluntarily! Nebraska's Senator Edward Zorinsky, whose commitment to open government was solemnized by the removal of his Senate office door, died on March 6, and Mr. Woody Hayes, the fiery Ohio State football coach astonished his critics by dying during nocturnal repose and with a smile on his face. Senator Zorinsky and his door have been replaced, the former by Mr. David Karnes. Former President Jimmy Carter returned safely from an impudent five-nation tour of the Middle East, proving that even hostage-takers have their standards.

•The Rev. Jim Bakker stepped down as Pope of the Praise the Lord ministry amid charges that he misused a glass of *vin blanc* to exchange bodily fluids with church secretary Miss Jessica Hahn. The redoubtable Rev. Jerry Falwell agreed to replace him, though it was Lt. Col. Oliver North who gained most from the scandal. His secretary, Miss Fawn Hall, was offered by *Penthouse* magazine \$150,000 more to model her private parts than Miss Hahn, and Miss Hahn has the same number of private parts. General Alexander Haig entered the race for the



Republican presidential nomination, and a tennis injury will apparently keep Arkansas Senator Dale Bumpers out of the Democratic race.

•In Manchester, England, a high-tech robber left shopkeeper Mr. Derek

Ryan's cash register empty and his hands stuck to the counter with instant glue. In Peking, couples waiting to wed had to exchange rat tails for marriage licenses during a recent rodent extermination campaign. Researchers in

Amherst, Massachusetts continue to sift through the soiled diapers of sixty-five children to discern how much dirt they consume. In a retaliation against Japanese trade practices the Reagan Administration doubled tariffs on

some Japanese products, and India banned the export of frog legs. Finally, the 1987 NCAA Basketball Tournament was won by Indiana University, coached by Bob Knight, a neoconservative. —RET

## CORRESPONDENCE

### What's Wrong with Jack Kemp?

It never ceases to amaze me how partisans of Jack Kemp, like Gregory Fossedal and Gordon Jackson, ignore the obvious, while bitterly complaining conservatives don't support their candidate ("Kemp on the Defensive," by Gordon Jackson, *TAS*, March 1987). People on the Right, particularly old conservatives and Southern conservatives, do not perceive Kemp as one of their own; what has produced this perception is Kemp's conspicuous efforts to make himself attractive to minorities—or, more accurately, minority spokesmen. His vigorous sponsorship of the bill making Martin Luther King's birthday into a national holiday, his repeated statements about equality as a conservative principle and about the unacknowledged racism of the Republican party, and his initial, vociferous support for sanctions against South Africa all explain why many conservatives are keeping away from Kemp.

Perhaps Congressman Kemp deeply believes in the moral need for taking positions that are repugnant to old line conservatives. Nor do I doubt that some of his partisans who are chastising the Right for not falling in behind him enthusiastically support his "enlightened" views. What bothers me is that his advocates are less than candid in telling us why Kemp is not considered a conservative in too many places beyond the offices of the *Wall Street Journal* and of neoconservative publications. The attempt by Gordon Jackson to depict him as too rightwing for big business simply won't wash. Kemp argues for tax breaks, not for dismantling the welfare state.

My own view is that Kemp has made a mistake running for the presidency as a self-declared conservative. His overtures, symbolic and substantive, to a leftward-marching civil rights movement have made it hard for him to remain a credible candidate of the Right. His stand against South Africa caused one conservative acquaintance of mine to wonder "whether President Kemp might not decide to bomb Pretoria to make Julian Bond like him." Moreover, Kemp has probably not been helped by boosters whose conservative credentials are often problematic, but who none-

theless presume to condemn the Right for not liking their man. Kemp might have become a plausible candidate of the center; as a standardbearer of the Right he is neither plausible nor likely to win the Republican nomination.

—Paul E. Gottfried, Senior Editor  
The World and I  
Washington, D.C.

### Gordon Jackson replies:

Kemp is indeed guilty of making overtures to blacks, and to organized labor, the elderly, the poor, and other groups not usually seen as being in the Republican fold. He thinks his policies can benefit them just as much as the life-long Hooverites, and he sees no reason to write them off. This strikes me as transparently good sense.

Granted, he does tend initially to be a bit more accommodating than is prudent to bills advertised as benefiting these groups. But his good conservative instincts, or advisers, or whatever, usually get the better of him and he backs away from bad legislation, as has been the case with votes on the Legal Services Corporation, South African sanctions, and the Civil Rights Restoration Act.

As to Kemp's alleged disinclination to fix the welfare system and his alliance with big business—I strongly disagree. He will be running on a comprehensive program of welfare reform; look for a speech on it shortly. And like most supply-siders, he has come to view economic growth as depending primarily on the marginal tax rates on individuals, which strongly affect the prospects of small business. Mr. Gottfried may not have noticed, but Reaganomics in its current form has seen fit to trade a host of tax benefits to established business for the lower rates on individuals. Nobody has had more to do with this trend than Kemp.

The Martin Luther King holiday is small potatoes, hardly any reason to reinforce the perception that conservatives have written off the black vote.

I can't deny my credentials for writing a critique of the conservative movement are "problematic," this being my first venture up Mt. Olympus. But I would suggest that one who chose to cuff around the neoconservatives in such an unlikely forum as *In These*

*Times*, "the independent socialist newspaper," as did Mr. Gottfried, is not exactly the best candidate for keeper of the seal.

### Oliver Stone's Message

I enjoyed Bruce Bawer's thoughtful, insightful article on *Platoon* ("Poltrone," *TAS*, March 1987), and thought it easily the best thing I've read on that movie.

I saw the movie before I knew much about Oliver Stone, however, and I wonder what Mr. Bawer would think of my reaction: That it was not so much a pacifist film, or even anti-war in a political sense, but anti-the-kind-of-war Vietnam became, i.e., with no clear vision, no proper consensus, no real leadership, no purifying discipline from the top. I felt that even Elias's comments to the effect that after kicking others around so much it's time the U.S. got its ass kicked, could be understood as an example of the demoralizing effects of the upheavals at home trickling down to the front in the absence of clearly articulated convictions. A combat veteran of World War II told me recently that even in that "good" war, it was necessary to be reminded over and over again of the rightness of the cause and the reasons for being there. I wouldn't take the film as comprehensive, but Vietnam was a war we lost, and we lost it on many levels, and *Platoon* shows one of them.

I admit that Stone's own comments make it hard to hold such a view, but I wonder if the movie itself is as narrow as the ideas he wants to impose on it.

—Carol Iannone  
New York, New York

### Bruce Bawer replies:

I thank Carol Iannone for her gracious words about my review of *Platoon* and for her very interesting remarks. I think the main difference between our interpretations of the film is epitomized by her reference to Sergeant Elias as an "example" of demoralization. To say that a character is presented as an example is to suggest that he is depicted objectively. With Elias, this is not the case. It seems clear to me that Stone wants us to see Elias not as an example, but as a martyr, a Jesus-figure, a Voice of Truth. This deification of Elias is

consistent with the heavy-handed characterization of the film's other principals. It was these characterizations—and the clumsily didactic purpose they serve—that I objected to most strongly in my review.

I will agree with Iannone, however, that after one listens to Stone yammer on fatuously about *Platoon's* "message"—as he did, for example, in his Academy Awards acceptance speech—one is surprised that the film isn't even more crudely polemical than it is.

### Worst Dictionary of the Year

I bought *The Dictionary of American Conservatism* through the Conservative Book Club. I found myself blinking while reading it as RET must have. I would have sworn that I saw a testimonial from Buckley on the dustcover. I appreciate RET's award of the Coogler ("Conservative Cooglers," *TAS*, February 1987) since until then I thought I was the crazy one! Do look up "Conservative" in the book—it's a classic. I expected an intellectual and enlightening definition that I could quote when asked what conservatives like myself are and instead I get this. At least some of the references are interesting. It's also good practice for proofreaders.

—Mitchell Vincent Gossman  
Eagan, Minnesota

### Who's Nutty?

So the *Wanderer* is "a nutty tabloid" ("Hunthausen Humbled" by Tory Stempf, *TAS*, March 1987)? Does that make *TAS* reactionary drivel of delusional McCarthyite throwbacks?

C'mon, as you well know, conservative, traditional, orthodox publications deserve recognition for their clear-mindedness rather than back-of-the-hand derision.

—John Paul Arnerich  
Los Angeles, California

### Turner Talk

I am writing to clear up an inaccuracy contained in Malcolm Gladwell's article, "Ted Turner's Cable Scam," in your March issue. Although Channel 13, as well as other independent stations in the market, was threatened by cable (continued on page 52)