

EDITORIALS



NAPOLEON AND REAGAN

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

In Paris last June I stopped by Napoleon's tomb, a rather large tomb for a homunculus, and peered down on the Emperor from precisely the spot where the conquering Germans stood in June of 1940—they to have their moment of grandiosity, I to glimpse how William F. Buckley, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Henry Kissinger might choose to be interred. Notwithstanding the vast marmoreal splendors of the place, the thought crept upon me that even a military genius can lose his throne when he shows the flag with no clear thought of the consequences. Napoleon brought French flags into chill Russia; the United States now brings its flags into steamy Araby. In neither instance have the consequences been squarely faced, and in both instances the consequences appear perilous.

Napoleon entered Russia in 1812 full of brag and bounce but with insufficient transport to feed his army's horses. Doing so, given the contemporary state of transportation, was probably impossible. Not only had the Emperor given insufficient thought to matters of supply, he had also given insufficient thought to his military and diplomatic objectives, and that was his most damaging oversight. He had beaten the world's greatest powers, including the Russians, in numerous European battles; but he had not weighed the consequences of fighting so far from Paris as Smolensk, Borodino, and Moscow. His superb army repeatedly defeated the Russians, but as was true of the Swedes before and would be true of the Germans later he could not extricate himself from hostilities nor could he continue them. Six months after invading Russia with a half million men, only 5,000 of his troops returned home in organized units.

That the French have included the battle for Moscow among Napoleon's victories engraved at the base of his

tomb is still more evidence of mankind's tendency to beautify its past. Napoleon did indeed take Moscow, but at a price that led speedily to the defeat of the world's preeminent military power and to his banishment. He overlooked the fact that one does not commit military force without militarily useful objectives and the resolve to take those objectives.

In committing the Navy to the Persian Gulf, the Reagan Administration has acted hastily and thoughtlessly. If there are any military objectives there that will serve American diplomatic purposes, recent history has demonstrated that our political establishment lacks the resolve to capture them. Even the thought of doing so is beyond our political establishment. American influence in the Middle East has been ebbing ever since we allowed our Marines to be murdered with impunity in 1983. American influence will not increase if the Navy

comes under fire from any of the congeries of hostile forces supported by shadowy authorities in the Middle East and is unable to respond with mortal blows.

Supposedly the Navy is escorting Kuwaiti tankers in the Persian Gulf so that the Kuwaitis will not have to invite in Soviet bodyguards. If the Kuwaitis do not recognize the danger of relying on Soviet defenders they are ignoramuses, and one can only protect ignoramuses from themselves for so long. Of course, the Kuwaitis do recognize the danger of a Soviet protection agency. That is why they went to such lengths to snooker the United States into protecting their shipping from the Iranians. Yet in the event of an Iranian attack, will our Navy be allowed to bomb Iran, or will it be ordered to participate in a wretched give and take with the puny Iranian naval units harassing it?

And if the Iranians and their agents renew a campaign of international terror against us, will our political establishment have the resolve to retaliate? Perhaps once or twice, but will we continue to bomb Iran with all the lunatics in the world demonstrating against us and only an occasional statesman such as Mrs. Thatcher standing by us? I doubt it. Congress would come alive with gimcrack theorists hoping to gain fame from appeasing the assassins.

The Persian Gulf is of vital strategic importance to us, but it is of even greater importance to Europe, Japan, and to moderate Arabs in the region. Let those prosperous nations establish an international force to patrol the Gulf, and let us attend to other areas of vital interest to us, for instance Central America. There our friends are at least willing to shoulder a rifle in their own defense. □

HOWDY DOODY AND OLLIE

On the occasion of Lt. Col. Oliver North's first appearance before them, what did the Machiavels on the joint congressional committee truly intend by having their chief counsel, John W. Nields, Jr., made up by the late Howdy Doody's make-up artist? His hair was a perfect strawberry. His ears and nose were the very image of the famed puppet, though I perceived no freckles on Chief Counsel Doody's face. He should have had freckles. I believe that the Machiavels' intention was to impress all yuppies in the television audience that there was once a wholesome time when soldiers possessed of no foreign policy experience and only vague authority were incapable of representing the National Security Council on secret missions abroad.

That explains Chief Counsel Doody's pontification at the outset of Colonel North's questioning, wherein to the amazement of some he declaimed that "it is a principal purpose of these hearings to replace secrecy and

deception with disclosure and truth." It explains his charge that members of the Administration have been lying to the American people. And it explains his eager presumption that he, his colleague Mr. Arthur Liman, and the investigative panel speak for the American people.

A deep gulch separated the point of view of the two gladiators early in their epic battle. Both claimed to serve God and country. Mr. Doody believed he spoke for national virtue. Mr. North spoke for national security. Replying to the chief counsel's charge that he lied to the American people, Mr. North insisted that he was not trying to deceive them but their enemies abroad, some of whom were holding Americans hostage and torturing one to death, others of whom were establishing a second Cuba in Central America.

For over three decades televised congressional hearings have evolved. They began with investigations of those who were accused of internal subversion. Soon the televised investigations were



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scrutinizing organized crime. By the 1970s televised congressional hearings were looking into the Nixon Administration's attempts to cover up the Watergate break-in and to spy on political opponents. Now television has broadcast a congressional investigation of government officials who resorted to secret diplomacy to effect the Reagan foreign policy and to return American hostages by means publicly disdained by the President. In North's case he freely admitted that he "dissembled" to foreign governments and to some of his own associates (1) to align the United States with moderate Iranians, (2) safely to retrieve Americans being held hostage abroad, and

(3) to get supplies to an anti-Communist army in Central America during a time that army was being sorely pressed and Congress was vacillating on how to treat it.

The goal of earlier investigators was to thwart subversives, mobsters, and corrupt government officials. Is the present goal to thwart friendly relations with a moderate Iran, the release of hostages, and democracy in Central America? Of course it is not. Those Americans who are enthusiastic about these hearings and applaud their gifted inquisitors assert that Mr. North broke laws regulating American diplomacy. Their claim is that ours is a Nation of Laws and that the Reagan Administra-

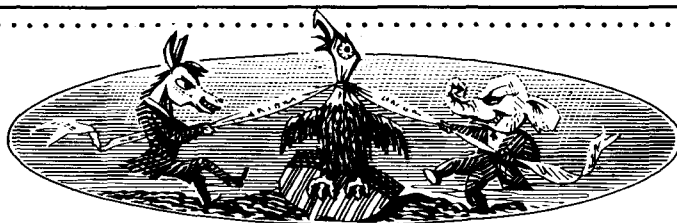
tion has done violence to the Rule of Law. I would take their pieties more seriously if they were not the same people who over the past couple of decades warmly advocated civil disobedience, which is to say selective adherence to the law. Some of the disobedience has been for noble goals such as civil rights, but some has been for goals of the utmost frivolity, such as legalized marijuana.

Many Americans have sniffed out the hypocrisy of these proceedings. Now they are noting the imprudence. After all, these inquisitors are, in their grandiosity, demanding that Mr. North compromise the names of nations that out of shared interests with the United

States have secretly assisted us. These hypocritical proceedings have endangered the lives of friends abroad and our influence in the world.

But will they return America to an age of innocence? Come, come. The Congress that is now inflamed over Ollie North's deceptions has in recent years had more of its members indicted or convicted of criminal offenses than any other organization in the country, with the possible exception of a few luckless Mafia families. The only serious issue in these hearings is the conduct of a particularly reckless kind of partisan politics, away from the ballot box and on TV for all our enemies to see. □

CAPITOL IDEAS



IN THE CASTRO

by Tom Bethell

"Use condoms," say the ads on San Francisco's buses. The AIDS hotline number is appended. Sometimes you see a poster of Pope John Paul II releasing a dove from the balcony of St. Peter's: "The Holy Father is Coming, September 17-18, 1987." You also see bumper stickers showing a circled Pope with a diagonal bar, captioned Papal Free Zone.

The Hemlock Society advertises for members on the bulletin board of the First Unitarian Church on Franklin Street, as do Womyn's Spirituality Circle (witches, as they used to be called) and PASSAGEways (Places for Adult Survivors of Sexual Assault to Grow and Evolve Safely). There was also a flier promoting an expansion of rent control in San Francisco (vacancy control is an important issue in the mayor's race now underway).

Again there was a circled picture of the Pope, with a diagonal bar across his face: HALT DOGMA.

A news clipping pinned to the board quoted the Unitarian Universalist Association as saying that the Vatican's statement on homosexuality (calling it an intrinsic moral evil) is "laced with archaic religious assumptions and astonishing arrogance," and furthermore "threatens homosexuals' lifestyles." F. Jay Deacon of the Unitarians' national

office of Lesbian and Gay Concerns said the Vatican's linkage of homosexuality and AIDS was "mischievous and arrogant."

About 3500 AIDS cases have been diagnosed in San Francisco, with almost 2100 deaths. About 97 percent of the cases involve homosexual or bisexual men. In June, ninety-six new cases of AIDS were diagnosed, ninety-five of them homosexual men, six of whom also used intravenous drugs. "The remaining case involved a boy of elementary school age who contracted the disease from a blood transfusion in 1982," according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Estimates vary, but there are perhaps 75,000 homosexual men in San Francisco—one-tenth of the city's population. According to a commonly cited estimate, half of them are infected with the human immunodeficiency virus that causes AIDS. People in San Francisco with AIDS can't be fired for that reason, nor can they be denied or evicted from housing simply because of an AIDS diagnosis. Insurance companies in California are not allowed access to results of the AIDS antibody test, and there was even a case in Los Angeles when an administrative law judge ruled that AIDS was a job-related illness and awarded worker's compensation payments to a construction worker who acquired AIDS, from prostitutes in Zaire (he said).

It was only in May that the last gay bathhouse in San Francisco was closed, and that after much grumbling and charges of official harassment. In the late 1970s there were thirty such establishments—consisting of dimly lit rooms designed for anonymous homosexual encounters. The lawyer for the recently closed bathhouse said that the two owners plan to retire, believing that they succeeded in providing "a service to their community." But they suspect also that "the future for gay bathhouses at the moment is not bright."

Gay activist Randy Stallings said that he would always remember the just-closed 21st Street Baths, with its subdued lighting, its jacuzzi, its theater with "adult" movies, and its great big shower room. It was clean, he said, "very, very clean."

Everyone says that the Castro district, gay mecca, is much more subdued than it was at its heyday in the late seventies. Today you see slim, prematurely aged, grayish unshaven men leaning on canes as they come creeping down the streets. But the gay bars on Castro Street still seem to have a good many customers, even in mid-afternoon, and on weekends they're packed. The *Bay Area Reporter*, a weekly paper catering to the homosexual community, still comes out with pages of classifieds, many of them un-

printable, and numerous display ads of nearly nude men, often on the telephone. ("Tired of the same unbelievable fantasies? You've never had a sex call this hot, nasty and sexy. . . . Message changes with each call.")

Turn back a few pages and you come to DEATHS—perhaps ten or fifteen obituaries every week. "Due to an unfortunately large number of obituaries," the paper explains, "*Bay Area Reporter* has been forced to change its obituary policy. We must now restrict obituaries to 200 words. And please, no poetry." Many of these obituaries are written by a "lover," who may of course have transmitted the AIDS virus to the deceased.

About 200,000 San Franciscans turned out for the annual Gay Pride Parade down Market Street in late June. "Whips were everywhere," according to the *Bay Area Reporter*. "A stand-in for Pope John Paul II rode in a pope-mobile pulled by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. 'His Holiness' was garbed in splendid pontifical robes and carried a whip with which he threatened the sisters when they looked like they were beginning to get lax in their duties."

It seems that politicians, whether elected or aspiring, cannot afford to miss this event. Everyone from the sheriff to the district attorney turned out for the parade. In the current mayoral race (Dianne Feinstein is not

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