

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-

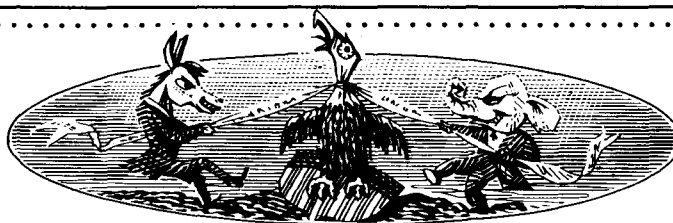
tion has done violence to the Rule of Law. I would take their pieties more seriously if they were not the same people who over the past couple of decades warmly advocated civil disobedience, which is to say selective adherence to the law. Some of the disobedience has been for noble goals such as civil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

Tom Bethell is The American Spectator's Washington correspondent.

running for re-election), a surprising issue emerged between the two leading contenders (Assemblyman Art Agnos and Supervisor John Molinari) when Agnos carelessly said that he "didn't have time" to campaign in the "leather bars." This remark, said the *Bay Area Reporter*, was "interpreted as an attack on Molinari." Not that Agnos is anti-gay—far from it. Despite AIDS, any candidate perceived as be-

ing in the slightest degree "homophobic" is doomed in the city of St. Francis.

Only one mayoral candidate (Cesar Ascarrunz) has had the temerity to risk gay wrath, and he's a political newcomer. "He said 'some of my best friends are gay but I wouldn't want my daughter to marry one'—that kind of nonsense," said Gilbert Block, who plays "Sister Sadie Sadie the Rabbi

Lady" in the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. "If he gets more than one percent of the vote we'll all be very surprised." Block and his friend Gilbert Baker (Sister Chanel 2001) applied for and received a license to do business as the "Official San Francisco 1987 Papal Welcoming Committee," complying with the law by publishing their intentions in a local paper. An admiring profile of Block was published in a recent

issue of the leftist *National Catholic Reporter*.

The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (about twenty strong) are planning various activities and street theater for the Pope's visit, but Sister Boom Boom (real name Jack Fertig), who gained notoriety at the time of the 1984 Democratic Convention, will not be with the group. He told me that he gave up alcohol and drugs in September, 1985, quit the Sisters, and since then has started to go to church (Catholic) "seriously." (Contrary to rumor, he did not get married.) He dismisses the Sisters as for the most part "alcoholics and drug addicts."

There could be no better demonstration of political power and social acceptability of homosexuals than the recent tribute to Dr. Tom Waddell, the founder of the Gay Olympics (now called the Gay Games, in the wake of a Supreme Court copyright ruling). Dr. Waddell recently died of AIDS, aged 49, leaving a wife and a three-year-old daughter. He was then eulogized in the Rotunda of City Hall in terms that brought to mind (and consciously evoked) the praise heaped on Robert F. Kennedy after his death. About 400 "family, friends and extended family" gathered to honor Waddell "for his heroic life and the legacy of inspiration it has left them," according to the *San Francisco Examiner*.

Remarkably enough, this tribute was organized by the city's Department of Public Health, for which Waddell worked as chief physician until he came down with AIDS himself. I joined the crowd of 400, and as I did so the taboo, unprintable-in-San Francisco, unmentionable thought came to mind unbidden: Had Waddell, public health official, transmitted AIDS to others?

There were mauve cummerbunds, women in men's clothing (blazers and ties), three U.S. naval officers in whites and medals, a good many young men with floppy mustaches, shiny pated boardroom types in T-shirts and blue jeans, and a solemn row of eulogizers awaiting their turn at the podium on the marble staircase. Gay "rainbow" flags were on display. A pianist played "Look for the Silver Lining," and there was the customary sign-language accompaniment.

We heard from Health Commissioner James Foster, who said that Waddell wanted to heal the diseases not only of the body but also of the soul—diseases that "divide gay from straight, men from women... walls of oppression... we in public health are grateful...."

We heard from the Director of the Health Department, who told us that

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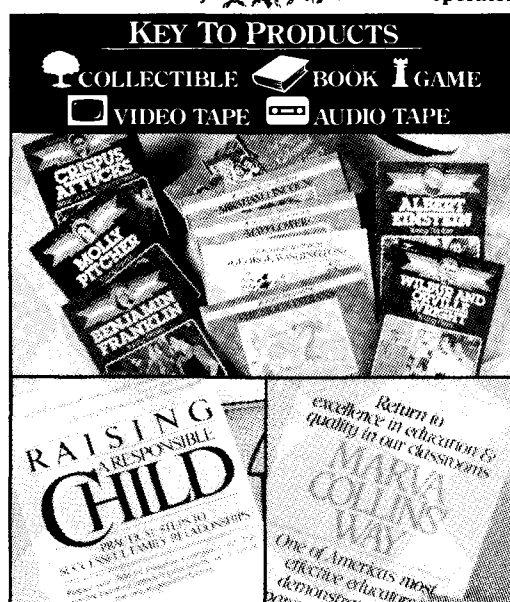
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Tom was a caring person, and from the mannish Mary Dunlap, Esq., lead counsel, San Francisco Arts and Athletics, who spoke bitterly of "this disease which picks on our leadership and our fellowship in the most insidious way," and we heard from the widow, Sara Lewinstein, herself an athlete who had met Waddell at the first Gay Games. Wearing tailored jeans and dressy high-top Adidas, she told us that "the actual vows of the marriage ceremony didn't mean anything to us." She and Tom had lived apart. "There are men and women who want to have a child, and their sexuality has nothing to do with it," she said.

Finally we heard from the Associate Director of Health, Dr. Tom Peters, who expressed his deepest appreciation "to the many members of Tom's extended family. . . . You have provided us with a model for years to come, as we train new health care providers. We at the Health Department will always remember you, Tom."

"Ladies and gentlemen, the Lesbian and Gay Chorus," someone said, and they came solemnly down the stairs in white shirts and black bow ties while the piano played "Hand in Hand."

I attended this ceremony with a friend. "Women in drag sitting in the rotunda of City Hall," she said as we left, "memorializing a man who died of a venereal disease, and nobody seemed to think it was odd."

"Tears, smiles, and a few moments that approached exaltation were intermingled in the resonant Rotunda," said the man from the *Examiner*.

The Papal Visit Task Force fundraiser was organized by gay rights attorney John Wahl, who has been mobilizing a coalition "to express the united outrage of Californians at the Pope's public condemnation of gay liberation, women's right to choice, and liberation theology in Third World countries."

It was held one Sunday afternoon at the Langtry Inn, an 1894 Queen Anne Victorian guest house for women travelers partly owned by Ginny Foat, former California president of the National Organization of Women. She was acquitted of murder charges in 1983. Ms. Foat was on hand, wearing an I. Magnin blazer, as was Gilbert Block, in civvies. Foat said she was a practicing Catholic but was disappointed that the Pope was not a combination of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, "not a compassionate man."

"That man is coming here in September," said Wahl, 53, who was attorney to slain San Francisco supervisor Harvey Milk (shot in 1978 by Dan White, a "closeted gay man," accord-

ing to Wahl). "And he wants to walk our streets like a gentle grandfather, patting the heads of supplicants. Is that what you're going to do?"

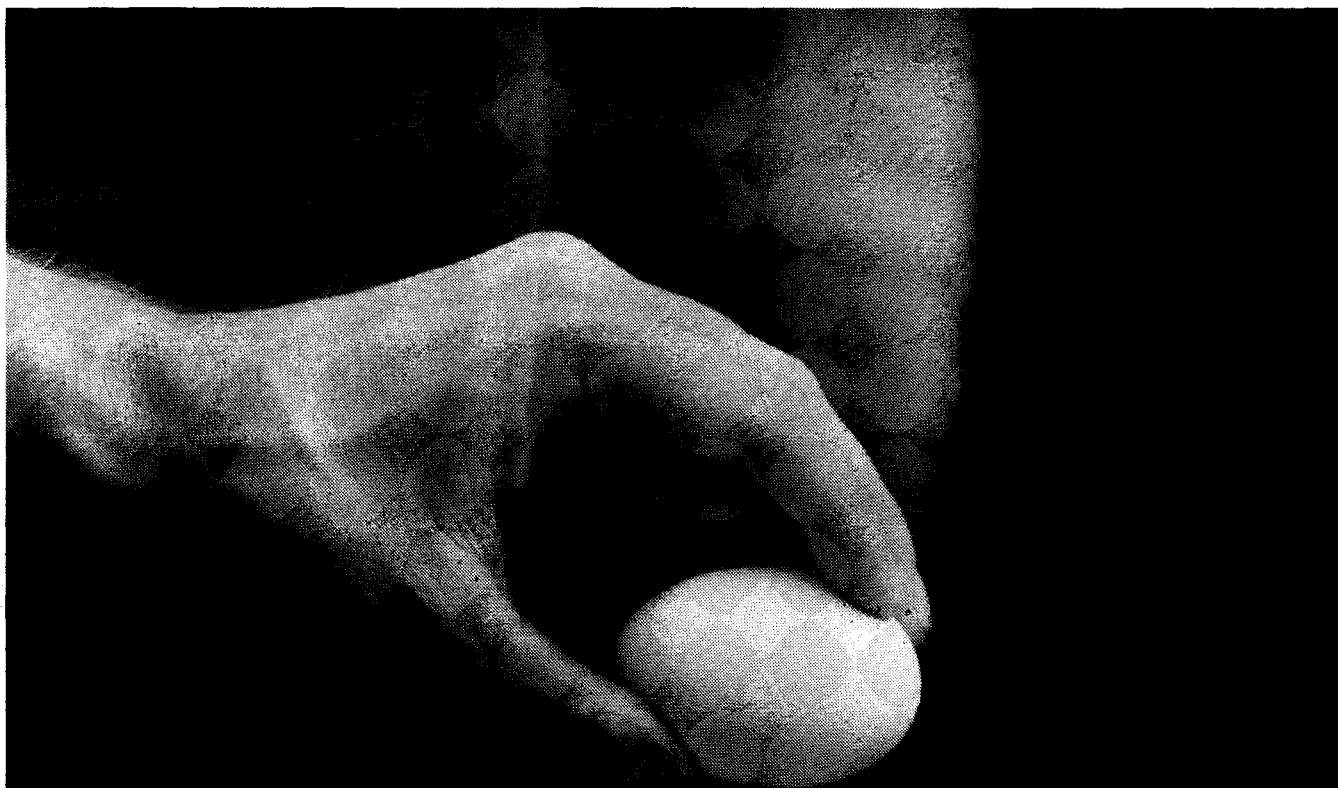
The audience in the chintz and floral-patterned Lillie Langtry drawing room murmured no, no, no.

"That's not what I'm going to do," Wahl went on. "That's not what thousands of people are going to do. We're going to tell that man and every other

so-called religious leader that says that kind of thing, that is guilty of that kind of lie, that kind of inflammatory rhetoric, we're going to say to him or her . . . go home, go back to bed, go back and get psychoanalyzed, get some therapy, you're sick, you're impeding the progress of humankind in advancing and growing up."

Back in the Castro district, I spoke to a Catholic priest who was coming

out of Most Holy Redeemer Church and who visits dying AIDS patients in the Coming Home Hospice opposite the church. "The Pope is in for a big surprise when he gets here," said Father John. "People are hurting and he comes out with statements that are harsh and judgmental. The church is not a very loving place." He said the Pope should "stay home and send us a videotape." □



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Brit Hume

OLLIE NORTH AND THE FOOLS ON THE HILL

How Senators Inouye, Rudman, Mitchell, Cohen, Tribble et al.
wound up with Mom's apple pie on their faces.

Before the end of the Iran-contra hearings, Republican Senator Warren Rudman of New Hampshire, the Sam Spade of Capitol Hill, had discerned two new constitutional rights: that of the American people to be wrong, and that of the President to create his own political disasters. He might have added a third: the right of congressional investigating committees to make fools of themselves.

This certainly seems to be what the public thought the Iran-contra committees had done after it had seen them and Lt. Col. Oliver North go at it for a week. A *Newsweek* poll found that a 48 percent plurality thought the committees were harassing the colonel. A larger *Los Angeles Times* poll found that only six percent thought the committees were being fair, and, perhaps most startling, that same survey showed people thought Congress more to blame than the President for the Iran-contra debacle. And all polls showed that majorities believed the colonel was telling the truth and that support for the contra cause was surging. Time may soften some of these judgments, even reverse them. But this is clearly not the outcome the committees had in mind, which is especially ironic considering that North gave the committees an extraordinarily revealing and unflattering portrait of goings on in the Reagan White House.

Some members, including Republican Dick Cheney of Wyoming and Democrat Thomas Foley of Washington, thought it was television that made the committees look so bad. Certainly television had a role in magnifying and dramatizing the spectacle and in providing North the vast audience to which he successfully played. But more careful analysis suggests the committees left themselves wide open for the black eye that Col. North and his as-

tonishingly aggressive lawyer gave them. This, you will recall, was an investigation its leaders said was not about crimes, but about policy and accountability. It would, of course, answer the principal accountability question—what did the President know and when—as soon as possible. Senate Committee Vice Chairman Rudman said last winter it should only take a few months. Senate Committee Chairman Daniel Inouye said it would take longer; he had been through this before (in the Watergate case) and knew better. Republican Rudman also insisted Democrat Inouye was acting without partisanship. Some Republican senators thought they knew better; unlike Rudman, they had seen this sort of thing before, too.

Both Houses appointed investigating committees, but the Senate committee ended up leading the way and setting the tone for the hearings, largely because it got started earlier and was, supposedly, a non-partisan panel with Republican and Democratic staffers

working together. With Rudman's enthusiastic support, the Senate committee chose Arthur Liman, a New York criminal lawyer with an enormous reputation and extensive background in analyzing complex financial schemes, to head its investigation. He was a perfect choice for the backstage work but a disastrous one for the public phase of the inquiry. With a caustic, sarcastic style of cross-examination and a heavy New York accent, he would prove to be the Howard Cosell of this case—the man the TV audience would love to hate.

Rudman and Liman emerged as the driving forces in the investigation. Rudman is a sharp former prosecutor who loved his previous job as New Hampshire's attorney general, not least because it allowed him to ride around with state troopers on border drug busts. Whatever political qualms Rudman might have had about his role were overcome by his fierce sense of probity and his police-detective instincts. Inouye seemed content to let

him lead things, since Inouye is not known as a hard worker and Rudman's lead role gave the investigation a further imprint of non-partisanship.

And Rudman gave Inouye much more than that. Along the way, the chairman repeatedly made accusations about the President without evidence to back them up. For example, Inouye claimed in April that the President's diary would "cause embarrassment," because of unspecified remarks the President had made in it. But that "embarrassment" has yet to come to light. Then, on May 3, the eve of the hearings, Inouye said on "Meet the Press" that the President knew the White House staff was raising money to provide arms for the contras. Outside, he acknowledged there was no evidence of that. The next day, however, he said it again. The weekend after Oliver North's testimony began, he charged on "Face the Nation" that a North-to-Poindexter memo indicated the President had approved the use of Iran arms funds for covert projects other than supplying the contras. In fact, the memo outlined some proposed covert actions, but said nothing at all about how they were to be financed. Moreover, there was no indication on the face of the document that the President had approved anything, only the word "Done" next to North's recommendation that the President be briefed. In each case, Inouye and Rudman were appearing together and Rudman tried to soften Inouye's accusations. But he didn't contradict them, and he didn't keep them off the evening news, either.

The committees could have stopped all of Inouye's, and everybody else's, speculations by summoning North and former national security adviser John Poindexter right away, granting them limited immunity from prosecution, and demanding to know what they had told the President about the contra



Brit Hume is national correspondent with ABC News, for which he covered the Iran-contra hearings.