

Communists read these writers at underground universities, along with the eighteenth-century free-marketeer Adam Smith and such contemporary American conservatives as William F. Buckley, Jr. They greet American conservatives as soul brothers.

Now they want to rebuild their countries with Reagan's America as their model. Precisely how friendly so many of these former protesters are to the ideas of American conservatism is really quite breathtaking. As Alajos Dornbach (now deputy speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly, once a lawyer jailed for repeatedly defending Hungarian dis-

sidents) told me, he had hoped the "collectivist" French and British governments of the 1960s and 1970s would fail, for that would weaken the Soviets; and he lauded Ronald Reagan's military buildup that "bankrupted" the Soviet Union. Interestingly, every one of those I have interviewed was surprised by the rapidity of Communism's local collapse in 1989. All agreed with the Reagan policy, but not one expected the Communists simply to give up. It is as though one day the Pope were to become an agnostic, call Satan into the Vatican, hand him the keys, and vanish into a retirement home. But here my analogy ends,

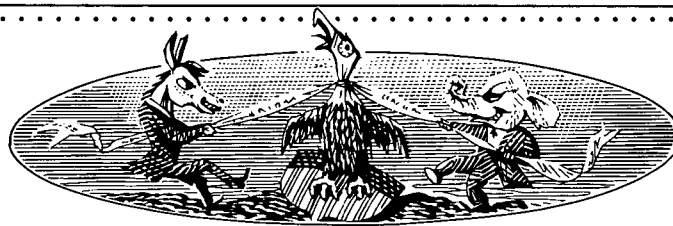
for the Pope would not be leaving behind the ruin and sadness that is Eastern Europe.

The Communists are gone now, some to retirement, others—I kid thee not—to become international bankers and entrepreneurs. But behind them they have left a sad generation of elderly citizens who never knew the ebullience and hope of youth in a free society. They have left pollution beyond an American conservationist's grimmest nightmare, economies that are years behind the West, and they have left the comic, too. Near the elegant Czech parliament, amidst heroic monuments from the pre-Communist

past, stand behemoth, blockheaded statues of Marx and Engels, and the blockheads are as ugly to the eye as their ideas were destructive.

And then there is the rare ex-Communist trying to make it in a political world dominated by what look like nothing so much as Eastern European Reaganites. He urges moderation in everything. He loves American literature, particularly Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. If you can remember those two clowns, you probably last saw them at an American peace demonstration, where the concern was over flowers, not Communist brutes. □

## CAPITOL IDEAS



### THE CENTER FOLDS

by Tom Bethell

Back at last to "the center," as people within the Beltway think of Washington in relation to the U.S., and as Moscow until recently thought of itself in relation to the Soviet Union. Wouldn't it be nice if we began to experience those centrifugal forces that have been felt in many other parts of the world but not yet here? If we no longer had to send 25 percent of our income to the American "center"? If Californians, Vermonters, and Georgians, like Russians, Lithuanians, and Georgians, decided that the time had come to take control of their own lives and destinies?

Beltway nightmare, gentlemen. And let's not kid ourselves: Republicans worry about it almost as much as Democrats. One of the first items in the news on my return to Washington in late August was the White House criticism of Boris Yeltsin, attacked in fierce whispers by anonymous aides as a "demagogue" who threatens the Old World Order. (This has been cleverly labeled the New World Order by President Bush.) The name of Brent Scowcroft, national security adviser and Old World Order enthusiast, surfaced in connection with this Yeltsin-bashing. Later, a White House statement finally and reluctantly supporting Baltic independence ignored Yeltsin "but ten times repeated the word 'Soviet,' which now has no context except as a Gorbachev

lifesaver," Evans and Novak reported.

My guess is that official Washington admires Gorbachev and the relics of the Soviet system as much as it does because it recognizes its own analogous position. If power is permitted to slip away from the center in Moscow, perhaps the same dreadful thing could one day happen in Washington. Maybe the people will get peculiar ideas here, too, inspired by some Yeltsin-like "demagogue" on this side of the Atlantic. As I say—Beltway nightmare. The *Wall Street Journal's* "Washington Wire," a compendium of Inner-Beltway conventional wisdom, imputed the distaste for Yeltsin to the cherished Washington belief that the "world economic tide" is supposed to be moving in the direction of countries "banding together rather than breaking apart."

There's precious little evidence for this interpretation of events, of course. A dozen European countries are supposedly moving toward some kind of union, but all is dependent on bureaucratic stealth and the citizenry in the various countries not really understanding what is going on. In this respect, they have been systematically kept in the dark by their own heads of state. (Margaret Thatcher was an exception, and she stirred up enormous resentment among the superstatists for blowing the whistle.) When the Germans, the French, and the rest figure out what the bureaucrats have in store for them they

will probably rebel, and it's a good bet that the European superstate will never materialize.

Elsewhere in the world, power seems to be moving away from the center. In addition to the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia is breaking apart, much to the disgust of those elites who had fondly imagined that here Communism would at last emerge in respectable and humane garb. In recent years, admiring chapters of economics textbooks have been devoted to the Yugoslavian economy; total nonsense and bogus statistics from beginning to end, of course; all of which will have to be discarded. The hunger of Western intellectuals for a planned world will have to find satisfaction in some other fantasy.

As I write in mid-September, the Yugoslav military (primarily Serbian) is waging war on Croatia, and I have no doubt that all good Beltway types are quietly rooting for the Yugo-Feds. The lead sentence of a story about Germany in the *Washington Post* (by Marc Fisher) suggests such sympathy for Belgrade, to put it mildly: "Germany alone has repeatedly threatened to recognize the breakaway republics of Croatia and Slovenia." Fisher's editor presumably thought this use of the word "threatened" was perfectly acceptable. That's the way people automatically think at the center. The proponents of one centralized system will naturally support another. They recognize the danger to the governing classes everywhere if secession (otherwise known as indepen-

dence) is permitted to go unchecked.

Meanwhile, let us hope that secession proceeds apace in every corner of the globe; let Scotland be an independent country, Wales another. How pleasant it will be to see Canada separate into its constituent provinces. Within a multiplicity of jurisdictions, surely, one or two might adopt the principles of self-government that inspired the framers of the U.S. Constitution—now abandoned here in all but name, and adopted hardly anywhere else.

The collapse of the Soviet Union is construed (no doubt deservedly) as a victory for conservatives; but soon enough it is likely to pose problems for Republicans. I do not refer to the 1992 presidential election. President Bush seems certain to win it. But now at last people may start asking: What, if anything, do the Republicans stand for? As long as the Soviets constituted a real threat, and the Democrats remained subservient to their McGovernite wing, people did have a real reason to vote Republican. The Dukakis tank commercial probably did as much to elect George Bush in 1988 as the furloughing of Willie Horton. The specter of the Kremlin likewise worked to Ronald Reagan's advantage, both in 1980 and 1984. Today, however, military differences between the two parties are no longer important.

Why, then, should anyone vote Republican? One important issue dividing

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the two parties today is abortion. Typically, however, moderate Republicans are trying to remove this key distinction by eliminating the right-to-life plank from the GOP platform. My suspicion is that if this move were to succeed, there really would no longer be any reason for the party to remain in existence. It would wither away and die, no doubt to be replaced by something more vital. Therefore, I confess, the "pro-choice"

plank does have a certain Machiavellian appeal. If adopted, we would soon see a major and long-overdue rearrangement of the political furniture in the U.S.

The main problem with the Republicans is that they have no real confidence in their own moral legitimacy and they remain uncertain of how to cope with the aggressive tactics of Democrats in Washington. Remarkably enough,

Republicans have actually lost the initiative on the abortion issue in the last decade. When Sandra Day O'Connor appeared before the Judiciary Committee in 1981, as the *Washington Post* pointed out, it was the Republican Senator Jeremiah Denton of Alabama who took the offensive, pressing for her views on abortion. At that moment, the supporters of abortion were briefly on the defensive. No longer. In September,

Clarence Thomas was pressed for his views on the subject from the opposing direction. Pro-abortion senators confidently assumed that the Supreme Court nominee could be embarrassed politically by eliciting anti-abortion sentiments from him. Of course, abortion opponents undermine their own cause by timidly refusing to express it. Imagine opponents of slavery in the nineteenth century in the same position—yet not confident enough of their own abolitionist sentiments to express them openly to a panel dominated by pro-slavery senators.

Republicans instinctively want to play defense. Here was Clarence Thomas, an attractive and obviously intelligent nominee, sounding at times like a defendant taking the Fifth as he ducked and weaved with confusing responses. This was the Duberstein Strategy, or so we were told; a reference to Kenneth Duberstein, the assistant to Howard Baker who was mysteriously elevated to chief of staff in the waning days of Reagan's presidency. Perhaps the strategy will have worked (the Judiciary Committee has not voted as I write this), but it shows a poor grasp of politics to advocate a defensive crouch in the glare of television lights. It is precisely at such a moment—when the cameras are so eagerly and mercilessly seeking out signs of doubt or evasion, that the media give Republicans the rare opportunity to play offense. But that is what Republicans never want to do.

Senator Joseph Biden offered Thomas as a golden opportunity when, at the beginning of the hearing (when media attention is at its peak), he waved a copy of Richard Epstein's book *Takings* before the cameras and practically defied the nominee to come right out and say that he believed in this nonsense about people having a right to property. Thomas might have reckoned that, contrary to what Biden seemed to imagine, there is much support for such a view, especially among taxpayers. Instead he began his evasive maneuvers. Such defensiveness only confirms the Democrats in their moral righteousness, however deluded, and encourages them to press the attack further.

Thomas, incidentally, had plenty of time to consider his response on this point. Before the hearing began, Biden had confided to him that the questioning would begin with the topic of economic rights—an area potentially perilous to Democrats (but only if Republicans are willing to exploit it).

It would be nice to see Richard Epstein himself as a nominee to the Court. Here one begins to fantasize about Republicans on offense, an oxymoron, but still, one would give a lot to observe the huge consternation in Washington

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should the eloquent Epstein ever appear as a nominee before the committee—instructed (in my fantasy) not to evade the questions but to suggest politely that income transfers appear unconstitutional on their face; and reminded (in a prior Oval Office *tête à tête*) that even if he were not confirmed the ensuing publicity would do wonders for his lecture fees. To complete the fantasy, Judge Richard Posner of the Seventh Circuit would be “on” next, for the further edification of the committee and the country . . . One wonders how long it would take for Biden to decide that, under the circumstances, live television coverage of confirmation hearings was no longer appropriate.

“Oh, that’s not the way things happen in Washington,” sober Republicans will tell you when you suggest such strategies. True. And that is why the Republicans have for so long remained in the minority. Part of the problem is that the liberal ideology of today’s Democrats seems to be morally intimidating to many Republicans. Rich people (like Senators Kennedy and Metzenbaum) are perceived as heroically at odds with their own self-interest: rich, but unselfish enough to help the poor. Republicans then contemplate their own philosophy—which amounts to little more than businessmen helping businessmen—and they feel like moral pygmies by comparison. They fail to recognize that, in an age besotted with envy, advocating the expenditure of other people’s money has been the camouflage of choice for the rich. In addition, the more of other people’s money you seek to spend, the more the media will call you compassionate. So it’s nice work if you can get it and perhaps it’s understandable that Republicans have been taken in. The mental escape route open to them is to see that it’s not government’s job to help *anyone* in a tennis tournament. But such philosophizing does not come easily to Republicans, to put it mildly.

A more immediate problem is that the present Republican leadership is perfectly content with the existing division of labor in Washington, D.C.: in which Republicans are permitted to preside over Democratic policies. It’s really a one-party system with the Republicans enjoying the perquisites of office and delegating policy to the Democrats. This became more than normally conspicuous earlier this year when lobbyists for minorities (and hence the Democrats) pressed for employment-quota legislation in the guise of “expanding civil rights.” The White House response was to press for marginal alterations in the language, detectable only by trained lawyers, but preserving intact the features of the Democrats’ bill,

which will lead inexorably to quotas. The point is that Republicans are in no hurry to fix a system that they do not regard as broken. The mistake is to imagine the Republican leadership as somehow frustrated by their minority status and eager to change it. They aren’t. Nonetheless, the system is broken. The federal budget has been expanding by leaps and bounds, and congressional spending is unconstrained;

or rather, is constrained only by Republican refusal to raise the taxes to pay for it. Last year, President Bush yielded that high ground to the Democrats; this year, Governor Pete Wilson made the same error in California (see my “California Calamity” in the September *TAS*). Republicans do not know how to cope with the Democrats’ desire to be ever more compassionate with the tax-

payors’ money, because they have fore-sworn the one strategy that would upset the present symbiotic (rather than adversarial) arrangement in Washington: playing offense. It’s not too late to learn. The next time there’s a vacancy on the Supreme Court, phone up Professor Epstein, invite him to the center, and ask him to bring along a copy of *Takings* so that *he* can brandish it before the cameras. □

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## COMMIES—DEAD BUT TOO DUMB TO LIE DOWN

In time for the Tailgunner's birthday, the second annual readers' update of the Joe McCarthy Memorial New Enemies List (compiled with the assistance of Shawn Miller, who gathered, read, and sorted the various missives quoted below and thereby shifted our *auto-da-fe* into Drive).

This year's Enemies List is about a quart low on yellow bile. Which is nothing to be ashamed of. Conservatism is not a vulgar mass movement that needs to foster hatred as a "unifying agent." Nor are we, like the jejune progressives, angry because established things are established and we are not. We rule the world. Ha ha. And cheerfully. Yes, we can afford to be indulgent toward the *left-outs* and the *left-overs* and their ever more pathetic fantasies of influence and power. But that's not why this list is relatively short. We can afford to be indulgent, but we aren't. The bullying communard palaver spewed by fascist Levelers is as repulsive now as it was when it had a Soviet Army attached to it. We loathe these intellectual Gulag-mongers as much as we ever did. We still want them marched north onto the pack ice of Hudson's Bay and there, clad only in Birkenstock sandals, set to the task of teaching polar bears vegetarianism. We're conservatives. We know evil exists. And we're able and willing to identify it in that long police lineup which is modern politics. But there's the problem. This is the fifth Enemies List. Evil-doers with any kind of public name, we've publicly named them. We're beginning to repeat ourselves or belabor the obvious: the Kennedy family and their never-ending zipper problems, Winnie Mandela with her Leon Spinks approach to political indoctrination of the young, Molly Yard, Sen. Paul Wellstone, Saddam Hussein, Ann Richards, Kitty Kelley, David Dinkins, Linda Ellerbee, Linda Ellerbee, Linda Ellerbee.

There's some value, of course, to reiterated denunciations. It would be hard to put Sinead O'Connor on an enemies list too many times. She is the entire left-wing thought process: "The world faces

difficult and horrendous problems—war, famine, disease, poverty, and injustice. We could ask scientists and scholars what to do about these problems or pray to God for guidance, or we could study the problems ourselves and try to discern solutions, but fortunately, we don't have to do any of that because there's a bald girl in Dublin who has all the answers." Worthy though such duplication is, however, it's boring. And to be boring violates the first rule of retribution: "If it's boring it isn't really revenge."

Speaking of revenge, we still have not, even after three years of trying, invented a suitable means of blackening the fates of our black-listees. I have two more suggestions:

**Smoke.** Smoke cigarettes, smoke pipes, but especially smoke cigars, the great big capitalist-pig chair-leg-sized stogies that smell like barbecuing snow tires. Smoking probably isn't very good for us, but it drives liberals mad, pro-

pels them into frenzies of indignation and sanctimoniousness. They flop around in paroxysms of worry about the effects of passive smoke inhalation. It's a well-known fact that every year thousands of liberals die from having fits about staying healthy.

**Shoot cats.** Why lefties have such a pronounced affinity for these dislikable, useless, and eminently unendangered knaves of the animal kingdom is no mystery. Cats are disloyal, self-regarding layabouts with nothing but contempt for those who feed and protect them. Left-wingers acknowledge this likeness by giving cats names such as "Che," "Chairman Meow," and "Linda Ellerbee." Owning a cat is as close as most pinkos come to having a normal personal relationship. (I had no more penned these words than, opening the September 9 *International Herald Tribune*, I was confronted by a five-column review of a New Age self-awareness

book titled *Know Yourself Through Your Cat*. The obviously insane author, Vivienne Angus, said: "I'm a great believer that in everybody is every animal and every animal is in everybody." Shoot cats, *Q.E.D.*)

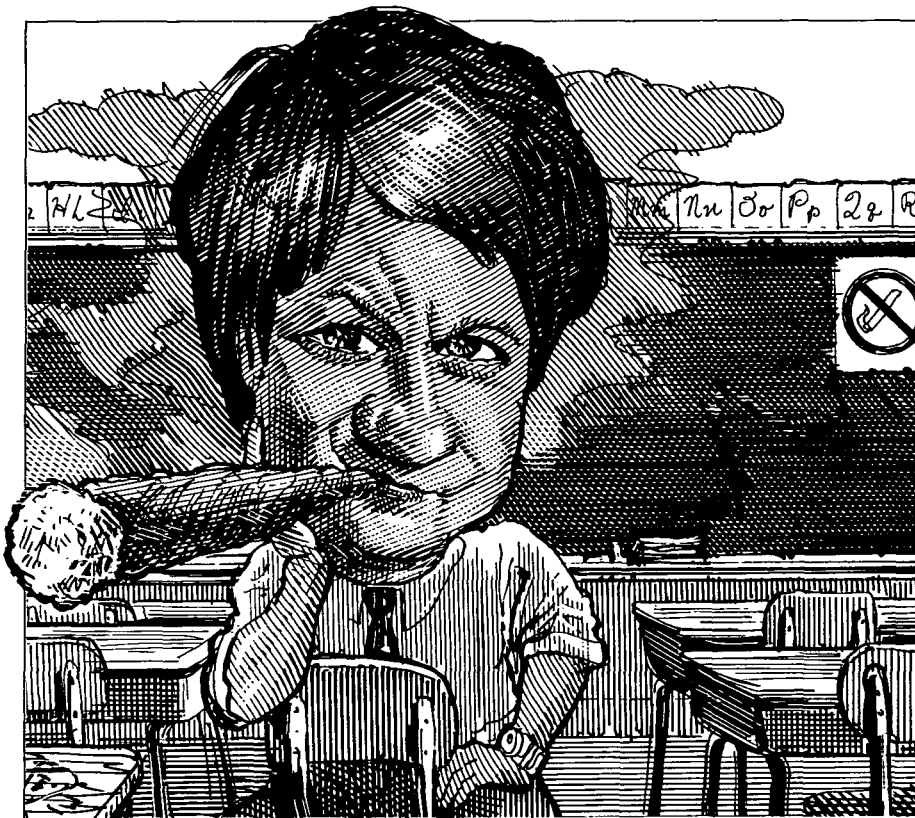
Another reason why this Enemies List is a tad brief is that other people have taken up the idea and even improved upon it. Thank you, Boris Yeltsin. We've got a call in to Boris, and we hope soon to have all U.S. "Soviet experts"—Stephen F. Cohen first among them—indicted with the rest of the coup conspirators. Also, now that the KGB is on our side, expect Lawrence Walsh to have a mysterious accident in the bath. Another fine job is being done by L. Brent Bozell III. We may have named Cranston, Biden, and Kennedy here first, but it was Brent who ponied up for the TV ads. However, the best post-TAS proscription is Don Kowet's "Desert Storm Hall of Shame," which ran daily in the *Washington Times's* Life section for three weeks last March and named and quoted more than two dozen Persian Gulf peace creeps. Herewith, a Hall of Shame sampler:

Dreadful *New York Times* columnist *Anna Quindlen*: "Can we live as a country with the knowledge that once again the children of the poor and of people of color will be killed for the convictions of well-to-do white men?"

Appalling *Washington Post* columnist *Colman McCarthy*: "The reason for not supporting U.S. troops was the same for not supporting Iraqi troops, or any troops anywhere for any reason. They are anti-life."

Pantsless pot-walloper *Ted Kennedy*: "We're talking about the likelihood of at least 3,000 American casualties a week, with 700 dead, for as long as the war goes on."

Actual socialist—live and in captivity —*Bernie Saunders*: "Is [a ground war]



P. J. O'Rourke's most recent book is *Parliament of Whores: A Lone Humorist Attempts to Explain the Entire U.S. Government* (Atlantic Monthly Press).