



by Benjamin J. Stein

Embarrassments

Monday

Here we are in Oxford, Maryland, again. I have taken me old Ma and Pa out to the Eastern Shore to look at houses. This is my obsession. "In my Father's house are many mansions," and I want one. Obviously, I rarely buy one. But I make it up to the realtors with gifts of money. I hate to have my time wasted, so I don't like to waste their time. Also, if I see the right house at the right price, I just might buy it.

We looked first down a beautiful long rural avenue called Bailey's Neck. It has dense forest and houses with long drive-ways. The one I really liked is called Safe Landing Farm. The house is a trifle in need of repair, but it sits on a lovely plot of land, has a huge indoor swimming pool, and a magnificent dock. The owner is apparently an heir of some kind who lives mostly in Georgetown. He has fine taste in books, including a lovely Larousse French dictionary—or maybe it's an encyclopedia. The house is large but well proportioned, with perfect mullioned windows looking out on the lawn that slopes slowly to an inlet of the Tred Avon River called Safe Landing. In the inlet, several power boats rode at docks. Two immense, snowy white swans glided along the inlet.

"They come by here from Canada in the fall," said our real estate agent. "Then they go back and stop here in the spring."

I walked all through the house thinking how much I would like to own it. It had a whole raft of rooms upstairs where Tommy could have his friends. It would be great if it were not for the repairs.

"How much does it cost to heat this

house?" my father asked the helpful realtor.

My mother looked at the floors and the ceilings. I guess this bears some thought. A house you occupy part-time is just a foolish way to spend money. You lose the foregone interest on the down payment. You pay for something full time that you only use part time. You pay taxes. You pay insurance. It winds up costing you a fortune every night you're there (and even more every night you're not there).

Still, it's a dream house. It's a lot like a house I once saw in a movie called *The Wanderer*, based on an incredibly successful French novel, *Le Grand Meaulnes*, the French equivalent of *Catcher In the Rye*. The film is set in a region of France called La Sologne: flat, marshy, heavily forested, lovely. In the movie, a boy gets lost in a forest and comes upon a strange small child's party set in the old manor house. The boy has an enchanted evening and can never find the house again. I can't do it justice, but let me say it's about missing the past and about missing the perfect moments of childhood. Safe Landing makes me think of it, and that's worth something.

Even my sensible parents were obviously moved by the place. After looking at other, less powerful houses, we had dinner and drove home. My mother was in the back seat snoozing, or maybe just thinking. My father said, "You know, when your mother and I first started seeing each other in Chicago in 1936, she used to make me dinner in her apartment. We would spend the evening talking, and then I would walk home along Blackstone Avenue and I just felt as if no one had ever been as happy as that in my whole life before. I felt so light, so happy. I would just walk along, singing."

"It's a wonderful feeling," I said.

"I hadn't thought about it for a long time, but today it's on my mind. We didn't eat there so as to save money, although that was usually a concern. We ate there just to be alone with each other."

"Great," I said.

"Then I went off to teach in Iowa for six months and Mom waited for me and then we got married. I used to take the train to see her from Iowa. That was a cold place. I would be so happy to see her when I got to Chicago. But I remember that feeling when I walked home. Walking on air."

That night, I watched the Oscars by myself. My parents were exhausted from their trip, so I sat alone, stupefied and angry. On behalf of Hollywood I felt sick, and I'll try to tell you why.

Like most other Americans, I was amused and bored by the long, comically swishy production numbers. I felt queasy about the self-congratulations of the winners. But that's standard for the Oscars.

I really started to feel upset when the part with Steven Spielberg began, and he was introduced and described as "courageous." I noted that a number of the men and women on the stage had been called brave or noble in some way.

It so happened that earlier in the day, while waiting for our dinner at the Tidewater Inn, I had been on the phone with my father-in-law in a small town in north Arkansas. He's 73. He won the Silver Star for fighting hand-to-hand against the SS in Germany in 1945 when he was 25. He was a career Army officer. He won another Silver Star in 1965, when he was 42, for leading his ARVN advisees in a firefight while they were in a river fighting against North Vietnamese in sampans. I call him and his comrades in arms "courageous."

Steven Spielberg is obviously very tal-

BENJAMIN J. STEIN is a writer, actor, economist, and lawyer living in Hollywood and Malibu.

ented, persistent, imaginative, and capable in many ways. I admire his works, especially *Schindler's List*. But I am not sure what he has done that puts him in the category I would call "courageous." Persistence is not the same as courage. It insults men and women who are really courageous to call Hollywood powers "courageous." Not only that, it's just idle self-praise.

Then there was the part where they brought out Kirk Douglas. Spielberg talked about him. Douglas, always one of my favorite actors, was called talented and hard working, which is fair, but then the introducer noted that Douglas had also "helped to shatter the blacklist." Kirk came out, obviously severely impaired by a stroke, and gave a halting but fine speech, while the stars in the front rows revved up their craft to look sympathetic, touched, yes, even moved, and also impressed and proud that one of their own had been so, well, brave. There was even the genuinely moving shot for a millisecond of Mr. Douglas's wife sobbing as she watched. But why drag out that hoary chestnut about the blacklist?

Why? Because Hollywood is among the most pampered universes on earth. And it always has been. So to make itself feel noble and brave, it regurgitates tales of one brief period when a very few of its players were not treated as above the law the way they should have been. It's embarrassing—like a billionaire complaining about having to wait at stop lights.

A few minutes later, in what has to be one of the ethical low points of modern TV, Christopher Reeves was wheeled out, paralyzed, obviously deeply ill, barely able to breathe, alive only with a respirator, in a wheelchair in front of the titanic, Hitlerian stage set. The audience roared, as they should have, for his suffering and resolution. They thought about it, made the right "choices," and put on the exact same masks of pride, sympathy, solidarity, and mingled pain that they had put on when Kirk Douglas came out.

What did Reeves' script call for him to say? It was a lengthy tribute to Hollywood's social conscience—fighting for the union (shots of *Norma Rae*), for integration (shots of black people in movies), fighting against mistreatment of homo-

“
***I started to feel upset
when the part with
Steven Spielberg began,
and he was introduced
and described as
'courageous.'***
”

sexuals (shots of *Philadelphia*), fighting against nuclear war (shots of *Dr. Strangelove*). Barely alive, Reeves could still be heard talking about how great Hollywood's one-party political views are and always have been. All I could think of was some poor brave Stakhanovite from the Donetsk Basin working until his back broke, and then, with his final breath, shouting "*Za Stalina!*"

In fact, the last, most-watched hour of the show was about calling up two severely impaired men and making them tools of agitprop. Again, it's maddening, and it's embarrassing.

Is it not possible to have a radical restructuring of the evening? Maybe try a show that is not aimed at sickening the audience by overdosing them with saccharine? Here are a few suggestions:

Have some glimpse into how movies are made. Show some real work on the set. Interview some of the makeup artists, the gaffers, the special effects folks. They are not in the Hollywood monolith. They have non-conventional things to say. Plus, it's interesting to see them make people up, set a stage, prepare a scary mask. I have been on many sets, and I can tell you these things are far more fascinating than all the dance numbers on the show put together.

Also, why not have some interviews with the nominees, however brief, for best writer, say, or best director or best actress? Maybe at their homes. The best Hollywood stuff ever done was by Ed Murrow in his "Person to Person series." Why not try some of that, even if it's just for a few minutes for each nominee? Interviews get

good numbers on "60 Minutes." No matter what, it cannot be worse than what they're doing now.

Tuesday

Back to glorious L.A., Center of the Oscar Universe. I am on American Flight 75. This is a nice flight, a well broken-in, commuter's flight back and forth from LAX to Dulles. But even on this great flight, I am suffering the usual slings and arrows of the air traveler's fate.

First, my seat has a little tiny TV on the arm rest. It doesn't work the first ten times I try it. When it does work, it works so poorly that I can't hear the sound. Then I can't see the picture because the screen is so small. A waste of my good time.

Next, the beefy man in front of me started bugging me to "borrow" some AA batteries, as if he would use them and return them. I am also a fool, so I "lent" them to him. Then the said huge man with his hair in an accursed pony tail started banging on his laptop so loud it sounded like a teletype. I asked him to be quiet, and he did for a few minutes. Then bang-bang-bang again.

"You're driving me crazy," I said to him. But he just smiled because he did not hear me: he was listening to his Walkman with the batteries I had given him. Of course he could not hear his laptop either.

I moved to another seat. This one was where the flight attendants were having a mini-convention, discussing boyfriends, showing scarves. "Please," I said. "I'm trying to read. You're disturbing me with your talking."

They looked at me cheerfully and kept on talking. "Please," I said. "This is not right."

They moved away. Then one came back with a huge bottle of some vile smelling perfume, doused it on herself right next to me, and put me into an asthmatic fit. Cheap perfume on a plane flight is like nerve gas. I know the folks at the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page do not believe in allergies or sensitivity to chemicals. With all due respect, I assure them it's real. I could barely catch my breath for about a half hour.

I didn't buy my ticket to be tortured by stewardesses. Mr. Crandall, take note.

Wednesday

The kind of day that makes me insane. First, I woke up happy because I had a commercial. I got dressed and went off to watch my son in a school play about Passover. He goes to a religious school, so he is allowed to thank God for his blessings, and he does.

At the break, I went to the phone and got my messages.

"Why aren't you at your commercial?" my agent asked in a distressed tone.

I called her back. "I'm not there because it's not until 5:15," I said.

"No," she said in a thick nasal voice caused by a bad cold. "It's 9:15. *Nine* fifteen, not 5:15."

Uggh. So I missed that for no good reason except that I could not hear properly because my agent—a saint—had a rare cold.

I fumed through the day. That night, we were supposed to have a festive holiday dinner. But no. Martha, my wife's sickly, ailing Weimaraner, ate a box of crayons and a rubber ball. So we had to spend Passover at a 24-hour veterinary emergency animal hospital. While we waited for Martha's diagnosis, we ate a quick meal in a nearby Thai restaurant. Tommy refused to eat Thai food for Passover. He only would eat McDonald's. So off we went on foot to a McDonald's. There was only one other customer. He was a homeless man buying five cheeseburgers with pennies from a plastic bag.

When we got home, our babysitter called. "I just want you to know that Tommy was very careless riding his bike this afternoon," she said. "He wasn't watching where he was going, and a car almost hit him. It was only because the driver was so careful that Tommy wasn't killed. Tommy crashed his bike into the man's car, but the man had stopped."

So. It turned out to be a perfect day after all. God saved my Tommy—and I wound up the day on my knees with gratitude as usual.

If kids only had a clue how vital they are to their parents, they would be a lot more cautious. At least I think so. I kissed my boy on the forehead as he was falling asleep. "My boy," I said. "Little boys are not meant to compete with cars. Be very careful. You're all Mommy and I live for."

“

***All I could think of was
some poor Stakhanovite
working until his back
broke, and then, with
his final breath, shout-
ing, 'Za Stalina!'***

”

"I'm sorry, Daddy," he said, and all was well. It's really funny, but day after day, I buy new toys for my son. Remote control cars. Nerf guns. Computer. Video games. Chemistry sets. But every day, he asks me for more. I always say, "How can you be so ungrateful with all I give you. Isn't it ever enough?"

But I do the exact same thing. I get a great life in America, a wonderful boy, a devoted, loving family, interesting work, no bad diseases, superior friends, attentive readers—and all I can think of is one little missed commercial. I am a fairly stupid person most of the time and tragically stupid all too often. If I really got what I deserve, I would be in a padded cell. When I was in college, we said a prayer in my fraternity, the Alpha Delta Phi, before each meal. Because most of the boys were Episcopalian, the usual prayer went like this: "For the gifts we are about to receive, O Lord, please make us truly grateful."

It makes far more sense than I realized at the time.

Thursday

Off to Los Feliz to pitch a talk show with an executive of ABC. He turned out to be a very smart fellow with the likely name of Tom Campbell. "I'd like to do a show about real problems," I said. "Like waking up each morning and feeling suicidal, the way a lot of people here do. All the shows on TV ignore real problems of fear and self-loathing. Let's get into them and have people who are really famous and also

not so famous talk about how they deal with feeling that way. I will modestly agree to be the host."

Tom scratched his stomach. "I have this little bulge of fat here," he said. "I feel as if getting rid of that fat is essential to being a happy man. But when I go home to New Hampshire, I'm the best-looking man in the state and no one thinks I'm fat and they all think that anyone with a life like mine has nothing to complain about."

"But I guess a lot of them still wake up feeling bad about their lives," I said.

"Maybe so," he said. "But let's face it. Maybe the people who watch TV don't want to face reality. Maybe that's why they're watching TV."

"There's such a thing as being too smart," I said, because he had stumped me there.

I had little to say after that, so I headed over to Beverly Hills for an audition on the Fox lot. Truth to tell, I do not like that lot. I associate it with many failed deals and wasted time. I connect it with people I used to know long ago who are now super famous and would not give me the time of day.

Anyway, I parked illegally and went in for my audition. It was for a movie starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, a great actor and a great guy altogether. I met him a decade ago at a dinner honoring Milton Friedman. I like him a lot. Anyway, I read my lines, but I had a weird vibe about it. Then I had lunch at the Commissary. As I did, I read Dorothy Rabinowitz about kooks and conspiracies. Wow, is she a great writer. She is the best thing about the *Wall Street Journal*. Elegance in a daily. That is rare. Plus, guts, guts, guts. A real treasure. She is the only national writer who stands up to the child sex-abuse nutcases who claim vast made-up conspiracies involving witches and knives and underground tunnels.

Those people are worse than Torquemada. They terrorize whole states, imprison innocent people, ruin lives, turn neighbor against neighbor, wreck children's lives—and never get called to account. Often, they have serious psychiatric histories—the accusers, never the accused. They hook up with unqualified, low-IQ, low-MQ (morality quotient) prosecutors and spineless judges, and wreak

evil. They are probably the lowest, vilest human beings in America, these little Berias in North Carolina and Washington and Massachusetts. Few writers will ever stand up to them, but Dorothy Rabinowitz does.

Friday

"All my love,/ All my kissin',/ You don't know what you been missin',/ Oh, boy." I am so excited. I'm on my merry way to a call-back for that Schwarzenegger movie. The casting people liked me enough to call me back to read for the producer, Chris Columbus, and the director, Bryan Levant. I am stoked. I've memorized my lines and practiced over and over again. If I got this part, it would relieve a lengthy dry spell in acting. It would change my life and put me back on track. Will I get it? God, I hope I get it, I hope I get it...

In my battered Acura, I ventured forth to the studio and parked illegally, once again, and awaited my turn. A thin, well-dressed fellow came up to me. "Hi," he said, "do you remember me?"

"I'm sorry. I know I should and yet I don't."

"I played you in the movie, *The Boost*," he said cheerfully. "I'm John Rothman."

"Ah, yes," I said, recognizing him as the fellow who played me as a young *Wall Street Journal* writer in the movie based on my best book, *Ludes*.

"What are you doing these days?" he asked.

I loathe that question, because it implies that I am not famous enough for the questioner to just plain know what I am doing these days. "The usual," I answered. "Scribble, scribble, scribble. Occasionally act. Teach. Count my blessings. The most important form of arithmetic. What are you doing?" I asked—to return the favor.

Like a talking high-speed printer, Mr. Rothman spat out a comprehensive résumé: co-star of a movie about a paranoid played by Sigourney Weaver, co-star of a long running Broadway play written by "Woody." More and more and more until I felt like the Sorcerer's Apprentice, unable to keep up with bailing out all of the boasts and credits.

While my head reeled, the casting woman called me in and told me to read.

I was still in shock from my ego drubbing from Mr. R., but I dragged myself in. I reminded Chris Columbus that I had once sought to hire him to write a script, long ago before he was a zillionaire superstar writer-director-producer. He remembered quite cheerfully—although interestingly enough, he remembered that I was pitching him a script, which was not quite how it was. Still, I was glad he remembered me at all.

I read my lines—fairly well, I thought—but I did not have a good feeling as I left.

This is not going to happen, I thought. But, oh how I wished it would. I thought how other actors probably needed the money more than I did, but I still wanted it so very, very badly.

The casting woman politely followed me to the waiting corridor and told me I had done a good job. Maybe I do really have a chance.

Yes, after all, I am a past master at bringing out the best in big stars. Maybe I will get it. Maybe I will get it so I can make Arnold look better.

I called my agent and manager and asked them both to remind the powers that be of how human I make the stars look by my own wooden monotone. They agreed I had a shot.

I went off to get my boy and take him to the beach. He was loaded for bear. He wanted a remote control jeep. "But you have so many toys," I said. "It's just not right for you to get so many gifts for no special occasion. Better to give the money to charity."

“

'Getting rid of that fat is essential to being a happy man. When I go home to New Hampshire, I'm the best looking man in the state.'

”

"Most of the toys I get are for being good, right?" he asked.

"Well, a lot of them. Maybe not most, but a lot."

"Then I earned them, right?" asked little Descartes.

"In a way," I agreed.

"Then they're not really presents, are they? I mean, when you get paid for your work, is that a present?"

"Actually, sometimes, yes."

"But usually?"

"You're right. Usually, it's earnings, not a gift."

"Then it's the same with me. I haven't really gotten that many toys as presents. I earn them. Today, I'd like one as a present."

In all sincerity, this boy right now, today, could get through law school. He is so smart. Little Aristotle. He's not inferior in his reasoning to any adult I know.

"All right, little Justice Holmes," I said. "You got it."

He turned to a book he was reading, maybe Calvin & Hobbes comics, and sat silently for a while. "Are you sick, my boy?" I asked. "You're very quiet. That's not like you."

"I'm not sick," he said. "I'm a bit subdued because I'm reading."

He has a killer vocabulary. He has a killer everything, as far as I can tell. I sat in heavy traffic on the Pacific Coast Highway. If he didn't talk, what could I do? I called my answering machine. There was a mournful sounding message from my acting manager. Uh-oh. I know what that's going to be.

"Yes," she said. "You didn't get the part in the Schwarzenegger movie. The director and producer liked you a lot, but they decided to offer it to Martin Mull and he wanted to do it."

"But, but, but," I sputtered. "Martin Mull is ten times funnier than I am, but I am ten times more right for this one part."

"Yes, but he's their pal and they wanted a big name," she said.

I love Martin Mull. He's a genius of comedy, but I don't really think he's a name like John Travolta. Is he?

However, that's it. I felt terribly sad. But really, really devastated. Just lost. Naturally, to make matters worse, I was in heavy, not moving traffic. Perfect. Frustration piled on frustration.

His will be done, I thought over and over. I have no right to complain. But I still felt really sad. Stuck in traffic, yes, but still able to do my Malibu Serenity exercises, I said them to myself:

• If my rule today is just to throw in the towel and accept whatever God sends me, today will be fine.

MOVING?

TAS Address Changes Made Easy!

1. Please write your new address in the space provided.
2. Attach the mailing label from your most recent issue.
3. Return this form to us at the address listed below.

— That's all there is to it. —
Just be sure to allow six weeks for your change to take effect.

The American Spectator

Subscriber Service
P.O. Box 655, Mt. Morris, IL
61054-8084
1-800-524-3469

ATTACH ADDRESS LABEL HERE

IMPORTANT:

Allow six weeks for address change.

- ☐ Renew my subscription for one year (twelve issues—\$35)
- ☐ Payment enclosed
- ☐ Bill me later
- ☐ At various times TAS rents its subscriber list to other organizations. If you prefer that your name not be rented please check here.

Name: _____
(Please Print)

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____

Zip: _____

Date of change: _____

VCAFRM

“

*I am a past master
at bringing out the*

best in the big stars.

*Maybe I will get the part
so I can make Arnold
Schwarzenegger look
better.*

”

• All real power comes from the starting point of accepting God's will.

• God is always there and His will is always working, no matter what you think.

• Real salvation means accepting *everything*, not just what you feel like accepting.

• My relationship with God is the only relationship that matters. If I am right in that one, all the others will work out fine.

• There is no such thing as an impossible problem if you really turn it over to God.

• I am more secure in my surrender to God than any emperor is in his fortress.

I said these things to myself and believed them, and felt incomparably better.

When I got home, I slept for a while—also a vital tool for serenity—in fact, a sacrament. Then I wrote on my little Dell—because work is also a blessing—and then I slept more. Soon, two friends from the Army came over. We drove up to Ventura to buy a remote control car for Tommy. (Why should he suffer because I'm having a bad year?) On the way back, we bought dinner at a chain restaurant called Marie Callender's in Oxnard. The food was pretty good, and the room was delightfully deserted.

Driving home, we passed immense military cargo planes lined up on the runway at Point Mugu, and then a mighty split rock, and then, heading due south, we saw the moon laying down a blue-white track on the waves, just off the rocks and sand.

As we rounded a turn, we could see the parti-colored lights of a beachfront roadhouse called Neptune's Net.

"Daddy," Tommy said, "remember how we used to go there and get Slurpees?"

"Indeed, I do," I said.

"My favorite was the blue, but I also really enjoyed the green and the red," he said. "That was fun, Daddy."

This is like being born again. To hear him at eight reminiscing about the good times he had with his Dad—while I'm still alive—is bliss.

Friday

I'm up in Sandpoint at the Panida Theater, a restored old gem from the beginnings of the century. We're watching a showing of the industry acclaimed movie, *Il Postino*, which apparently translates as *The Postman*. I am watching it and my blood is boiling, for a simple reason. The story is about a mentally retarded mailman on a small Italian island. To this island comes the famous Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, who has been exiled from Chile for being a Communist. Neruda helps the mailman write poetry to win the love of the town's flirty little bartender. In admiration of Neruda, the mailman becomes a Communist and—after getting married to the beautiful serving wench—is killed by Christian Democrats at a rally. (I am not kidding.) Neruda comes back to meet the deceased postal worker's little son, named after Neruda.

This movie has a crafty script (though you might as well watch paint dry). But it's a clear piece of Communist agitprop, intentionally or not. Neruda, who, if I recall, was a noted apologist for Joseph Stalin, is treated as an avuncular, kindly man who wants nothing for people but love. The Christian Democrats are thugs and killers.

Someone tell me this: Could a movie possibly be made where the hero was a poet who praised Hitler and Nazism? Could a movie be made where the nebish postal worker becomes a robust stormtrooper and gets killed by the Jews?

Now that I think of it, wasn't *The Postman* the sentimental favorite at the Oscars? *Za Stalina!* ❄



by Jonas Bernstein

Democracy Can Wait

Will Yeltsin and Zyuganov cut a deal to share power?

Boris Yeltsin's poll numbers have been going up lately—one recent survey commissioned by the *Moscow Times* and CNN had him ahead of Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov—and the Russian stock market has responded by heading skyward. But the good tidings on Russia's Wall Street have been lost on some of the country's most powerful new entrepreneurs. On April 27, all of Moscow's major newspapers published an appeal signed by thirteen business barons, each of whom heads a financial-industrial group—Russia's version of the Japanese *kiretsu*—warning that the June presidential vote could have apocalyptic consequences. And while the signatories mentioned the danger of “ideological revenge” if the Communists won, it was not their central point.

What is worrying them? Simply that, after the June vote, “a minority, red or white, will receive a mandate to enforce rules categorically rejected by a huge part of society....The acrimony of the opposing political forces is so great, that either of them can rule only by embarking on the road toward civil war and the disintegration of Russia.” To avoid this, they wrote, the opposing sides must find “a political compromise.”

This call for a compromise between Yeltsin and Zyuganov has left many observers scratching their heads. How could these two enemies possibly iron out their differences? The majority view is that the businessmen, fearing

the prospect of their goodies being nationalized if the Communists win, decided a display of neutrality would cover their backsides.

Some analysts, however, say there is more to the appeal than that. They note that the Yeltsin government, in the run-up to last December's parliamentary vote, tried to create two official parties as a way of co-opting the center-left and center-right and forcing the extremes off the playing field. This experiment in Latin American-style corporatism failed: one of the parties never got off the ground, while the other, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin's Our Home Is Russia, got creamed by the Communists in December. So the Kremlin may now be trying to incorporate Zyuganov and his “people's patriotic bloc” into such a scheme. The appeal, some are saying, may have been a Kremlin trial balloon to test public reaction, and perhaps also a way to make a Yeltsin-Zyuganov compromise seem the result of spontaneous societal pressure.

In any case, Zyuganov immediately expressed interest in meeting the appeal's signatories to discuss their ideas. And while Yeltsin's first reaction was to warn the businessmen that a Communist victory would mean their expropriation, several days later his aide Georgi Salarov called the appeal “a responsible civil act” and announced that Yeltsin will hold talks with the Communists.

While such a coalition may be hard to imagine, so, after all, was the Soviet-Nazi pact. As

Russians themselves like to say, anything is possible here. Yet a Yeltsin-Zyuganov deal also has a certain logic to it. As the business leaders wrote in their appeal, “Society is split.” That schism is not as deep as it was in 1917, true, and is instead more like Chile at the time of Salvador Allende's election. But many analysts believe both Zyuganov and Yeltsin have already attracted the bulk of their respective potential electorates, each marshaling about a third of Russia's voters. The rest are unwilling to vote for either candidate; thus whoever wins the inevitable run-off will do so only by a few points. A significant win by Yeltsin will be ascribed to cheating; indeed, the Communists will denounce a Yeltsin victory as electoral fraud, whatever the margin. Given that Russia's political divide has a geographic component, pro-Communist regions may simply refuse to recognize a Yeltsin win or even declare themselves independent Soviet republics, leaving the Kremlin with new Chechnyas to deal with.

Furthermore, the military is also split, and in a way highly unfavorable to Yeltsin. An internal Defense Ministry document leaked last March to *Moskovskye Novosti* had poll numbers showing 21.5 percent of the military's senior officers saying they “trusted” Zyuganov, 18.4 percent saying the same about ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, and a mere 4.2 percent trusting Yeltsin.

The Defense Ministry study predicted that if the political situation before the June vote becomes unstable and degenerates into disorder, part of the army will side with the opposition, particularly in pro-Communist regions—

(Continued on page 72)

JONAS BERNSTEIN is a journalist in Moscow.