

quate professionalism among producers and editors. Interestingly, Hess opts for this explanation, but with an interesting twist. Among mainstream media leaders, he says, there has been

an abdication of social responsibility that theoretically makes the news business different from the fast food or automotive industries. The constitutional and legal preferments of the press are not based on good behavior, but it helps. The standards of the press have been overwhelmingly sustained in this country by the noblesse oblige of a few families and firms.

Coming from a member of the Brookings Institution, perhaps the most staid of Washington's liberal think tanks, that is an intriguing comment. Does he have in mind the predictable, "government-knows-best" approach of the *New York Times* op-ed page, or something more bracing—say the notion that journalism requires intellectual integrity and

disciplined detachment more than anything else, especially more than well-meaning sentimentalism? Both "good behavior" and "noblesse oblige," after all, would surely have been applauded by Henry Luce, a conservative of strong convictions who founded *Time* and proclaimed ours to be "the American century." They clearly imply that some values—and, indeed, some cultures—may be more admirable than others when Americans take a close look at the globe on which they are living. If that sentiment takes root at any point among mainstream media, then the deterioration in the quality of foreign reporting may be reversed. Someone in New York might come to understand that what happens in Russia, or China, or Japan, may have more bearing on the lives of ordinary Americans than whether O.J. Simpson broke the speed limit in his white Bronco. Now that would be news. ❧

ment in the struggle for Nicaragua. In *Balance of Power*, Wright now surveys his 34-year career in the House and returns to the scene of his ouster.

The reader looking for pained mea culpas will not find them here. Wright's enterprise, rather, is to revise the record, laying the groundwork for a future mythology starring himself: an honorable man forced out of office, as he put it in his farewell speech, by "mindless cannibalism." Wright presents himself as a victim—not of his own wrongdoing, but of a fiercely partisan Republican cabal led by Newt Gingrich. That Gingrich succeeded was due, in turn, to the work of another villain, Richard Phelan, the outside counsel hired by the House Ethics

Committee to investigate the allegations against him.

In recounting the years before his speaker-ship,

## Rosty Jim Wright

**Balance of Power:  
Presidents and Congress  
From the Era of McCarthy  
to the Age of Gingrich**

Jim Wright

Turner Publishing / 528 pages / \$25.95

REVIEWED BY

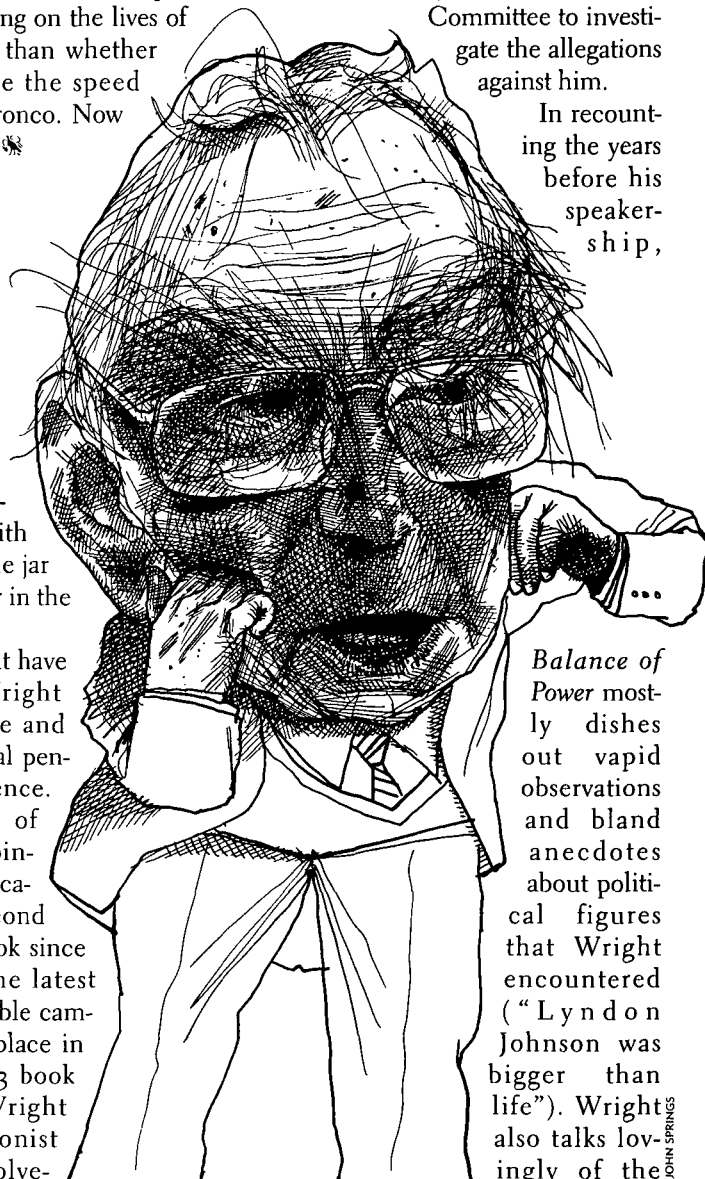
**David Andrew Price**

**D**an Rostenkowski's defiant reaction to his sentencing last April 9 for mail fraud recalled Jim Wright's similar defiance seven years earlier. Although Wright was forced to resign as Speaker of the House, he pooh-poohed the charges against him, as Rostenkowski has, and magnanimously offered that he

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was "not a bitter man"—as if the public servant caught with his hand in the cookie jar had cause to be bitter in the first place.

In 1989, one might have assumed that Wright would slink offstage and take his congressional pension in grateful silence. But this season of Rosty's downfall coincides with the publication of Wright's second autobiographical book since his resignation—the latest effort in his improbable campaign to polish his place in history. In his 1993 book *Worth It All*, Wright offered a revisionist account of his involve-



*Balance of Power* mostly dishes out vapid observations and bland anecdotes about political figures that Wright encountered ("Lyndon Johnson was bigger than life"). Wright also talks lovingly of the

goods he brought home to his district from his perch on the House Public Works Committee: this post office, that water project, this airport. But along the way, he lays the foundation for his case against his accusers, extolling earlier days under Sam Rayburn when nonpartisanship was the norm and the work of the House was based on a "mutual assumption of honor."

Wright's mythological view of his fall has a few problems, which he deals with by ignoring. He refrains from mentioning the results of the ethics committee's preliminary inquiry, in which the group of six Republicans and six Democrats unanimously found "reason to believe" that Wright was guilty of numerous ethics offenses, including his use of bulk book sales to circumvent honoraria limits. (He resigned before the committee could finish its work.) He assails Phelan as having been motivated by his own political ambitions, but never squares this theory with the fact that Phelan was a politically active Democrat. He sidesteps his role in tying down federal regulators who were struggling to close insolvent savings and loans.

Yet, like many myths, Wright's has a wisp of truth behind it. Gingrich really had been trying to get at Wright by promoting various ethics charges, some of which never panned out. Still, the fact remains that the violations leading to Wright's fall weren't Gingrich's creations—they were his own.

**W**right's pattern of myth-making repeats itself wherever he deals with an unflattering subject. The evasions are transparent to the reader who already knows the story—but that isn't the audience Wright is addressing. Thus, for instance, Wright complains of having been victimized by "the sensationalized treatment in the *Washington Post* of an assault upon a young woman by a congressional aide of mine sixteen years ago, when he was nineteen years of age." He adds, "That happened before I even knew the young man." Wright is obviously assuming that his readers will have forgotten what the fuss was all about. The aide was John

Paul Mack, Wright's top staffer and his hand-picked executive director of the House Democratic Steering and Policy Committee. (He was also Wright's daughter's brother-in-law.) The "assault"—Wright's total description of the incident—consisted of Mack ordering a female college student to lie down on the floor of a storeroom, then repeatedly smashing her skull with a hammer and slashing her torso and neck with a knife. "It was a hairsbreadth away from murder," recalls Fairfax Commonwealth's Attorney Robert Horan, who prosecuted Mack. "I thought then, and I still think today, that Mack was a very lucky man that she survived."

And it's only barely true that the crime happened before Wright and Mack knew each other. Wright had informed the court at the time of Mack's sentencing that he was welcome to take a job in Wright's office. Mack served less than two-and-a-half years for the crime before being released. Though he lacked any college education or Hill experience, Wright immediately hired him and eventually promoted him to the top job.

**W**right also skews the picture when he recounts his involvement in Nicaraguan diplomacy, portraying his role in foreign policy during his speakership as just normal operating procedure, rather than the extraordinary power grab that it was.

The track record of Wright's earlier involvement in Nicaragua was not exactly auspicious. As majority leader, Wright supported Carter's 1980 aid package for the new Nicaraguan regime in hopes that democracy would prevail over Cuban and Soviet influences. The day after the aid passed the House, Wright traveled to Managua and obtained guarantees from the Sandinistas—or so he thought—that the junta would respect civil liberties and private property and would soon hold elections. But by the end of the summer, the Sandinistas would postpone elections until 1985, ban all political activities by the opposition, and impose a regime of censorship on the press.

Nonetheless, for reasons that Wright never makes clear, he repeatedly placed total confidence in his favorable instincts regarding the Sandinistas in the late 1980's. Functioning essentially as a second State Department, Wright inserted himself further into the execution of foreign policy than any speaker since Henry Clay got the U.S. into the War of 1812. As Robert Kagan recently reported in *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990*, Daniel Ortega told the rest of the Sandinista Directorate in August 1987 of a "parallel power" in the U.S. government who could "paralyze and defy the authority of the President." That "parallel power" was Jim Wright. "As in the case of Vietnam," Ortega assured the Directorate, "we will win this war in Washington."

In October and November, Wright's involvement reached its apogee. The Sandinistas agreed to negotiate with the contras through an intermediary. Soon afterward, the junta clumsily tipped its hand, twice asking Wright to serve in the role of intermediary himself. Even Wright managed to discern that this would be beyond the pale, and declined. Ortega then moved to plan B; he agreed to the naming of Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, whose selection was supported by Arias and the U.S., but he counted on Wright to tilt the negotiating table.

Wright met personally with "Comandante" Daniel Ortega at the Capitol—on Veterans Day. Wright, along with Rep. David Bonior, met again with Ortega the next morning. That afternoon, when Secretary of State George Shultz visited Wright, Shultz was perturbed to find that Wright intended to stay involved and unsuccessfully tried to persuade him to back off. When four members of the contra leadership met with Wright later that afternoon, Wright more than lived up to Ortega's hopes. Wright doesn't refer to his strong-arming of the contras, but writer John M. Barry, who was present, recounts it in *The Ambition and the Power*, his generally sympathetic volume about Wright:

They talked for an hour about cease fire technicalities—defensible boundaries, supply routes. Then the contras talked of good faith. What if the Sandinistas were not serious?

"Then they will become isolated in the world," Wright replied.

"Castro has lived isolated for many years," Adolfo Calero observed. "We need more than moral condemnation."

"You mean," Wright said gravely, driving his message home, "when will the Sandinistas become so unpalatable that we will resume military aid? My opinion is there will not be support again for military aid."

The room grew cold and still.

Despite its promising start, Ortega's plan unraveled when, at the next morning's meeting, Cardinal Obando faced down Wright, Bonior, and Ortega. Obando politely rejected Wright's offer of assistance from his own "technical advisers." (According to Barry, Wright had told Shultz that Obando and the Sandinistas "want me to have people assist them in the negotiations, probably oversee them.") In the end, with the possibility of renewed contra aid lurking in the background, Obando was able to obtain the Sandinistas' agreement to the 1990 elections that ultimately sent them packing.

**T**he key revisionism of *Balance of Power*, though, lies in Wright's role in the fleecing of the savings and loan system. Although he denounces savings and loan deregulation as part of "a movement to dismember government," and purports to be aggrieved by charges that he had improperly intervened with regulators, the truth is that the very obscurity of the issues in the savings and loan debacle effectively gave Wright a free pass that he doesn't deserve.

In the mid-1980's, in the wake of deregulation measures under Carter and Reagan (which had bipartisan support), the seriousness of problems in the industry became acutely apparent to federal examiners. With deposit insurance funds at risk, regulators sought to tighten supervision, to place some troubled thrifts under different management, and to close some entirely. (A stronger source of discipline, that of the

market itself, was entirely absent, thanks to changes in deposit insurance.)

During the period from September 1986, when Wright was majority leader, to February 1987, shortly after he became Speaker, he intervened with the Federal Home Loan Bank Board to bring about favorable decisions for thrift owners who were major contributors to the Democratic Congressional

Campaign Committee. One of them, Tom Gaubert, was national finance chairman for the DCCC and had raised \$100,000 from the industry for the party's candidate in a 1985 special election for an open House seat. In addition, Wright tried to have two employees of the Bank Board fired: H. Joe Selby, executive vice-president and director of regulatory affairs at the

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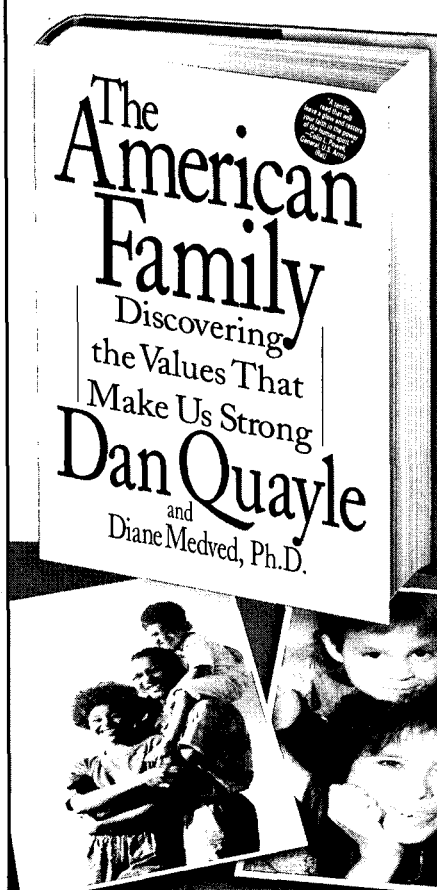
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Dallas branch of the Bank Board, based on spurious rumors that Selby was sending the bank's outside legal work to a ring of sadistic homosexual lawyers, and William Black, on the staff of Board's San Francisco branch, apparently because Wright learned that Black was passing unfavorable information to journalists about Wright's interventions.

A more obscure form of intervention was Wright's fiscal strangulation of the FSLIC (Federal Savings & Loan Insurance Corporation) reserves for the purpose of leaving the FSLIC without the substantial funds necessary to pay off depositors or to allow for the rescue of troubled thrifts by solvent institutions. By 1985, the \$5.6 billion level of FSLIC reserves was clearly too low to handle the seventy-one institutions that were already known to be insolvent. Thus, beginning in early 1986, the Reagan administration sought authority for the FSLIC to issue \$15 billion in bonds (to be repaid by member institutions, not the Treasury) to "recapitalize" the reserves.

Industry lobbyists opposed the effort to build up the insurance fund; as long as the fund stayed bare, the high-flyers in the industry didn't have to worry about being shut down. In January of 1987, as the savings and loans continued to hemorrhage, President Reagan urged passage of the bill in his State of the Union address. Wright, however, staved off the recapitalization bill until August 1987, when Congress approved only two-thirds of the amount the administration had requested. James Ring Adams reported in *TAS* in March 1989 that during the year-and-a-half while Wright kept the spigot closed, the cost of the crisis doubled.

As it turned out, Wright's part in the looting of the deposit insurance funds did not amount to an ethics violation in the view of the ethics committee. It is strange that Wright's best-known ethics violation remains his bulk book sales, which netted him the comparatively minor take of just over \$54,000. Which raises the question: If the book sales had never happened, would Wright still be Speaker of the House today? If so, that's reason enough to forgive Wright's literary muse all her sins. ❧

## Correspondence

(Continued from page 12)

administration to prosecute Hiss.

By limiting what Nixon said to the protesters at the Lincoln Memorial to remarks about football, Stone paints Nixon as a boor who made inane small talk at a grave moment. That reference actually followed Nixon's explanation that he understood the protesters' concerns and that he had sympathized with Neville Chamberlain's vain efforts to avert World War II, but learned from Winston Churchill that nations sometimes must fight. Those familiar with Nixon's sharp *jours de force* can imagine the full conversation. In that context, the football reference comes off as an attempt to connect on a personal basis, a request that the protesters give him the same respect that he was giving them.

I find no fault with Taylor, as executive director of the Nixon Library, in defending Nixon. Nevertheless, although Nixon (along with President Reagan) deserves a Nobel Peace Prize more than anyone else since 1950 for winning the Cold War, conservatives should remember that he abandoned the domestic conservative agenda and let his supporters down with his duplicity. It was no accident that Senator Goldwater persuaded Nixon to resign in August 1974 (Senator Buckley had called for resignation in March). Nixon could have admitted what his campaign had done, pointed out that this was nothing new in American politics (he assumed that President Johnson had bugged his campaign in 1968), acknowledged that both parties stood in the wrong, and probably emerged unscathed. Instead, the debacles of 1974 and 1976 and the removal of integrity from the image of conservatism remain central parts of his legacy.

— PAUL WINDELS III  
New York, New York

## Bothering Brother Bob

Daniel McGroarty's "The Trial of Brother Bob" (*TAS*, March 1996) shows more than the hostility of Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction toward Christianity and DPI's total indifference toward the students it is supposed to serve. It shows that DPI is grossly overstaffed.

If DPI had a question on whether

Messmer was a sectarian school, DPI could have called up Brother Bob and asked him for an explanation. That is how people typically handle questions when there is a lot more important work to be done. Instead, DPI sent a team of employees to spend four hours one day and seven another to inspect Brother Bob's school. The only reason the team could do that is that they did not have enough productive work to do. The solution is to cut DPI employment—something Governor Thompson should be able to pull off.

— MITCHELL E. AYER  
Houston, Texas

The most shocking thing about "The Trial of Brother Bob" was not that the ACLU and others opposed having a Catholic school's students declared eligible for vouchers. No, the most notable was the following statement from "Brother Bob": "We hope that any student we touch leaves our building being a good Christian, if they're [sic] Christian; if they're [sic] a non-Christian, being a good non-Christian; if they're [sic] an atheist, being a good atheist." This from a Capuchin monk!?

Pray, ask "Brother Bob" what his order teaches a "good non-Christian" (i.e., person who denies the divinity of Christ) is; then, please ask him what a "good atheist" (i.e., one who denies God exists) is. "Brother Bob" says his school's exclusion from the Wisconsin vouchers program is a commentary on the state of society. Wisconsin society came, and it will go. Better he should ruminate on what his own example says about contemporary Roman Catholicism.

— KEVIN R. GUTZMAN  
Charlottesville, Virginia

## Heathgate

A huge jeer to correspondents Mark Anderson, James Wilkins, and Mark Eiben for their attacks on Mr. Pleszczynski in your April issue. Mr. P. happens to be dead-right about Heath Shuler and his marginal abilities as an NFL quarterback. It seems to me that all three of them engaged in the same type of ad hominem attacks on Mr. P. that they accused him of doing to Shuler.

I'll excuse Dr. Anderson. He's from Knoxville and has obviously been brain-

washed by the University of Tennessee propaganda machine. By the way, Doc, how many times did Shuler lead the Vols to victory over Alabama?

Mr. Wilkins, in a letter that smacks of extreme bigotry, does nothing but rant and rave for six paragraphs before stating that Heath Shuler will become the next Joe Montana. The next Montana?! Shuler will be lucky to be the next Bubby Brister.

Mr. Eiben accuses your magazine of defaming the reputations of Shuler, Norv Turner, and the Redskins organization. I'm sorry, Mr. Eiben, but Shuler, Turner, and the Redskins front office have done enough damage to their reputations on their own these last two years. They don't need the help of *The American Spectator*.

— JOE ROBERTS, JR.  
Wise, Virginia

## Shake Down That Booty

As one of those lawyers who plays "the role of defense lawyer" in Alabama courtrooms, let me thank you for printing Dave Shiflett's article, "Alabama Jury Booty" (*TAS*, April 1996). The *Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, and a few other national publications have turned a spotlight on the free-for-all that Alabama's civil court system has become, but to me, it means more when it comes from the *Spectator*.

Let me also provide a postscript to a few of the subjects covered by Mr. Shiflett. The 1994 election of the chief justice of Alabama's supreme court involved a number of absentee ballots which were never counted. Mr. Shiflett's quotes from attorney Davis Carr suggest that it was known that these absentee ballots were cast for Democrat and incumbent Sonny Hornsby. In fact, the court challenges to the counting of these ballots resulted in orders that they not be counted. The reason is simple. Once the absentee ballot is counted, the documents of attestation (the signature, the witness signatures, and the notarization) are removed and separated from the ballot itself in order to preserve its secrecy. If the votes had been counted, it would have been impossible to determine which votes were cast by properly attested ballots, and which were not.

The importance of this is shown by the untold thousands of dollars spent by state Democrats to obtain a court ruling order-

ing that these ballots be counted. This massive effort was undertaken even though, ostensibly, no one knew what would be found inside those ballots. In retrospect, it is a bit hard to believe that someone, somewhere, was not already well aware of exactly how those "absentee" ballots had been filled out. Indeed, in the counties in which those ballots were turned in (this was learned during the court challenges), it is not unusual to find absentee ballots from deceased or mentally incompetent persons on a regular basis.

Second, regarding the *Life of Georgia* case in which \$15 million in punitive damages was awarded: the appeal of that case resulted in a bizarre (to say the least) ruling from the Alabama supreme court. Even though no party had argued or presented evidence on this issue, the court decided, completely on its own, to use the case as a vehicle for legislating a rule that all future punitive damage verdicts would be split between the plaintiff and the state of Alabama. This occurred just as the effort to pass tort reform legislation

was building momentum, and was touted by Alabama plaintiff's lawyers as a solution to the crisis. This ruling played no small part in deflating interest in a legislative solution, even though it did nothing to place limits on punitive awards.

Indeed, the case probably will help escalate such awards... If a jury wants a plaintiff to have a \$12 million punitive award, it now knows that it will have to award \$24 million....

— E. BERTON SPENCE  
Birmingham, Alabama

I would like to commend Dave Shiflett for a fine piece of journalism that was both interesting and, even to a local observer, informative. However, as a sixth-generation Alabamian, I must take exception to his remark that "Mental stress [as a legal claim] is as common in Alabama as chiggers." Hell, with luck you can go a whole week in these parts without encountering a chigger.

— STEVEN RUDD, M.D.  
Birmingham, Alabama

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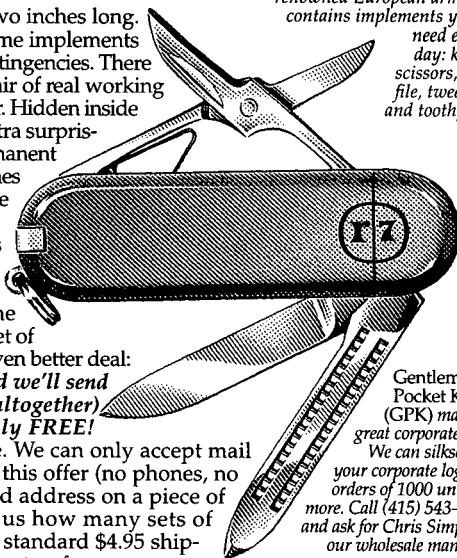
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## Russia Watch

(Continued from page 55)

something that might happen after a Yeltsin win, as well. Though the poll looked only at the views of senior officers, the loyalty of the lower ranks is also a question mark. A growing number of press reports about Russia's enlisted men mention them begging for food and even starving to death.

A recent incident underscored Yeltsin's doubts about the armed forces' reliability. On April 19, Defense Minister Pavel Grachev admitted to the State Duma that he had ignored his commander-in-chief's March 31 ceasefire order in Chechnya for six days. Yeltsin has neither fired his insubordinate military chief nor even said a word on the subject. It is not hard to guess why. During the October 1993 parliamentary uprising, Grachev reportedly cobbled together a force from reliable infantry, armored, and *spetsnaz* units to suppress the rebels. Yeltsin may need him again.

If Zyuganov wins, on the other hand, any move toward wholesale nationalization or other steps to reverse the property redistribution of the last four years would be resisted by businessmen and local administrators in pro-Yeltsin

regions, particularly in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Ekaterinburg. The endgame could be an Allende-like scenario, in which the armed forces intervene on the not-unfounded pretext that the country is on the verge of a fratricidal civil war.

**T**hus Russia's current situation might be compared to one in which two competing mafia groups, realizing that they are evenly matched, suddenly decide to have a sit-down and talk things over. In the process, they find they have a lot in common.

Not only did Yeltsin and Zyuganov (and their respective teams) once serve the same master: since the beginning of the year, their approaches to policy have been converging. The Communist leader has promised there will be no nationalizations without just compensation and that "all forms of property" will be respected. Yeltsin, on the other hand, has often cribbed from the script Zyuganov uses when preaching to the Communist faithful—he criticizes the economic reforms that have created a society in which ten percent live well while fifty percent live below minimum standards, promises to compensate savings lost to inflation since 1991, and even threatens, through his subordinates, to overturn the results of some of last year's controversial privatizations. And there is little doubt that the Communists' policy toward Chechnya, despite their fake dovishness on the campaign trail, would differ little from Yeltsin's.

For their part, Russia's robber barons, while clearly nervous about the talk of nationalization and reversing privatization, share both Zyuganov's and Yeltsin's interest in industrial policy. As *Kommersant* pointed out, the signatories to the appeal—who used the deflating ruble and low domestic natural resource prices to make their fortunes during the first years of economic reform—now face a different economic environment. Inflation is low, and raw materials are at world price levels. They have begun investing in domestic industry and want it protected from foreign competition.

And they also want personal protection: while many of the new tycoons themselves had shady beginnings, there is no doubt that they are tired of maintaining huge private security forces, wearing flak jackets around the clock, and even sleeping in a different location every night to avoid killers hired by competitors. They would welcome a law and order regime.

Perhaps the idea of a Yeltsin-Zyuganov compromise is, as one commentator put it, "nearly utopian." Perhaps one or both sides think they can win and hold power. Perhaps the Communists are willing to lose and continue serving as the parliamentary "opposition," collecting their perks until their elderly supporters die off and their political role dwindles to nothing. Maybe Yeltsin and his cronies are ready to accept a Communist win and retire abroad.

On the other hand, perhaps everybody involved—Zyuganov's national bolsheviks, Yeltsin's "party of power," and the new business elite—figures they will benefit most by cutting a deal now, before the elections. One possible scenario has Yeltsin remaining as president, with Zyuganov becoming prime minister.

The only fly in the ointment is the voters. While the former party comrades in power may be capable of cutting a deal with the current party comrades in opposition, will the Yeltsin-hating, destitute pensioner or factory worker swallow joining hands with the Zyuganov-hating, *nouveau riche* banker for the sake of peace and national consensus?

The power brokers are themselves probably debating how to get around this problem right now. Following the publication of the business leaders' appeal, one of its signatories—Boris Berezovsky, head of the huge LogoVAZ automotive-industrial concern and reportedly very close to Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin—dropped an interesting hint. "This issue of constructing society will not be solved by voting," he said. "It will be solved either by a civil war or by a compromise between the competing politicians." Stay tuned. ❧

**Joanna Pleszczynska**

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spills of the Blitz in our Docklands Park, air raids begin promptly at six. Enjoy a dogfight in a Spitfire.

I shouldn't complain too much, because I like it here. London is a city where, for the most part, the small civilities are still observed. Stopped by a stranger on the street, I don't brace myself against a possible mugging, but understand that it is merely somebody in need of a street direction. Buses stop for me at pedestrian crossings. Taxi drivers speak English. I can count on two mail deliveries a day. Should the national lottery ticket I bought this week prove to be the winner, I will not have to pay tax on my millions, or wait for the bonanza to be paid out piecemeal over the next two hundred years. Elbowing my way into Harrod's cigar shop, past shifty-eyed American smugglers, snatching commie Havanas with both hands, I cannot only buy a good Cuban cigar over the counter, as it were, but may also light up in a restaurant without the health fascists at the next table flying into a frenzy. Once having finished my shopping in Harvey Nichols fifth floor food hall, I can repair with my parcels to the adjoining bar for a tippie, a convenience yet to be made available even in the most opulent American food emporium. But the late Peter Cook, of *Beyond the Fringe* and other inspired comedy enterprises, was right when he ventured years ago that this island was doomed to eventually sink giggling into the sea. Recently, William Muirhead-Allwood, 49, an orthopedic surgeon who had participated in the Queen Mother's hip-replacement operation, gave a press interview wearing mascara and eye-liner, with light face makeup over his visible stubble. Married, with two children, the doctor was contemplating a sex-change operation. "I am now known to everyone as Mr. William Muirhead-Allwood," he said, "but for years I have called myself Sarah, and that is how many of my friends know me."

In yet another knee-slapper, pretty 24-year-old Caroline Roy, a mobile phone company manager, has been awarded £113,000 by an industrial tribunal, because

her boss insisted on her greeting him in the office with the accolade, "Hello big boy, you were fabulous again last night." This, Ms. Roy protested, "belittled and demeaned my female status."

This is not to suggest that all British bosses are boors. Kelvin MacKenzie, for instance, is an advocate of the disadvantaged. MacKenzie, head of the cable television station Live TV, the man who has brought viewers *Topless Darts*, has placed an ad in the tabloid *Sun*: "Newsreader wanted. Must have stammer." This, he explained, would further distinguish Live TV's news bulletins from the "dull and regimented" format of Britain's mainstream current affairs programs. A spokesman for the British Stammering Association has said that his organization is "extremely interested."

**O**n April 2 I was invited to lunch at the House of Commons, and the food was just what you might expect in a British public school. One of my companions, a Tory peer, conceded the coming election, but doubted that his party would be diminished to two in number, as were the Conservatives in Canada in 1994. The last time I had been to lunch in the House, with then-Labour MP Woodrow Wyatt, I had asked him if MPs had ever refused to pair. This, I should point out, is a convivial system whereby if, say, a Tory MP cannot be in the House for a vote, pleading that he must visit his sickly, beloved old mum in the hospital, but, more likely, has arranged for a nooner with his pert research assistant, his Labour pair agrees not to vote as well.

"Yes," said Wyatt. "Once, when there was some talk of diminishing the size of the Member's Bar, an insufferable notion endorsed by some devout Welsh Labour MPs, we absolutely refused to pair."

After lunch, I sat in on question period. What with the Easter hols about to begin, the silly boys and girls of Westminster were in a whoopee end-of-term mood, waving order papers, jeering, and wise-cracking. John Major, in fine form, made a quick meal of a subdued Tony Blair. Major, who continues to endure truly vicious attacks in the Tory press, seems to me the most likable and decent of men, while Tony Blair strikes me as more of a

marketing chap than a principled leader. The most effective, and justifiably feared, debater in the House is easily Robin Cook, the Labour spokesman on foreign affairs, who always does his homework and can speak at length without notes. During the debate on the Scott Report, and the alleged Tory cover-up of illegal arms sales to Iraq, a government minister was foolish enough to argue that the sales of machine tools to Saddam had been good business and had guaranteed thousands of jobs.

"Good business?" snapped Cook, his smile menacing. "Good business? If any of you were CEOs of a privately-owned company you would have been sacked ages ago. The sales to Iraq totaled £700 million and Saddam has yet to send a check. Those machine tool sales were guaranteed by your government and paid for by British taxpayers," he added, reducing the Tory front bench to stony silence.

**P**acking suitcases in Quebec, back in November, for our annual five-month sojourn in London, I scrupulously went through all my jacket and trouser pockets to make sure I wasn't carrying any cocaine, heroin, gold bars, A-Bomb triggering devices, or stacks of counterfeit U.S. \$100 bills, lest I make a bad impression on Her Majesty's customs inspectors in Heathrow. But, preparing for our return trip home, as we are now, I don't worry about such piffling contraband. What I watch out for, even more carefully, are sheets of unilingual matzohs. Or, God forbid, a jar of gefilte fish with a label that is in English only. Two weeks before Passover, in Montreal, an alert Québécois tongue-trooper, an official of our province's Office de la Langue Française, ordered a food distributor to remove kosher products from store shelves and demanded that future shipments be labeled in French. "This is not only a matter of removing these products," he wrote. "You must [also] obtain confirmation from your suppliers that the packaging will be francized so that this violation is not repeated in future years."

I don't want to make too much of this. I want to be fair. On balance, it is still safer to be a Jew in Quebec than a three-year-old cow in the United Kingdom, and you can quote me on that. ❧

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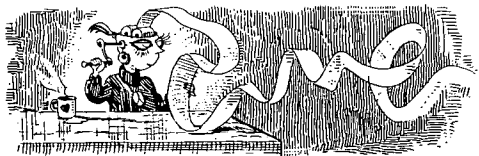
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### Washington Post

Another stirring account of how the Clinton administration is succoring the "forgotten middle class":

From the sidewalk outside, Jacqueline Nesbitt's gray, four-bedroom town house off Route 1 seems identical to those of her solidly middle-class neighbors in Mount Vernon's Clusters at Woodlawn complex. Her four boys roller-skate and play ball outside with other neighborhood kids and ride the same school buses.

But in her case, \$1,000 a month in rent is paid entirely by the federal government through a housing subsidy similar to those received by hundreds of low-income families along the Route 1 corridor. And that is driving a wedge between those families and area homeowners, who say their suburban world of \$100,000 to \$500,000 houses is threatened by the steady encroachment of housing for the poor.

Nesbitt, a formerly homeless, recovering cocaine addict who has been unemployed for more than nine months, was allowed to choose her housing location under federal guidelines.

[APRIL 20, 1996]

### Our Town (New York, New York)

A treatise on right and wrong by a born sap:

In your "Police Blotter" column (March 21), you wrote about a man who was six-foot-tall and weighed as little as 145 pounds who got caught stealing. Well, people so underweight should be fed, and have their health checked by a doctor.

Besides, if they are hungry, as they are apparently are, they should rob for food. This community is lucky that these people aren't committing murder. I was robbed by Hispanic men a year ago, and I still believe that unless society takes the responsibility to give needy people more than token help, the needy must get subsistence the best way they can. They need to steal.

Charles Abernathy  
Lexington Avenue

[MARCH 28, 1996]

### San Jose Mercury News

One Miss Barbara Riverwomon, an "activist" for the "homeless," speaks of the Golden Age opening up in old Santa Cruz, where the city council plans to integrate homeless people into state parks midst all the L.L. Bean aristocrats:

One of the intriguing things about this plan is that it will create a truly integrated community, with rich people as neighbors to the poorest. They will all be sitting around open campfires, living in tents and delighting together at the beautiful trees and ocean and bird songs. Is it so wrong to take a tiny step in the direction of a society which I think all of us secretly dream of? It's worth a few bumps in the road.

[APRIL 3, 1996]

### New York Times

A voice of sanity and reason, and no, it's not Anthony Lewis but one Thomas J. Campanella of Somerville, Massachusetts, which is near Harvard Square:

Although I deplore the criminal acts of the suspected Unabomber, I also find myself in begrudging admiration.

If Theodore J. Kaczynski is indeed guilty of the crimes that he is believed to have committed, he is a murderer and should be severely punished. But having said that, I also believe we should listen to what he has to say.

To have evaded the Government's pooled technology and manpower for so long is a feat in itself. But the Unabomber seems a prophet, albeit a misguided one, a Thoreau gone berserk, emitting a hi-tech yell in the desert....

It is troubling that Mr. Kaczynski's reclusiveness and apparent disregard for appearance have been pointed to so hysterically.

Our society is obsessed with cheerleaders who march to the beat. We are suspicious of reflective souls and of intellectualism.

Not long ago this nation sat riveted to the murder trial of a fallen icon. It will be revealing to observe public reaction to the trial of the Unabomber and to gauge the manner in which each of us confronts the anarchist within.

[APRIL 10, 1996]

### Los Angeles Times

What passes for broad-mindedness from a duly unaccoladed columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, calumniating one of this journal's Renaissance men:

When I was a student reporter at Indiana University in the late '60s, one of my assignments was to cover the campus right-wingers led by R. Emmett Tyrrell Jr. I remember wondering then what kind of childhoods had led them to such narrow views of the world so early in life.

Tyrrell went on to become editor-in-chief of the archconservative *American Spectator*. He hasn't changed any. So it came as a surprise that I found an article in Tyrrell's magazine worth reading.

[MARCH 12, 1996]

### Good Morning America Sunday

That's why they call him the Boy President:

NANCY COLLINS: Last summer I interviewed President Clinton, and I had, I came up with a few observations which is first of all, this is a guy who is really, and the subject of my piece was for *Good Housekeeping* magazine and I can guarantee 15 million women voters so, of course, they leapt at it.... [H]e is used to dazzling women, and having women be dazzled by him; and I don't mean necessarily in the sexual sense. I mean, he's very comfortable with women; he knows how to woo them. And there is something that's going to sort of defame the idea of him being such a womanizer, but I found, with him, that he sort of, you want to mother him. There's a bit of maternal, he brings out the maternal in you, because he's the eternal boy. He's that American archetype. You know, the eternal boy.

WILLOW BAY: If you could just help him out a little. You know, just get the shoelaces double-knotted, everything would be okay.

[MARCH 24, 1996]