

the same breath, painful encapsulation of the "people's right to know" issue:

If by some bizarre turn of events here I get killed, please don't let anybody say anything leftist to the press, like (some other) families of Marines killed here.

Marine Sergeant Phillips has been killed in Lebanon, in the line of duty. □

## Compassion Anyone?

Within a social stratum that may be described as *very* wealthy and *very* liberal, *The New Yorker* is venerated as the "Sovereign One"—which is the "in" synonym for the Lord in the new lectionary issued by those charming theologians from the National Council of Churches who have decided to rewrite the Book. Actually, for more than a decade, the magazine—nearly a sexagenarian—has been a sad spectacle of superannuated radicalism. Radicalism, as we all know, can be alluring, though never graceful, when it is worn by youth. To be a sixtyish radical and actually to take oneself seriously requires some sort of mental callousness, even if it is deeply embedded in that particularly American tradition that sees fun in senile kookiness, to which polite pity should be the proper response. Nothing better defines *The New Yorker* of today than its film critic—an elderly lady whose looks convey anything but sensual expertise—who salivates in lengthy, garrulous essays on the blessings of the sexual "revolution": her apotheosis of a movie that instructed teenage girls in oral sex is an odd exemplification of ludicrousness that renders both irony and skepticism helpless. This is why, as someone has already noted, the top-hatted Eustace Tilley (*The New Yorker's* emblem) has outlived his relevance: a representation of a revolutionary bandanna above a visage that reveals several costly face-lifts done in Manhattan beautification clinics would more accurately crystallize the truth.

In a recent elegant editorial, *TNY's* suave sages invited their readers to ponder the plight of the hungry and homeless—after the former had finished



savoring their filet mignon in their posh penthouses. After detailing the case histories of a half-dozen starving indigents, the editors displayed the careful fastidiousness that characterizes their style as they contemplated the question of moral responsibility. Discarding theory after theory, they finally settled on a satisfactory indictment which condemns everything without soiling anyone's tux:

The system—the same system that treats most of us well—has done them [the poor] in; it's the system that mires them in racism, that works to deny social mobility and to concentrate wealth, that keeps public schools inadequate.

No one, though, is really to blame for this state of affairs, least of all *TNY* writers who innocently enjoy the best that this malevolent system has to offer:

We usually are what we are through no fault of our own. And what some of us are is rich.

Something ought to be done about those nonrich people who aren't eating, of course, but apparently no one need forego such essentials as fashions from Fifth Avenue shops or subscriptions to refined magazines in order to donate

money to charitable institutions. "It's not almsgiving that's needed," we're assured, but something else: "The system must be changed before poverty will start to disappear. . . . We must change the system in such a way that new generations do not grow up poor." We do not understand this kind of social determinism. Are both poverty and wealth surgically detached from the quality of a human being? What *other* system do the editors of *TNY* have in mind? That one, perhaps, in which nobody has anything, but in which a handful of radical journalists who serve ideological thugs have more than anyone else? And how can this change be effected by readers who are deeply involved with fashion designers and luxury cars, or by investment bankers who are best at building portfolios? *The New Yorker* explains patiently:

We can vote for politicians who might raise our taxes, and for politicians who will make sure the bureaucracy works for poor people.

This we call the Metzenbaumian social ethics. The name is derived from one Senator Metzenbaum, a liberal multimillionaire who is a fanatical constructor of social programs paid for with skyrocketing taxes. He, naturally, is also willing to pay. Of course, even if he pays according to the highest bracket on the tax tables, he still has enough to eat filet mignon every night. The hardworking American, who *also* has to pay for the programs Sen. Metzenbaum promotes, is slipping ever closer to the poverty line as a reward for what he is "through no fault of [his] own . . .," that is, a carrier of the idea of self-reliance, work ethics, and human dignity. Sen. Metzenbaum does not ponder compassion, he serves it like a tennis ball—a dubious metaphor perhaps, but one that should be quite vivid for *The New Yorker's* readers. Its editors—that's another story. They deem systems in which compassion is enforced (by whatever means) as something much nobler than the homely capitalism of plumbers and grocers. □



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