

Letters

Public drunks? No tanks!

Editor:

Its really appalling to read (ITT, Aug. 31) that a major city such as L.A. is still in the 18th century regarding the treatment of public inebriates. Since 1971 I have worked in three alcohol detoxification centers that operated on "medical" and "non-medical" (drug aided and drug free withdrawal) models. I can state categorically that:

1. They are more humane than jails. Any detox. client will tell you that.
2. The detox. approach is simply more intelligent and practical than incarceration. Alcoholics are treated for their affliction and offered the opportunity to continue treatment elsewhere.
3. Detoxification is cheaper than incarceration. Any detox. center or the municipality or police district in which it is located can supply the relevant statistics. When I was at the Boston Alcohol Detoxification project in 1971-1973 the arrest rate for public intoxication in Police District 4 (the notorious South End Skid Row area) was cut by 80%.

Furthermore, the indirect savings accrued when various individuals with long arrest records achieve extended periods of sobriety is very large.

Ed Davis must indeed be "Crazy." Or perhaps he's just forgotten what its like to walk a beat or drive patrol. Every cop I've ever met in Boston and Denver was glad to have us take care of people they knew they or jail could not help.

To me this is not an issue of legalisms and constitutionality. Bob Sundance surely knows this and is using the law as a lever. May he move a lot of old rockheads.

—Howard Herunstadt
Denver, Colo.

Muddleheaded liberals

Editor:

As a subscriber and regular reader of ITT I have finally been moved by your recent editorial "Suppression can be a two edged sword" (ITT, Sept. 7) to share with you some observations about the paper.

Your editorials seem to represent the work of muddleheaded liberals trying to take the middle (uncommitted) road and are totally lacking in analysis expected of a "leading left publication." Your attempt to justify ACLU's defense of the Nazi Party and the KKK is so incredibly naive that it would be laughable were it not extremely dangerous.

It is clear that the right of people to engage in unpopular and anti-government activities has never been "free" and unrestricted and that laws and ordinances exist and are selectively enforced, usually against the left. You admit that the Nazis and the KKK "advocate injury and murder of people they hate," yet you support their "freedom" to organize, demonstrate and march with the stated purpose of violating other people's basic rights.

The Skokie ordinance forbidding demonstrations that "will incite violence, hatred, abuse, or hostility toward a person or group of persons by reason of or reference to religious, racial, ethnic or national affiliation" by no stretch of the imagination applies to an "open housing demonstration" or any other progressive action which are all issue oriented and do not violate other people's human rights. Police action against such activities are common and do not require legal sanction. A sure first step toward a police state is to legitimize the violence of the right.

The logic behind the ACLU defense invariably leads to the absurdity of blaming the victim (blacks, jews, etc.) for the crime (why are you so weak?).

Your lack of sensitivity to the dangers of racism, chauvinism and fascism indicates your inability to clearly see the major issues that confront us. This will inevitably lead to more muddled editorials and the question of: whose side are you on?

—Tanja Winter
La Jolla, Calif.

Editor's reply: Tanja Winter distorts our view. We wrote, "It is too easy to forget that the ACLU is not defending the Nazis [for the Klan], but basic civil liberties against dangerous . . . if well intentioned . . . city ordinances whose oppressive grasp . . . might reach all other groups not in favor with . . . 'public opinion.'" The historical record proves that this is far from naive.

Winter also muddles the distinction between sustaining rights and preventing or punishing wrongs. The editorial stated that freedom of speech and assembly also requires that these rights not be used "as a mask for depriving others of civil liberties, safety of their persons or their lives. If the Nazis . . . avail themselves of rights in order to assault the persons or rights of others, to incite unlawful acts or murder, they should be prosecuted under the existing laws. And if government will not enforce these laws, people will justifiably defend themselves and their rights in whatever manner they deem appropriate."

The editorial also specifically argued that the defense of civil liberties required not only opposition to oppressive government measures but also "with equal vigor" the demand for "police protection against assault on the rights and persons of others, and for prompt arrest and prosecution for such assaults."

The muddleheadedness here lies in not realizing that the defense of civil liberties has nothing to do with defending wrongs or crimes and everything to do with combatting them.

The IWW replies

Editor:

In your editorial supporting ACLU defense of free speech even for totalitarians (a position the IWW has always taken) you misinform your readers when you write: "Consider the IWW, which often advocated sabotage in public speeches that were followed on occasion by bombings."

Around 1912 to 1916 individual members of the IWW did write and speak in favor of sabotage, describing it as taking such forms as slow down, work to rule, telling unfavorable truths about products, misdirecting shipment of scab products, etc.

Though your use of "which" says so, the IWW as an organization did not advocate sabotage even in this sense, feeling it tended to give workers the illusion that they could redress their grievances by individual action, when organization was needed. Military usage of the term sabotage during W.W. I gave it a connotation of destruction that led the IWW officially 58 years ago to advise members against using the term. Then you slip in some bombs by a journalistic device that implies IWW responsibility without putting yourself out on the limb of saying so. From its start in 1905 the IWW has relied on building a mutual understanding among working people, not on bombs or emery dust, and has repeatedly said such nonsense harms the working class.

—Fred Thompson
Chicago

Editor's note. We did not mean to imply that the IWW relied on violence or sabotage. On the contrary, despite the often violent rhetoric of IWW organizers, the union's tactics were almost always peaceful. Nevertheless, on occasion, as in Butte in 1914, IWW rhetoric about sabotage was followed by dynamiting. That this was probably done by agents provocateur does not change our point.

She Dunn us wrong

Editor:

Mary Dunn's letter (ITT, Sept. 14) about David Moberg's NAM convention story reads more like someone with an axe to grind than someone diligently in pursuit of the truth. Dunn is right that the planning committee for the national socialist feminist conference in 1975 included a number of other groups—all women's unions—in addition to NAM. However, Dunn fails to mention that NAM initiated the conference. Our conception of the conference at the NAM national convention in 1974, was that it should involve as many women's groups as possible. The conference was not intended to be a NAM front or simply to push our own ideas or role.

Second, Moberg did not say that the conference was for women who "shared NAM's politics" as Dunn claims. We have political views on a range of questions that were not conceived of as a framework for the conference. However, the principles of unity drawn up for the conference were in line with NAM's view of socialist feminism. I don't believe there is anything dishonest in Moberg's phrasing on that point.

The NAM convention included many women who have been active in the women's movement, in organizing women, and in the lesbian movement. Everyone who participated—including Holly Near—commented on the central role that women, feminism, and gay liberation played. Dunn's snide comment about Near's participation is an insult to all of them.

—Judy MacLean
NAM Organizational Secretary

The AFT Convention in another light

Editor:

Your article on the 61st annual convention of the AFT (ITT, Aug. 10) was both more and less than is needed to understand the internal dynamics of the union. It gave more of Lois Weiner's personal opinions than are useful, but less detail of the actual struggles at the convention than is necessary for decent reporting. Furthermore, the red-baiting of United Action Caucus was in poor taste and wrong.

You fail to mention that the convention did not "split over racial lines." In fact, it split nationally between the enormous New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) vote and the rest of the country! Had Shanker not controlled the 173,000 vote New York bloc he would have lost on Bakke. New York carried Shanker's Bakke position, but he lost Washington, D.C., Chicago, Detroit, most of Philadelphia and the west. The majority of those who voted against Shanker's position were white, since black teachers are still woefully underrepresented in the AFT. The Illinois delegation, a majority of which was white, voted by more than 90 percent against Shanker.

Briefly, Shanker lost everything west of New York and south of New Jersey. That is worth mentioning if the purpose is to inform people of the dynamics of the AFT.

Your article failed to mention that Shanker had scheduled Irving Brown, a CIA operative and "Meany's Man in Europe," to speak at the "Labor Education Luncheon." A boycott of Brown organized jointly by the Black Caucus and the United Action Caucus dropped the Brown luncheon's attendance from an expected 1,000 to less than 200. The turnout was so small that Shanker had to change the luncheon's location to a smaller ballroom. Otherwise they would have been further embarrassed.

Both Irving Brown and ITT used the same ploy to deal with the opposition: red baiting. The United Action Caucus is not the Communist Party's caucus in the AFT. UAC, both open and demo-

cratic, includes people at all levels of its membership and leadership who have varying political and social views. We are united behind a program and against red-baiting, which is one of the main ways the Shankers and Browns keep unions like ours in their pockets.

Another item that you failed to address was the importance of the Black Caucus this year. It is impossible for anyone who was at the convention in Boston not to have noticed that the Black Caucus was the cutting edge of most of the progressive moves against Shanker. Not to mention its existence was a disservice to your readers.

By the way, the resolution on Elvis (see below) was not introduced by UAC, but by a UAC member on the floor. Part of its purpose was to break through Shanker's stodgy inanity.

—George N. Schmidt
Member, UAC Board; Chairman, Substitutes
United for Better Schools, Chicago; Member,
Chicago Teachers Union

The Elvis Resolution:

Whereas, the youth of America, caught in the throes of McCarthyism and the depths of the Cold War, were awakened by the throbbing of the rock guitar, and

Whereas, the same anti-education forces that twenty years later were to burn school books in West Virginia and fight busing in the north tried to keep him from appearing below the waist on the Ed Sullivan Show, and

Whereas, an entire generation of American white folks were first burst from their up-tight gestalts by his music, and

Whereas, it is seldom in a lifetime that Americans can truly say, "The King is Dead"

Be it therefore resolved that the American Federation of Teachers support the naming of American public schools after Elvis Presley, and

Be it further resolved that the American Federation of Teachers use its enormous influence in the Congress of the United States to have Elvis Presley's birthday declared a national holiday on which schools are closed, and

Be it further resolved that the president of the American Federation of Teachers declare a moment of silence each year at the Federation's national convention at the moment of Elvis' passing.

Be it finally resolved that each convention of the federation open with the new federation "song," a medley of "Love Me Tender," "Heartbreak Hotel," and "Don't Be Cruel."

Sustenance makes the mind grow sharper

Editor:

Enclosed is my check for another year's subscription. Subscribing to *In These Times* was one of the best things I did when I moved to eastern Montana. The hills and sky here are good medicine, but I often feel politically isolated and in need of some strength and reassurance about my beliefs and ideals.

Getting *In These Times* keeps me thinking. So much of what you deal with relates to the things I encounter here. Between you and our Montana *Borrowed Times* there's sustenance that enables me to be more active politically.

—Marie A. Root
Miles City, Mont.

More letters on page 17.

Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you want to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

Jean-Pierre Cot

French left faces tough campaign says member of the National Assembly

"French left falters under pressure," Diana Johnstone thus described the situation of the French Left in *ITT* (July 6). It is true that the left had it too good in recent years. Ever since the signatures of the Common program by the Socialists, Communists, and the "radicals" (who represent the moderate wing of the left in France), the left has been gaining in votes and influence. After having barely missed victory in the 1974 Presidential election, the left won the Local elections in 1976 and 1977. It is persistently ahead in the polls.

Those who thought that situation could carry the left smoothly into power in 1978 badly misjudged the situation. The conservative coalition in power since 1958 had repeatedly denied the opposition any right to power as long as Communists were involved. The conservatives have too much to lose politically, and too many economic benefits dependent on its hold on the State.

French capitalism has thrived through the period thanks to an incredibly conservative social policy. The differential among salaries has grown larger in the last twenty years. Protection against accident and illness has become less effective. Old age pensions are still far from adequate. The tax system is one of the best in the world—for capital earnings—and one of the most severe for the workers, with sales taxes bearing the burden and very light income taxes.

All that is questioned today by the French left, and would be changed by a victory in 1978. A faction of the conservatives understands the difficulty and has tried with Giscard d'Estaing to pro-

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mote certain reforms. It has failed. For instance, the government was unable to get a relatively moderate capital gains tax through Parliament. The poor substitute that was voted has since been repealed. And French capitalists are turning more towards Chirac, the strong arm within the Right.

The international stakes are just as important. A victory of the United Left in France will have historical significance. France is a more powerful and better organized country than Portugal, Italy or Chile. Its weight, political, economic and strategic, is important. The route set by the United Left will be considered with interest by progressives throughout the world. But the example will also be examined closely by all the conservative forces. No one can afford an error in such circumstances. That is the reason why the Socialist Party has been taking pains to explain the danger of any counter productive reaction among its partners, among which the U.S. is not the least important.

The temptation is great for international capitalism to prevent a victory of the Left, rather than cope with the tricky problems that would rise out of

that victory. The American columnist, Joseph Kraft has recently advised the Carter administration to help Giscard out of his mess. The French left does not fear foreign intervention, which would probably create a favorable reaction for it. But such an attitude would certainly complicate future relations in the event of a left victory.

This context is necessary to understand the attitude of the French Left under growing pressure. We must iron out the ambiguities of the Common Program, signed in 1972 in quite a different setting. In these five years, the economic picture has changed a great deal. The political forces of the parties within the left have been modified, with the Socialist Party grasping the upper hand today (polls give us somewhat over 30 percent of the vote, vis a vis 20 percent to the Communists, while the two parties were at par in the 1973 election). The actualization (bringing up to date) of the Common Program undertaken this summer, is not a simple matter. Each Party presses for its own views. Differences of opinion still exist on the extent of nationalization, the short-term economic and social policies,



the chapter on disarmament and defense. They should be overcome by mid-September, at the summit meeting of Mitterrand, George Marchais, and Robert Fabre.

The right is obviously taking advantage of this situation to shield its own internal divergences (the strife between Giscard and Chirac has been very severe these last months). But, with a brand new Common Program, the left will have a programmatic basis for its campaign that the right has been incapable of defeating. The mere fact that the political debate in France is centered on the Program of the left—and not on that of the Government, as the Mitterrand-Barre television appearance showed—is an important political success for the left.

The campaign will be a tough one. As positions harden, the danger of violence develops. A certain part of the French right would love to create insecurity throughout the country, so as to repeat the 1968 elections, which gave a massive vote to the Gaullists, in reaction against the massive strikes of the spring. The nuclear protest marches may create such an opportunity. But all the organized Left (parties and unions alike) are wary of the situation and will not let it develop, much to the disappointment of certain leftist splinter groups.

Whatever the outcome of the battle, the French Left does need comprehension and solidarity throughout the world. . . more than back-seat driving.

Jean-Pierre Cot is a member of the French National Assembly and of the Executive Bureau of the Socialist Party of France.

Alvah Bessie

Considered Opinion

Richard Nixon won't even fade away

What did we do to deserve Richard Nixon?

How did it happen that we, the people of the United States, twice elected to the highest office it is in our power to confer, a liar, a crook, an unprincipled operator backed by men of power and money, a politician with no scruples, no sense of humor, an uptight personality ruled more by hatred than the Quaker principles on which he was raised and which he attempted to exploit as he has exploited every idea, every personality, every situation and every opportunity to get for himself the money and power of his backers?

It isn't as though these are new and stunning revelations; anyone who has observed the U.S. political scene since 1946, when the man first ran for Congress, has known these things about him. Every reporter assigned to his many campaigns for the House of Representatives, the Senate, the Vice-Presidency, the Governorship of California and the Presidency, has known and spoken (off the record) about the sort of man he was from the start: cold, hungry, shifty and arrogant; aggressive and unprepossessing, motivated only by what he wanted and to hell with anything or anybody in the way.

This was, is and always will be Richard Milhous Nixon, a kid from "the wrong side of the tracks" in the middle-class Orange County slum named after a bad poet: John Greenleaf Whittier.

He got into Congress by smearing a man named Jerry Voorhis, as conservative an anti-Communist as they came in those days. He called—no, he implied or "let it be known," or hinted that Voor-

How did he do it? How did we let him do it? There was plenty of reason to know.

his was sympathetic to "Red" ideas. That ended the political career of an honest California Congressman.

He slid into the Senate by defeating Helen Gahagan—and letting it be known, or hinting, or implying that Gahagan and her well-known actor-husband, Melvyn Douglas, were "pinkos." In Nixon's book they were dangerous radicals because they were died-in-the-wool American liberals. They were on the side of the underdog in public and private life. They supported the Spanish Republic in its death-struggle with Franco when the Committee on which Nixon later made his name openly supported fascism. They supported the people that Committee smeared and got fired and blacklisted from the moving picture, television, radio, newspaper and publishing industries between 1947 and 1951.

Nixon rose to "fame" on that Committee with the help of an obvious psychopath named Whittaker Chambers, who hid some old microfilms of irrelevant government documents in an empty pumpkin on his farm (!)—and miraculously produced them to destroy the distinguished career of Alger Hiss, who was just as certainly the victim of frameup as were Ethel and Julius Rosenberg who were convicted of giving "the secret of the Atom Bomb" to the U.S.S.R. The fact that Harold Urey, one of the men who had built it, testified that there was no secret at all, did not save their lives.

But Nixon's activities helped to execute them as surely as did his boss, Dwight ("That's my boy!") Eisenhower, who refused to stay their execution or grant the clemency a later Republican President lavished on the self-condemned Nixon.

Nationwide reaction to the TV show that netted Nixon \$600,000 plus ten percent of the profits, and which he hopes will spark the sales of his \$2,000,000 "autobiography" was universally negative. People prominent on the Watergate Committee said he was still covering up; others asked why, if Nixon had been falsely accused, had he waited for three years—and a million dollars—to "answer" such false accusations.

The woman and man in the street used such words as: liar, crazy, sick, contrived, wouldn't tell the truth, confused, contradicts himself, the same old lies, a teaser for his book. The newspapers collated what he had told Frost with the actual records of the Watergate investigation and made the same sordid diagnosis.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* of May 6th said, "... he showed himself still the self-serving, unrepentant Nixon, still unwilling to acknowledge the criminality of conduct that has disgraced him beyond any other President . . . evasive and shifty . . . the unindicted (but since pardoned) co-conspirator of the Watergate coverup conspiracy, still insisting he

was not guilty of obstructing justice when the tapes of his own voice convict him of it."

The question remains: How did he do it? How did we let him do it? And the answers speak to our qualities as a people, our good qualities and our bad:

We do not really believe that "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." We are inclined to think people are honest until they are proved crooked; to see the best in people until we are forced to see the worst; to believe what they say about themselves and each other; and what the newspapers, radio, television and the other media say: and all these media are controlled by men and women who are also seeking money—and power.

On our bad side: we become cynical too easily; we are disillusioned with politics and say, "To hell with it." We decide all politicians are crooks and refuse to participate in the democratic process. We decide that since everybody is out for himself and the devil take the hindmost, we will do the same: "I'll get mine, Jack, and—fuck you!" We swallow the glib promises of a man who grins and says, "I'll never lie to you."

We have a long way to go, simply to realize that these good and bad qualities tend to cancel each other out and leave us with both feet firmly planted in mid-air. So it is easy for short-change artists to slip through our guard and usurp the power that is rightfully ours.

Alvah Bessie is a novelist, critic and screenwriter who has published seven volumes of fiction and nonfiction, was involved in the Spanish Civil War as a soldier of the Republic and was a member of The Hollywood 10.

