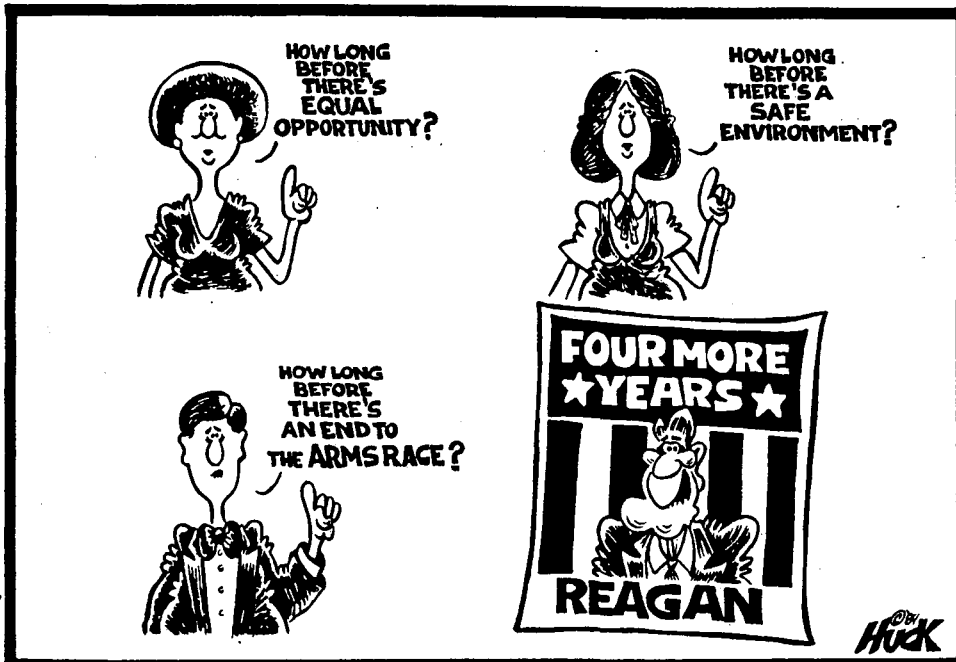


EDITORIAL

The seamless web extends to politics



Whether Ronald Reagan's overwhelming victory November 6 represents a long-term swing to the Republican Party and Reagan-style conservatism is still unclear. True, the Democrats' showing in both House and Senate elections was more than respectable in the face of the Reagan sweep. But for the left, both the socialist part and what Reagan calls the special interest groups—labor, the elderly, blacks, Hispanics, feminists and gay rights advocates—one thing is painfully clear: we have no coherent platform from which to address the majority of the American people.

As a loser, Mondale looked good. But his concession speech, which was among

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his most moving appearances, had the ring of liberation theology, not politics. He spoke as if he had a mission to the poor, not to govern our nation. And in so doing, he inadvertently drew attention to the weakness of his campaign. He made it easy for Reagan to speak as the representative of principle and general interest, while painting the Democrats as representative of narrow self-interest in conflict with the well-being of the nation as a whole.

The irony of the campaign was that the special interests Mondale was accused of representing, or giving in to, constitute a majority of the population—or would, if he truly represented them—while the special interests that Reagan actually represents is the smallest and most elite in the nation. Yet a substantial majority of the voting population accepted Reagan's definition of special interest, while many among Mondale's target constituencies didn't bother to vote, or voted for Reagan.

Two Reagan themes worked most strongly against Mondale, the special in-

terest charge and the charge that the Democrats stand for big spending and taxes. These stuck, and Reagan got away with seeming to represent the general interest, for one simple reason: Mondale accepted the framework of Reagan's policies, and especially the idea of an increase in military spending.

Mondale tried to have it both ways. He tried to convince the corporate community that unlike Reagan he was responsible—to them—and that he was a leader who knew the budget had to be brought more closely toward balance, and that taxes would have to be raised to do it. But he also appealed to the "special interest" groups by supporting programs that would cost a good deal of money, which could only cause further imbalances. Unless, of course, there were massive cuts in military spending, and that he explicitly opposed—calling instead for a slightly smaller increase than Reagan wants.

Reagan, of course, has consistently attacked programs that he says create dependency on government. He argues that an end to government interference with business and social spending will release a surge of entrepreneurial vigor and sustained recovery. And yet Reagan has engaged in the greatest government pump priming since World War II military spending finally got the country out of the Great Depression of the '30s. If the despised Keynesianism of the New Deal was based on deficit spending, what can one say about the Reagan deficits? And who can doubt that whatever recovery we are enjoying is the result of military Keynesianism?

But Mondale would have left this intact, or modified it but slightly. And in that context, his promises to increase spending for blacks or for the elderly, or on education or the environment could only be seen as more money out of the pockets of middle-income families. Without attacking the framework of our national priorities, giving to one group means taking from another. The result, as post-election polls prove, is that Mondale won a majority of votes only from those in the lowest income brackets. And most of those were probably negative votes by people most detrimentally affected by Reagan's policies or most offended by his priorities.

Coming out of the election, the Democrats are leaderless and directionless, and the left, both socialist and non-socialist, is not much better off than it was four years ago. On the plus side, we can count the advances made by women mobilizing politically and gaining recognition, both with Geraldine Ferraro's nomination for vice president and with the large number of women nominated for lesser offices.

And we can count Jesse Jackson's campaign and the entrance of blacks into the political arena on a large scale. Jack-

son's campaign had serious negative aspects, especially his embrace of Louis Farrakhan and his own anti-Semitic remarks, which only increased the racial polarization that any first black presidential candidacy would have intensified. But his role as a catalyst in politicizing blacks will be an enduring positive result. And then, too, Jackson was the only contender—after George McGovern withdrew—to tie domestic reform to opposition to American neo-colonialism and a reduction in military spending.

But despite Jackson's rhetoric about a rainbow coalition, the various components of a potential left majority acted too much like the special interest groups they were accused of being. The AFL-CIO leadership pursued its goals while accepting the framework of the cold war and the Reagan military buildup. The freeze leadership stuck narrowly to its issue, NOW and other feminist leaders concentrated on running women for office. And so it went.

But especially now that the days of steady American corporate expansion are over, government policies are a seamless web. We cannot have adequate Social Security, universal quality education, a high level of health care for the public, true environmental protection and other socially useful and desirable programs if we continue to spend untold billions of dollars on armaments. And we cannot reduce armaments as long as our elected leaders are committed to acting as world policeman for Corporate America, and continue to use the Cold War as an excuse for intervening against Third World

movements of national independence.

"Practical" leaders and organizers of a wide range of social and political organizations on the left have argued over recent decades that their organizations should stick to their particular issues and demands. They say that to take on the whole framework in which public policy is formed—and especially foreign policy—is impractical and self-defeating. But the Mondale campaign, which was the creation of the labor movement and NOW, indicates that the opposite is true, that if you accept the framework of the Cold War, the U.S. role as international policeman and the massive military spending that is its inevitable consequence, there is no room left for concern for the majority of our citizens who require social intervention for employment, health, education, environmental protection and security in old age.

These issues are of concern to Americans right now. But to make them credible requires a change in our public concept of the role of the United States in the world community and our priorities as a nation.

In his final political campaign, Ronald Reagan appeared to take the high ground. He spoke of making America great again, of reviving pride in our accomplishments and hope for our future. Given the timing of the recovery—at its peak during the campaign—that rhetoric may have been unassailable. But the assault that was attempted fell flat because it was correctly seen as sour grapes. One cannot challenge the success of Reagan's presidency while accepting the underlying basis of it. ■

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LETTERS

In These Times is an independent newspaper committed to democratic pluralism and to helping build a popular movement for socialism in the United States. Our pages are open to a wide range of views on the left, both socialist and non-socialist. Except for editorial statements appearing on the editorial page, opinions expressed in columns and in feature or news stories are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the editors. We welcome comments and opinion pieces from our readers.

NATIONAL CAMPAIGNS

THERE IS MUCH I AGREE WITH IN Fred Clarkson's thoughtful letter to *ITT* (Oct. 31). "Political strength will emerge from basic organizing and credibility at the local, county and perhaps state level...."

I entirely agree and the Citizens Party has run more than 200 races at various levels, winning something more than a dozen. We hope to run more such races between now and 1988. It is our experience, however, that it is possible to get substantial numbers of candidates for such races only if they feel they are part of a national enterprise, and not isolated political adventurers. The only way to do that is to run national campaigns.

Also, such campaigns *do* raise issues. This year, as you well recognize, there was a terrible paucity of serious debate. Yet wherever Sonia (her especially) and I went there was, if only for the duration of our visit, some serious political discussion and through press coverage it radiated well beyond the small audiences we reached in person.

As one who has written about politics for 30 years, I understand how difficult it is to be taken seriously. But we decline to accept the sports-page mind set that equates seriousness with the number of votes. We believe—and our campaign experience sustains that belief—that there are significant numbers of people, even some press people, who think that political ideas and values have intrinsic value. The Citizens Party and the values it represents are much better known now because of our campaign. And although the numbers are small in proportion to the general population, something important can begin with only a few thousands.

We met enough like-minded people to agree enthusiastically with your assertion that "this is no dream—it is a possibility...." Lord knows, we can't be confident that ours is the only or even the best way to build a left with significant political weight, but doing

something is better, we believe, than doing nothing, and the left has been doing very little in recent years. The Mike Harrington/DSA strategy simply hasn't worked. It was always too timid and there was scarcely any liberal wing of the Democratic Party to work with. After yesterday's catastrophe, whatever lingering liberal impulse the party had is certain to have diminished. The only significant part of the old coalition is the blacks. Despite that, they will be screwed again by the party as they were after the convention. With two-thirds of the whites voting for the Republicans, the blacks should have enormous influence within the Democratic Party but, as you know, that just isn't going to happen.

So the American political scene is in a tremendous state of flux. With the influence of the old political parties already (and, I think, permanently) on the wane, the situation is (or should be) encouraging for new parties, but I have no idea of the best way to take advantage of it. I would be grateful for any thoughts you might care to pass on.

Sectarianism obviously has been one of the banes of the left and we of the Citizens Party are trying to avoid it. We of the left must cooperate. It is the values of the Citizens Party that are important, not the party itself, for its value is solely instrumental. If its fate is to be only an evolutionary stage, so be it. And it, of course, is open to change; it is young enough to be flexible, not in principle, but in means.

—Dick Walton
Warwick, R.I.

TELL ME IT AIN'T SO

TO GET MY MIND OFF THE DEPRESSING reality of the election campaigns this fall, I read a historical romance novel. You know the kind—lots of explicit sex, fantastic adventure and a beautiful young heroine who survives all kinds of misery and adversity before finally being reunited with her one true love to live happily ever after.

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STA1

The central horrible situation in which the novel's heroine was caught was a slave breeding farm in Czarist Russia of 170 years ago, at which blond, blue-eyed children were produced for sale to the Ottoman Turks, who supposedly couldn't get enough of blond slaves. (Russians and Turks seem to be convenient villains both in fiction and real life.) The Russian nobleman who owned the farm was rich as a result of his business. I thought I was reading a fantasy.

Then I read the article about "law and economics" (*ITT*, Nov. 7) and was shocked to find that conservative judges in the U.S. today are seriously proposing that "efforts to breed children with a known set of characteristics" to be sold to the highest bidder would be quite in keeping with the best principles of American free enterprise capitalism. It's enough to turn anybody into a socialist.

In the novel, the idea of breeding children with a specific set of characteristics to meet a market demand is so terrible that in order to resolve the story, not only does the heroine escape, but the breeding farm itself is destroyed, and its rich owner is shot dead by a fellow Russian who is repelled by the general, all-around decadence of it all.

Fantasy and reality seem to be merging. Please, tell me it isn't so. Please tell me I've only been temporarily caught in the Twilight Zone. My sanity is at stake.

—Nella Tillman
Lansing, Mich.

BRIGHT SPOT

I JUST READ THE REVIEW (*ITT*, OCT. 31) of *An Unfinished Song: The life of Victor Jara*, and it is sticking in my mind. Is the name of the high-ranking officer who so "bravely" beat Jara at the sports complex known? I can visualize Jara defiantly singing a final chorus of "Venceremos," though he knew his last sun had dawned. I would like to spread the information contained in this review to other people. Men and women such as he shine like supernovas and renew my own determination.

—Danny J. Bobrow
Socorro, N.M.

INVESTIGATE

THE AD "WE'RE THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY, TOO" (*ITT*, Oct. 17) is astonishing.

Health concerns be damned. *ITT* readers are supposed to back the tobacco capitalists—welfare recipients with their growers' subsidies, really—simply because workers are employed.

I realize *ITT* needs the tobacco growers' money. And you can count on us to detect the flawed values and logic of the ad.

Besides, shouldn't *ITT* readers take some pity on the tobacco industry? After all, *ITT* is part of the tobacco industry's support system, too.

Indeed, capitalism is cunning and money is insidious.

May *ITT* readers now have an investigative article on the Bakery, Confectionary and Tobacco Workers International Union local 203 T, which paid you for this space?

—Lee Baxandall
Oshkosh, Wisc.

NO. 1 KILLERS

I WAS EXTREMELY DISAPPOINTED TO see the ad entitled "We're the Tobacco Industry, Too" (*ITT*, Oct. 17). I think it is appalling that the name of Dr. Martin Luther King and causes such as supporting health care for the elderly and Social Security as well as the voting rights act were used in the ad to promote tobacco.

The ad has all the hallmarks of the slick advertising campaign put on by R.J. Reynolds. In particular, the ad says, "Everyone knows there's a controversy over smoking." This is a lie. There is not one reputable scientist in the world who says that smoking is harmless: 350,000 people die in this

country as a result of smoking-related diseases.

It's true that the tobacco industry creates jobs, but it's also true that smoking is the chief single avoidable cause of death in the U.S. It is very disappointing to see *In These Times* publish a purposefully misleading ad created by America's number one killer industry.

—Lawrence White
Executive Director

Californians for Nonsmokers' Rights

THE WRONG IMPRESSION

THE HEADLINE OF MY ARTICLE ENTITLED "South Africa-Mozambique truce is a FRELIMO victory," that appeared in the November 7 issue of *In These Times*, gave an impression less ambiguous than the tone of my article had intended. While it is true that the negotiations were initiated by Mozambique, whether they are a victory or not depends on what happens in the future. Many problems remain.

—Allen Isaacman
Minneapolis, Minn.

WHERE THERE'S SMOKE...

IN RESPONSE TO EDITOR JIM WEINSTEIN's reply to my letter criticizing *ITT* for the full-page ad, "We're the tobacco industry, too" (*ITT*, Oct. 17), I would like to respond to Weinstein's reasons for stating, "I would gladly run another such ad." These reasons are, first *ITT*'s financial difficulties, second, that other newspapers run ads that are in opposition to their editorial views, and third, that the tobacco workers face loss of employment if the industry goes bankrupt.

I sympathize with *ITT*'s financial plight. I would, however, encourage Weinstein to seek other means of remedying that condition. Foremost of these reasons is that taking advertisements that depict the labor-management committee of the Tobacco Industry attempting to justify its existence seems to be in the same category as any advertisement for smoking. Federal law prohibits the advertising of cigarettes on television. Weinstein would say (as he did in his response to my first letter) that Congress, by taking this stand, has thereby infringed upon the freedom of the press. I would like to point out to Weinstein that all freedoms come with responsibilities, and when a given freedom threatens the good of the community, the community may legislate against that freedom. This is a political issue and not, as the editor suggested, a moral one.

I share Weinstein's concern about tobacco workers losing their jobs. He should recall that the idea of retraining workers for new jobs is not only the conventional answer to technological unemployment, but is also a major policy of those unions where workers face job phase-out.

Finally, Weinstein stated, "I'm not so hostile myself [to smoking] as to think that anyone who smokes or wants to argue for it is beyond the pale." Is the editor aware that the research on the health effects of cigarette smoke to non-smokers is now well documented? If not, I refer him to the recent surgeon-general's report on this topic.

What political rights do individuals need in order to win and maintain a safe and healthy environment? I suggest one such right that is relevant to this discussion is the right of people to refuse any project they believe will damage their health or that of future generations.

—Alvin Winder
Amherst, Mass.

Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may 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.