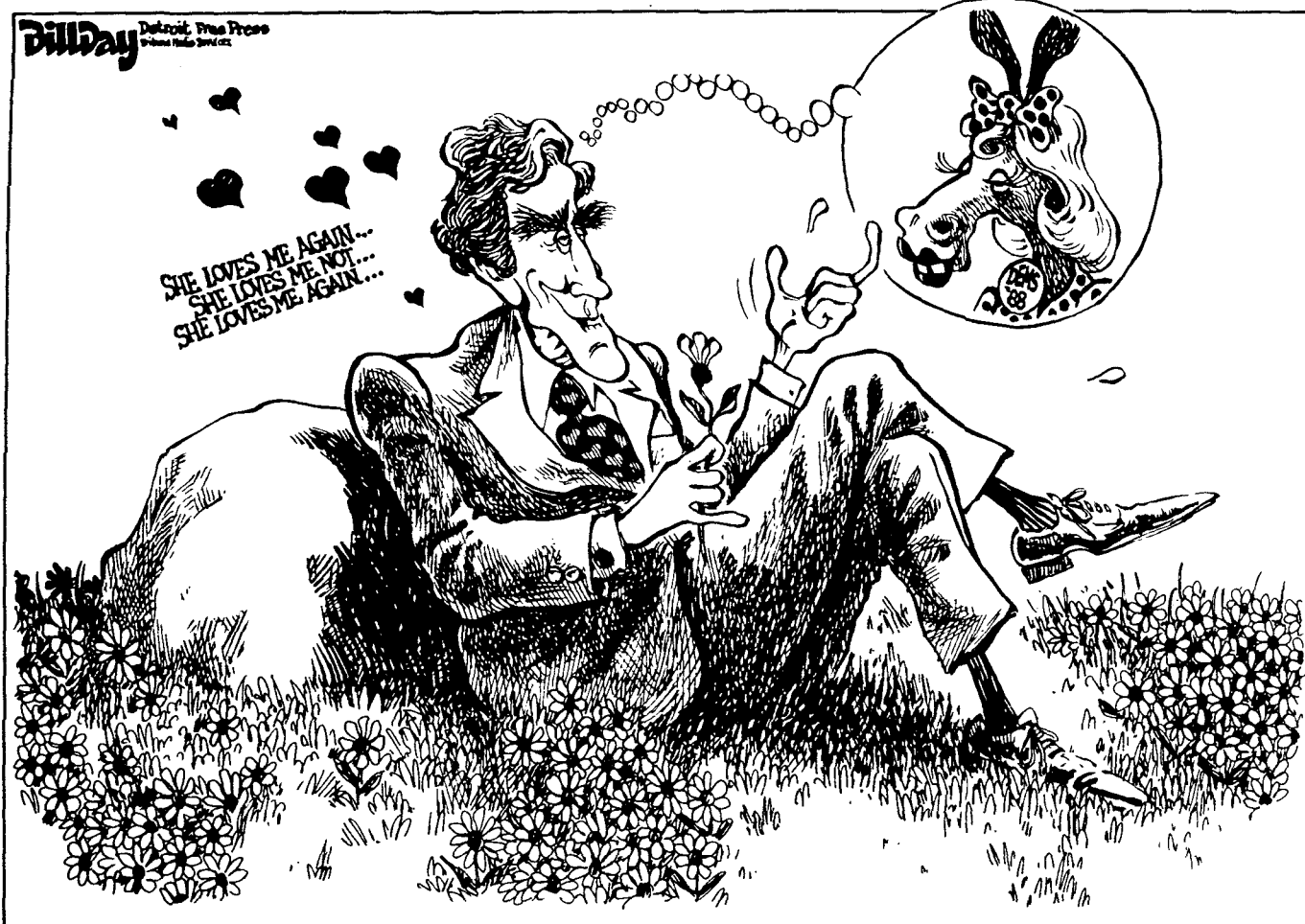


EDITORIAL



Bold, imaginative, but saying nothing new

Gary Hart still knows how to get attention. Few will deny him that. And he knows how to make an appealing speech. When he re-entered the presidential race last week, he noted that we have recently "seen a monumental stock market crash that exposed very serious faults in this nation's economy," that we may "lose more young Americans unnecessarily in the Persian Gulf," and that we "still have no long-term solution to a staggering budget and trade deficit." To win the election in 1988, Hart said, the Democrats are "going to have to be bold, imaginative and strong, not cautious or political." This election, he said, "is too important to let it pass as a conventional contest in a period of calm."

Hart was entering the race to see that this would not happen. When he quit last spring, he "believed other national leaders would enter this race," and that his "ideas for strategic investment economics, for military reform and for enlightened engagement would be adopted and put forward by others." But after waiting for six months, he observed that "neither of these things has happened."

So he concluded that it was his patriotic duty—and his right—to come back in and save the country.

But—leaving aside the questions about his overweening ego and blind self-absorption—Hart has little to offer that is different from the timid, narrowly opportunist and superficial positions on issues that the other six Democratic candidates have put forward in the dozen or so debates. His three-word summary of ideas—which he says "took months and years to think through and organize" by "some of the most creative minds in the country"—are pedestrian indeed: "Invest, reform and engage."

The first of these is a "policy of strategic investments that rebuild our nation's economic foundation: our schools, our factories, our farms, energy production, public works and our research centers." This is all to the good, but hardly original or unique. Jesse Jackson, Paul Simon and others have offered similar proposals.

The second, "reform" of the military, is designed "to provide an effective conventional force while we drastically reduce our reliance on nuclear weapons." This is a call—now almost universal among moderate proponents of the military-industrial complex—to keep the military budget high in the face of potential cuts in nuclear armaments. It is the worst position of liberal anti-nuclear advocates, one that even Jackson is sliding back into now that he is presenting himself as a candidate who will be responsible to the powers that be.

The third, "enlightened engagement," would "use the force of change in the world, of nationalism, of world markets and of dispersed power as the basis for a new internationalist foreign policy." It's not clear what this means, but it sounds like enlightened imperialism—as in

John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, which gave us today's militarized Central America.

In short, while playing to a real need for boldness and imagination, Hart remains cautious and political in all but his personal behavior. His appeal—such as it is—is in large part a result of popular perception that Democrats must begin looking beyond symptoms to underlying causes if they hope to win in 1988. Paul Simon is correct in saying that one Republican Party is enough. But to revive the two-party system in this country, the Democrats will have to move beyond tinkering. They need to alter their basic principles of domestic and foreign policy. The party will have to abandon the framework of Cold War liberalism and develop programs that put the needs of working Americans above those of our corporate rulers. And they will have to initiate a foreign policy that rejects the idea of the United States as the international policeman for our multinationals.

We, too, are disappointed with the performance of the candidates who have been in the race so far. Unfortunately, Hart's re-entry only makes matters worse. As always, his campaign will center around Hart, the man, rather than around the issues he proposes to discuss.

Nicaraguan self-defense excuse for contra aid

"This doesn't help. The timing wasn't very good at all," said Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT) last week when Maj. Roger Miranda Bengoechea, a top-level Nicaraguan defector, was trotted around Congress to tell members that Managua intended to increase its armed forces to 600,000 men.

But it did help. At least it helped Ronald Reagan in his relentless war against Nicaragua. It was one more example of the administration's ability to manipulate events on Capitol Hill—and of the tenuous nature of Democratic Party leaders' commitment to ending the conflict on terms favorable to Nicaragua.

The new issue is whether or not Nicaragua will have the right to defend itself against the threat of future aggression after the contras are removed from the scene. As Daniel Ortega said last week, Nicaragua is "a small nation," and "not defended by any military pact. The United States can do anything it wants against Nicaragua and nobody is going to defend us." The country will "probably have an army of 60,000-80,000, but the whole people will always be a reserve force," Ortega said. This will be true even if a security pact is signed between Nicaragua and the U.S., because past performance gives no grounds for trusting American intentions.

Ortega's view is more than understandable. Given the nature of Reagan administration policies, and the Democratic Party's unwillingness to oppose them in any principled manner, Nicaragua's leaders would be derelict in their duty if they did less.

IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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Graphic feedback

I JUST WANTED TO LET YOU KNOW HOW MUCH I enjoy your art department's work on the cover and back page of *In These Times*. I am a new student of graphic arts and the father of two graphic designers, and it is the highlight of our get-togethers to pull out the old *ITT*s since the last time we met and go over the graphics. I especially liked Peter Hanan's work on the November 16 cover.

Just thought you'd like to know that some of the graphic ideas in the feature articles in some of the weekly papers here in Northern California have been inspired by your work, although you would never recognize them. (Reason: my daughter has worked for many weekly newspapers throughout the area).

Of course, I subscribe to *In These Times* for its political content, but how much more enjoyable it is with your excellent input. Keep up the good work. I am—we are—looking forward to seeing next week's issue.

Erv Knorzner
Oroville, Calif.

Human canaries

IN HER RECENT ARTICLE "SILENT SUMMER" (*ITT*, Nov. 23), Kate Millpointer describes in detail the effects of recent radioactive emissions on several species of birds. She concludes: "Ornithologists generally agree that birds can be regarded as early warning systems for humans because they are extremely sensitive to the environment—like the canary in the coal mine. The miners never knew when poisonous gases were accumulating to dangerous levels. When the canary died, the miners got out. Did birds send a similar message to humanity in the summer of 1986—this time about the dangers of low-level radiation?"

If they did, they are a little late. Many of us have already gotten the message, and have been getting it for the last 40 years. We are the ones who have been diagnosed with "environmental illness," or "multiple chemical sensitivities." We have been reacting with a variety of symptoms, some quite severe, to the more than 70,000 new synthetic chemicals now part of common everyday products. Radiation, radon, asbestos and auto exhaust, all widely publicized, are but a part of our total chemical load, as they are a part of everyone's. We react only because we have gone over our tolerance threshold.

As Rachel Carson expressed it over 25 years ago: "The contamination of our world is not alone a matter of mass spraying; indeed, for most of us this is of no less importance than the innumerable small-scale exposures to which we are subjected day by day, year after year. Like the constant dripping of water that in turn wears away the hardest stone, this birth-to-death contact with dangerous chemicals may in the end prove disastrous.... Lulled by the soft sell and hidden persuader, the average citizen is seldom aware of the deadly materials with which he is surrounding himself; indeed he may not realize he is using them at all."

In short, it is we with environmental illness who are the canaries in the mine—a not-so-distant early warning system. We want our fellow human beings to know that they are indeed in danger from poisonous

gases. It is time for all of us to get out of the chemical miasma we live in.

Lynn Lawson
Human Ecology Action League (HEAL)
Evanston, Ill.

Planning, not genocide

SALIM MUWAKKIL'S STORY ABOUT ABORTION, "Black America's unspoken issue" (*ITT*, Nov. 9), was particularly interesting. The arguments advanced by Nathan and Julia Hares and others—in summary, that abortion is a white tool for black genocide—are frightening because they could hurt black children by increasing the proportion who are born unwanted. They would also saddle more young black women with child rearing responsibilities that make it impossible for them to finish their education and become self-sufficient.

The arguments are not only dangerous, but factually wrong. Abortion has not caused genocide: the black population is steadily growing, from 9.9 percent of the population in 1950 to 12.1 percent in 1984, and it is projected to reach 14.3 percent in 2020. In 1985 pregnant black teenagers were only 76 percent as likely to have an abortion as whites. But surprisingly, there is a little-known grain of truth to what they say: the birthrate among black teenagers has actually been decreasing, from 148 per 1,000 in 1970 to 96 per 1,000 in 1984. Black teenage pregnancy may have become more visible partly because the proportion of mothers who remain unmarried—and lack financial support—has increased from 66 percent in 1970 to 91 percent in 1984. And the birthrate among teenage blacks remains more than twice the rate among whites, as does the infant mortality rate.

The purpose of family planning is not to commit genocide against black people, but to enable black and white women to wait to have a child until they are ready to nurture a child, without destroying their own chance to escape poverty.

Kim Wentz, M.D.
Epidemiologist, Children's Hospital
Seattle, Wash.

Omission

DOUG TURETSKY'S GOOD ROUNDUP OF NEW housing bills (*ITT*, Nov. 9) incorrectly observes that "none of the current bills aims directly at one of the most critical issues facing the nation's low-income housing stock—expiring federal subsidies and use restrictions on privately owned projects built with federal funding."

Title III of Rep. Ron Dellums' "National Housing Act" (HR 4727), based on the Insti-

tute for Policy Studies' "Progressive Housing Program for America," bears the heading "The Subsidized Housing Preservation Act." It provides for permanent mortgage write-downs plus operating subsidies for non-profit projects with defaulted mortgages, and similar benefits for privately owned projects if they are converted to social (non-speculative, non-profit) ownership. Other sections of the title provide for upgrading physically deteriorated projects, grants for conversion to social ownership, enhanced security of tenure and resident control, management by community-based entities and prohibitions against loss of such subsidized housing through demolition or conversion to private, profit-oriented ownership.

The full IPS program is available through me, at IPS, 1601 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009.

Chester W. Hartman
Institute for Policy Studies
Washington, D.C.

ACLU

I HAVE ONLY ONE SLIGHT DISAGREEMENT WITH JOHN Judis' sensible analysis of the ACLU (*ITT*, Nov. 9) It does require a perverse stretch of the imagination to construe airport metal scans as generally "unreasonable" searches. Nonetheless Judis does the ACLU an injustice by lumping this error with their stand on the taxation of religious organizations. This form of tax exemption is a disgraceful parody of the principle that "Congress shall make no laws respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Given an intrinsically regressive tax system, all tax exemptions are de facto political endorsements of whatever "persons" or entities happen to have amassed the greatest capital. Arguing that generalized religious exemptions are an effective way to reduce the tyranny of the majority is tantamount to arguing that generalized oil exemptions or generalized capital gains tax reductions are an effective way of ensuring freedom of entry into the energy business.

Conversely, arguing that taxation of organized religion is a "prohibition of its free exercise" opens the door to the absurd conclusion that every form of taxation is a violation of the Bill of Rights—for instance, that taxing CBS constitutes an infringement on free speech.

What this example makes plain is that, whatever the theoretical validity of the conventional distinction between "political" and "constitutional" questions, its practice is riddled with elementary logical errors. Clearly there is little hope of resolving such errors legislatively so long as candidates for legislative (and executive) office are encouraged to engage in black propaganda exercises.

By conflating this problem with the question of public safety Judis—not the ACLU—encourages the stupid attitude that the judicial branch should offer no solace for the rationalist minority in the face of a legislative branch deeply tainted via legalized bribery and media conglomeration.

Jonathan McVity
Charlottesville, Va.

Debasement

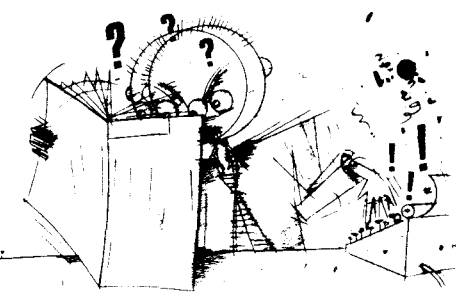
THE PIECE ON THE ACLU BY JOHN JUDIS (*ITT*, NOV. 9) is a pretty good analysis. The lessons he draws are, I believe, quite bad.

It is true, as he says, that the ACLU (and liberals in general) have made a fetish of the Constitution and hopelessly befogged the distinction between juridical and political questions. They rush forth with the holy script held high to fight imperialism, racism, monopoly, male chauvinism and environmental pigs. They debase themselves before the court.

Thus our good friends (and myself) in the ACLU were not wrong to fight the Vietnam War or seek to impeach Richard Nixon. They were right. The error was not political action or commitment, but rather confusing all this with the pale and silent Oracle of 1789. For too long, left-leaning activists have sought comfort in the black-robed seers. Indeed, they had great victories with the judges, while they lost the people. Co-opted by legal fictions, their political vigor was castrated. What they won in the courts (abortion, capital punishment, civil rights) was being squandered at the ballot box.

As James Watt drove the prissy Sierra Club into political action, William Rehnquist may save us (and the ACLU) from the sterile worship of legal mysteries.

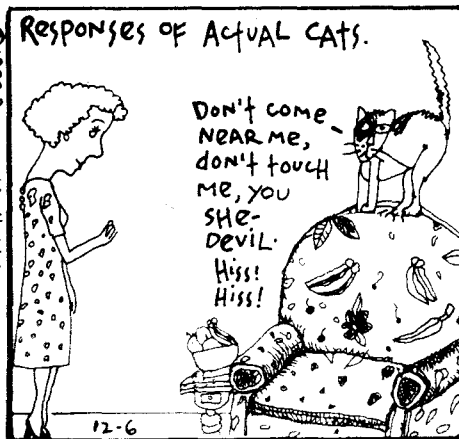
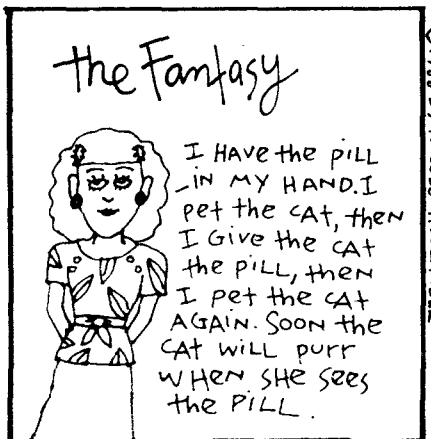
Robert J. Koblitz
Orleans, Mass.



Correction

A headline for the December 7 article about Canada's elections, "A victory for free trade; a loss for social programs," misrepresented Doug Smith's story. In fact, Smith wrote that deficit reduction "could be accomplished without a cut in social programs."

SYLVIA



by Nicole Hollander

