

EDITORIAL

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'ONE LAST REQUEST... I WANT YOU GUYS IN CONGRESS TO GET OUT THERE AND KILL ONE MORE COMMIE FOR THE GIPPER.'

Reagan manufactures another Nicaraguan crisis

In a desperate attempt to save his campaign to overthrow the government of Nicaragua by force and violence, Ronald Reagan charged last week that the Sandinistas had invaded Honduras. To stop this "act of aggression," Reagan sent 3,200 airborne troops to Honduras—allegedly at the request of that country's president. As we went to press it wasn't clear whether or not Nicaraguan troops had in fact crossed the Honduran border. "No one has any real facts," an administration official admitted. "There is no real hard intelligence on what's happening. By the time anyone finds out what's really going on, it will probably be all over."

The Hondurans did not feel threatened. There are no Honduran troops in the border area where the fighting occurred, and a foreign ministry official said last Wednesday that he had "absolutely no information about any request" by his government for U.S. military assistance, though the administration later extracted a request, as they had also done in 1986. Democrats in Congress who had recently voted against further military aid to the contras were skeptical. As Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT) observed, every time a vote on contra aid has been imminent, or lost, the administration has manufactured

a crisis designed to stampede timid legislators into continued support for its dirty war. Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-MA) noted that "this is not the first time the president has made use of his military authority after he lost a vote on the contras.... It is an irresponsible involvement of American troops in the conflict in Central America and an unwise escalation of tension."

There have been many incursions into Honduras by Nicaraguan troops in hot pursuit of contras retreating into their sanctuary across the border. But because Honduras officially denies the existence of contra bases on its territory, it has objected only when pressured to do so by the Reagan administration, and even then mildly. Now, of course, the existence of the bases is especially embarrassing—or should be—because they are in blatant violation of the Arias plan, and of Honduran assurances at the January meeting of Central American presidents that such bases would no longer be tolerated. That is why they were moved late last year to the Bocay region, a remote roadless area surrounded by dense jungle.

For the administration, however, these are mere technicalities. From its inception, Reagan has done everything he could to obstruct the Central American peace process, and the fact that it is the Hondurans, not the Nicaraguans, who are violating it is irrelevant. But Democrats opposed to further contra aid should not allow this latest administration ploy to succeed. They should insist that the troops be withdrawn, and that Honduras end its complicity in the contra war by shutting down their operations in its territory.

The people of Budapest are trying one more time

On Tuesday, March 15, 10,000 people shouting "democracy" and demanding political freedoms marched through the streets of Budapest to mark the 140th anniversary of the day when the poet Sandor Petofi launched Hungary's rebellion against Austrian rule. It was the biggest anti-government demonstration since 1956, when a democratic uprising was crushed by Soviet troops, much as the 1848 rebellion had been put down with the help of the Russian czar.

As the second open expression of dissent in two years that authorities have tolerated, last week's demonstrators cheered dissident philosopher Gaspar Miklos as he told the crowd in Parliament Square that in 1848, 1918 and 1956, the Hungarian people had "tried to achieve the aims of freedom, equality, independence and a place in the community of civilized nations," but that they "are still far from these aims." How far was demonstrated that same day. In a series of dawn raids the government arrested several opposition publishers and writers in an apparent attempt to scare people away from the demonstration.

Hungary is the Eastern European country with the greatest degree of economic freedom—won as a means of pacifying the population after the revolution of 1956 was drowned in blood. But like its neighbors, it is allowed few political rights. This year's demonstration, like the revolution in 1956 that brought Imre Nagy briefly to power, follows a signal from Moscow that things are loosening up. In 1956 it was Nikita Khrushchev's speech denouncing Stalin to the Soviet Communist Party's 20th Congress. This year it is Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost*. Then, Khrushchev's speech catalyzed a movement for national independence and political democracy that gave rise to the hope that Hungary—in Joseph Szilagyi's words—might become "the first and only socialist democratic state in the world." But the Soviet leaders would not tolerate either democracy or the withdrawal of Soviet troops. They feared the first would subvert their own system, and the second threatened their sense of security.

It is too early to tell whether this new movement will grow to the proportions of 1956, or—if it does—whether the Hungarian people will be permitted to determine their own fate. The Janos Kadar regime—installed by the Soviets after the Red Army did its dirty work—will do all it can to prevent a recurrence of 1956. But the people of Hungary defeated a more powerful and oppressive regime then. If they do it again, Gorbachev will be faced with the ultimate test of *glasnost*.

IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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(ISSN 0160-5992)

Published 41 times a year: weekly except the first week of January, first week of March, last week of November, last week of December; bi-weekly in June through the first week in September by Institute for Public Affairs, 1300 W. Belmont, Chicago, IL 60657, (312) 472-5700

Member: Alternative Press Syndicate

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UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

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LETTERS

Faith

THANKS FOR JOEL MILLMAN'S "NICARAGUA'S SOCIAL revolution and Christian base communities" (*ITT*, Feb. 24).

I am a Catholic priest, now in my 70s, who has travelled extensively in Latin America for the past 25 years and has read extensively in fields such as the sociology and religion of Latin America. Millman's article puts into proper perspective what I have been thinking for many years.

Two years ago I travelled to Nicaragua with a Witness to Peace delegation. I thought I was going there to help the poor farmers in a *cooperativo*. What happened was this: they helped me to understand Christianity, to bury hatred, to learn how to love my enemies and to do good to those who may harm me.

The bishop of Jinotega prohibited me from celebrating mass because of his own intransigence and paranoia. The people in the small *comunidad de base* in which I lived for a week accepted me with love. In our prayers together they prayed for their bishop; they prayed for their pesty torturers, the *contras*; they prayed for President Reagan!

I would take Millman's thesis even one step further than he does in his article. I firmly believe that the type of theology and the type of love that inspires the Christianity of the base communities in Latin America will, some day, spread to North America to enliven our Christianity and faith.

Rev. Thomas E. Lacey
St. Matthias Church
Redwood City, Calif.

Tribalism

IT SADDENS ME THAT YOU HAVE BURIED THE PALESTinian uprising more deeply than the Israeli soldiers who recently tried and failed. Though you take politically correct stands in your editorials, your hearts are obviously not into any exposure of the Jewish homeland. Otherwise the brutality of the Israeli military in the occupied *bantustans* would somehow intrude into your news coverage and analysis.

I have waited in vain since the "*intifadeh*" broke out on December 9, 1987, for you to feature, at least once, the story that has been brewing since the occupation began. Clearly tribalism has won out over socialist internationalism, shortsighted self-interest over compassion.

Whose side are you on, I must regretfully ask: that of the victims or that of the executioners? Of the still colonizing West or of the Third World oppressed? Your virtual blackout of the Mideast over the last dozen crucial weeks betrays your fear and prejudice, reiterated by a refusal to support the only credible presidential choice, Jesse Jackson, whom even the Democratic Socialists of America are backing.

Were it not for the dispatches of Diana Johnstone, certainly the finest foreign correspondent writing for the U.S. press today, I should cease subscribing to your tired excuse for an independent socialist alternative.

Shame on you.

Garrett Lambrev
Oakland, Calif.

Exemplified

PLEASE CANCEL MY SUBSCRIPTION. I RESENT YOUR anti-Israel position. How can there be the first step to negotiate with a party (PLO) that doesn't even recognize you?

Israel is a tiny country—Jordan is huge, and refused to take the Palestinians in when the state was made.

What about the rock-throwing and fires? The violence from the PLO you don't mention!

I am an old "progressive" who belonged to the American Labor Party in New York. I am ashamed of your paper now.

Name withheld

Standard liberal reformism

JEFF ALSON (*ITT*, FEB. 17) THINKS "IT IS APPARENT" that the primary reason why many progressives remain ambivalent toward [Jesse] Jackson's candidacy is the perception that he cannot win. That is definitely not the reason why the Socialist Party USA is not supporting Jackson, and instead is running the only democratic socialist in the campaign—Willa Kenoyer for president and Ron Ehrenreich for vice president.

Maybe Jackson can win. But the point for us is, how do you advance democratic socialism in America? If you think that this can be done without running openly democratic socialist candidates on explicitly socialist platforms, you are deluding yourself. If you think that by running a liberal, even a left-liberal like Jackson, that anything more than liberalism will be advanced, you are kidding yourself. If you think that Jackson is a "social democrat" or that somehow by supporting him that social ownership and workers' control of the economy are going to be popularized rather than standard liberal capitalist reformism, you are fooling yourself. Moreover, you are failing to do anything concretely to advance democratic socialism, but rather are fostering reform capitalism.

Maybe all that you want to do is advance liberalism and reform capitalism. That's fine, but don't go confusing that with the serious and difficult work of building a democratic socialist movement, which, among other things, means running candidates who are going to actually talk about instead of attack socialism. Rev. Jackson and Operation PUSH have never been about socialism, but rather about black capitalism and liberal reformism.

Donald F. Busky
Philadelphia

Totality

IN A RESPONSE TO LETTERS (FEB. 17), IN THESE TIMES I asserted that the United States is a "democracy" and that "anyone" who thinks otherwise is "living in a dream world—or has a definition of democracy so abstract and absolute as to be meaningless." *ITT*

also asserted that its "standard of democracy means little or nothing to most Nicaraguans." Readers were thus left to guess whether *ITT* respects Nicaraguan democracy as Nicaraguans understand it or whether *ITT* rejects Nicaraguan "democracy" as falling short of the American "standard."

Moreover, it is difficult to reconcile *ITT*'s simultaneous assertions that the United States is a "democracy" but that its citizens are "ruled by a corporate oligarchy." If this were "democracy," the masses would clamor for less democracy and elites for more democracy.

Apparently *ITT* cannot distinguish a democracy from other political systems. *ITT* says that "under our constitutional system the population must be persuaded" and that to be re-elected politicians "cannot totally ignore public opinion." But no regime, with or without a constitution, can govern without "persuading" a significant segment of the "population." Not Somoza's, not Ortega's, not Reagan's, not Gorbachov's. Nor can any regime "totally ignore public opinion" if it is to survive. Not Somoza's, not Ortega's, not Reagan's, not Gorbachov's.

The avowed purpose of *ITT*'s defense of the "formally democratic" American regime is to keep the left "in tune" with the "American people" so the left can "contest for power." Fortunately, the democratic left can struggle for power without accepting a definition of "democracy" that includes rule by a "corporate oligarchy." In fact, it is just such an overly inclusive definition of democracy that the left must contest.

Eric Schnauffer
Ann Arbor, MI

Editor's note: There's nothing to guess. It's not our job to sit in judgment of Nicaragua's form of government. Nicaragua's standard of democracy is Nicaragua's business, not the United States'. True, no regime can survive indefinitely without the acquiescence of the majority of the population. In a democracy, however, the people have a recognized right to free speech, a free press and participation in the electoral process on a formally equal basis. We can overthrow our government without resorting to revolution.

Relevant but unknown

WHO HASN'T PICKED UP A BOOK HE/SHE couldn't understand? Not I. As it happens, Marxist scholars are far less guilty of using an impenetrable jargon than their non-Marxist colleagues. For such a learned Marxist scholar as James Weinstein to think otherwise (review of Russell Jacoby's *The*

Last Intellectuals, *ITT*, Feb. 17) shows how little is known about the great number of high quality, politically relevant and generally well-written Marxist works that are being produced throughout the academy. Don't take my word for it.

Take a look at *The Left Academy: Marxist Scholarship on American Campuses*, vols. I, II and III, edited by Ed Vernoff and myself, which surveys the research of Marxist scholars in 23 different disciplines. The most striking conclusion that emerged from our efforts is just how much good Marxist scholarship there is (yes, in the very sense that Weinstein means it).

The second most striking conclusion was just how little of it is known, even among people who have contributed to it. Forging the weapons of criticism is a necessary and ongoing task in the class struggle, both inside the universities and out. But succeeding at what we still have to do requires that we have a better understanding of what has already been done.

Bertell Ollman
Dept. of Politics
New York University

By the book

YES, WE HAVE A FORM OF DEMOCRACY IN THE U.S. Americans established a bourgeois republic 200 years ago.

But let's ask the real questions. Democracy for whom? Freedom of assembly? Who owns the meeting hall?

Class-divided society is a power vacuum. To abolish capitalist rule, the working class must seize power or lose it. To speak of democracy out of this context is to equate it with the status quo. Socialist democracy is a new type—workers' democracy.

Tim Mills
Belvidere, IL

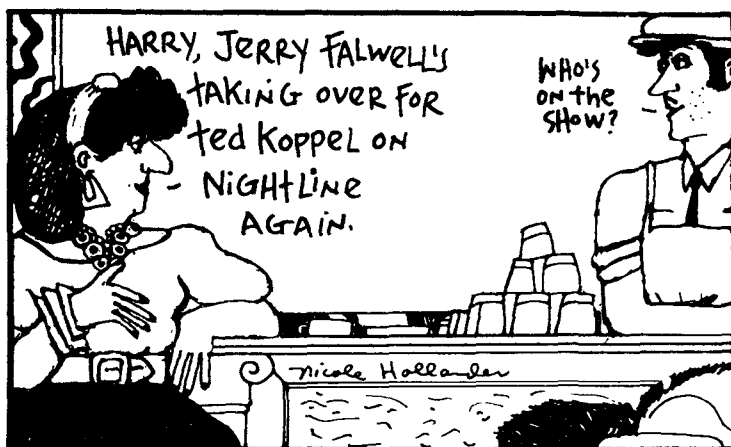
Unskilled teachers?

SINCE WHEN IS IT A BAD THING TO PAY PROFESSORS less than skilled workers? If Polish academics are so unhappy with this state of affairs, (*ITT*, Jan. 20) why don't they leave the universities and find work in the shipyards?

Ken Lawrence
Jackson, Miss.

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.

SYLVIA



by Nicole Hollander

