

LETTERS

Offensive I

THIS IS TO PROTEST THE OFFENSIVE CAPTION APPENDED to the Oliphant cartoon illustrating the Aaron Back article (*JTT*, June 20).

The caption's reliance on dialect distracts and detracts from the article's thrust. As my wife and I see it, it belongs with Goebbel's "wit" and, at best, suggests that Oliphant deems the cartoon unable to stand on its own merit.

The extreme poor taste of the cartoon and the poor judgment in choosing it for publication is a disservice to the cause it purports to support and an affront to the intelligence of the reader.

Malcolm Hardon
Santa Monica, Calif.

Offensive II

AS A LONGTIME SUBSCRIBER TO *IN THESE TIMES*, I was very distressed and angered by the cartoon on page 3 of the June 20 issue. It has a strong anti-Semitic tinge. The hooked noses and beards of the right-wing Jews portrayed, particularly in conjunction with the so-called Jewish accents in the text, could have come right out of some of the neo-Nazi publications of the '30s, '40s or '50s. They have no place in a paper such as yours.

There is no doubt that the Shamir government is reactionary and repressive, and it should be attacked as such. However, such attacks should relate to Shamir's government as head of state and not in terms of an ethnicity which is essentially irrelevant in the political dialogue.

Howard Walzer
Far Rockaway, N.Y.

Editor's note: We agree with the criticisms expressed by Malcolm Hardon, Howard Walzer and others whose letters we have not printed. The Oliphant cartoon that appeared in our June 20 issue slipped through the cracks of our editorial process. We apologize and will try to assure that similar mistakes do not occur.

Enlightenment

AARON BACK DESCRIBES THE NEW ISRAELI GOVERNMENT as "the most hardline and extremist in Israel's history" (*JTT*, June 20) and predicts that "the government will bring a discernible rightward shift to national and foreign-policy decision-making."

Yet in its first month in existence, the Israeli government announced that it would not, as a matter of policy, send new Soviet Jewish immigrants to the disputed West Bank territories; released some 400 imprisoned Arab rioters; and provided financial compensation to the families of Arabs who were killed by a lone Israeli gunman, even though as a government it had no obligation to do so.

In short, Back's simplistic characterization of the new Israeli government ignores the fact that, in the complex labyrinth of Israeli politics, parties and individuals do not always fit neatly into the narrow "right" and "left" categories of American political discourse.

Bertram Korn Jr.
Executive Director, Committee for Accuracy
in Middle East Reporting in America
Philadelphia

Bootlickers, labor fakers

SPeAKING AS AN INDUSTRIAL WORKER, I HAVE more than a few differences with John B. Judis' article, "U.S. automakers ride a rough terrain" (*JTT*, March 28). To be brief, Judis' focus seems to be that American autoworkers and the bosses of the "big three" have a common interest in fighting the Japanese (surprising statements to see in a "socialist" newspaper). Judis also seems to think that the auto bosses are really interested in protecting American industry, American jobs and the United Auto Workers (which Judis actually claims the auto bosses support!). This sounds like a dream, and, well, I'll take this opportunity to "wake up" Judis.

Frankly, I notice far too much emphasis on "labor-management cooperation" and "team concepts" in this article. How can there be cooperation when workers and bosses have a fundamental conflict? Workers sell their labor power to bosses and want to get as much for their labor power as they can. Bosses buy labor power and want as much work as possible as cheaply as possible. Also, there is a tremendous power imbalance between workers and any bosses. The only protection workers have is a labor union whose limited resources are totally dependent on small weekly dues from them. The reality is that the reason bosses "cooperate" with their hired hands is to get more work from fewer workers for less pay, and I really don't think auto bosses are any different from any other bosses.

As for all Judis' emphasis on "productivity," all I can say is that if Judis ever worked in a factory he'd know that workers don't use that word. The term they use is "speed up." And when the foreman tells you to "speed up," the only real choice is to resist. If you don't, they'll expect you to do more work, and the next guy's out. Then the guy after you does more work, and you're out. Then the company's made more product than people can buy, and everybody's out. I'm amazed Judis doesn't realize this.

Finally, Judis attacks the only people that are out there defending U.S. autoworkers. I think Michael Moore's wonderful movie really exposed the naked, amoral greed that is behind those "white men in suits behind desks" that own America's auto industry. By their own admission, they're in business not to make cars but to make money, and if they have to destroy U.S. jobs, unions or communities, they will. In fact, they're up to their necks "cooperating" with the very same Japanese bosses Judis claims are the mortal enemies of American autoworkers (GM with Toyota, Ford with Mazda and Chrysler with Mitsubishi, not to mention

numerous joint ventures throughout the world).

Among the few groups to realize this is New Directions. They see that the only way to protect American jobs is the old-fashioned way—struggle. Licking Roger Smith's or Lee Iacocca's boots, the method suggested by Judis and the time-servers and hacks at Solidarity House, just won't do it. The only way to stop layoffs is with a fight against the bosses, American or Japanese—exploitation doesn't have a nationality.

Gregory A. Butler
New York

Super-sensitive

I'D ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT WHEN I "COVERED MY butt" I was protecting it from a kick (as in "to kick ass"). But now that Phil Bereano (*Letters*, June 20) has explained the true origin of the idiom (which explanation suggests that female butt-coverers may be—alternatively or additionally—protecting an adjacent orifice), I hope we'll all stop offending the sensibilities of conquering armies that quite understandably engage in a little anal rape (which is no big deal, really; just relax and enjoy it).

I'm shocked, therefore, that Bereano uses the word "sodomy"; this clearly maligns the citizens of Sodom, just as "buggery" unjustly stereotypes Bulgarians and members of the Greek Orthodox Church. ("Bugger" and "buggery" derive from medieval Latin *Bulgaris*, which signifies not only an ethnic Bulgar but also a "heretic"—specifically a member of the Greek Church. Very strange, but true.)

Bereano has, I think, screwed up (my apologies to prison guards); he has, in fact, written a load of balls (sorry to insult male sexuality). It is (African-American readers, please forgive me) a black day for the English language.

Robert Allen
Philadelphia

Stationary posts

THE RECENT ARTICLE IN YOUR JUNE 20 EDITION "A search for policy in Cold War's wake," took issue with an amendment that I offered to the Export Facilitation Act of 1990. My amendment, which was adopted by a vote of 390-24, conditioned the export of high-technology goods to the Soviet Union on negotiations between the Soviet Union and Lithuania over the issue of self-determination. It also provided that negotiations should be pursued "without economic coercion." Rep. Mel Levine (D-CA) added additional language on Jewish emigration.

The author of the article, John B. Judis, argued that such an amendment appeared to "be moving the goalpost each time the Soviet Union advances down the field." I couldn't disagree more.

At this moment the Soviet Union is imposing an economic blockade on Lithuania. Though there are some hopeful signs, the blockade effectively denies this small nation energy resources, medicine and such basic necessities of life as chlorine to purify water. This is not a new tactic by the Kremlin.

In 1948 Moscow imposed a similar blockade on Berlin. Fortunately, the Allies rallied to Berlin's side and the blockade was broken. The effort to apply economic pressure on behalf of Communism failed.

Though we are all heady with the euphoria of normalized relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, should we be so naive as to ignore the obvious? Mikhail Gorbachov is using the economic blockade to force Lithuania's hand and to avoid any negotiations over a future free status for Lithuania. Though I concede that the future of the Baltic nations and the republics of the Soviet Union is a thorny issue, should the U.S. ignore the hardship and suffering being endured by the Lithuanian people if these facts run counter to our dream of peace?

I hope not.

And I offer as my evidence the recent visit by Nelson Mandela. Apologists for apartheid and the South African government cautioned the U.S. not to impose economic sanctions on South Africa. They argued that it would only stiffen the resolve of Pretoria, deny strategic resources to the U.S. and penalize black South Africans. Their counsel was ignored. Sanctions were imposed, and Mandela was freed.

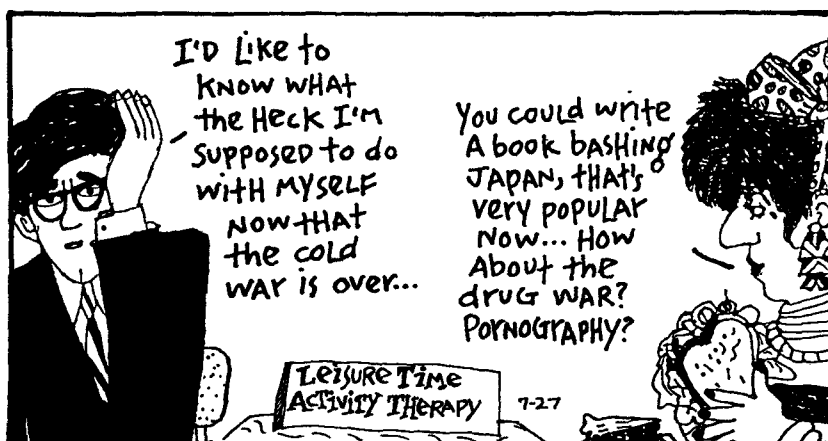
Whether the cause is South Africa or the Soviet Union, we should not be so naive as to allow our hopes for peace to cloud the reality of human-rights violations.

Finally, though I am sure that the election of Boris Yeltsin was the major reason, our action on the House floor may have helped to break the deadlock and start the inevitable negotiations between the Soviet Union and Lithuania.

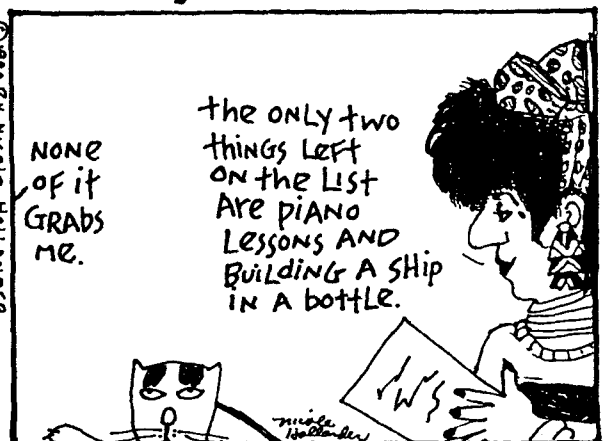
Richard J. Durbin
U.S. House of Representatives
20th District, Illinois

Editor's note: Please 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



By James B. Gilbert

IN 1945, THE UNITED STATES STOOD supreme in the world, a nation with astounding productivity, a sense of purpose, a population committed to identifiable social goals and a thriving, if small, welfare state. Its allies as well as its enemies were exhausted.

In 1990, the U.S. is only a first among equals in a polycentric capitalist world. It suffers a decayed and archaic infrastructure, political stalemate, economic stagnation and moral disorder. But its long-term enemy, the Soviet Union, threatens at any moment to fly apart under the centrifugal forces of economic calamity and ethnic jealousy. If George Bush has the dubious honor of watching over a victory in the Cold War that he does not understand or finds too dangerous to savor, Mikhail Gorbachov has the infinitely more difficult task of presiding over the dismemberment of Soviet power and the dismantling of many Communist elements of the Soviet economy.

With these events has come an unraveling of long-held assumptions about the Cold War. In particular, the left has had to confront the possibility that liberals and conservatives were basically correct in their assessment of the struggle between the West and the Soviet Union—a possibility, that positions taken during the last 45 years were wrong. Such a reassessment was the subject of two recent meetings in Washington, D.C., at the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS). The first meeting was held June 9 and the second the next day to honor the works of American historian William Appleman Williams, who died in April.

The surface view: The urgency of this task has been increased recently by conservative claims that Reagan's policies brought the Soviet Union to its knees and by a more reasoned liberal position that, despite some excesses and failures, the Cold War was a historic success. If there is a liberal consensus valedictory to the Cold War, its author is probably John Lewis Gaddis, a historian at Ohio University. His assessment, published in the May 1990 *Atlantic Monthly*, is

Reopening the Cold War debate in a polycentric, capitalist world



sober but celebratory. Gaddis argues that the bipolar world of struggle in the last decades promoted a European peace, much better than the settlement following World War I. Indeed, he hopes for a continuation, under another guise, of this arrangement, with the survival of Russia as a great power, yet capitalist in nature. On balance, he concludes, there is much to be pleased about with the defeat of Marxism-Leninism and, as he puts it, "authoritarian command" economies.

The implications of accepting such a position were deeply troubling to many participants at the IPS conference. They were quick to point out the enormous cost to the Third World of a Cold War fought away from the power centers in Europe and North America. At the same time, the new peace between East and West could cut even more deeply into Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America. With the Communist model of development in disrepute and with no power to challenge multinational corporations and banks, developing nations have less reason than ever to expect revolutionary social and economic experiments to survive.

Several of the participants argued that taking up the issue of Third World development—or, indeed, struggling against proclaiming victory in the Cold War—could provide a way to activate left groups in the U.S. Certainly it would make sense to explore a new developmental model that could avoid the destructiveness of market capitalism and authoritarian socialism.

A shift in perspective: But reassessing the last 45 years must involve much more than foreign policy, as interesting and important as this can be. The price of victory in the U.S. is an issue that is beginning to dominate American politics. Ironically, the crusade against socialism abroad has weakened and deeply damaged the social-welfare system that has made our market system tolerable. While it may be important to deepen our understanding of the Cold War and its incredible impact abroad, it is probably more important to focus on the ways the Cold War became an important element in the struggle over the welfare state inside the U.S.

A new history of the Cold War should be

written, but not with the idea of retaining old positions. Instead, we must recognize that the stunning suddenness of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the peaceful transfer of power to non-Communists in Eastern Europe raises a host of new questions. Might the Cold War have ended in 1956, or 1960, or 1968? How aware of Soviet weakness were American policymakers? Were there political reasons why neither side would bend at crucial moments? How did the Cold War operate as a force in American and Soviet politics? What will the Soviet (and American) archives reveal about these questions?

Williams' writings bear directly on such problems. Although conceived and written in the late '50 and early '60s and therefore bound by the language and arguments of that age, *The Tragedy of America* and *The Contours of American History* offer some striking suggestions about the impact of the Cold War. As outlined by Martin J. Sklar, Walter LaFeber, Thomas McCormick and others at the June 10 conference, Williams' works provide a frame for understanding how the market system could emerge victorious in an ideological and economic struggle while undercutting and seriously diminishing the victor.

In his books Williams called American foreign policy a search for the "Open Door," or, in today's language, the market system. He clearly understood the values of American policymakers, their commitment to American institutions such as political democracy and anti-colonialism; he recognized the importance of their patriotism. But he also understood that commitment to both the market and to democratic values carried a tragic flaw, for the market disrupted and destroyed the best of intentions. In a world where choices between economic and alternative values had to be made, economics triumphed.

In periodizing American history, Williams extended this same tragic sense. Again his language was sometimes idiosyncratic, but his meaning was clear and compelling. With the triumph of corporate liberalism in the late 19th century Williams saw a fundamental and continuing struggle between traditional American values of community—values he associated with his childhood in Iowa and his experiences at Annapolis and in the Navy—and the needs of a system of economic expansion abroad and corporate consolidation at home.

In his remarks on Williams' work, historian Christopher Lasch developed this notion of tragedy and contradiction. The U.S., he noted, had certainly won the Cold War. By any measure the Soviet Union has been defeated. Yet, in the struggle the U.S. had also spent much of its spiritual, moral and economic capital.

This argument suggests Williams' most enduring contribution—his sense of the ideological and moral nature of the Cold War and its costs, what Lasch deplored as the cynicism, bureaucracy and moral disorder of contemporary American society. This, not a defense of old positions, can also be the point on which to reopen the debate over the Cold War itself. It is a debate that, as Alan Hunter, organizer of the IPS conference, noted, is as much about this compromised past as a perilous future. ■

James B. Gilbert is distinguished professor of history at the University of Maryland.

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