

# LETTERS

## Driving dumb

ACCORDING TO DANIEL LAZARE (*ITT*, NOV. 7), "Rather than the 50 [miles-per-gallon] Honda, the most environmentally benign car may be the high-powered sports car that pays more in taxes yet is clearly not designed for such mundane pursuits as shopping or commuting, both of which take place when demand for highway space is greatest."

That has to be the dumbest remark ever to make it into print, and to find it in your newspaper, of all places.

First, the amount of taxes paid does not correlate with being environmentally damaging or benign. Then are we to believe that people who own high-powered sports cars needn't bother with such mundane pursuits as shopping or commuting? If not, do they go about these endeavors on bicycles or afoot?

Chances are, they own two or more gas guzzlers, plus a speedboat or an airplane, plus a big centrally heated, air-conditioned house and are blasting hell out of the environment with every move they make. Show me an environmentalist, and I'll show you a person who drives a compact car.

Laverne Rison  
Albuquerque, N.M.

## Advice for Bush

WHERE IS LAO TZU, NOW THAT WE NEED HIM? Why is no one offering his kind of advice to the current emperor? Are we too far into the decline-and-fall stage of this fleeting empire?

I replace the Chinese word *tao* with the phrase "the Way Things Work" in the following quotation (#31) from the *Tao Te Ching*:

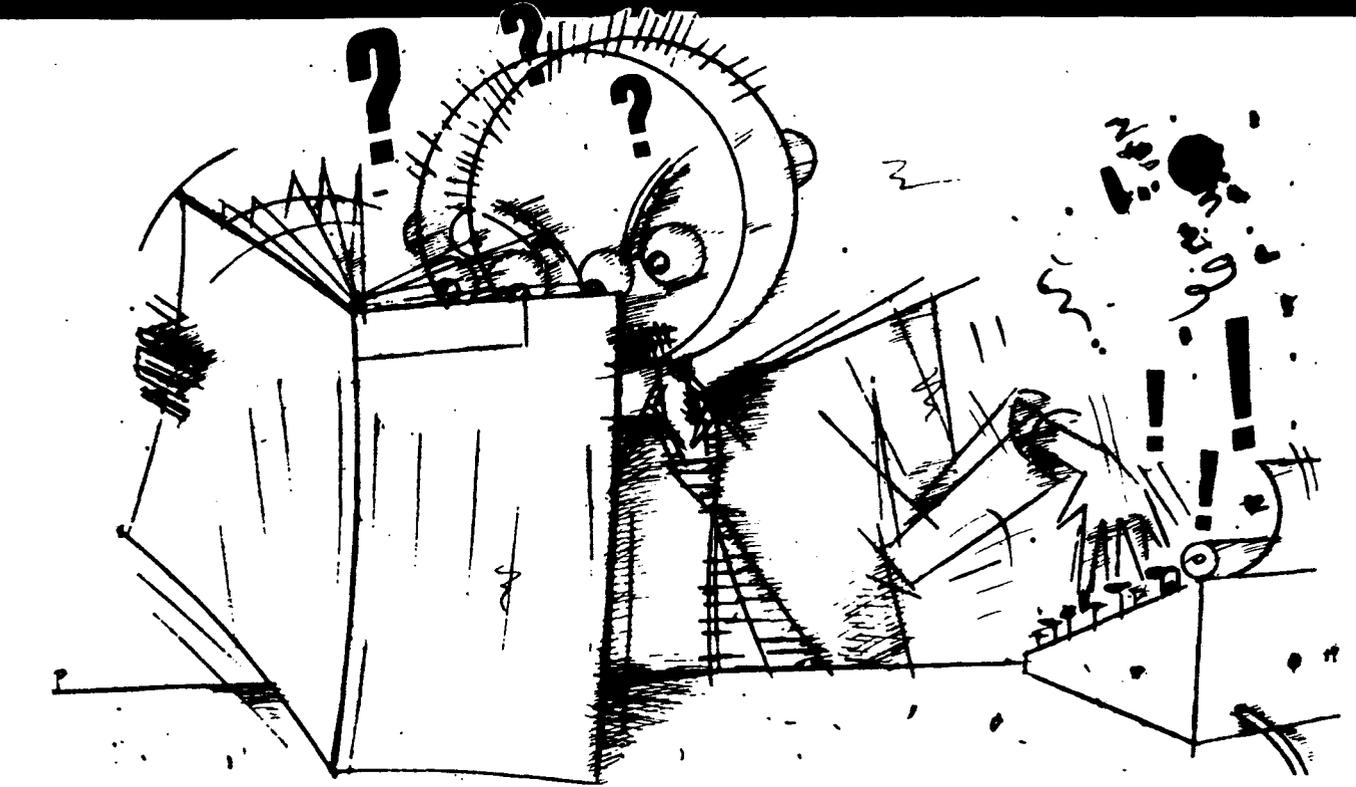
*Whenever you advise a ruler in the Way Things Work,  
Counsel him not to use force to conquer the universe.  
For this would only cause resistance.  
Thorn bushes spring up wherever the army has passed.  
Just do what needs to be done.  
Never take advantage of Power.  
Achieve results, but never glory in them.  
Achieve results, but never boast.  
Achieve results, but never be proud.  
Achieve results, because this is the natural way.  
Achieve results, but not through violence.  
Force is followed by loss of strength.  
This is not the Way Things Work.  
That which goes against the Way Things Work comes to an early end.*

Harry Willson  
Albuquerque, N.M.

## Hark, I hear a phony progressive

IT HURT TO SEE *IN THESE TIMES* GIVE ITS BLESSING to Iowa's Democratic Sen. Tom Harkin (*ITT*, Oct. 23). Granted, Harkin was better than his opponent, Tom Tauke, but is he a "progressive populist"? Let politicians earn that tag by working consistently for progressive causes; don't simply hand it out because there is no one else around to give it to.

It is interesting that Harkin is calling for a 50-percent cut in the military budget by



the year 2000. Does this mean he's willing to give up his pet food-irradiation project at Iowa State University? That's right, "progressive" Tom Harkin has successfully lobbied the Department of Energy for \$3.9 million to build a food-irradiation facility to treat Iowa pork and other meat products with radiation. Food irradiation is nothing but a misguided attempt to put a smiling face on the nuclear industry, and Harkin fell for it. Food irradiation offers nothing to consumers but additional human-health threats and environmental dangers. It is known to deplete essential nutrients and vitamins and creates unique chemicals in food, some of which are known carcinogens. Even companies such as McDonald's, Coca-Cola and Phillip Morris—no friends of progressives—have recognized the hazards of the process and adopted no-irradiation policies.

Michael Colby  
Blairstown, N.J.

## Simon, Harkin and the Mideast

YOUR COVERAGE OF THE IOWA AND ILLINOIS SENATE races (*ITT*, Oct. 24 & 31) spoke in glowing terms of the liberal records of Tom Harkin and Paul Simon. However, I have to question their liberal credentials, given that these two Democrats take positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that are to the right of the Bush administration—and of many Israelis as well.

Simon and Harkin were among those who recently wrote a letter to Secretary of State

James Baker commending him for his opposition to Palestinian statehood and encouraging him to withdraw all U.S. funding for the United Nations or any of its member agencies, including the World Health Organization, that recognize Palestine. Last June, just four days after Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir restated that Israel would never give up the West Bank and Gaza and would continue its colonization of Palestinian land, these two senators signed a statement that appeared in the *Washington Post* praising Israel's "willingness to allow all options to be put on the table." Shamir's proposal for Israeli-managed elections in certain Palestinian areas was described as "sincere and far-reaching," and the senators called on the Bush administration to give Shamir's plan its "strong endorsement." The pronouncement was widely interpreted as an attack on Baker's call the previous month for the Likud government to give up on the idea of a "Greater Israel."

Not only does Simon oppose the Palestinians' right to self-determination, he opposes the Palestinians even presenting their perspective to the American public. Simon joined Jesse Helms of North Carolina, Charles Grassley of Iowa and like-minded figures on the Republican right in a successful effort to close down the Palestine Information Office in Washington, D.C., despite the fact that no one at the office had ever been accused of criminal activity and the office had complied with all applicable U.S. laws. Both senators also opposed Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leader Yasir Arafat's right to speak before the United Nations.

Harkin and Simon helped spearhead the drive this past summer for the U.S. to cut off negotiations with the PLO. By opposing Palestinian statehood and rejecting negotiations, these erstwhile liberals have effectively endorsed continued occupation and repression. They have similarly rejected any linkage of an estimated \$3.7 billion in U.S. economic and military aid to any Israeli compromise on negotiations, settlements or human rights.

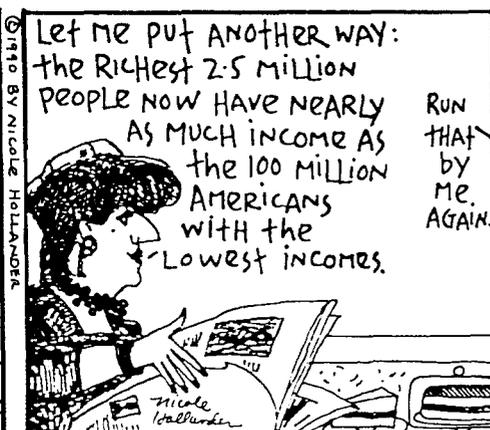
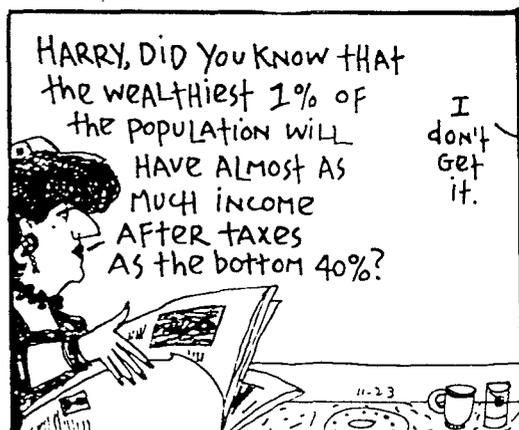
In short, Harkin and Simon believe that military rule is better than democratic self-determination, that U.S. foreign aid should not be linked to human rights, and that military solutions are preferable to diplomatic ones. How *In These Times* could consider these senators as upholding the liberal tradition is beyond me.

Single-issue voting on the Middle East is as wrong as single-issue voting on any other issue. I'm glad Harkin and Simon were re-elected. Yet to ignore their reactionary position on this issue encourages them to keep getting away with it. Politicians must be challenged as vigorously for their reactionary policies on the Mideast as on Central America or anywhere else.

Stephen Zunes  
Walla Walla, Wash.

**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 Daniel N. Nelson

**A** NEW BREED OF SNAKE-OIL SALESMAN IS descending on Eastern Europe and the USSR. Representatives of this new breed stand not on the backs of wagons but behind lecterns at free-market investment seminars, business roundtables and management colloquia. Instead of selling eucalyptus tonics or fire and brimstone, these new faith healers proselytize for free-market cure-alls and get-rich schemes.

Eager audiences of naive entrepreneurs and retooling *nomenklatura*—all would-be CEOs, bankers and corporate attorneys—are bombarded with promises of deliverance by Adam Smith (with a bit of Edmund Burke now and then): set the market "free," dismantle state involvement in the economy and society and govern "less" but protect individual rights—principally the right to own property.

This is a new economic determinism, albeit contrived by prophets with familiar smoke and mirrors. Free at last to own and profit, man will be prudent and naturally good. In such an environment, the state can and ought to wither.

The prophets, of course, are not only American. Britons, Germans and other Europeans have been joined by businessmen, bankers and think-tank operatives from other developed capitalist states. Even quasi-religious organizations have entered the fray. Rev. Moon's Unification Church, for example, has begun a concerted effort to expose young Soviet entrepreneurs and

## Will property and profit set Eastern Europe free?

university students to Western business practices, as well as the religious practices of that particular sect.

Sowing seeds of untroubled belief, these instant experts are pushing aside those who have spent years mastering the languages and deciphering the socioeconomic complexities of Eastern European cultures. Crowding the hotel lobbies throughout the erstwhile communist world are purveyors of the free-market's unilingual slogan—that property and profit solve all.

There are many converts. But doubt, confusion and disbelief are also consequences of the onslaught underway in meeting rooms and conference sites from Moscow to Varna to Gdansk. While free-market advocates are active in governments throughout the region, few are committed to recreating capitalism as it exists in the West. Instead, officials from Mayor Gavriil Popov in Moscow to Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz in Poland temper their commitment to market mechanisms with a recognition of the state's social responsibilities.

These are not students, and the West is not the teacher. These new non-communist officials do not believe that the invisible hand carries a magic wand. Marketization

is not understood simply as a blissful unraveling of state control. Most of these new leaders are cognizant of the struggle and sacrifice that must come before, during and after efforts to regenerate private ownership with a social conscience (Czechoslovakian President Vaclav Havel's admonition). They know that anything else is a phony bill of goods.

A pragmatic approach to democratization and marketization requires that they be seen as parallel but distinct processes. Their linkage flows from a mutual dependency on political legitimacy and social cohesion. Free markets cannot be created unless power is legitimated through open expression and electoral accountability. Conversely, these democratic practices cannot persevere without advancement on both economic and political fronts. The free market is a guarantor of neither.

Indeed, the interaction between "politics and markets" about which Charles Lindbloom wrote in the early 1980s cannot be ignored. The market of supply and demand is not a benign or self-perpetuating mechanism that ensures survival for the political system interwoven with it. The strains of the market even in stable democracies can rapidly deplete a government's political capital. In systems emerging from

decades of dictatorship, market vicissitudes pose even greater risks to fragile democratic processes. As equality is skewed by exaggerated individualism and the social safety net evaporates, popular support for democracies will shrink.

But these complexities are ignored by the new wave of market proselytizers. Their avoidance of the underside of property and profit is at once the greatest strength and weakness of their message. These salesmen have a simple and reassuring pitch. In an environment where anyone can get rich, everyone is free. Such banal equations are, in fact, the indispensable logic of today's capitalist carpetbaggers.

Russians, Czechs and Hungarians, to their credit, are not all buying into this shell game, knowing that states exist in part to insure the well-being of those who cannot adequately provide for themselves. They know, too, that the requirements for governmental legitimation have evolved far beyond Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*.

Private enterprise is an obvious and necessary component of the transition from one-party authoritarianism to full-fledged democracy. But alone it is not sufficient to the transition. Even the most popular, trusted governments must provide political goods—liberty, equality, justice—as they attempt to improve material well-being.

Pursuing one at the expense of the other may destroy Eastern Europe's chances of achieving either. But the snake-oil salesmen won't tell you that. ■

Daniel N. Nelson is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Anyone who savors our freedoms should have a copy.  
— William P. Noble, author of *Bookbanning in America*

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