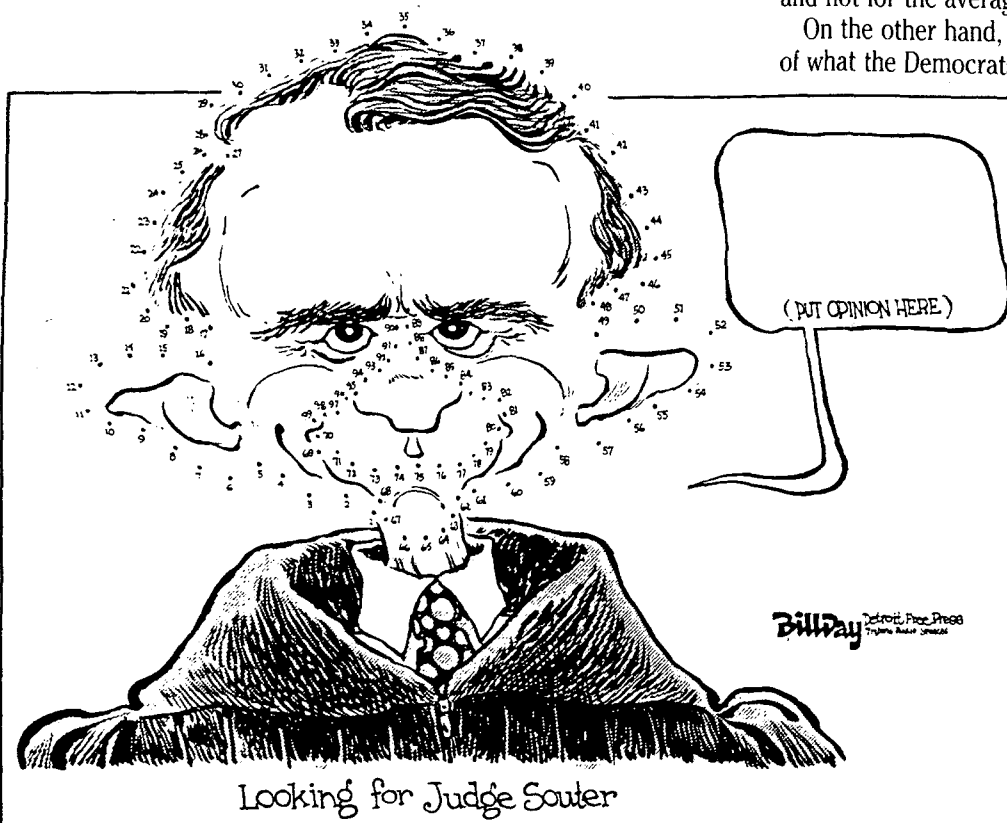


# EDITORIAL



Looking for Judge Souter

## What do voters want?

The warning flares from voting booths and polling tallies indicate that voters in the U.S. are increasingly disenchanted with the overall course of the country and the direction of its political leaders. But the same flares indicate that neither the voters nor their leaders know where to go.

The incomplete triumph of conservatives over the past decade has resulted in a crippling political gridlock. Democrats cling to an ideologically mushy margin of power in Congress, but year by year they lose ground with U.S. public opinion. While more trusted on some key issues (environment, health, education, social security) than the Republicans, the Democrats are seen as incapable of running government in a way that delivers economic growth and strength. At the same time, the Republicans cannot fully capitalize on the Democrats' weakness because voters increasingly see the GOP as the party of the rich, out of touch with the needs of "people like me."

These are a few of the implications of the just-released 1990 edition of an opinion survey conducted since 1987 by the Times Mirror Center for The People and The Press. While the survey forecasts no widespread threat to Democrats running for office this fall, it clearly indicates a rapid downward trajectory for the party as a whole. Democrats are spared disaster only because of core Republican weaknesses and voters' inclination to support their own incumbent member of Congress, even if they have no use for Congress as a whole. But buried within the gloomy news for Democrats is an opportunity for the party to seize if it wants to flourish.

In the few years since the survey series began, there has been a dramatic increase in feelings of political alienation, distrust of officials and powerlessness, equally matched by growing personal hopelessness and economic worries. Such despair has grown mostly—as one might expect—among the poor and middle-income groups. But what is striking is the rapid increase in disaffection among lower-income whites to levels approaching that of blacks. Such alienation, however, seems to have produced not a new level of support for Democrats, but just the opposite—an erosion of support from some of its core constituencies, identified in Times Mirror typology as New Dealers (largely older, blue-collar whites) and the Partisan Poor (largely big-city blacks).

In the past few years, the Republicans have won an increasingly clear, though mostly unfavorable image. In volunteered responses, 51 percent (up from 18 percent in 1987) of those polled by the Times Mirror saw the Republicans as the party of the rich, powerful, monied interests, and 28 percent (up from 5 percent) saw it as "not for the people." Others saw the party as conservative (44 percent, up from 21 percent), and business-oriented (24 percent, up from 13 percent). But since more Americans identify themselves as conservative rather than liberal, and since the percentage of Americans who identify themselves as business supporters has grown from 29 to 41 percent over the past three years, those images are not clearly unfavor-

able. Yet it is the nagging sense that the Republicans are for the rich and not for the average person that holds back the Republican tide.

On the other hand, comparatively few voters have any clear image of what the Democrats stand for, and what image they do have is almost all bad. Only 16 percent of respondents, down from 21 percent, said the Democrats were for working people, striking at the heart of Democratic hopes for a political identity. The only other image of any significance was liberal, virtually unchanged at 17 percent.

Despite Cold War thaws, the major self-identification of those polled was "anti-communist" (down from 70 to 60 percent, but still strong among traditional Democrats), followed by identification as a supporter of civil rights (45 percent); environmentalism (43 percent); business, the anti-smoking movement (41 percent); Democrats (31 percent); the anti-abortion movement (31 percent); and feminism (30 percent).

The Cold War's decline is likely to mend Democratic and open Republican divisions, and Democrats are likely to gain overall from being pro-choice, while Republicans become more deeply torn by abortion politics.

But there is one gaping hole in the middle of the Democratic Party that will sink its fortunes until well and properly filled: the Democrats need an identity, based on sound policy and unwavering strategy, as managers of the economy for competitiveness, growth and good jobs for working people. Despite the growth in pro-business sentiment, distrust of corporations remains high. Democrats can be supporters of businesses that are socially responsible, but they must also become reliable critics of corporate excess, bulwarks against the rich getting richer while the poor get poorer (as 78 percent of voters believe is now true), and defenders of working people—their vanishing historic claim. They must grapple head-on with fundamental American political ambivalence and voters who greatly distrust government, yet look to it for a better society.

Voters have turned away from the Democrats not simply because they are incompetent, as the Times Mirror survey suggests. More fundamentally, even pro-Democratic voters do not believe the party's leaders stand for supposed traditional Democratic values—or for much at all. On that count, voters are quite right to be disenchanted.

## Un-Soutered for court

Judge David Souter was informed at the outset of the Senate hearings on his nomination to the Supreme Court that he bore the burden of proof of fitness for the high post. In the face of flimsy objections that his legal record lacked the bell-ringer controversial positions of a Robert Bork, he tried to show he wasn't a "19th-century man"—a loner without social experience or compassion. Such image-making and evasive testimony will probably prove sufficient for a smooth sail through the Senate, but mere political momentum is no excuse for approval.

Although on some points Souter seemed more moderate than expected, his record and his testimony raise doubts about his defense of individual rights—including the right of privacy—and his willingness to use the court to protect the disadvantaged from the prejudices of the powerful and the majority. When polls show widespread public support for censorship, violation of due process and persecution of unpopular speech, the Court must above all defend the rights of individuals and minorities. While commenting on many issues that would come before him as a justice, Souter selectively waffled on the key question of how he views the *Roe v. Wade* decision guaranteeing women the right to an abortion. While it is appropriate to shelter the Court from overt political pressures, it is a charade to pretend that politics has no influence. The law is not some mystery of divination. Senators should recognize that the values a justice brings to the bench help shape the law.

Ultimately, the most important decisions will be won or lost in the political arena, which eventually influences the Court. And as the Supreme Court becomes less reliable, the majorities against restrictions on the right to abortion continue to grow. Even if approved, David Souter may not have the decisive vote after all.

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"...with liberty and justice for all"

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# LETTERS

## The new Joads

**R**ICHARD HILL'S ARTICLE "GRADES OF WRATH" (*ITT*, Sept. 19) struck a raw nerve. A few years back, after I'd left behind nearly 10 years as a "temporary" assistant professor at Michigan State University, I'd entertained writing an article titled "The New Slavery: Teaching Writing in America." Time and honest work blunted the impulse, but Hill's short story described the condition of American writing teachers all too well, with wrenching poignancy beneath the wit.

One presidential commission after another bemoans the fact that Johnny can't write, yet teachers of writing in this nation remain second-class citizens at best. Approximately 60 percent of the writing teachers in our higher education system are itinerant labor, as Hill's story more than suggests. These are Ph.D.s and ABDs, for the most part, who have devoted a substantial portion of their lives in order to become college and university teachers. For most, though, it's an empty dream. The great majority are thrown into a pool of vagabond "temporaries" who work for the bottom of the scale year after year, with no job security, usually without benefits—all for the sake of a precious annual appointment that will allow them to teach for another year.

As in Hill's story, many become pathetic figures, crisscrossing the nation year after year in search of another appointment, often dragging spouses and children in their wake—the new Joads. They're grateful for the scraps of academia.

It's a good deal for universities. Cheap labor, often ineligible for Social Security, yet frequently skilled and motivated teachers—until the system grinds them down.

It's a story worth telling. Hill began it. I wonder if *In These Times* would consider writing the next chapter in greater depth.

Jack Helder  
Williamston, Mich.

## The exploding sheikh

**J**OH. BLEIFUSS' USEFUL COLUMNS ON THE ORCHESTRATION of war fever in the nation's leading periodicals (*ITT*, Sept. 12, 19) could be augmented with material on the demonizing of Saddam Hussein. One notable example is a column by Jim Hoagland in the September 6 *Washington Post* headlined "Diplomacy, Saddam Style."

The column opened with a story about an incident in 1971, when Saddam was involved in negotiations with Mustafa Barzani, the leader of rebel Kurds. According to Hoagland, Saddam sent seven religious leaders from Baghdad to talk with Barzani. Saddam's security chief asked one of the sheikhs to wear a hidden tape recorder to the meeting with Barzani, instructing the sheikh to push a particular button when he got close enough to Barzani.

In fact, according to Hoagland, the "tape recorder" was a bomb. But "fate saved Barzani" because the sheikh pushed the button "just as a tea server moved in front of Barzani." Hoagland wrote that Barzani told him the story of the "exploding sheikh" in 1973.

This, I thought, was a great story. Then I thought about it. I didn't recall reading the story in any of the demonizations of Saddam that had been published since the

invasion of Kuwait. (Later I used the NEXIS research service to find out whether I had missed the story. I had the computer search for stories after July 1 with Saddam's name and some version of "explode." Only Hoagland's column came up with the story of the exploding sheikh.)

Then, my lawyer's instincts led me to wonder about the credibility of Barzani's account. Obviously the exploding sheikh didn't tell Barzani what had happened. Perhaps one of the other emissaries did, though then you have to think about the seating arrangements for the tea service, which led to the deaths of only the exploding sheikh and the tea server (how come the other sheikhs were sitting in places where none of them was injured?). Or, though it seems unlikely, maybe Saddam or his security chief told Barzani what they had done.

Hoagland said in his column that the story "stayed with" him since 1973. Just to check, I used the NEXIS service again. It came up with 33 stories Hoagland had written since 1979 mentioning Saddam Hussein and 12 mentioning the Kurds. Two of the stories included fairly substantial portraits of Barzani, but in none of them did Hoagland tell the story of the exploding sheikh.

My search was incomplete, of course. Hoagland may have written about the exploding sheikh in some publication not included in the NEXIS data base. The story is so terrific, though, that I would expect that it would have become part of the demonization of Saddam if it had been circulated at all widely.

I don't mean to suggest that the sheikh never exploded. I suspect that Barzani told the story to Hoagland in 1973, and that Hoagland too was a bit suspicious of it—it really does sound like something you would read in a novel you pick up to read on an airplane. So, even though the story is really good, and stayed with Hoagland, he found himself able to make his points about Saddam without using the story of the exploding sheikh, until now.

Unfortunately, the story is almost too good. Maybe it happened, but I for one wouldn't build it into the picture I have of Saddam Hussein.

Mark Tushnet  
Professor of Law, Georgetown University  
Washington, D.C.

## Letting down the barrier

**T**HE WALL OF SEPARATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT and the free press was recently breached by two major metropolitan New York news organizations. Although, as has often happened in the past, the cause was

war and military mobilization, this time it was the news media—not the government—that pounded a hole in the barrier.

After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the deployment of U.S. military forces to Saudi Arabia, a New York City all-news radio station, WCBS, and a Newark-based daily newspaper, the *Star-Ledger*, launched a campaign to encourage the sending of letters to American troops. Specifically solicited were missives addressed to "Any Serviceman" to be sent in care of the two media to a Newark post office box; eventually, in coordination with military and postal authorities, these letters would be delivered to the overseas troops. Importantly, the solicitations were accompanied with stories about the harsh conditions of the Saudi desert and the soldiers' privations.

These actions represent the active participation of news organizations in governmental policy, transcending mere editorialization. The danger of affirmatively organizing on behalf of the government may be seen later, when the policy has turned sour. At that point, the editorial board may be faced with the difficult task of opposing a policy the organization had previously supported. Needless to say, such a history could inhibit the editorial board from taking a novel, critical perspective.

The more prudent role of the news media is to objectively report current events and to take positions, whether favorable or not to the government, in clearly designated editorials. The taking on of active, mobilizing work in support of government policies is outside the scope of the news media's proper role.

William Volonte  
Dunneilen, N.J.

## Questions and answers

**D**AVID STEINBERG IS UPSET THAT ONE OF YOUR readers expressed the view that U.S. taxpayer money should be cut off from human-rights violators, be they in Central America or the Middle East. (Letters, Sept. 12). He then asks a number of questions that should not go unanswered.

Steinberg asks: Does Israel have death squads?

Answer: Yes. Every day, units of the Israeli Army bring death and destruction to the West Bank and Gaza.

Steinberg asks: Is Israel a police state...?

Answer: Yes—check out the military gear on the backs of Israeli soldiers policing the streets of Nablus.

Steinberg asks: ...with no meaningful political choice...

Answer: That's right—no meaningful

political choice for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

Steinberg asks: ...run for the benefit of a couple dozen families to the detriment of an impoverished majority of citizens?

Answer: That's right—run for the benefit of settler families to the detriment of the majority Palestinian population.

Al Daniels  
Washington, D.C.

## More that's fit to print

**N**O DOUBT BERTRAM KORN JR., WRITING AS EXECUTIVE director, Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America, is as entitled as anyone else to deliberate obfuscation or error, but his rather pretentious title seems to give one license to object to his inaccuracies (Letters, Sept. 19).

Israel and her friends would have it understood that the 1982 invasion of Lebanon was "...in response to continuous terrorist raids by Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) forces in Lebanon," but would have it forgotten that those raids had been in recess for the 11 months preceding the invasion. Many feel that Israel's invasion was as much a response to this peaceful self-control by the PLO as it was in memory of earlier "continuous" raids. To forget the 11-month cease-fire, better observed by the PLO than by Israel, is hardly the mark of one dedicated to "accuracy" in reporting.

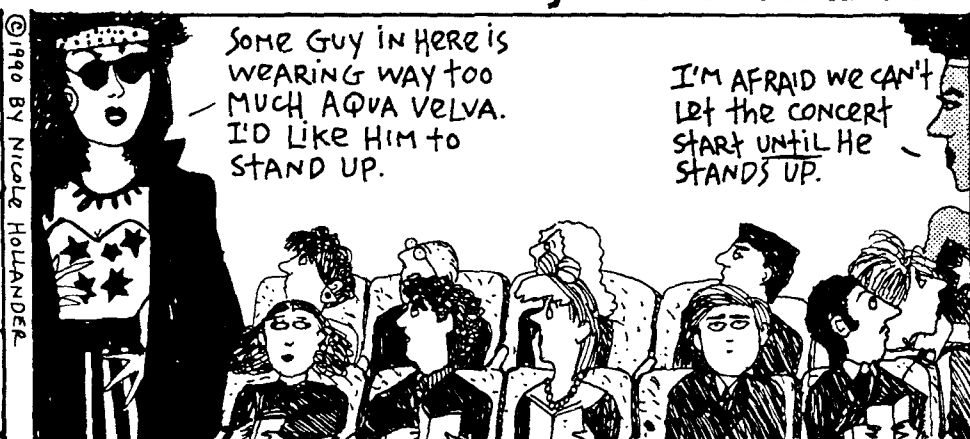
Even Israel's claim that the 1967 war was begun by Arab militance is subject to challenge: not only did Israel fire the first shots of that war, a fact universally agreed to today, but arguably had begun the serious provocations in its shooting down of six Syrian MiGs near Damascus in April 1967.

It is a pity that the Arab states have not followed the PLO in accepting U.N. Resolution 181 (1947), thus accepting the same definition of Israeli legitimacy that Israel accepted in its declaration of statehood and its later entrance application to the U.N. If they were to do so today, a peaceful end to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait might be found and a beginning made to a peaceful end of the Arab-Israeli conflict. But, in all but its economic impact, the latter invasion cannot compare to Israel's invasion of 1982.

Peter A. Belmont  
Lexington, 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.

## SYLVIA



by Nicole Hollander