

APPALL-O-METER

THE IN THESE TIMES INDEX OF INDECENCIES



By David Futrelle

On the beat 4.5

Eager to vanquish once and for all their reputation as wanton head-bashers, the Chicago police treated demonstrators gingerly during this year's Democratic National Convention. But some old-timers apparently still feel a bit of nostalgia for the days of '68. According to the *Washington Post*, one local merchant has made a mint selling T-shirts reading: "Chicago Police: We kicked your father's ass in 1968 ... Wait till you see what we'll do to you." According to the *Post*, police have been "among the most avid buyers" of the T-shirts.

Of course, the protests this year didn't quite live up to the protests in 1968. One group, an outgrowth of the U.S. Junior Chamber of Commerce called Wake Up America, was only able to garner the attention of one spectator at its scheduled 8 a.m. protest—and that one spectator was *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter Steve Rubenstein. Nine police officers stood guard as the rally's speakers invited Rubenstein to join their

crusade against teen smoking and Social Security cut-backs. All movements start small, speaker Tim Jackson told his audience of one, "but when our movement catches on, we'll look back at the people like you who were with us at the beginning." For their part, the police officers never doubted their ability to deal with the crowd, such as it was. "You seem fairly docile," one officer told Rubenstein. "I don't anticipate any problem from you."

Killer smile 9.3

The last time Yigal Amir appeared on the Appall-O-Meter, the convicted assassin of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was looking for a wife. He may not have much trouble finding one: According to a report in the *Chicago Tribune*, a sort of fan club for the assassin has sprung up among

right-wing teenage girls in Israel, several of whom "attended Amir's trial like rock 'n' roll groupies, wrote



him fan letters in jail, put his picture on their walls and glorified his murder of Rabin as an act of patriotism." In a television interview, one of the girls recalled a treasured moment at Amir's trial. "He smiled at me," she gushed. "I love him. He has this wide smile—a sweet smile—very attractive. I have his picture on my wall."

People person 3.2

Taking a stand, sort of, against the cultural conservatives in his party, Bob Dole seems to have embraced a mild form of multiculturalism. At least we think he has. "Jack Kemp is certainly reaching out to black communities," Dole told the *New York Times*, explaining his philosophy. "I've tried over the years. Hispanics. So I'm very optimistic. I feel good. I'm confident. Sleep good. Work hard. I mean, I like to work. I like to campaign. I like people. I was out there the other night with flash-lights."

Appall-O-Meter Scale:

1. Ricki Lake Effect
2. Waterworldly
3. CK Be Bad
4. Tesh-esque
5. Lulla-Bayh boring
6. Suharto heartless
7. Limbaugh low
8. Ralph Reed-icious
9. Morris Dicked
10. Unabombastic

that gave it a negotiating role in setting across-the-board wage raises for all workers.

Many in the labor movement now see the Accord as a disastrous error. It yoked the movement to the ALP's free-market orientation, in effect forcing it to endorse a remorseless erosion of real wages year after year. Meanwhile, labor's paramount body, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), forced a number of shotgun

weddings between trade-based unions, forming 20 or so "super unions."

The effect of all this was to alienate workers from their unions, and to deprive the labor movement of the sense of solidarity necessary for opposition and struggle. The Coalition government has taken advantage of this weakness. New legislation would preserve the arbitration commission as a shell but promote individual contracts between worker and boss, ban the

closed shop, restrict picketing and make it almost impossible for organizers to visit workplaces.

The ACTU has responded by organizing a nationwide campaign of non-violent protest, but its credibility within the union movement has suffered due to its past political spinelessness. Militant unionists are currently taking the first steps toward rethinking strategy for a union movement that is now a smaller player among a range of social movements (among the Canberra demonstrators were Aboriginal activists angry at the new government's return to paternalistic and reactionary policies that minimize the importance of Aboriginal self-determination). They are also trying to develop a politics that views these setbacks as opportunities to find a more universal and collective basis for progressive social change.

—Guy Rundle

DANCING WITH A DICTATOR

Until recently, Illinois Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun walked a fine line on Nigeria. Though she was one of only two members of the Congressional Black Caucus to oppose sanctions on the West African nation for human rights violations, she has worked hard to avoid the appearance of being an uncritical supporter of the country's military regime. But her recent trip to Nigeria crossed the line. She is now widely perceived as an apologist for the regime of Gen. Sani Abacha, which has been described by Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights John Shattuck as conducting a "reign of terror."

Testifying against a Senate sanctions bill in May, Moseley-Braun chose her words carefully. She did not dispute the "propriety" of condemning Nigeria for human rights violations, "the most notable being the Saro-Wiwa execution, the detention of elected officials, and the failure to protect minority rights."

But, she argued, sanctions are unlikely to oust Abacha. Moreover, punishing Nigeria would be inconsistent with lenient U.S. treatment of, say, China. Instead of sanctions, she called for "engagement" and "dialogue."

Most human rights organizations and African-American officials disagreed with her view. "Without the imposition of international sanctions," argued TransAfrica's Randall Robinson, "the Nigerian government has no reason to relinquish power." But at least some praised it as thoughtful and responsible. To Adonis Hoffman, senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment, Moseley-Braun's position on Nigeria made her a "statesman."

Her private trip to Nigeria in August, on the other hand, has found few if any defenders. Before going, she did not notify her chief of staff, Edith Wilson, or the State Department. Upon her return, press accounts suggested that she had cozied up to a dictator, that Wilson had resigned in protest, and that the State Department was unhappy that she had bypassed the customary congressional briefing. Moseley-Braun responded that Wilson was planning to leave anyway. As for the trip, she explained it variously as a private vacation and an exercise of senatorial diplomacy.

If the latter, it was at best not very

artful. During her visit, Moseley-Braun met with Nigerian Foreign Minister Tom Ikimi and told him that as the "only American of African descent in the U.S. Senate," she felt a responsibility "to see to it that U.S. policy is formulated based on facts and not fiction." What kinds of facts and fiction did she have in mind? During their meeting, Ikimi told Moseley-Braun that "it is not true that Nigeria is a country where people are being killed."

This statement came only nine months after Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni political prisoners were executed, and only two months after Mrs. Kudirat Abiola, wife of the imprisoned winner of Nigeria's last presidential elections, was assassinated in suspicious circumstances. Yet if Moseley-Braun made any effort to distance herself from the statement, it was not reported.

The senator also met with Abacha and his wife, whom she apparently knew from several prior visits to Nigeria. She later explained that she wanted to console Mrs. Abacha about her son's death earlier this year. But, according to *Newsweek*, a pro-regime Nigerian newspaper reported that the senator "commended the role of the first lady in the support and promotion of family values and the general improvement of

the welfare of Nigerian families."

Did Moseley-Braun really make this statement, which sounds more like public support for the Abacha regime than a private expression of sympathy for a friend? In her many published explanations since returning home, she has not disavowed it.

Nor, while in Nigeria, did she voice any reported criticism of the regime's human rights record, or meet with such opposition groups as the Campaign for Democracy or the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights. Anthony Omotosho, head of the Chicago-based group Nigerians for Democracy, objected that Moseley-Braun was supporting a "drug-dealing, murderous regime."

If the trip was an embarrassment as diplomacy, it was a public-relations disaster for Moseley-Braun. One journalist accused her of being under the "Svengali-like influence" of her former fiancé and campaign manager, Kgosi Matthews, once a registered lobbyist for Nigeria. Others have implied that her trip was paid for by Nigeria or was illegally funded.

But these allegations—which have yet to be proven—are side issues. The real lesson of Moseley-Braun's misjudgments is that diplomacy is a delicate business. Dialogue with a dictator too easily slips into an embrace.

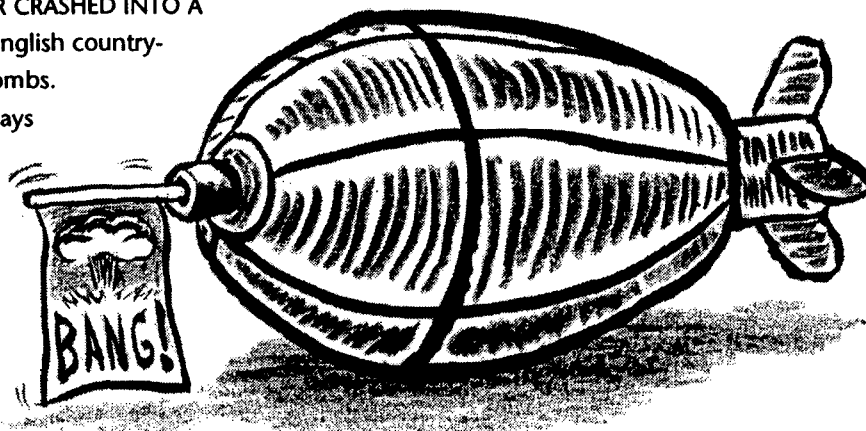
—Doug Cassel

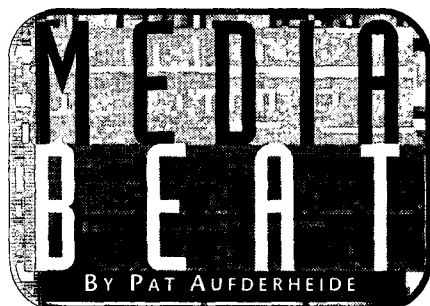
A brush with nuclear disaster

FORTY YEARS AGO, A B-47 AIRCRAFT BOMBER CRASHED INTO A nuclear weapons store in Lakenheath in the English countryside, setting on fire three Mark Six nuclear bombs.

"Preliminary exam by bomb disposal officer says a miracle one Mark Six with exposed detonators sheared didn't go," said Gen. James Walsh, the commanding officer of the U.S. Seventh Air Division, in a private cable to his superior in Washington. At the time of the crash and again in 1979, when the story first emerged in the press, the Pentagon denied that nuclear weapons were damaged or that civilians were ever at risk. The Washington-

based National Resource Defense Council uncovered the declassified documents, including the smoking-gun cable, in the U.S. Library of Congress last year. The papers prove the occurrence of a near-disaster on English soil—and the U.S. government's scandalous initial cover-up. —D.McF.





Beeppers with a catch

In the 1950s, science fiction writer Philip Dick imagined a world in which mosquito-like agents would buzz your ear and whisper advertisements or dunning notices. As usual, he was depressingly prescient. PepsiCo is already marketing a version of Dick's little nightmare: beepers that bring their very own advertisements. Thirsty Mountain Dew addicts who mail in proofs-of-purchase of the sugar-and-caffeine delivery system along with \$35 get a beeper with free airtime. (They can learn all about it at Mountain Dew's Extreme Network Web site, an online club that's really one big commercial.) The only drawback: Every few days one of those beeps will be a call from PepsiCo, offering a commercial from one of 24 advertisers (including Subway, K2 Inline Skates and Foot Action) that want to reach Mountain Dew's target audience, young men.

Dinosaur power

In the age of the Internet, aren't broadcasters dinosaurs? After all, they've lost more than a third of their traditional viewers to cable, video, computers and the great outdoors. All true, but they're still some of the most important players in mass media. In the first quarter of 1996, *Advertising Age* reports, spending by advertisers for network TV rose more than 12 percent—at a time when the overall increase in ad spending was only a little more than 5 percent. (Web advertising is still too small even to be on the charts.) That makes sense, at least in the short run. "Free TV" may have lost a third of its traditional market, but it still reaches more

eyeballs at any one time than any other medium. Those network ad revenues are a healthy reminder of broadcasters' profitability, at a time when they are gnashing their teeth at the cost of providing educational kids' programs and begging the FCC to give them free spectrum space.

Don't confuse me with the facts

One of the peculiarities of the *Wall Street Journal* has long been the ugly divorce between its news—an uneven mix of brilliant investigative features and carefully transcribed press releases—and its fulminating (but influential) editorial pages. Now the *Columbia Journalism Review*, the nation's premier press journal, has done an investigation of the editorial page run by editor Robert Bartley. Writer Trudy Lieberman (a *Consumer Reports* senior investigative editor)

tracked down dozens of disputed editorial assertions over the last few years. The paper was guilty of unfounded personal attacks, innuendo and flat-out errors and took a casual, at best, attitude toward corrections. And the errors had a political payoff. For instance, *Journal* editorials helped scuttle the confirmations of Democratic judicial nominees Bruce Greer (judged guilty by unproven and, in fact, erroneous associations) and Peter Edelman (falsely accused of furloughing a rapist—which he didn't even have the power to do). Meanwhile, the editorial page lashed out against the "liberal shock troops of the D.C. bar" for supposedly disciplining Elliott Abrams, the Reagan-era official implicated in the Iran-contra scandal—committing at least three factual errors in the process. Bartley wisely refused to comment on the *CJR* study, so we'll never know if he's sorry.
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TOMORROW'S NEWS TONIGHT

By Steve Brodner



Clinton convention redefines "baby boom";
thousands of welfare kids are dropped from ceiling.