

# VIEWPOINT

## THE DANGER OF OPPORTUNISM

Robert Poole's REASON editorial ("Libertarian Realpolitik," August 1976) is a disastrous and self-defeating counsel for the Libertarian Party and for the cause of libertarianism in general. Mr. Poole poses a dichotomy between the goal of getting libertarians elected to office, and that of educating people in political philosophy, and he opts strongly for the former. But there are several fallacies with the alleged dichotomy itself. In the first place, the goal of the Libertarian Party should not be to *get elected* but to get elected *as libertarians*. But that means "educating people in political philosophy." Furthermore, Mr. Poole would have the LP stop educating people in libertarianism—and thereby in effect surrender or conceal our basic principles in order to con the public—in exchange for *what*? For I submit that even on his own admitted *Realpolitik* terms, his opportunist counsel is self-defeating. For if the LP simply presents to the public what appears to the average voter (and to myself, for that matter) as a mere carbon-copy of, say, Ronald Reagan (e.g. a balanced budget amendment, and deregulation of industry, which even President Ford favors), why the hell should these voters pull the lever for the miniscule and relatively unknown LP when they could vote for Reagan in the first place? As in the case of the market, it is necessary to *differentiate one's product*, especially in the case of a new and small organization offering itself to the public. Indeed, I submit that those libertarians who want to hide their principles in order to get into office as quickly as possible, have a much more efficient and more *Realpolitik* course open to them: to forget about the Libertarian Party and to join the Democrats or Republicans.

Mr. Poole is also forgetting his *Realpolitik* when he airily suggests that the task of educating the public to libertarian principles be left to "non-party vehicles." One question is: *which* "non-party vehicles"? Since they don't exist, and show no signs of coming into existence, this means that we are left with the Libertarian Party as the

only *realistic* vehicle for such education. This point is enhanced by the fact that the American public seems only to care about political principles *in the context* of electoral campaigns, and also seems chronically uninterested in joining any ideological groups except political parties. All this makes the Libertarian Party the only serious vehicle that we are ever likely to have in educating the public in political philosophy.

But most important, Mr. Poole's gravest error is a failure to think in terms of historical dynamics. It is absurd to think that the LP has a realistic chance of coming to power immediately; such an electoral majority looms only in the future. The first realistic political influence that we could expect the LP to have, as it grows in strength, is—in the great tradition of third parties—to push the establishment parties in a more libertarian direction. And to do this, once again, we have to establish a clear alternative, a direction in which to do the pushing. But, especially, the terms in which Mr. Poole puts his dichotomy are faulty. The prime task of the LP, as well as of whatever non-party vehicles may emerge, should be to *build the libertarian movement*, to build a *cadre* of dedicated libertarians in continuing communication and acting together in the political realm. But in order to do that, we must "educate" people to become such cadre, cadre who will have influence, even on the number of votes, far beyond their own numbers. If he considers this, he will hardly consider it a failure if each political meeting converts a few cadre to the libertarian cause. If Mr. Poole will examine the history of successful "radical" political movements, he will see that that is precisely how they won—not by opportunistically watering down their principles and programs as soon as they began—but by sticking to their principles which are their sole excitement and glory, and thereby building an ever stronger cadre which adheres to them and spreads their influence. For just one important example in our Bicentennial year, I cite Sam Adams, whose revolutionary and libertarian drive for independence and against British state tyranny did not begin as a



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majority; the important thing is that it ended victoriously and with majority support.

Let those who think as Mr. Poole does join the Democratic or Republican parties, and we will see how successful they will be in our allegedly common ultimate goal. But let them leave the Libertarian Party alone to raise the banner to which those who love liberty and are sick of government may repair—and we will be able to see which strategy will prove, in the long run, to be more successful. Let us see, by the way, how much media attention—which Mr. Poole concedes that the LP has had in abundance—the opportunists who sound very much like other Republicans or Democrats will get. And, by the way, before he sings hosannas to Mr. John Curvers' strategy for the Workers Party of Australia, may I point out that I haven't seen *them* take over Australia yet. When they do so, then perhaps it will be time for us to evaluate their strategy, *as well as* what they will be able to accomplish for liberty once they have achieved their cherished office. ■

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# MOVIES

● **SWASHBUCKLER**, the first major pirate film in years, is old-fashioned, romantic, anything but realistic, only slightly tongue-in-cheek, and first-rate entertainment. Robert Shaw and James Earl Jones head an able cast of derring-do pirates, folk heroes to the people of Jamaica and thorns in the side of the island's utterly corrupt Royal Governor (played with convincing menace by Peter Boyle). Genevieve Bujold turns in a fiery performance as a fearless, liberated and determined young rebel, who enlists the aid of Shaw and his pirates to free her father from Boyle's dungeon. Beau Bridges is comical as the slogan-spouting, ineffectual officer assigned by Boyle to do battle with the pirates. The literate script by Jeffrey Bloom, from a story by Paul Wheeler, bristles with frequent swordplay and sparkling dialogue. Especially effective are a daring rescue of James Earl Jones from the gallows in the film's opening sequence, and a verbal confrontation between Bujold and Boyle near the end. A few of the sequences are deliberately overplayed,

but for the most part *Swashbuckler* is designed to elicit cheers rather than laughter. Rated "PG."

—Charles F. Barr

● **THE OMEN** is an obvious, contrived and labored effort to cash in on the financial success of *The Exorcist*. But the enterprise is not likely to succeed, because it shortchanges the audience on every ingredient except explicit gore (including a hideous beheading). The plot, tenuously based upon a Biblical prediction of the coming of the Antichrist, finds a U.S. diplomat and his wife (he wittingly, she unwittingly) bringing up a child who is not their own. By the time he is five, it is obvious that not only is the kid a devil, he is *the* devil. This is demonstrated by the awful things that happen whenever he gives out with glassy-eyed, significant stares, and by his refusal to go to church. From here on, the plot gets murkier and murkier, despite the best efforts of Gregory Peck and Lee Remick to keep it afloat. All the overworked clichés are present:

a pair of guilt-ridden priests, a midnight visit to an abandoned graveyard (why not high noon instead?), an arcane ritual to destroy the Beast from Hell. Worse, *The Omen* (in sharp contrast to *The Exorcist*) is suffused with an atmosphere of impotent good and efficacious evil. From the standpoint of believability, the movie's greatest flaw is that regardless of the external evidence, the child simply does not act like Satan reincarnated; he behaves like a five-year-old child. And without this believability, *The Omen* becomes a pointless exercise in mysticism and gore. Rated "R."

—C.F.B.

● Although few science fiction movies have atomic monsters now, the typical sf film is still likely to be a bit of fluff like *Logan's Run*—heavy on special effects, short on depth. **THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH** is different; it treats serious themes *seriously* and with great sophistication. Some hardcore sf fans may not like it because it is not a straight-forward action film à la Asimov but unlike many "artsy" films, this one works.

David Bowie plays the alien who comes to Earth on a desperate mission to save his world and, disguised as human, builds a fantastic Howard Hughes-like technological empire. Bowie's characterization is one of the film's strongest points; his sensitive performance, his mysterious manner and strange, beautiful face create an aura that is fascinating and perfect for the role. The performances of the supporting cast (Candy Clark, Rip Torn, Buck Henry) are also outstanding.

Although the style is somewhat avant-garde, it is essentially a romantic, even moralistic, film that indicts power and corruption. The innocent, totally good hero is no threat to humans yet is menaced by a powerful government that considers his innovations "technologically overstimulating" and a threat to the "social ecology." On a psychological level, the hero struggles poignantly against succumbing to the corruptions of this society and to the alienation of being different and the alienation of despair and loss of loved ones.

Because of the style, the story is sometimes obscure but the hypnotic effect of the visual imagery, Bowie's extraordinary performance and the poignancy and power of the themes more than make up for the flaws. It is a beautiful and thoroughly fascinating film. Rated "R."

—Sharon Presley



James Earl Jones, Genevieve Bujold and Robert Shaw escape from angry soldiers in *SWASHBUCKLER*.