

washington watch

Education Tax Credits

Education tax credits remain the best opportunity in this session of Congress for a victory with which libertarians can feel really comfortable. It will not be an easy one. The public education establishment and its allies in government and the media have mounted an impressive lobbying campaign against it. Perhaps they feel the same sorts of possibilities are inherent in any scheme to allow people more freedom of choice in education which some of us feel, except in reverse.

Letters to your Congressman and Senators are very important at this juncture. The education lobby is able to generate tremendous amounts of mail, and they have legislation, the Administration proposal for more grants and scholarships, which they can claim will give parents some relief from the high cost of education. However many legislators can see the superiority of a simple tax credit system compared to adding yet another layer of bureaucracy and spending more taxpayers' money. They may need only a few letters on the tax credit side to counterbalance the organization-generated mail on the other side. But they may be getting little mail on that side now, compared with a large volume from the teachers unions and their allies. So your letter could be extremely important.

(US Senate, Washington, DC, 20510; US House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.)

Gun Control by the Back Door?

The US Treasury's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms has published a proposed regulation, scheduled to go into effect May 22, which looks like a big move toward national registration of all firearms. The regulations, if they are allowed to go into effect, would require all transactions of firearms within existing federally licensed commerce to be reported quarterly to the BATF. This involves 688,000 quarterly reports a year from licensed dealers (at a cost to dealers of about \$8 million per year), and computerizing between 35 and 40 million firearms transactions each year.

In 1975 the Treasury Department told Congress that it should not act to centralize existing records without new authority from Congress. At that time, BATF esti-

mated it could trace a firearm in 27 minutes if the priority were high enough. The only justification for this centralization is expansion of bureaucratic authority and a real desire to register firearms.

Many people are speculating that this move is Carter's means of putting *de facto* gun registration in place without having to get a vote for it in Congress. This may not be formal gun registration, but if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck....

Congress can act to nullify these regulations if there is enough pressure. Please write to your Congressman and Senators protesting the new BATF firearms regulations.

Humphrey-Hawkins

The House passed the final version of the Humphrey-Hawkins national economic planning bill in March, and the Senate Human Resources Committee is now working on a Senate version. The amendments passed in the House indicated Congressmen are really living in fantasyland, dreaming that the economy will respond as desired if only you pass laws mandating progress. An amendment to set a specific inflation goal of 3% was replaced by one with vaguer wording. An amendment proposed by James Jeffords (R-VT) did prevent the Administration from using public service jobs as real jobs in figuring unemployment levels. But another amendment would include maintenance of farm income at 100% parity as one of the goals of Humphrey-Hawkins. Amendments which failed in the House but may be brought up in the Senate include a requirement for tax cuts, a balanced budget, and one which changes the reporting of unemployment to a system more closely resembling reality.

The important point to get across, in letters to Senators, is that Humphrey-Hawkins embodies several basic fallacies, and is not capable of being perfected by amendment. The notion that the federal government should assume paternalistic responsibility is widespread, but nonetheless wrongheaded, not to mention being one of the major sources of the economy's present travails. Humphrey-Hawkins, besides the enormous expense involved, would enshrine in law the germinal institutions of centralized economic planning. Similar types of planning, whether compulsory or "indicative" have proven dis-

astrous in other countries.

Without more effective opposition, I am afraid Humphrey-Hawkins will pass in a relatively noxious form. There is still a chance that the Senate will "committee it to death" and not vote on it this year. But Senators need to hear from the opposition. If Humphrey-Hawkins passes, we will pay for it dearly in years to come.

Airline Regulatory Reform

The Senate has passed the Kennedy airline regulatory reform bill, in a slightly stronger version than that brought forward by the Commerce Committee. This action places a bit of heat on the House Aviation Subcommittee, which has been sitting on a similar bill. There seems to have been some motion in the House in the last month or so, but letters to your Congressman would be especially helpful.

Incidentally, Rep. Elliott Levitas (D-GA) who proposed the substitute which would call for little reform now but abolition of the CAB in 1983, professes to be horrified that people saw this as a ploy to derail the reform movement. He really is sincere about wanting to abolish the CAB, he claims. This is encouraging, but one must doubt whether Congress would really let it happen unless the climate of opinion changes dramatically between now and 1983 (which we hope it will, of course, but one can't be sure.)

A What?

Rep. John Breckenridge (D-KY) thinks we need a horse census. He's pushing a bill to require the Agriculture Dept. to take a count of both farm and nonfarm horses to help the horse industry know what its market is.

The American Horse Protection League, which tries to prevent commercial exploitation of horses, opposes the bill, noting that it would cost taxpayers about \$2.5 million per year to do market surveys for the horse industry.

Contrary to rumors, the bill does not stipulate that the census will be taken by counting the legs and dividing by four.

Alan Bock

LUCIFER'S LEXICON

by L. A. Rollins

addictive, *adj.* Having an inelastic demand curve.

overdose, *n.* Too much of a good thing.

school spirit, *n.* Ardent loyalty to the school one is forced to attend.

movies

• Straight Time • Semi-Tough • The Betsy • The One and Only

• One of the few "heavy" films thus far in 1978, **STRAIGHT TIME** is well scripted and deftly acted by Dustin Hoffman and others. Its direction is low-keyed, and often a sense of dramatic propulsiveness is lost in meandering chit-chat (largely among members of the criminal underworld), which does, however, add some atmospheric touches. One could argue plausibly that it was best handled in this way. At any rate, this is not the film's main problem—which is that one quickly loses sympathy for the central character. After he commits a few stickups while on parole and kills out of pure vengeance, one realizes that far from being a misunderstood ex-adolescent, he was brutally vicious all along and would have gone back to crime with or without benefit of a parole officer. One tends to lose much of one's interest in a film if after the first half hour one no longer cares much whether the central character lives or dies.

One would not see this film for amusement: aside from a few moments of sick comedy it is almost unrelievedly depressing. One would not go for aesthetic experience, since it is not that masterful a work of art. If anything, one would go for information and insight into the lives of prisoners on parole. If the film is supposed to give us insight into the *mind* of even one such character, it is not very successful—it isn't easy to fathom what is going through the protagonist's mind as he robs stores and banks. If it is supposed to enlist sympathy for the plight of ex-prisoners under the restrictions of parole (which would have been a highly legitimate enterprise), it is still less successful, since the characters chosen apparently didn't deserve even parole. Whether intentionally or not, the message that does clearly come through is "never trust an ex-con," for—one after another—every one of those depicted in this film, even under the slightest pressure, slips quickly and easily back into a life of crime. In the film the rate of recidivism is 100 percent, which unfortunately is only a few percentage points higher than it is in real life.

—John Hoppers

• To have your girlfriend marry your best friend is, to put it mildly, **SEMI-TOUGH**. It's supposed to be about professional

football, but this is only an occasional backdrop to the theme of the picture, which is a love-with-feigned-indifference triangle involving Burt Reynolds, Kris Kristofferson, and Jill Clayburgh, as well as Robert Preston as the girl's father. The actors are at their relaxed best in this film, and part of the time, at least, one enjoys watching their shenanigans as they meander from one incident to another.

As in its equally foul-mouthed predecessor, *Slap Shot*, the humor is coarse but authentic. There is one scene that is hilariously funny, involving a large group-therapy session in which various bits of verbal mumbo-jumbo are supposed to act as catalysts to release the patients' pent-up emotions (if any). However it may have been intended, it comes off as a raucous travesty of the real thing. The remainder of the film, including the plot, is readily forgettable within a few minutes after leaving the theater. But for escapist entertainment one could do worse.

—J.H.

• **THE BETSY** is not a worthy vehicle for the talents of Laurence Olivier, although his role, covering a wide spectrum of emotions, is a meaty one, and it is always a pleasure to see him in whatever role he plays. That he has the starring role in this film is the best single thing about it.

The failure of the film is more the fault of Harold Robbins' book, on which it is based, than of the cinematic treatment itself. The flashbacks to 1931 and back to 1976 are only mildly irritating, not really confusing. But with scenes of every kind juxtaposed with no apparent regard for their cumulative effect, the total result is so dispersed as to leave no powerful thrust in any one direction. Even when individual scenes are intense and well done, their effect is lost in the whole. Some of the motivation, too, is murky: if the only reason why No. 1 (Olivier) voted to stop production of the car he designed was to save the life of his favorite employee (Tommy Lee Jones), why does he still want to hold back production after that employee has become his rival and enemy?

That it takes years of training and effort to design and build improved automobiles is not a fact of which the viewer of this film is made aware, even though the

ostensible subject of the film is the attempt to mass-produce for the American public a superior car which will get 60 miles to the gallon. There is one good scene (a board meeting) in which the car-makers fight the increasing demands of government bureaucracy, but it is so brief as to have little impact and nothing like it turns up in the film again. The strongest impressions left with the viewer are (1) that automobile tycoons lead very flaky sex lives, and (2) that all the really important men in industry have their own Mafia which they can use to inflict their will when push comes to shove.

If these two features were the only ones that distinguished inventors and designers from other people, no cars would ever have got built; but not once is any such fact brought to the viewer's attention during this film. That carmakers have to be achievers in a highly competitive market is hardly even suggested; that they are rich wastrels who ought to have it taken away from them, come the revolution, is something the viewer after seeing the film will be much more likely to sympathize with. The film could well be used in the Soviet Union to confirm all their propaganda about the evils of American capitalism; but the bureaucrats there will probably not have the brains to do it.

—J.H.

• Henry Winkler, **THE ONE AND ONLY**, does an engaging and credible portrayal, in the leading role, of a basically insecure person who overcompensates by telling the world how great he is. His zaniness is quite different from that of the character he portrays on television; both actor and script-writer appear to have thought out the role better than in most current comedies. His wife-fiance is also believable, though much less clearly delineated. After that point, however, the characterizations tend to become caricatures, especially her parents. Caricature, especially when carried to extremes, doesn't produce very effective comedy, as the comic greats from Chaplin and Keaton on long ago discovered.

The film isn't really all that funny. Nor is it deep or probing. Nor does it make a point of any significance. It tells a semi-comic, semi-melodramatic story with one character at least with whom one can empathize to a limited extent. The script and direction are adequate without being in any way noteworthy. The most that can be said for the film is that it is mildly entertaining from time to time. Still, it's a lot better than staying home and watching television, even Winkler's own series.

—J.H.