

By Kelly G. Ross

## Lawyer for The Little Guy

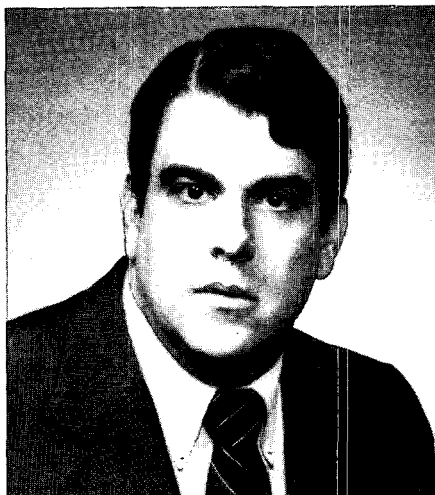
**D**an Popeo was following the path hoped for by many of his fellow Georgetown Law School graduates: a position on the legal staff in the Nixon White House, a brief stint in the US attorney general's office, and a job as a trial attorney at the Department of Interior. The next logical step was a lucrative offer from one of the capital's distinguished law firms.

But Popeo, the son of a working-class family, was offended by his cases at Interior. Handed the responsibility for enforcing health and safety regulations often capricious and petty in nature, he found that his opponents in court were often struggling entrepreneurs. The last straw, Popeo related in a recent interview, was when he found himself seeking a court injunction to "close down a one-man mine operation because the owner didn't have a two-way radio to talk to himself, or a stretcher to carry himself out of the mine if injured."

So instead of moving up to a plush office on Pennsylvania Avenue with an extensive law library and legions of support staff, Popeo in 1976 borrowed \$15,000 to establish the nonprofit Washington Legal Foundation. His quarters: a \$100-a-month cubicle with \$100 worth of office furniture. His only law library was across town at his alma mater, and Popeo's wife served as secretary, typing briefs at home in the evenings.

Today, the Washington Legal Foundation is one of the country's largest nonprofit public-interest law centers. Its latest annual report cites over 200,000 members and supporters nationwide. Ensclosed in their own four-story renovated townhouse in one of Washington's fashionable areas, the foundation's 13-member staff has gained national recognition for work in the courts, regulatory agencies, and public-policy arena.

Once the sole province of the liberal left, "public-interest law" is now practiced by a score of conservative and libertarian organizations across the nation. "Groups like the Washington Legal Foundation," says Popeo, "have every intention of using the courts for free enterprise, for a free market, and for a limited government in all the ways, with



Dan Popeo

all the methods, that the ACLU, Ralph Nader, and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund have used the courts for years."

Several of the foundation's most-publicized cases in defense of freedom have involved a party usually absent from American courtrooms—the Soviet government. Popeo's group first challenged the Russians in 1983 when they defended the right of the city of Glen Cove, New York, to bar vacationing Soviet diplomatic staff from municipal recreation facilities. The city, which contended that most of those involved were in fact KGB agents, was ultimately unsuccessful in its effort, but the dispute was featured in a segment of *60 Minutes*.

A year later, the foundation filed a complaint in the US Court of International Trade seeking to enforce a 1930 law that bars the importation of goods made by slave or forced labor. The action was prompted by a CIA report that some three dozen products imported from the Soviet Union fall into such a category. A move to implement the required ban by the US Customs Service was blocked by Treasury Secretary Donald Regan.

The complaint is still pending, as is the foundation's defense of Vanna Om Strinko, a Cambodian refugee who is being prosecuted for her peaceful protest in front of the Soviet embassy in Washington. Unlike the nearly 2,000 people who

have been arrested since November 1984 for breaking the same law in front of the South African embassy but whose charges are routinely dropped, the diminutive Mrs. Strinko—now an American citizen—faces a maximum possible penalty of 60 days in jail and a \$100 fine.

Popeo is angered by the double standard often evident among liberals. "You don't see the do-gooders and so-called human rights activists arguing against slave-made goods, or the ACLU running to the defense of Mrs. Strinko," he says in exasperation.

His organization and others like it, says Popeo, are engaged in "a war of legal ideas and a dispute over how to govern." On the other side, he sees activists who use the courts "to pursue radical social and political agendas that they couldn't possibly accomplish at the ballot box." Counters Popeo: "I don't think anybody ever wanted the US district judges to become America's modern-day Founding Fathers, rewriting our Constitution in the courts."

On the same side as the courts in this "war of legal ideas" is the government-funded Legal Services Corporation ("all the money they've used to pursue their own radical agenda could have been used for legal services for the poor"). Then there are all the "so-called public-interest spokesmen, who over the years have built up the role of government in making sure that business profits don't get too big—because the bigger a business, 'obviously' there's corruption or exploitation of the worker going on."

But he concedes that citizens and voters themselves bear some of the blame for government's intrusiveness in their lives. "The American people," he charges, "have been turned into the biggest bunch of babies! Every time something goes wrong, the first thing they do is look to the government for a solution or an answer."

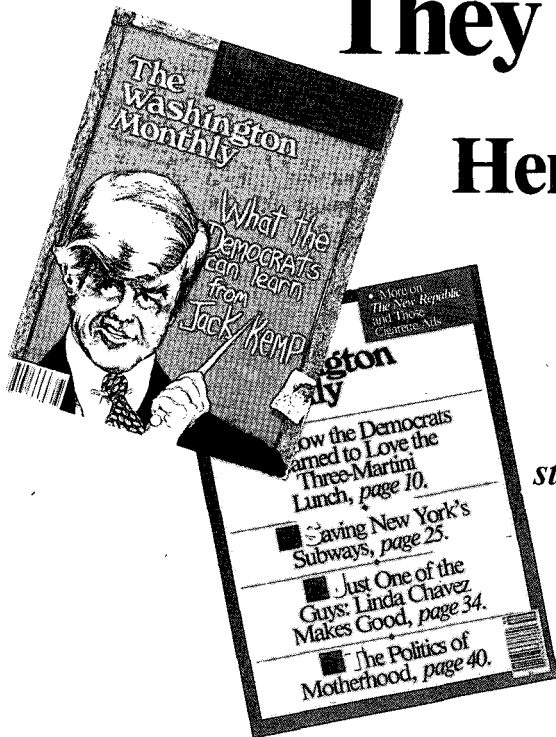
But even after such serious rumination, Popeo can't help but lean back and, with a wide grin, exclaim, "But I'm having a hell of a lot of fun!"

*Kelly Ross is the director of public affairs of the Reason Foundation.*

# John Kenneth Galbraith

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RE 95

## The Big, Bad B Movies

By John Ahrens

**M**ovies, claimed D. W. Griffith, would make war literally impossible. They would present such a compelling picture of the true brotherhood of man, argued this pioneer American filmmaker, that even the most untutored provincial could not fail to grasp its meaning.

Well, . . . maybe. It was in 1924 that Griffith made this optimistic prediction about the social impact of movies, and he didn't expect it to be realized in less than a century. But if he was right, a lot of contemporary film-makers are going to be looking for a new line of work. For there just doesn't seem to be much peace, love, and brotherhood in the movies, especially the "B movies" that are cranked out by the dozens every year.

Last year at Christmastime, mothers across the nation voiced complaints about TV ads for one of them, *Silent Night, Deadly Night*; it seems that their children were frightened by a fellow in a Santa suit who comes with an axe to punish bad children. Brian De Palma's recent Hitchcock thriller, *Body Double*, provoked the usual outrage among feminists; they are troubled by a movie in which the hero is a peeping Tom, a young woman is murdered with a very large power drill, and the clue to the killer's identity is found in a sleazy porn flick. And *Terminator*, which featured Arnold Schwarzenegger in 90 minutes of totally gratuitous mayhem, led the pack in box office receipts.

Of course, violence, sadism, and sexual perversion are not the only themes that characterize B movies. But it is the horror and science fiction movies—those populated by monsters, mutants, weird aliens, sex-crazed slashers—that generate the most outrage. Since the very first child had a nightmare after seeing *Frankenstein* at the matinee, the defenders of decency and good taste have condemned Hollywood for pandering to our basest instincts. And Hollywood has been forced to shoulder a good deal of the blame for violence, promiscuity, drug abuse, simple-mindedness, and other ills that beset society.



This is the simple explanation for the popularity of B movies, and the simple critique. But it just won't wash. B movies certainly aren't art, and they seldom present a very uplifting picture of human existence. But the history of B movies suggests that they provide audiences with something much more substantial than cheap thrills and that they are much more a symptom than a cause of the ills of society.

**T**he B movies got their start in the 1930s, the depression era, when Hollywood had to tighten its belt along with the rest of the country. Producers discovered that there are many ways to

save money on movies and still attract a sizable audience: reliance on formulas saves money on script development, actors need not be stars or even competent, and formula plots don't usually require expensive sets or locations. A genre film—Western, science fiction, horror, detective—can therefore be cheap to make and will usually attract a sizable audience simply because people know in advance what to expect.

Film genres are by and large the same as literary genres, and most of them have been around since the beginning of the movies. But in film, as in literature, genres evolve. And, not surprisingly, this evolution parallels changes in the worldview of B-movie audiences.

The typical horror and science fiction movies of the '30s and '40s drew extensively on the supernatural: vampires and werewolves were popular, as were other "unnatural" creatures like King Kong or Frankenstein's monster. But the evil depicted in these movies was of a thoroughly natural sort. Someone was overcome by uncontrollable impulses, to drink blood or to bay at the moon and consume raw flesh. Or someone meddled with forces that human beings were not meant to understand and control.

That such stories should be popular in the Western world is no surprise. Western culture has always exhibited an interest in subjecting "evil" human nature to the domination of reason and society and an insistence that there are strict limits to what it is right and proper for human beings to know or to attempt. In short, we have always been afraid of ourselves and of what we might do if we ever lose control and give in to our natural impulses.

This fear is not without justification, and this is what gives the horror and science fiction movies of the '30s and '40s, as well as the endless cycle of sequels, remakes, and updated versions, their continuing appeal. When nature overcomes reason, as in *The Wolfman* (1941), or when man probes too deeply into nature's secrets, as in *Frankenstein* (1931) or *The Invisible Man* (1933), there is never any doubt what the outcome will be. The audience knows what to expect, because viewers have been warned time and again by parents, teachers, and preachers.