

Minor-League Las Vegas

In the Bluegrass State

JAMES A. MAXWELL

VISITORS to Cincinnati often find the natives painfully smug about the lofty morality of their city. Within certain limits, this self-approbation is understandable. There hasn't been a first-rate municipal scandal in the town in more than thirty years; the local government is regularly cited in textbooks for its efficiency and freedom from corruption; and gambling is largely restricted to church-sponsored bingo.

Recently a friend of mine from New York was in Cincinnati. During the first few days of his stay, he was astonished at the degree of rectitude in this large industrial city and mildly annoyed with the residents for their complacency. Then I had lunch with him after he had been in town for about a week, and it was obvious from the knowing look on his face that he had made an important discovery.

"I finally figured out how this city of yours remains so pure," he said with deep satisfaction. "Last night I had some time on my hands and a man I met in the hotel bar suggested that I get in a cab and go across the river to Newport, Kentucky. What an eye opener! No wonder Cincinnati has many of the aspects of a Girl Scout camp. You keep all your sin in another state, just a ten-minute cab ride away."

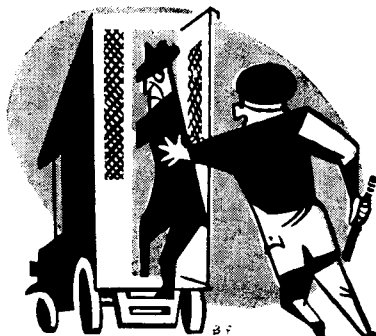
'Action' Across the Ohio

There was considerable justification in my friend's comments. Campbell County, Kentucky, where Newport is located, usually operates as a minor-league Las Vegas oriented to inculcate in a man the faith that he can profitably flout the laws of probability. There are, as well, numerous accommodating women to be found in the area, and there is no need for a thirsty man with the price of a drink in his pocket to endure his parched condition at any hour of the day or night.

Prostitution and after-hours drink-

ing are, however, minor businesses in Campbell County. Gambling is the big industry there, and the man eager for "action" can find it in almost any setting he desires, from a plush night club to a shabby "bust-out joint."

Beverly Hills Country Club, about six miles from the center of Cincinnati, is one of the most attractive night clubs in the country. The floor shows regularly feature such top performers as Lena Horne, Joe E. Lewis, Pearl Bailey, and Johnny Ray, and a good orchestra is always on the bandstand. The main dining room is large and handsome, and the food, drinks, and service are excel-



lent. New Yorkers are usually startled by the modest total on the Beverly check. The Beverly Hills has no cover charge, drinks are moderately priced, and an excellent steak dinner is served for \$4.50.

What makes this economic legerdemain possible is, of course, a large room on the side of the building where the gambling takes place. Conceivably a stranger to Beverly Hills might never learn of the existence of this room. It is located at a discreet distance from the dining room and no employee ever suggests to a customer that he try his hand at a game of chance. The word does get around, however.

The gambling emporium is large and well lighted, and is almost as quiet as an office building on a Sunday afternoon. Deep pile carpeting

muffles footsteps, and the customers, their faces the traditional masks of stoical impassivity, are silent. Only the occasional monotone calls from the men running the games, the rattle of dice, and the click of roulette balls disturb the stillness. Incidentally, this decorum is not observed because of fear of attracting the attention of the police. Beverly Hills merely attracts well-mannered gamblers.

On a fairly busy evening, there are usually in operation two or three crap tables, a couple of roulette games, a chuck-a-luck session, and several blackjack games. A number of years ago before the Federal government took an active interest in gambling, Beverly Hills, like almost every other Campbell County establishment, including drugstores, had slot machines. These have disappeared since the imposition of the Federal \$250 annual tax on each of these devices.

Peeling Belles

If the gambler prefers somewhat earthier *divertissement* and a simpler background for his activities, he can go to the Glenn Rendezvous. This was once an intimate supper club with floor shows more or less comparable with those at the Beverly Hills, but now the entertainment is directed to strip-tease fans. The gambling room, adjacent to the dining room, is considerably smaller in scope than its counterpart at Beverly Hills, but there are adequate means available for those who want to bet against the house odds.

Newport also has a number of places such as the Flamingo Club, the Yorkshire Club, Glenn Schmidt's Playtorium, and the Merchants' Club. These have no floor shows but do offer good food at reasonable prices as a lure to customers. In addition to the usual games of chance, most such places do a brisk business in racing bets and most of them have elaborate facilities for recording results from tracks throughout the country.

ALL THE LARGER gambling halls guard their reputations for honesty as scrupulously as the French bourgeoisie do the chastity of their marriageable daughters, but a number of small "bust-out joints," dis-

dainful of the usual percentages favoring the operator, employ dice of dubious symmetry, marked cards, and similar aids to increasing the house profits. If a player should have such phenomenal luck as to overcome these handicaps, he is sometimes forcibly relieved of his winnings on his way home.

Tangled Arms of the Law

Operating a gambling hall in northern Kentucky, however, is not without its complications. Gambling is illegal in the state, a fact that forces a proprietor to maintain amicable relationships with a host of law-enforcement agencies, several of which may, at a given moment, be working at cross purposes.

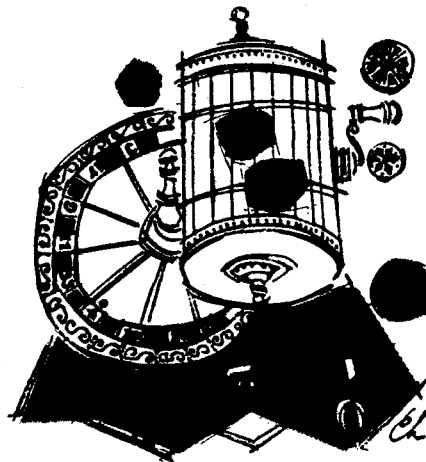
For example, in Newport an owner's business routine can be disturbed by the city police, the county police, the state police, agents of the State Alcoholic Control Board, and, if he has failed to purchase the \$50 "gambler's" stamp required by Federal law, even by raiding representatives of the U.S. Bureau of Internal Revenue.

Frequently the gambler is caught in a political crossfire. If, for instance, the governor is annoyed with the politicians in northern Kentucky, he may send the state police into Campbell County to close all of the gambling establishments. Or, if the objective is harassment rather than outright warfare, state liquor agents may visit the area, discover to their consternation that games of chance are taking place in bars and restaurants, and suspend the liquor licenses for a week or two.

There have been periods in the past when even various branches of the Newport police department have shown a deplorable lack of teamwork in law enforcement. About two years ago, for example, detective Jack Thiem, accompanied by a photographer from the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, raided Glenn Schmidt's Playtorium. Presumably, Thiem was surprised and somewhat embarrassed to find there Police Chief George Gugel and three detectives from his own office. The photographer, of course, recorded this curious encounter and was promptly arrested by Chief Gugel, who destroyed the film. Gugel was temporarily retired from the force,

more because of the cries of outrage from newspapers over his treatment of the photographer than for his choice of recreation. But Newport is not a town to take such peccadilloes seriously, and Gugel was soon returned to his job, which he still holds. Thiem, however, was fired, presumably for an unforgivable breach of professional etiquette.

A minor occupational hazard to the northern Kentucky gambler is the grand jury, which is often filled with citizens who take a hostile view to open flouting of the law. Therefore whenever the jury is to be con-



vened, all gambling equipment goes into cupboards and the operators take a vacation in Florida. These interruptions to business are infrequent and usually brief. Most of the proprietors accept them philosophically.

Gugel Goggles

The most damaging blow dealt northern Kentucky gambling in recent years was the 1951 hearings of the Senate crime-investigating committee, which characterized the area as "one of the worst gambling spots in the nation." Malcolm Rhodes, a former city manager of Newport, told the Senators that an estimated \$10 million is annually spent on gambling in the region. "Gambling," he said, "has gone on there for some fifty years or longer."

The investigation revealed that a major part of the gambling was controlled by a syndicate of Cleveland and Kentucky men, a number of whom found themselves in disfavor with the Internal Revenue Bureau. After reading of the size of the oper-

ation, the Bureau felt that many of the gamblers had been something less than accurate in filling out their income-tax forms.

One of the most interesting witnesses at the Senate hearings was Chief Gugel, who professed to be dumfounded to learn about the state of affairs in Newport. The Committee was understandably puzzled about his ignorance of these matters.

"Would you be surprised to know there is gambling going on?" counsel for the Committee asked at one point.

"For me, yes, because I've never been in there," Gugel answered virtuously. "All I know is what somebody told me."

Gambling in northern Kentucky went into a sharp decline after the Senate hearings and remained at low ebb for some time, but the man with an urge to wager could always find someone in Campbell County willing to oblige him. Activity gradually increased and, by 1955, most of the regular halls were in full unabashed operation. Last April, Federal agents raided a number of places that did not have the \$50 stamp—all establishments with stamps continued to function without interference—but that has been the only important interruption in several years.

THERE is little evidence that the citizens of Campbell County have any strong desire to change the status quo. As a Federal Grand Jury sadly reported a few years ago, "There does not seem to be a majority sentiment in favor of enforcing anti-gambling statutes. . . . Candidates pledged to enforce such statutes have been recently defeated at the polls."

Although there are a few church groups that rail against the situation, they seem to have little popular support. The Newport Civic Association probably comes close to expressing the people's will with its slogan, "Clean up but not close up Newport."

Chief Gugel retains the touching innocence he displayed before the Senate committee. From time to time, he issues fierce warnings—echoed, it should be added, by various state and county officials—of the dire fate that awaits any crapshooter who sets foot in northern Kentucky.

Rokossovsky: Pole or Russian?

ISAAC DEUTSCHER

AT THE BEGINNING of last October two Polish politicians visited me in my home in Surrey, England, to discuss the situation in Poland. This was shortly before the upheaval in Warsaw as a result of which Wladyslaw Gomulka was to return to power and Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky was to be dismissed from the Polish Politburo and Ministry of Defense. My guests, old acquaintances and prewar comrades, described the inner alignments in the Polish Workers Party, the conflict in its midst between the pro-Stalinist Natolin Group and the anti-Stalinists, the attitudes of individual leaders, and the prospects of an approaching denouement. They themselves belonged, of course, to the anti-Stalinist wing and, firmly yet with reservations, backed Gomulka.

At one point of our discussion I asked: "And where does the army stand in this conflict? What do you think Rokossovsky is going to do? May he not throw his weight behind the Natolin Group and stage a coup against you?"

"Rokossovsky?" My visitors were surprised by the question. "No, we don't expect any difficulty from him. He will probably play no role at all in the coming crisis. He has kept aloof from the inner party struggle, but he has indicated anti-Stalinist feelings more than once. In any case, we can count on his absolute loyalty to the Central Committee, whose orders he will carry out; and in the Central Committee the Stalinists are already an isolated minority. No, no, Rokossovsky is certainly not the man to stage a coup against the Central Committee."

YET A FEW DAYS later when the Central Committee met for its now famous session and when Khrushchev and his colleagues suddenly descended on Warsaw, the danger of a military coup appeared to be quite real. Warsaw was astir with

rumors about movements of Russian and Polish troops. Rokossovsky, far from playing no part in the crisis, found himself in its very center. Indeed, it was the question of his re-election to the Politburo rather than Gomulka's return to power that brought the conflict between the Stalinists and the anti-Stalinists to a head. The Natolin Group had already reconciled itself to Gomulka's return: "Re-elect Rokossovsky!" was its battle cry. Since the battle was joined over Rokossovsky, the anti-Stalinists, some of whom held him responsible for the sinister troop movements and for the threat of a Stalinist coup demanded—and got—his dismissal.

Yet my anti-Stalinist visitors, who assured me so confidently of Rokossovsky's sympathy with their attitude, were not altogether mistaken. Rokossovsky was undoubtedly one of the most authentic anti-Stalinists in Poland, an anti-Stalinist of much longer standing than Gomulka, for instance. Few could have stronger reasons for hating Stalinism than Rokossovsky. Yet it was as a symbol of Stalinism that he was dismissed from all his posts and had to leave Warsaw. What accounts for this paradox?

You Can't Go Home Again

The city from which he has been so ingloriously expelled was his birthplace. It was Warsaw, at the turn of the century when Poland was ruled by a Tsarist Governor-General, where he spent his childhood and early youth. Only during the First World War did he find himself, together with many other Poles, in Russia. Yet from that time on something like a curse seemed to bar him from his native city. On at least three occasions, each time when the city's fate hung in the balance, he returned or attempted to return to it. And every time disaster lay in wait for him.

The October Revolution in 1917 was to him, as to many left-wing Poles in Russia, a supreme act of liberation. In 1919, in the midst of civil war, when Lenin's government was on the brink of defeat, the twenty-three-year-old Rokossovsky volunteered for the Red Army and joined the Communist Party. No problem of national loyalty was as yet involved in this. After about 150 years of Poland's incorporation in the Russian Empire, it was up to a point natural for Poles to be involved in Russian politics. Poles—it is enough to mention Dzerzhinski and Radek—played a prominent part in the Bolshevik leadership. And Moscow did not as yet think of re-annexing the territories of nations that had been annexed by the Russian Empire. The ideals of the Revolution still held the hearts and minds of foreigners.

A YEAR later, however, in 1920, the young Rokossovsky was marching on Warsaw with the Red Army. He marched with high hopes and enthusiasm, and there was still no question for him of any conflict of national loyalties. He believed himself to be fighting in an international civil war, not in a war between nations; and the Red Army's march on Warsaw had been preceded and provoked by Pilsudski's march on Kiev. It was, indeed, the Polish left-wing expatriates in Russia who most resolutely urged Lenin to pursue Pilsudski's troops into the Polish capital and beyond, for they believed that the Polish workers and peasants would welcome the Red Army and rise against the Polish landlords and capitalists. Lenin shared the hope, although Trotsky, the Commissar of War, and Radek, the most brilliant of the Poles in Moscow, were opposed to the offensive on Warsaw.

The Poles spurned the invaders. They ignored their revolutionary slogans and international appeals and saw the troops only as the successors to the old Tsarist armies of conquest. At the gates of Warsaw the Red Army was routed and forced to retreat. Among the retreating was the unknown Polish Red Army man Konstantin Rokossovsky. His city and country had rejected him and his comrades, a remote pre-