

# Phoenix Nest

*Edited by Martin Levin*

## Labor Day

LABOR DAY is a fine line, on the other side of which most things that are going to happen, happen. "I'll see you after Labor Day." "We're in Massachusetts until L.D." Although it is only a line, many things go on above it. "Where are you going over Labor Day?"

The Knights of Labor, an organization of farriers and caulkers, held a parade in New York in 1892 on the first Monday in September and Samuel Gompers was in it. They called themselves Knights because their noble purpose was to raise wages. On other days of the year the Knights were known as Hunkies, Dumb Swedes, and Hey You. The American Federation of L had been founded the year before to keep children under ten from competing in the steel mills.

Martin Van Buren, a President, had decreed a ten-hour day back in 1840, but that was either an infringement of state's rights or nobody had heard of Van Buren, because nothing happened.

Now, after seventy-eight years, child labor is abolished but the damn parade is still going on. The noble objective is no longer better wages, though. This is partly owing to the fact that there are no longer any workmen. All that's left are a few Sanitary Engineers who refuse to collect the garbage, and \$20,000-per-annum Teamsters who have never seen a horse. The parade itself consists of phalanxes of wealthy contractors and the girls' band from St. Oliphant's. All the cops who own white gloves are spaced in between, while their ungloved brethren stand around estimating the crowd to be a million.

The noble objective (see above) is now the four-hour day, time off for good behavior, and time and a half for sickness, birthdays, Lag Bo-Omer, poor astrological forecasts, unfinished lawn-watering, and two months in Italy on the house.

The British spell it labour and have no special Day for it. What they do have is a Party, and it goes on all the time.

—HENRY MORGAN.

## It's Glue Time, and Watch Your Fingers

MY THREE SMALL children look forward to Glue Time, but for me it's something I can either take or leave alone, like cleaning out the sink trap.

The kids are always breaking things, and we have a rule that if the broken thing isn't too large (like a wall), the pieces must be gathered up and carefully placed on my desk. When the pieces start sliding off the pile and breaking into smaller pieces, it's Glue Time. From the shelf I get a shoe boxful of cans, tubes, and bottles of glue. Swiftly, the kids clear the kitchen table—breaking the sugar bowl—and cover it completely with today's unread newspaper.

All the broken toys and lamps and dishes are then moved from desktop to tabletop. "Poor horsie," says my eldest daughter, fondling a pile of ceramic chips. "Daddy will make you well."

As anybody who has messed around with glue knows, different glues must be used for different materials. (Except fingers. All glue glues fingers together.) The popular epoxy cement, for example, is excellent for replacing ears on porcelain rabbits, but will not glue tails back on plastic Irish setters. If you use epoxy on an Irish setter the tail droops and while you're trying to straighten it, your hands get sticky. If you don't keep your head, you'll find both hands glued to a tailless plastic Irish setter.

Epoxy cement, which comes in two tubes, is not to be confused with model cement which comes in one tube only there are two different kinds. One type of model cement works for balsa wood airplanes, and is used by people who like to fasten

little sticks together and spend the next twelve hours peeling their fingers. The other kind is plastic model cement, and this works fine on tails of plastic Irish setters and plastic blue dinosaurs. Both kinds leak out of the tube when you're not looking, and the stuff dries in a twinkling. It seeks out corduroy pants, and cannot be removed.

Rubber cement is best for gluing paper to paper, or paper to walls and floors if you don't supervise the children.

White glue comes in plastic bottles with caps that glue themselves to the bottle after use. You have to cut open the bottle, and then it dries up. A lot of this glue is sold, and you can see why. Brown glue also comes in plastic bottles, and is made from real horsies. Under no circumstances should this fact be mentioned during Glue Time.

White glue and brown glue are used for sticking pieces of wood together, like building blocks and pianos. It is best to use glue clamps on wood. There are two types: the wrong kind for the job, which you own; and the right kind, which you don't.

When you tighten clamps, excess glue squeezes out. It must be wiped off carefully with rags. Children like to run around the house snapping the rags at each other and covering themselves with glue. Then they hide the rags in upholstered chairs.

At our most recent Glue Time, my boy asked me to mend his favorite rock. (I avoided asking him what he broke the rock on.) It was a new challenge. I pawed through the glue box, but none of the labels said anything about rocks. The epoxy might have worked, but I had used it all up mending a bear which had been left in the driveway and run over by a station wagon, poor devil.

I finally chose a preparation, two cans you mix together, which I had bought at the hardware store after viewing an impressive demonstration model—a golf ball glued to a bottle glued to a hubcap and the whole thing glued to a wooden stand. If the stuff could do that, a rock should be a pushover.

Following directions, I scooped out both cans with a spoon and mixed the material on a board until it reached a uniform gray color. Then I lathered both pieces of my son's rock, and stuck them together.

Glue Time at an end, we left all the articles to dry overnight, wirebrushed ourselves, and went to bed.

The next morning I picked up the rock and the two halves came apart. But man, that stuff can really glue a spoon to a board.

—DERECK WILLIAMSON.



An essay review of "Men Who Play God: The Story of the H-Bomb and How the World Came to Live with It," by Norman Moss (Harper & Row, 352 pp., \$6.95)



## Absurdity and Common Sense: Coping with Nuclear Weapons

by ROBERT JAY LIFTON

There are two constructive approaches to the bomb—that of nuclear common sense, and that of what I would call nuclear absurdity. Nuclear common sense insists that we start from where we are now, with the bomb inhabiting our world, and then, on the basis of careful political and technical calculations, take small, prudent steps toward controlling the weapon and preventing its use, always with an eye toward what is possible. Nuclear absurdity, in contrast, involves an image of our weaponry as preposterous and grotesque in its capacity to extinguish our species many times over, and leads to such iconoclastic stances as nuclear abolitionism, social and political revolution, and an over-all world view dominated by mockery.

The two approaches co-exist, often even in the same mind, and each needs the other. Nuclear common sense alone can too easily lead to settling for much less than is needed, to the illusion of security through deterrence, and to other dubious expressions of "nuclear realism." Nuclear absurdity alone can move toward empty moralism, or even toward various forms of holocaust in the name of preventing same. Most people are able to accept a version of nuclear common sense, but few have recognized the necessity for what I would view as the more fundamental image of nuclear absurdity as the means for providing the only kind of feeling-tone around which adequate nuclear common sense can be mobilized.

A true sense of nuclear absurdity, then, requires one to keep asking, how

do we go on making, living with, generally accepting weapons whose only effect, if used, could be genocide? The question plunges us into the most intractable of our psychological and historical dilemmas. At issue is man's perverse capacity for the kind of pseudo-adaptation that can lead to his self-annihilation. Yet we have been shockingly lax in examining the strange new phenomenon of co-existing with the instruments that might put an end to that segment of human evolution we call history.

Norman Moss thus directs his inquiry about the hydrogen bomb to such questions as "how and why it was created, the way people learned to use it and not to use it, and how a place was found for it in the world." Significantly, he prefaces *Men Who Play God* with Winston Churchill's observation that "The atomic bomb, with all its terrors, did not carry us outside the scope of human control or manageable events, in thought or action, in peace or war. But . . . [with] the hydrogen bomb, the entire foundation of human affairs was revolutionized, and mankind placed in a situation both measureless and laden with doom." One could of course argue that the hydrogen bomb itself is merely a continuation of the weapons revolution initiated by the atomic bomb, but we in any case do well to note the revolutionary nature of the "measurelessness" Churchill referred to.

Moss narrates skillfully enough the sequence of events leading to the crucial decision, made during the last three months of 1949, to produce the hydrogen bomb. But when we read of the refreshing sense of nuclear absurdity expressed by James Conant (then president of Harvard and a member of the General Advisory Committee of the Atomic Energy Commission), upon re-

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