

# EDITORIALS



## IS IT LIBERAL CONVERGENCE?

*Kitty Hawk, North Carolina*

Do my eyes deceive me? Here I am at my annual retreat by the sea. Once again I repair to this historic beach to recharge my cerebral batteries by poring over books and scholarly journals written in many languages. Again my diligence is rewarded by a discovery of significant import to all students of political zoology.

In an English-language journal, misleadingly named *Bon Appetit* (August 1987), who do I see pictured in a full-page advertisement endorsing Rose's Lime Juice but my old pal Professor Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., distinguished historian and a prude who views the commercial impulse as disparagingly as the Rev. Jim Bakker now views the sexual impulse. Professor Schlesinger is a liberal, and so his fall into the capitalist embrace comes as a surprise, and a tip-off that in Ronald Reagan's decade historic changes have occurred.

Some, of course, will fear that Professor Schlesinger has been ill used by the tycoons of Rose's Lime Juice. There he is seated in a book-lined library, a stately old-fashioned typewriter at his side (we progressive conservatives use word processors), and a woman posing suggestively atop his Chippendale desk. She is Miss Tama Janowitz, a trendy authoress of New York lit, and she too urges Rose's Lime Juice upon us.

Doubtless many of the professor's liberal admirers scrutinized the advertisement for evidence of coercion. Was he being used against his will? Are there signs of physical abuse upon his person, his bow tie soiled, his glasses upside down? Is there a furtive signal to notify the authorities, perhaps a rude gesture with a finger, which would be so unlike Professor Schlesinger, perhaps a silly smile? Or his eyes, do they betray evidence of a Mickey Finn? If Miss Janowitz were on my Chippendale I would have to be drugged, I can tell you. Yet in the 1980s we all have

our price, eh Professor Schlesinger?

This was not always the case. There was a time when liberals parted company with conservatives over things mercenary. Professor Schlesinger's record in this department is irreproachable. Back in 1954 when one of capitalism's foremost twentieth-century evangelists, Professor Friedrich Hayek, came out with *Capitalism and the Historians*, Professor Schlesinger derided its "fiery dogmatism" and admonished against Hayek's absorption with the capitalist act. Ever since, Professor Schlesinger has been repelled by America's crass materialism, and the Reagan decade has evoked his warmest eloquence repeatedly: "Reaganism," he confirmed in the *Wall Street Journal* late last year, "has meant . . . a righteous sanctification of the unbridled profit motive, a worship of the fast buck. . . ."

Yet there he is in *Bon Appetit*, flaking for Rose's Lime Juice, a co-conspirator with Miss Janowitz, and both apparently are advocating vodka-typling in the hushed confines of one's library and while operating a typewriter. It is all highly irregular, or is it?

The truth is that liberals are no freer from the commercial impulse than conservatives. Political observers have

known this for years. Professor Schlesinger is not the first anti-capitalist moralizer to be caught *in flagrante delicto* endorsing capitalism's widgets. Recall, if you will, Lillian Hellman's endorsement of Blackglama mink coats; and Miss Hellman was a left-wing rigorist far beyond the mild hallucinations of Professor Schlesinger.

As the 1980s roll on with wealth spreading and unemployment declining, we are seeing that liberals have the same earthly desires as conservatives. The only difference seems to be that the liberals remain sheepish about admitting their materialism. Perhaps with the passage of time our liberal friends will become more enlightened and come to enjoy capitalism without

guilt. Certainly Professor Schlesinger's advertisement gives us grounds to hope.

This is not a call to promiscuous capitalism. Surely restraint must be maintained. But liberal critics of capitalism must be open and positive about the natural human impulse, as they say in the boardrooms, to "cut a deal."

What I believe I have discovered here by the sea might be called 1980s liberal convergence. The liberal publicly scorns the conservative but adopts his values. Democratic presidential candidates promise not to become entailed by the "special interests," read radicals. Mary McGrory, the liberal columnist, admits to purchasing her first Mercedes Benz. Professor Schlesinger falls in line with the Lime Juice Trust. □

## CONSERVATIVES, TAKE HEART

*New York*

Fellow conservatives and other adepts of humane and normative behavior, take heart. Pay no heed to those popinjays among the intelligentsia who report with unseemly exuberance that the heyday of Reagan conservatism has passed. As has been the case for many years, the current wisdom is mostly flappedoodle, thrilling, compelling, and wrong. It may be more inescapable today, blaring as it does into every corner of life thanks to broadcast media, but that does not make it any truer and should make it all the more tedious.

As for those sad sacks sedated in the current wisdom's idiot vapors, think of how unhappy their recent experiences have been. For nearly seven years they have believed that nuclear war would come on the morrow or economic collapse or the suspension of habeus corpus or worse. In other times and other lands their forebears believed that the world was flat, that the sun revolved around the earth, that a dirty old sock worn around the neck would cure illness. No, today's conservatives have no need to be saddened by the current wisdom. Besides, 1980s current wisdom

is usually incomprehensible to an intelligent mind, and no sooner has one familiarized himself with the bogus facts and faulty logic than the intelligentsia has moved on to new absurdities.

Conservatism passé? Come, come! What will the politicians replace it with, a more extravagant welfare state? higher taxes? still more accommodations to terrorists and to the liberators of Afghanistan? As the seven mediocrities now campaigning for the Democratic presidential candidacy are demonstrating daily, antiquated liberalism has nothing to offer beyond the array of extreme policies that almost knocked the Republic off its feet in the late 1970s.

I say laugh off the dirges about conservatism's demise and take heart from the 400-year-old wisdom of that suave Florentine statesman Sr. Francesco Guicciardini, a counselor to princes and popes who upon inspecting the current wisdom of his day observed that one "need not be surprised at our ignorance of things that happened in the past. . . . If you think about it carefully, you will find we do not have



*Adapted from RET's weekly Washington Post column syndicated by King Features.*

any true information about the present or about the things that happen every day in our own city."

If George Will has already used that quotation, forgive me. It seemed so appropriate to our present anxieties that I had to use it even if it meant braving the abuse Will endures for invoking the thought of one not now an eminence of the Washington press corps or the faculty of Harvard University. Sometimes Will's sources appear in Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations* and that brings him even rougher treatment.

Yet to substantiate my position that conservative thought still has miles to go before it sleeps, I bring more than ancient pronouncements and contemporary polemics. I can cite facts. At this very moment New York City is poised to undo still another of the 1970s' reckless enthusiasms. Its visionary Commission of Transportation is banning bicyclists from Park, Madison, and Fifth Avenues in midtown Manhattan between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. The bicycle was to 1970s liberals what the zeppelin was to turn-of-the-century German scientists, the vehicle of the future. It became holy and the object of irrational devotion. Whenever I

have reported on its dangerous brakes, its uncrashworthiness, the frightening bravura that comes over many cyclists when they grasp their handlebars, I have received the kind of hate mail generally sent by religious cranks.

Recognition of the bicycle's inappropriateness to the modern city began to set in as early as the November election in 1980. Then Mayor Koch began eliminating the dangerous cycling lanes that had been created in 1979 bringing with them congestion and chaos to many of New York's busiest thoroughfares. Now he is moving against unruly cyclists in Midtown, many of whom do

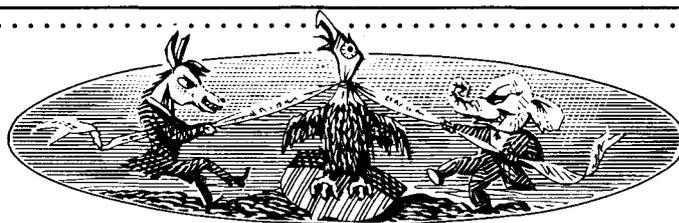
it for money as professional bicycle messengers (and here we see that conservative policy does not always side with the business interests). Soon it is to be hoped that bicycles will be banned from the city entirely. Doubtless they are superb recreational devices on country lanes, but in cities like New York they should be walked.

Conservatism is not dead, my friends. There is much to be done. The universities, drugs, sex, and other objects of 1970s delusion must be returned to the domain of common sense. Do not let the current whoop whoop fool you. □

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## CAPITOL IDEAS

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### I'M BACK

by Tom Bethell

After California, Washington, D.C. seemed like a museum diorama of the Carboniferous. The jungle has moved a few yards closer since I left last November, even if the 17-year cicadas have bravely nibbled back the branch tips. Still, the forest continues to encroach. Vines visibly creep, insects and whirring bloodsuckers tap eagerly on the window panes. "Open up there," I hear them chirping over the hum of the air conditioner. I sank into humid hibernation and hoisted a tentative periscope on the third day. The sun was a burning ball in the atmospheric murk. Welcome back to the Eastern Seaboard, Bethell, and stop complaining!

Your Washington correspondent, timely as ever, returned to the capital just as Congress was setting off on vacation and President Reagan leaving for his California ranch. The Iran-contra hearings were over—more or less a waste of time, I suspect. I agree with Jude Wanniski of Polyconomics that the key difference between Watergate and Irangate is that in 1973 the Dow Jones average was 700 and going down, in 1987 it was 2,000 and going up.

Col. Oliver North did show that it's possible to communicate conservative ideas to the American people via television. I'm only sorry the Great Com-

municator didn't venture to do the same thing before he and/or his aides decided to fund the contras surreptitiously. Reagan should have made the case publicly and then looked forward to the possibility that the Democrats would turn him down, enabling him to call them soft on Communism.

But embracing political conflict as a way of advancing his agenda is alien to Reagan and the timid businessmen around him. They think of "politics" as a danger zone—a minefield to be skirted whenever possible. They are still reluctant to believe that political battles can be won, basically because they would rather avoid conflict altogether. Reagan's behavior in the contra affair suggests that he feared the conservatives would be mad at him if he did nothing, and that the liberals would be mad at him if he did anything. So he took refuge in secrecy. When the subterfuge was exposed the Democrats became indignant because by their lights Reagan was trying to hide an unpopular move from the American people. The pitiful thing, as North showed, is that Reagan was in fact trying to hide a popular move from the American people.

Conservatives that I have spoken to in Washington are pretty much in agreement that Reagan is finished. His great weakness lay in his unwillingness to risk his political capital. Let us hope that in his last year he does not make too much of a bid for the history books

by trying to enact the liberal agenda. This at any rate seems to be Nancy's plan.

I went to the annual Salmon Cookout given by Ed Crane of the (libertarian) Cato Institute. Present were some of the more interesting members of the public policy community. Perhaps under the impact of technological changes that are slowly moving us away from a world of separate nation states, libertarian ideas are, I believe, on the rise today, and they are interesting for that reason. Both American liberals (leftists, to be blunt) and conservatives will resist this prognosis; the former because the brave new interconnected world that they for so long envisioned was supposed to be socialist, and dependent in the end on a transformation of human nature (certainly not dependent on contract); the latter because the conservative worldview is disoriented (needlessly, in my opinion) by the prospect of crumbling national borders.

At Crane's Cookout there was a certain amount of murmuring against Rep. Jack Kemp's allegedly undiminished enthusiasm for big government. Peter J. Ferrara, the Social Security expert, feared that a Kemp elected on such a platform would be hailed on arrival in Washington as the guarantor of Big Government. Future privatization would be difficult or impossible to at-

tain. Kemp would in effect saddle us with a massive welfare state in perpetuity. Others were saying that Kemp's advisers, notably Irving Kristol, seem to want to reconstitute the Democratic party of the 1950s and early 1960s. (The party of big government and anti-Communism—Senator Henry Jackson's dream.)

Governor Pete du Pont, however, is promising to privatize Social Security in a Ferrara-compatible fashion, and to do away with farm subsidies, and if he can sprint over the Iowa and New Hampshire hurdles unimpeded by such a platform, then the libertarians will be vindicated. But as George Gilder points out, the problem is that the Republicans who talk about changing Social Security have time and again been demagogued down to defeat by unscrupulous Democrats. Kemp doesn't intend to let that happen to him. We shall see. The race should be interesting.

In the last issue of *The American Spectator*, Aram Bakshian, Jr. defended the candidacy of Vice President George Bush (against my criticism the month before) on the grounds that such a candidacy could "in good conscience" be supported. Rather a weak defense, wouldn't you say? I agree to the extent that my conscience would certainly allow me to support Bush against Rev. Jesse Jackson, say, or