

EDITORIALS



THE SOUND AND THE FURY

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

To those of us steeped in the study of the great game of politics, the editors of the *New York Times* owe Dr. Pierre A. Rinfret abundant apologies. Admittedly, until the sorely pressed Republican party of New York summoned him from nowhere to rid New York politics of the ambitious and expensive Governor Mario Cuomo, this Dr. Rinfret was not known to me, and I can find no *Who's Who* entry on him anywhere. One need not know the details of this great man's life, however, to know that it is profoundly wrong for the *Times* to allege that Dr. Rinfret is a phony for having exaggerated his educational, professional, and political record.

For that matter what is so wrong with being a phony in politics? According to my calculations, most of our politicians are phonies, as are many of our public figures. Sham is the route to greatness in this era of public relations genius. Ask Donald Trump.

In two pitiless and misleading reports the *Times* disparages Dr. Rinfret for claiming to have advised four Presidents and to have been invited to serve in the Cabinet, though Dr. Rinfret provides little evidence to support his claims. Well, who needs evidence? Or what is evidence? Do any of the multitudes of politicians who boast of their formidable virtues ever provide evidence? Where is the evidence that Senator Edward Kennedy knows anything about the compassion that he speaks so incessantly about? Is he particularly kind to household pets? Does he work in soup kitchens in the off hours? What politician does?

The *Times* also snickers at Dr. Rinfret's use of the title Dr. when there is no evidence that he is one. Well, it is not as though he is claiming to be a medical doctor and thus practicing without a license. He is claiming to be an "economist" and that could mean anything. Economics is not a science; it is more like a religion. Moreover, these titles are

increasingly meaningless. Today's Ph.D. is comparable to yesterday's M.A. The members of both houses of Congress insist on being addressed as "the Honorable," though many are hardly honorable. Then too there are those dubious fellows in storefronts and on soapboxes who insist on being addressed as "the Rev.," though they have no real church or congregation or contact with a religious denomination. Has anyone ever questioned the propriety of so secular a fellow as Jesse Jackson insisting on the title "Rev.?" Let me be the first.

The Rev. Jackson is not a practicing cleric but rather a politician and a very adept one. If the *Times's* exposé of Dr. Rinfret's many shaky claims is accurate, it seems to me Dr. Rinfret, too, could become a very adept politician. Paul W. McCracken, formerly chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, when asked about Dr. Rinfret's professional qualifications, says: Rinfret "is very colorful, but he is a little more sound and fury than substance." If this



be true, Dr. Rinfret may be a man of destiny.

Embellishment is a prerequisite to political achievement in America. Back in 1976 a rising messiah claimed repeatedly to be a nuclear physicist, though *à la* Dr. Rinfret he did so without benefit of a degree. Later, when he was President and the world was still agog at his mastery of events, Jimmy Carter visited the Pentagon, where he told an audience that he had voluntarily "served in two wars." Actually Jimmy Carter in the last days of World War II was a student at the Naval Academy and during the Korean War he was stationed on the East Coast half a world away from battle. Other great names in political history have mis-

represented their military records, for instance Gary Hart. And others have misrepresented their scholastic records, for instance Senator Biden, a proven plagiarist.

But most frequently the American politician embellishes his moral record. Think of Washington's Mayor Barry lecturing us all by day and whooping it up by night. Think of Congressman Barney Frank, whose home was a bawdy house. Think of Senators Kennedy, Biden, and Howard Metzenbaum assaying the moral qualities of Judge Robert Bork and rejecting him as beneath their high standards. No, the only problem I see with Dr. Rinfret's record is that he got caught before he got elected. □

THE ANGRY 150

And so President Mikhail Gorbachev has returned to his home base, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, without defecting. Frankly, given conditions back home, I thought that during his meetings with President George Bush he might have sought asylum. With his many successful public appearances over the past few days still shining in my mind, particularly his visits near Palo Alto, California, I believe that he would make an excellent president of Stanford University. He is apparently more broad-minded than the faculty of that repressive institution. Possibly he and his spirited wife, Dr. Raisa Gorbachev, could dissuade the Stanford faculty from viewing the great books of the West through the eyes of racists and radical feminists. After all, these books created the West's unsurpassed regard for individual freedom, prosperity, and human rights.

Yes, by all means let us have the Gorbachevs here, spreading their pioneering message of tolerance, respect for the individual, and devotion to economic growth. In exchange there are 150 graduating seniors at Wellesley College outside Boston who would make excellent candidates for employ-

ment in the police apparatus of the Soviet government, especially if it returns to coercion, as it might. These are the young ladies who recently opposed Mrs. George Bush's commencement address there after she had been duly invited. Not that these 150 angry women would make very good Communists. They are incapable of the orderly thought required of the good Marxist. Yet they are superb bullies; and when they do think, they think narrowly enough to be part-time Communists, which is about the only type of Communist left.

Mrs. Bush has just been put through one of those humiliations that are now regularly imposed upon legitimate representatives of the American people by the indignatos of a brand of New Age Liberalism that has repeatedly failed to convert the American majority and now smolders in those elitist redoubts such as universities insulated from democracy's impositions of tolerance and diversity. Did the Angry 150 notice when Mrs. Bush finally spoke that in wit, intellect, sagacity, and style, she far surpassed them or any of the other New Age indignatos who have fueled their anger and equipped their tiny arsenal of ideas? Did they notice that

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not even that flower of Soviet womanhood, Dr. Gorbachev, shared their peculiar vision of careers before all else and ego above everything?

The Angry 150, who, let us note, have wide support amongst the cadres of militant feminists, do not have a very generous sense of the world nor is their vision very intelligent. They opposed an invitation to Mrs. Bush because she had not arrived at her position in life *on her own*, as though they themselves were all clinically maintained white rats, raised under the strictest

laboratory conditions, and with no external circumstances ever affecting their development—not family, personal wealth, distinguished benefactors, affirmative action. Affirmative action? Oh yes, they deny that Mrs. Bush should get a boost in life because of her husband, but they believe they should get a boost because of their gender or, if applicable, their race.

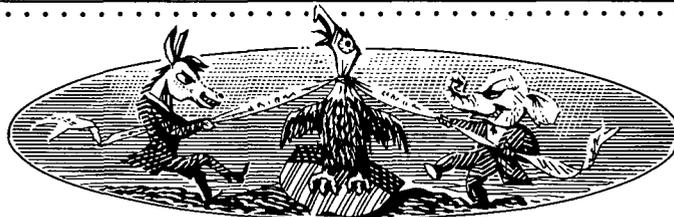
Mrs. Bush did not accept the full humiliation that these bullies impose on the true representatives of the American people when invited to cam-

pus. She refused to get up before the audience and accept their dictates on policy. Eschewing their demands for more futile federal programs to endanger further the American family, she boldly declared, “your human connections with spouses, with children, with friends, are the most important investment you will ever make.”

The greatest irony of the Wellesley row is that the Angry 150 have raised career above family. They espouse what traditional Liberalism has condemned, to wit, rampant materialism. But what

an absurd materialism it is! Over the centuries men and women have lived and died for family. Who but a fool ever died for career? “R.I.P. Charlie Wilson. He Gave His Life That General Motors Might Live.” Or how about: “Ms. Millicent von Hansdoodle died in a duel yesterday defending the honor of the accounting profession against slanders allegedly directed against it by smartalecks who were also disrespectful of executive vice presidents.” Imagine, our bogus progressives now stand four square for the bourgeois grind. □

CAPITOL IDEAS



THE COURAGE OF HIS CONVICTIONS

by Tom Bethell

President Bush received daily reminders from the tax-consumers inside the Beltway that it was high time for him to raise taxes. Budget negotiators would have to venture “where the money is” and support a “sizable tax increase,” the *Washington Post* said, adding a note of urgency: “There isn’t much time left. . . . The longer they wait, the closer will be election day.” (In Washington, elections are, understandably, perceived as hazardous.) Finally, on June 26, Bush issued a statement calling for “tax revenue increases,” and there was a tremendous sense of triumph in Washington. An important principle was thereby unwisely conceded, but budgetarily not much was changed by the statement, which also called for “growth incentives.” By this was meant a capital gains tax-rate reduction, for which it would be worth accepting some taxes on gasoline, cigarettes, and alcohol. But the Beltway gloating was understandable, for the President had at least given the impression that he was willing to sacrifice the defining difference between the political parties.

For the last eighteen months or so there has been a great sense of exasperation in Washington because new tax revenues, which since World War II have flowed effortlessly into the capital, have more or less dried up. As a result, Bush has been repeatedly urged to break his campaign promise. Only the other day there was a long, sly ar-

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ticle on the *Washington Post's* op-ed page by Stuart Eizenstat, Jimmy Carter’s chief domestic policy adviser, claiming that “the people will forgive a breach in a major campaign commitment if the President can convincingly demonstrate that external circumstances have changed.”

New revenues have dried up because bracket creep (inflation combined with static tax rates) has been eliminated by the Reagan reforms. Moreover, the “Laffer Curve” argument—that above a certain tax rate, tax revenues do not increase but actually decline—has been shown to work; in the early sixties, the Kennedy tax cuts ensured a massive increase of revenues. Then, for the remainder of the 1960s and all through the 1970s, bracket creep yielded non-legislated tax increases year after year. Washington could hardly devise programs quickly enough to keep up with the revenue bonanza.

By 1980, however, the injustice of taxing middle-income earners as though they were rich disturbed the electorate, who voted Ronald Reagan into office. In 1981 he cut the top tax rate from 70 to 50 percent, then cut it once again in the mid 1980s to a top rate (for most taxpayers) of 28 percent. The Laffer Curve proved as accurate in the 1980s as it had in the 1960s, and revenues continued to grow. But, just to be on the safe side, Reagan signed on to five more revenue-raisers, including hefty new Social Security taxes. By the time he left office in early 1989,

the revenues flowing into Washington were at least 50 percent higher than they had been when he arrived.

Undoubtedly, revenues could be raised once again by lowering tax rates still further—by reducing the top income tax rate to 20 percent, for example, and the capital gains tax likewise. Bush’s recent statement, calling for “tax revenue increases,” could in fact be construed as a call for further rate reductions. This will not happen, however, because the desire of politicians to spend the people’s money is exceeded by the pleasure so many of them take in appealing to envy. The tax code (Democrats in particular feel) ought to be punitive, even if this *does* detract from revenues. Washington is now in the unprecedented position of having to vote explicitly for tax increases to raise still more revenues. Bracket creep no longer exists—there are only two tax brackets, and the threshold dividing them is indexed to inflation.

In its ravenous desire to spend more and more of the people’s money, Washington already enjoys the overwhelming support of the press corps. An interesting aspect of the recent budget struggle, however, has been the way in which the internal dynamics of the news media have worked to impede the necessary “deal” being cut. The phrase that has been used is “immaculate conception.” An immaculately conceived budget “compromise” would be one in which all the relevant parties—both from the White House and Capitol Hill—met in private and struck a bargain in which taxes were raised, some (not

much!) spending was cut, and everyone agreed to the outcome. All participants would march out to face the cameras in unison, announcing that everything was unanimous. There would be no “finger-pointing.” The actual negotiating steps would remain invisible and completely inscrutable to the voters.

Bush himself obviously pines for invisible negotiations yielding unanimous conclusions, and he has had some success in imposing this *modus operandi* on his administration. But he can’t impose it on the legislative branch, with whom in this instance he must negotiate. Every time the dealers get together for a session, legislators leak the details of who said what to their sources in the news media. As a result, the necessary secrecy has proved unattainable. The whole proceedings might as well be conducted in front of live television cameras. And when President Bush issued his ill-advised June 26 statement, there was finger-pointing galore, with lots of Democrats on camera saying (nudge-nudge, wink-wink) that they weren’t going to blame Bush for breaking his campaign promise. One wonders if Bush will learn from this experience.

As I write, the likelihood that the budget negotiations will produce much change in the tax code seems fairly small. Ultimately, everything will depend on the President. What, then, are we to make of the man? Let us note first of all key differences between George Herbert Walker Bush