



You're All Right, Jacques!

by David Brooks

We are truly living in the age of Souter. It is an age in which Robert Bork can't get on the Supreme Court, but gray decencies such as David Souter and Anthony Kennedy pass in without a peep. It is an age in which the likes of Margaret Thatcher are brought low by decent John Major and his band of forgettable men. Now the flamboyant Jacques Attali has been ousted as president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and the only thing we know about his successor is that you won't be able to remember anything about him five minutes after you read about his appointment.

The global finance ministers who engineered the ouster of Attali did so on the grounds that he was wasting money. He spent \$1.1 million on a marble lobby for his bank, amidst other lavish expenditures. But if wasting money were grounds for dismissal, the World Bank building would be a windowless shell. The European governments that are keen to rein in Attali have just finished throwing hundreds of millions of dollars into serial HDTV technology, which, as George Gilder wrote years ago, was obsolete on the drawing board.

In reality, the anti-Attali push, and the obvious glee with which it was conducted, was an affair of personality, a triumph of grayness over flair. And we don't have so many outrageous personalities that we can spare the likes of Jacques Attali and still expect to wake up to an entertaining world.

But *le monde multilatéral* has a strict code of decorum, and Attali was too much the arriviste. The

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photographs he has distributed to the French press to publicize his current bestseller, *Verbatim*, capture much about the man. The book is supposed to consist of extracts from the sayings and judgments of François Mitterrand 1981-86, but Attali rarely strays far from autobiography. So the pictures depict Attali perched between Mitterrand and Thatcher, between Mitterrand and Gorbachev. Stuck in the middle of a lovely photo of Bush, Thatcher, and Mulroney at a G-7 summit is the beaming face of Jacques Attali. I now look for him in paintings of the Last Supper. Not without reason has he been called "God's Sherpa."

Attali was born in Algeria in 1943, the son of a then-poor Jewish perfume merchant. At the outbreak of the Algerian war he moved with his family to France, where Jacques's brainpower (and his father's growing wealth) gained him entry into elite French schools, including the Ecole National d'Administration, where a few dozen students a year are taught that they are brilliant and then sent off to run France.

"I want to act as a theoretician for politicians," Attali once said. "My model in America was Kissinger." Attali reportedly met François Mitterrand for the first time at a Paris disco in 1968, and began lecturing him about the effects of oil price fluctuations. When Mitterrand became president of France, he seems to have realized that he had come to power lacking a think tank (Reagan and Thatcher had theirs) and so hired Attali. Installed in the Elysée Palace in the office separating Mitterrand's office from the rest of the world (at a desk designed for Napoleon), Attali helped devise the 1981 Socialist economic plan that caused a massive capital flight from

France and would have destroyed the French economy had not Mitterrand eventually jettisoned it. The plan instituted massive nationalization of banks and industry, protectionism, reflation, longer vacations for French workers, and so on. It was this sort of Socialist thinking that made Attali an odd choice ten years later to lead Eastern Europe out of socialism.

It is Attali's misfortune to have a face that is smug even at rest. It lacks much in the way of a chin, and his mouth, indented, falls naturally into a shape that suggests superciliousness. Like French foreign policy, Attali is ugly, yet vain. You miss the first five minutes of a conversation with him because you are so dazzled by how well dressed he is. He can be seen wherever the air is thick with consultation, with his matching Hermès tie and kerchief, his gold-plated Benjamin Franklin glasses, his subtle cuffs. One gets the impression he mouses each hair individually.

He is a pianist, a collector of antiques, a film-maker, an avid tennis player, a husband to a former model, and the father of two children, who are named Jérémie and Bethsabée. He is famous for accepting invitations to three dinner parties an evening in Paris, and showing up at each.

Though he rarely gets to bed before midnight, he rises at 4:00 so that he can write for three hours before heading off to work. He has published a history of the Warburg banking family, a meditation on "the political economy of music," and a daring novel entitled *The First Day After Me*—as if anybody could be interested in a world that no longer contains Jacques Attali. (The movie version is to star Gérard Depardieu.)

In a recent book he sketched out his views of America: "The United States will find itself in a situation of being symbolically secondary. Already it can't sell anything to Japan but agricultural products. It will become Japan's granary, like Poland was for seventeenth-century Flanders."

In 1982 Attali wrote a history of time, in which he neglected to put quotation marks around the writings of other French philosophers. In *Verbatim*, he allegedly lifted passages of Mitterrand's wisdom from a forthcoming set of conversations with Elie Wiesel. Critics have not failed to notice his sloppiness; after a string of particularly bad books, *Le Monde* remarked that Attali isn't so much prolific as incontinent.

A French bureaucrat once said that during the Elysée Palace years, staffers used to scamper after Attali trying to chase down his ideas with great butterfly nets. One of his grander notions was a system of dams and dikes to stem the flooding in Bangladesh. Despite intense lobbying he couldn't persuade industrial countries to put up the billions of dollars required to build the project. The EBRD itself was another of Attali's schemes. Britain supported it because it would be located in London, and Mitterrand supported it because Attali did. Few other countries could figure out exactly what it was supposed to do.

Nor could Attali. There was talk that it would become Europe's central bank. Then he said it would be an organ to launch a new Marshall Plan. Then he boasted that it would become the world's largest merchant bank. "People will call me a megalomaniac," he reasoned, "but let me tell you my dream for this bank: to make it a kind of security council for Europe." One of the bank's first projects was to help fund the link-up between Czech airlines and Air France, which Mitterrand had appointed Attali's twin brother Bernard to head in 1988 (Bernard's first job in the airline business).

To staff the EBRD would be simple, Attali said. "I will just get hold of the lists of Nobel Laureates in economics and choose from them." He didn't get any laureates, but by dangling large salaries (and a diplomatic tax rate of 10 percent) he quickly filled 700 positions. Attali bought 600 Norman Foster-designed desks at \$900 apiece. He spent \$800,000 on private planes for himself and \$400,000 on artwork. He provided nine restaurants. The kitchen and wine cellar of the bank acquired legendary status, as did the mini-skirted receptionists. The \$60 million for the EBRD headquarters were supplied by Britain, causing the tabloid the *Sun* to editorialize, "The budget



director of the bank is a Mr. Pissaloux. He is aptly named because that is what Europe keeps doing. All over the taxpayers."

On the world stage, Attali has been a wonderful presence. He is just about the only European political leader who has upbraided the European governments for their cruel treatment of the post-Communist nations. He has protested vigorously as the EC nations preserve trade barriers to the east. He was among the first to publicize opportunities in the Central Asian republics. He has dragged the Western

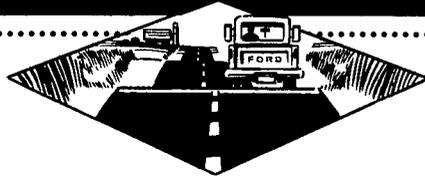
nations into cleaning up the deadly Soviet power plants.

Attali is, in weird ways, just like the East European leaders he has to deal with. He is sloppy—he double-billed his expenses for a \$10,000 flight to Tokyo. There is about him a whiff of corruption—he reportedly charged \$30,000 of personal expenses on his EBRD credit card, including trips to racy night clubs. He is arrogant. His resignation was built around the sentence: "I know of no action that I have taken that in any way could be worthy of reproach." Yet if all public servants were as entertaining as Attali, I would happily pay my tax bill.

The fall of Attali is a tragedy not because he was doing a good job, but because it makes the world a duller place, and represents another triumph of technocracy over charisma. Attali was fired not because he was bad for Eastern Europe, but because he was bad for the smooth functioning of the EBRD bureaucracy.

The European Community has another program to aid the east, TACIS, whose directors are only quietly arrogant and who are never sloppy. Every regulatory *i* is dotted and every *t* is crossed. The program is regarded as a pathetic joke across the former Soviet Union and among Western officials. Much of its money goes, after rigorous bureaucratic controls, into the pockets of European consultants who are friendly with TACIS officials or into the miasma of the ex-Soviet public sector.

Attali is a difficult, daring, and remarkable jerk, the sort of non-standard issue that exposes the myth that technocracies serve reason, not the individual. In an age in which only modesty is considered tasteful, Attali has set out to be a great man, to surround himself with great things, and to travel in great style. Though a socialist, he is a one-man rebellion against the egalitarianism of souls. Under Attali, the EBRD was vain, daring, overambitious, passionate, and disorganized. Under his successor, it will be rationalistic, meticulous, and irrelevant. □



The ADL Defamed

by Arch Puddington

This year marks the eightieth anniversary of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, America's most distinguished civil rights organization. The ADL's principal mission, of course, is the defense of Jewish interests, an assignment that even its detractors agree has been carried out with admirable diligence and professionalism. Much of its credibility derives from the reports on extremism and prejudice it periodically issues. The ADL goes to extraordinary lengths to get its facts straight, and takes a straightforward, non-hysterical tone. Indeed, the ADL serves as the model for ethnic anti-discrimination projects; Arab-Americans, for example, have established a legal defense organization patterned on the ADL.

Yet the ADL today finds itself in crisis, its leadership accused of maintaining a nationwide intelligence network that has attempted to infiltrate and subvert extremist groups and legitimate political organizations alike. Though most Americans still identify the ADL as a resolute opponent of anti-Semitism and racial hatred, critics describe the organization as a "secret police agency" and speak of "the biggest domestic spy scandal in recent American history." Could the ADL, honored by presidents and paid tribute to by hundreds of victims of bigotry, be the same organization the *Village Voice* calls a "Jewish thought police"?

The ADL's difficulties stem from an investigation into the activities of Roy Bullock, a San Francisco art dealer who worked as a part-time investigator for the organization. Bullock, who is not Jewish, has worked for the ADL for nearly forty years, having volunteered his services as a young

man out of personal revulsion over the Holocaust and a desire to subvert the Ku Klux Klan.

Bullock has infiltrated a number of hate organizations, and was credited with having helped bring to justice a man who was responsible for a string of synagogue bombings in the Bay Area. His abilities won the respect of law enforcement officials, and he established a working relationship with the local police, the FBI, and other agencies.

Bullock amassed impressive files from press accounts, meeting transcripts, and other public sources. Not all the files focused on anti-Semitic organizations; like any good reporter, Bullock believed that part of his job was to stay informed about the many and quite varied participants in Bay Area politics. He passed some of the file material along to the ADL's New York headquarters; the bulk was simply entered into Bullock's computer for possible future use.

The core of the "spy" case is this: Bullock is said to have received several cartons of material that had been the property of the San Francisco police. The files had belonged to a now-defunct investigative team, of which Bullock's friend Tom Gerard was a member. The case rests principally on whether Bullock violated California law to receive these files, but the legal complexities have become irrelevant in the current propaganda offensive. The San Francisco police and the prosecutor's office have fed the hysteria by handling the investigation like a drug probe. The police have released a 700-page dossier on the case, and there have been selective leaks to the media intimating that the ultimate targets are not Bullock and Gerard but higher-up officials of the national ADL.

All this has been seized upon by the lengthy list of political groups the ADL has managed to offend over the years.

Organizations like the White Aryan Resistance have crowed over the ADL's troubles; they have been joined by a variety of more reasonable-sounding anti-Semitic publications, including one edited by Victor Marchetti, the ex-CIA agent who gained fleeting celebrity on the left some years back by writing a book that "unmasked" the intelligence agency.

But more serious have been the attacks from the left. A Bay Area weekly referred to the ADL as a "Zionist version of the CIA," while Michael Lerner, editor of *Tikkun* and Hillary Clinton's "politics of meaning" guru, accused the ADL of seeing "every liberal group as a potential threat to the Jewish people." Alexander Cockburn hinted that cooperation between the ADL and the Mossad might be involved. The ADL is also the subject of a class-action suit filed by former anti-war Congressman Pete McCloskey, an inveterate critic of both Israel and of what he views as Jewry's baleful influence over American foreign policy.

Little has been said about Bullock's having infiltrated neo-Nazis and skinheads, and it goes without saying that the ADL's critics never raised civil liberties objections when the targets were white supremacists or anti-Semites like Gerald L.K. Smith, not even when the ADL's investigations included infiltration or cooperation with police agencies.

To understand the seething disdain in which the left holds the organization, we must go back to the 1960s. The ADL was a stalwart organization in the original civil rights coalition. Its legal staff played an important role in landmark civil rights litigation, and its investigators helped expose and weaken white supremacists. Yet the ADL has obstinately stuck to what might be called a traditionalist definition of civil rights:

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