

yearning for independence, is heavily diluted and substantially replaced when the nation seemingly runs short of frontiers to explore. Some have been obliged to *earn* their freedom, with both sweat and blood. But most of us were *born* free. Perhaps inheritances are not as well comprehended and prized as what we ourselves have won and produced.

IT WOULD be naive to suppose that all the American colonists were revolutionary heroes — or that the revolutionists were regarded as heroes by all the colonists. Indeed, the revolu-

tionists were a minority of the community — and not all of the revolutionary zeal reflected political idealism and philosophic purity. The revolution was conducted by people, not deities, so there is to be found in the history of the grand adventure a sufficiency of coarseness, ineptitude, and fear.

But the inherent frailties of people and the confusions and uncertainties which divided the community serve to make more visible the strength and the sense of those who bore monumental burdens to make us a nation. Certainly, the burdens of those men and boys at Valley Forge in the terrible winter of

1777-78 were monumental — quite beyond full comprehension as one now serenely surveys the lovely landscape in a warm summer day. No shots were fired at Valley Forge. But while enemy forces comfortably occupied nearby Philadelphia, more than 3,000 of the 11,000 troops under General George Washington perished from cold, disease, and starvation.

They died for us. Truly, I have trod hallowed ground. We shall deserve damnation if — through failure of *our* courage and integrity and judgment and dedication and perseverance, we meanly lose our noble inheritance. CPA

## The Working Press

# Lacking the Prudence of Squirrels

The *Chronicle* Looks at County Supervisors; An Unusually Honest Democrat

Tim W. Ferguson

YOU SURELY read a lot of wailing from local government officials about the shift of property tax funds away from them. What most didn't get from their papers was the sort of historical take Vlae Kershner gave readers of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which had to leave them considerably less sympathetic to the plight of the county supervisors. Suffice to say they (and their constituents) lived mighty high for years, and, of course, lacked the prudence of squirrels and didn't stash money away for harder times. The piece ended with a terrific bit from Phil Isenberg, an unusually honest Democrat in the state Assembly leadership and former Sacramento mayor: "Referring to the dire warnings of local officials, he said: 'I'm a skeptic because I used to be on the other side making some of them.'" ....

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Kudos also to the *Chronicle* for a series showing how the vast disparity in quality among public schools has no necessary correlation with money spent per pupil. Amid the cant over schooling in the state, this comparison of suburban and urban institutions probably gave one of the more balanced, honest appraisals of what works, what doesn't, where, and why. You knew it hit paydirt when a letter taking "strong exception" followed from Del Weber of the California Teachers Association ....

The *Chronicle*, again, was in fine form with a "special report" on the depression in the western San Joaquin Valley (worse than the eastern side) and its relationship to the new water rules out of Washington designed both to curb subsidies and to protect the Delta smelt and other fish. Whatever one thinks of these changes, they are contributing to upheaval in an eco-

nomically (and therefore politically) important part of the state, and have further divided Pete Wilson (who wants to slow the changeover) from the environmentalist lobby. Rare is the story in the metropolitan press giving this subject the coverage it deserves ....

GIVE PETER Schrag of the *Sacramento Bee* his due: He has never wavered in his criticism of Proposition 13, unpopular as that stance remains outside the world of government. He continues to say what more politic liberals only spit out with their gargle — that the Jarvis-Gann limit isn't reconcilable with ambitious provision of services by a well-paid public sector. The gaps at the local level, particularly, are more evident as the population currents grow wilder and the demands louder. In that final regard, however, one aspect of 13 that Mr. Schrag and other commentators haven't been men-

tioning is the hold it exerts on longtime homeowners and businesses. Were the lid placed on their property taxes (going back to 1975) blown off, California might see an exodus that would make the current departures seem orderly ....

If the *Bee's* Mr. Schrag is a one-note, its Dan Walters has his detractors who say he runs with the sentiment *du jour*. When you write a column every working day, it's hard not to cross your own tracks on occasion. But Big Dan didn't appear too nimble with an account of "revisionist thinking" that Governor Wilson did the school-choice forces no favor by thrusting their voucher initiative onto a November special ballot. It was not clear whose thinking was being revised, other than Mr. Walters himself, who was unusually lonely in his early appraisal to the contrary ....

ON THE other hand, the Walters column was the only place we read of a bill, passed by the Assembly, to prohibit employers (that's enough to raise alarms, right there) from discriminating against a unionist, just as minorities, women, and the handicapped are already shielded. What that effectively would mean, sure enough, is that union membership would be grounds for filing a complaint whenever someone is fired, demoted, not promoted, or not hired. Did anyone say "Utah"? ....

The *Bee* did itself proud with a review of the nearly 40 "regulatory" boards the state maintains, noting both their limp performance and — in embarrassingly detailed fashion — their function as sinecures for political hacks in need of pay and pensions. (Usually the beneficiaries are associates of governors.) It was another reminder, even if the *Bee* didn't intend this, that Sacramento hasn't exactly lost all its fat ....

Further on the subject of pensions, the *Sacramento Union* made us glad it's still around (barely) with the latest eye-popping rundown of what state offi-

cials such as the barnacles on the Board of Equalization manage to pull down when they finally get pried off. Try nearly \$200,000 a year as goodbye gifts to the canniest veterans. Add that to the case for term limits ....

What strikes a regular reader of the *Los Angeles Times* is how many of these significant state stories never seem to appear in California's leading daily. Although the *Times's* Daniel Weintraub is perhaps the best reporter on Sacramento's never-ending fiscal fiasco, its coverage of state affairs is rather short of a panoply and rarely the least bit memorable. It makes you wonder whether the paper has decided, like L.A.'s TV stations, that state government issues are just not crowd pleasers ....

Daniel Akst of the *Times* found a way to tell of state regulation in the form of a consumer-ripping story — about some consumers ripping off others thanks to government. He showed that nearly 20 percent of Pacific Bell phone customers are requesting "Lifeline" service as established for poor people, and the new requests are ringing off the hook. You see, the phone company doesn't have the resources or inclination to check a customer's vow of poverty — and why should it? The expense of subsidizing service obtainable for only a few dollars a month is passed along to the rest of us through a tax on our phone bills. That tax has risen four-fold since Lifeline was imposed in 1986 ....

Let's not forget smog regulation. Apparently several legislators haven't, as serious stabs are being made at reining in the regional air-pollution districts that levy fines to sustain their budgets and otherwise harass businesses out of town. The *Los Angeles Business Journal*, a weekly that covers such inconsequential matters, quoted the imperious James Lents, director of the South Coast (metro L.A.) Air Quality Management District, complaining, "There

is hysteria in the Legislature about job loss in this state." Hallelujah! ....

MEANWHILE, THE *San Francisco Examiner* exposed one more outrageous example of a merchant prosecuted for flouting the state's minimum milk-price law. The field remains wide open for some competition-loving consumer crusaders to raise radical hell with the interest-group oligopoly in the capital ....

Finally, we get around to political correctness at the *L.A. Times* again. Did you know that the op-ed editor's office there has a chart with pink and blue squares, indicating the sex of each day's contributors? Trying to get in the pink, the page runs some extraordinary drivel from womenfolk. But what may have been the most embarrassing PC offering in memory appeared in (naturally) the "View" section shortly after Assemblyman Pete Knight circulated his now infamous verse about illegal Mexican immigrants. This piece, "Special to the *Times*" (usually a clue of trouble), sought to teach us how racism can crop up in the everyday language of seemingly decent people. "Those that have power have the privilege of not having to be aware," said a generously quoted Yolanda Harper, "a University of Tulsa professor who studies multicultural psychology." She then added, redundantly, "Awareness is a choice for people who are in power." We are reminded that "welshing," "jewling," and "gypping" are all no-nos. But did you know that "blacklist," "black sheep of the family," and "don't get behind the eight ball" are also hateful terms and phrases? There was more lecturing and then some confessing in the article (none of it concerned racist speech *by* blacks, but then you knew that). The only redeeming aspect to the exercise was that it suggested how much is *too* much, even for the lords of "View." Instead of giving the piece the cover play for which it was obviously conceived, they stuck it on page 2, over Dear Abby. CPR

# California Titanic

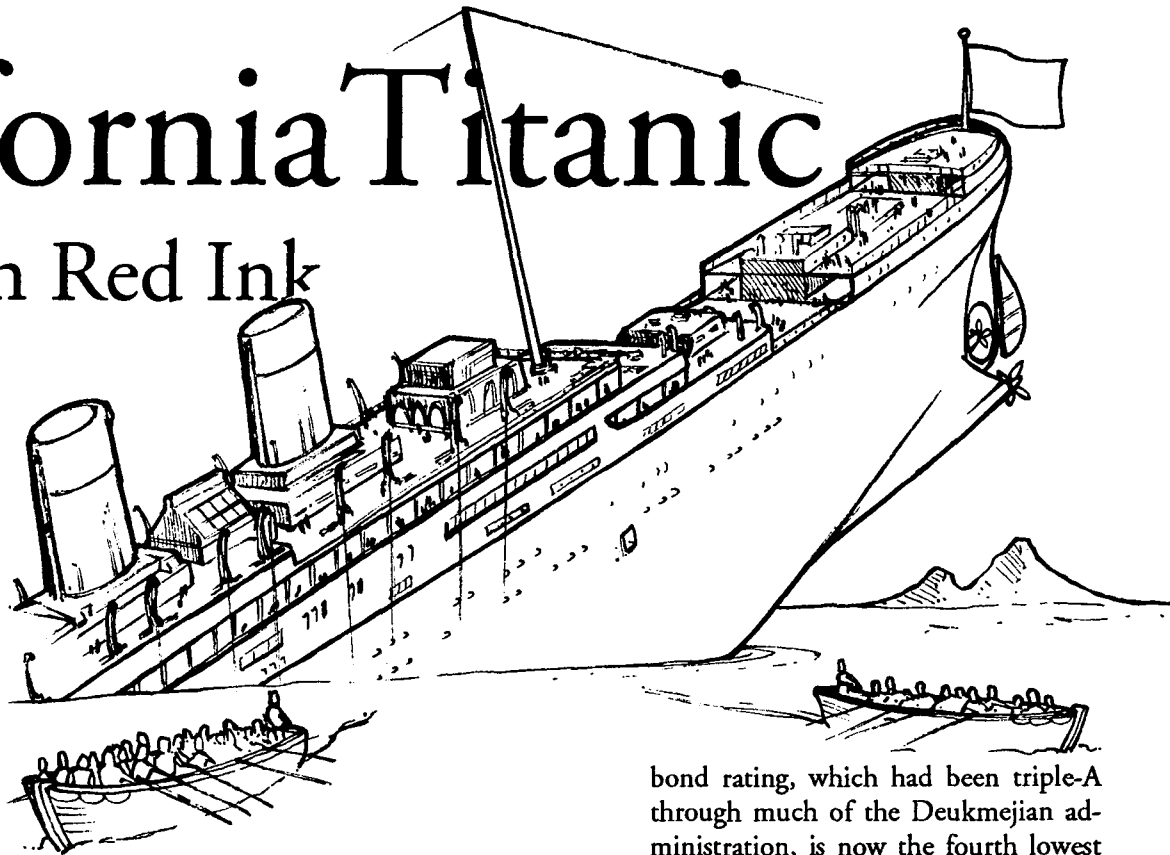
## Sinking In Red Ink

Tom McClintock

**A** STUNNED silence fell over the bridge of the Titanic when Captain Smith was apprised of the damage to his "unsinkable" ship. Seawater flooding the forward compartments was dragging the Titanic down by the bow, progressively lowering each of the ship's watertight sections just enough to allow water to spill over the bulkheads between them, filling one, then the next, then the next. Once this process began, the ship was doomed.

Today in the state Capitol, the same sort of daze seems to paralyze the officials who recklessly ran California full speed into a recession. As in-rushing red ink spills from one fiscal year to the next, the state is inexorably being dragged toward bankruptcy. At some point, that process will also become irreversible. If such a disaster seems implausible simply because it is unprecedented, today's newspaper will carry a list of businesses and households that have irresponsibly managed their financial affairs, ignored repeated warnings from accountants, failed to restrain their expenditures, refused to make adequate provision for uncertainty, and then unexpectedly struck a financial

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hazard that plunged them so deeply into debt they could not recover.

The spectacle of the great Golden State, stopped dead in the economic water and slipping steadily beneath a sea of red ink, leaves one with an inexpressible sense of tragedy and awe.

In its annual survey of the fiscal competence of state governments, *Financial World* magazine in April rated California the "worst managed" state in the nation. This dubious distinction completed California's fall from 41st place in 1991 and 46th place in 1992. To add insult to injury, the editors explained, "you guys really deserved this."

In May, Wall Street financiers warned the California Debt Advisory Commission that California's deficit now exceeded that of New York City in the mid-1970s. Calling California's short-term debt "unprecedented," a vice president with Standard and Poor warned that Wall Street could not indefinitely lend billions for California's bulimic borrowing binge. California's

bond rating, which had been triple-A through much of the Deukmejian administration, is now the fourth lowest in the nation and is under review for further downgrading.

Last year, an estimated 40,000 to 100,000 Californians abandoned the state in a frenzied evacuation of jobs and wage earners. Manufacturing jobs are disappearing at the rate of one per minute, and moving companies are swamped with out-of-state requests. One U-Haul agency in Agoura Hills reported receiving 35 outbound orders for every truck arriving. When Hughes Aircraft announced it was moving 3,000 jobs from the San Fernando Valley to Tucson, a company official noted that the cost of the entire move would be repaid in just three years from the savings of doing business in the Arizona desert's vastly more hospitable business climate.

**C**ALIFORNIA'S FISCAL distress is no more the fault of the recession than the Titanic's sinking was the fault of the iceberg. Just as the Titanic's officers ignored repeated warnings of ice fields ahead, the state's officials continued to spend recklessly despite repeated warn-