

duct enquiries, pursue visions, and enhance productivities, appropriate “diversity” will take care of itself.

Alas, high and refined intellect and creativity characterize few who compose, administer, and manipulate the machinery of college admissions. At best, the existing admissions game is a mess. There is much ridiculousness in the rules, which admit no more than 60 percent of UCLA freshmen on solely academic criteria and which aim at a student body that closely mirrors irrelevant characteristics of the immediately surrounding community. Now, it is discovered — again, by the *Times*, which is on a roll — that there have been indelicate improprieties in diddling with the rules.

Variouly Beautiful People of the Establishment — including chancellors, regents, politicians, and Daddy Warbucks types — have promoted special consideration

for marginal (and sub-marginal) candidates for admission. Sometimes the personal pressure has succeeded.

The initial response of the chief administrators at UCLA was regret, not over prostitution of his institution, but over “unauthorized” exposure of the evidence. And then he employed the USC defense: (a) the number of applicants involved is relatively *small*, and (b) some amount of back-door favoritism, some caving in to Beautiful People, is found *everywhere*.

It seems true that the shenanigans at UCLA and USC are not crimes or large numbers. Rather, they are a shaming of decorum and a corrupting of integrity and a diluting of probity and credibility. But it is difficult to explain good taste and uncompromised courage to those who have little of either. **CR**

THE WORKING PRESS

A Little Respect for the Readers

T I M W . F E R G U S O N

MARK WILLES was part of an inflation-fighting cadre back in his days at the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank. And here he is, still beating down prices — lowering by half the newsstand hit for his company’s flagship, the *Los Angeles Times*. The CEO of Times Mirror Corp. apparently looked at a drop in street sales of the gray lady from more than 200,000 to less than 90,000 and decided that 50 cents was more than she had coming. Now the price is back to a quarter, which is what most papers were before the industry convinced itself a few years ago that it was letting readers steal it blind. (It’s also what the *Times* still cost in competitive areas such as Orange County.) So we’ll see whether the problem for Willes’s newspaper is its price or the growing gulf between its white liberal culture and the politically and ethnically polyglot market it serves.

Along those lines, Willes made one interesting observation to a Columbia Journalism School alumni audi-

ence, reported in the latest big “whither the *Times*?” article, this one in the *New York Times*. Willes was responding to critics of the “almost reverential” (*NYT*’s words) coverage in the *Baltimore Sun* (another Times Mirror paper) of the Pope’s visit to that city. “You don’t give up your credibility by treating your readers with respect,” Willis said. Suburbanites in Orange County and elsewhere in the circulation area of Willes’ *Times*, folks whose values are disdained by so many in the urban journalistic ranks, will be interested to see what that attitude at the top portends.

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Another name in the news at the *Times* these days is Michael Parks, the new managing editor. Winner of the 1987 Pulitzer Prize for foreign coverage, he was chosen over home-office powergals Narda Zacchino and Carol Stogsdill (the latter made the *Times*’ Sacramento coverage what it is today). Parks is an authoritative fellow, though what his appointment will herald for the tone and substance of coverage is likely to be re-

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vealed only in the same slow way that Willes is affecting the *Times*. One thing his underlings believe is that Parks is eclipsing much of the newsroom role of Shelby Coffey, the titular editor. It was *Times* publisher Richard Schlosberg and not Coffey who announced Parks to the staff. Coffey is identified with the “diversity” style book and other concessions to the PC Zeitgeist, so his distancing from the newsroom would appear at first blush to be heartening to conservatives.



All of which is not to say that the *Times* has quit being the *Times*. Take, for example, the serial chronicle of the week-long California AIDS Ride down the coast. Probably the only people more glad to see this 525-mile journey end than the sore-saddle riders themselves were the readers of the *Times*, who had to endure Mack Reed’s ongoing tale of weepy men (hurting for their lovers and friends, not their butts), ugly bigots and wonderfully supportive families. No one begrudges a charity raising funds for the pitiful sufferers from this — or any other — disease, but only the best AIDS coverage avoids an undertone of moral lecture (to the benighted broader public) and self-absorption on the part of homosexual activists. This series did not escape those defects. How about similar Page 3 spreads for the next march against muscular dystrophy?



One result of the diminished content space (a cost-cutting move) at the *Times* recently has been the omission of the paper’s liberal local pundits from the Metro section of the main edition. And if the Life & Style section finally bites the dust, as rumored, then lefty columnist Robin Abcarian will be homeless. It’s amazing how losing a few pounds can make you feel better.



You can’t blame lack of space for the *Times*’s paucity of spot-news photos. For years, perhaps because it wants to set itself above tabloid journalism, the *Times* has only sparingly depicted thugs charged in street crimes or figures in celebrated court cases (the O.J. trial was unavoidably an exception), or most political candidates, for that matter. Compare this policy with, say, the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The *Chron* carried the pix of Richard Allen Davis flipping off Polly Klass’s family on its front page, for example; the *Times*, not at all. Photos of Sacramento Capitol affairs in the biggest paper in the state? Forget it. Even when a few porno

starlets lobbied the Legislature in June — a photo-op if ever there were one — the *Times* relied only on text. But this time your faithful correspondent was able to find no other metro paper succumbing to the salacious impulse, either. Nuts! Has the press gone prudish?



There’s big news elsewhere in Los Angeles, where the free weeklies are gearing up to give the *Times*, the *Daily News*, and the *Orange County Register* more needed competition. The *LA Weekly*, owned by the Hartz pet products king who also has the *Village Voice* in New York, is bumping up its press run by 20,000, to about 200,000. The *Weekly* is your standard left critique of the political and business establishment, which nevertheless yields some surprises. (It recently had a cover piece blasting the “whole language” instructional approach favored by the teacher’s unions.) The *Weekly* not long ago started a sister paper in Orange County, which immediately set upon Representatives Robert Dornan, Dana Rohrabacher, and Chris Cox with non-stop venom. (It also, however, chronicled how a born-again Christian woman who was president of the *Times*’s Orange County edition spoke unguardedly to a Westmont College audience about what it was like working in her very secular world. She was called on the carpet at headquarters and ultimately left the company.) Meanwhile, back in LA, one of the other free weeklies has been bought by the New Times publishing chain of Phoenix, which owns the *SF Weekly* in San Francisco. That paper has tried to twit the standard leftism of the *Bay Guardian*, so the new Los Angeles product may do the same to *LA Weekly*. The New Times owners call themselves small-L libertarians, and it’s very small-L, to be sure. But they can stir the pot. Curiously, they hired a couple of ex-desk editors at the *Times* to be their top guys in Los Angeles.



The other big start-up story is the California regional supplement to the *Wall Street Journal*, which after a long delay is now set to begin this fall. The *Journal* has published similar weekly add-ons to the regular *Journal* in Texas and Florida, filling them with stories on regional business and politics. The pattern has been to hire a junior staff to do these editions. Editor of the California *Journal* will be Rick Wartzman, who’ll move from the paper’s notorious Washington bureau. Wartzman formerly covered military contractors from Los Angeles. He is a solid journalist and (surprise!) of a liberal cast.

CPR

We live in America, not Albania

BY ARNOLD STEINBERG

In May, Assembly Speaker Curt Pringle named four new California Coastal Commissioners, including Calabasas resident Arnold Steinberg, and set off a flood of Democrat hyperbole. Santa Monica Assemblywoman Sheila Kuehl said Pringle showed an "anti-preservation, anti-consumer-use, and anti-coastline attitude." Not only that, she thought the appointments "cynical" and "completely inappropriate" to boot. Unquestionably, something interesting was afoot, and so it proved to be. Following are remarks Mr. Steinberg delivered June 12, at his first meeting as a Commissioner. If he achieves even a part of the objectives he outlines, the Commission's petty tyrants are in for rough weather.

We are here to serve the people of California. That means all of the people, not the wealthy and powerful with political connections, or property rights groups or environmentalists, but the people, especially those that come before us each month. Many believe that the former Coastal Commissioner in prison for corruption is the only one who got caught. We can show them that he's the exception. There are good and honest people who work for the Coastal Commission. These dedicated professionals should welcome reform. In fact, in the last few years, there has been improvement, but too much remains to be done.

Still, there is too much power in the hands of the Coastal Commission, the executive director, the staff. And it has been abused. That's why we need to do more than make the trains run on time; we need to keep the trains from running over our citizens. We need big changes very soon to assure openness, fairness, and due process. This Commission has become a revolving door for too many Commissioners, staff, and other hangers-on to represent so-called "developers" or so-called "environmentalists." We need to hear more from the people who want the permits, less from their high-paid agents. How sad that someone who builds a home needs to retain a lawyer to come here.

We must focus on the big picture — for example, urban sewage into the ocean. We must make people or companies

pay if they impose external costs on the rest of society, and find creative ways to involve the private sector in solving these problems.

Commissioners should not preside over fiefdoms in their area or trade votes. Coastal Commission staff should be polled, and the results processed by an independent firm, to determine which Commissioners have ever contacted them about specific cases. Such contacts should be discouraged and put on the record. Staff should report contacts from supporters and opponents of a permit or amendment, whether from the Sierra Club or a property rights group — the staff member could quickly complete a contact form for the record. This also will prevent staff members in enforcement actions from claiming that nonexistent meetings or conversations occurred.

I guess that raises the issue of *ex parte* communications. We're supposed to be quasi-judicial. I won't ask Assembly Speaker Pringle or his staff, and I don't expect them to instruct me, how to vote. And I'm considering whether to avoid all communications from anyone on a specific permit, unless they are on the record. Everyone here — Coastal Commissioners, staff, proponents, and opponents, should testify under oath. Opinion is opinion. But don't lie, because you'll no longer get a free ride in what we claim is a quasi-judicial proceeding.

We should not have a Coastal Commission executive director or staff recruiting or coaching people to testify at these hearings. It's not only wrong, it's insulting when these letters and statements bear an obvious staff fingerprint. Do we have to endure the spectacle of show trials, in which professional witnesses or people from Central Casting are brought here to prevent someone from moving into their neighborhood?

We need streamlined operations in every respect, from the agenda of these meetings to management and administration and staffing. We need an ombudswoman or ombudsman to keep things moving. We're here to process permits in accord with the law, not to twist the law in an arbitrary and inconsistent manner to make life difficult for our fellow citizens.

