

# THE ALTERNATIVE:

# TO BARE THE WITNESS AND THE TRUTH

Published remarkably without regard to race, color, creed, or (most redundantly of all) national origin -- the question of sex is still in committee.

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## Editorial I

### The Mightiest Itch of All

The scene is the hallowed chambers of the United States Senate and, in a nation fraught with turmoil and distrust, that august body is deliberating the Nation's destiny. In the very chamber where Daniel Webster brilliantly debated the cunning South Carolinian, Robert Y. Hayne, sundering forever historic alliances and illuminating the young Union's deep fissures, the magisterial figure of Senator J. Caleb Boggs rises. In a grave voice drawn out dramatically by his deep southern drawl, he addressed the President Pro Tempore of the Senate. Silence... as history unfolds.

Mr. President, the Senate will soon take up for consideration H. R. 12943, a bill to extend the Jellyfish Control Act of 1966 for another three years. I wish to state my strong support for this bill and to urge its passage by the Senate.

In these days when we are paying special attention to the problems of environmental quality, it is important to recognize that jellyfish, like polluted water, threaten to destroy some of our coastal waters for the use of fisherman.

And this is about the way that noisy assemblage, the Ninety-First Congress, attended the affairs of State. The same chamber which once witnessed the likes of

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## The Continuing Crisis

Senator Edward (Teddy) Kennedy again made headlines, this time for being beaten by Senator Robert Byrd in an attempt to maintain his position as the Senate's assistant Majority Leader. Voters of Edgartown, Massachusetts agreed to appropriate \$1,000 to repair the bridge at Chappaquiddick island which has been ravaged by souvenir hunters. And Senator Kennedy was in a sibylline humor on 30 January when he expressed the view that the 1972 Democratic ticket would be Muskie-Stevenson. Just prior to the Senator's statement President Ahmadou Ahidjo reported that the ten-year-old revolt in the Cameroon had been virtually crushed.

Meanwhile President Nixon delivered the one hundred and eighty-fifth State of the Union Message calling for a "a new American Revolution" but then backing off somewhat and merely proposing: A) consolidation of seven of the eleven Cabinet agencies into four new departments, B) extension of sixteen billion dollars of general purpose grants to the cities and states and C) expenditure of one hundred million dollars on cancer research and allied health programs. Also, he spoke movingly about the environment and resolutely about his Family Assistance Plan. The speech was received warmly and the chairman of the House committee which would have to pass the departmental reorganization plan termed Mr. Nixon's proposals "pure bull." He is Mr. Chet Holifield.

It was reported that 1970's rate of inflation dropped from the 1969 level of 6.1%

to 5.5%, and the National Bureau of Standards reported that women's body measurements have grown in the past 32 years. Chancellor Alan M. Cartter of New York University informed a meeting of educators in Chicago that the demand for Ph. D.'s would slacken for the next twenty years, and in Chicago came the report from the regional Bureau of Census that by 1985 there would be fifty percent more students in college. On 5 January R.O.T.C. Facilities at Claremont Men's College experienced a firebomb. Former UCLA teacher, Angela Davis, spent her twenty-seventh birthday in the Marin County (California) Jail on charges she had endowed the arsenal used in a shootout that left four persons dead. At Berkeley, California a "War Crimes Investigation" conducted by students and "street people" found Dr. Edward Teller of the University of California "guilty" but managed to administer only part of their punishment which included "break(ing) Teller's windows, burn(ing) his house and kill(ing) him". President Brewster announced that Yale students could take up to thirty-five years to pay their tuition, and U.S. News and World Report asserted that there were 1,800 demonstrations, building seizures and cases of arson in 1970--along with eighteen "major riots." News arrived from Veces, Hungary that Karoly Szakallas bit off the ear of Janos Molnar in a disagreement. On the 28th of December Congressman L. Mendel Rivers, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee passed away, moreover Senator

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# ALTERNATIVE February, 1971

## Radical Chic And The New Left

Terry Krieger

Cambridge, Massachusetts—In the 14 December issue of *Newsweek*, Stewart Alsop pronounces radical chic “dead.” It passed away, he reports, because it was “silly, sickening, and boring.” According to Mr. Alsop, “...radical chic—or the New Left, or call it what you will—was essentially a fad, and all fads die—”

It is true that all fads die—a fad is, by definition, ephemeral—but it is also true that fads can be revived by contemporary “sophisticates” who condescend to be amused by the popular culture of earlier generations, as with the phenomenon of Camp, or by organizations that hope to make money out of nostalgia, as in those television commercials during which entertainers of another era are brought out of cold storage to hawk records that allegedly contain “the best of the big bands” or that promise to recapture “those memory years.” (My secret ambition, which I am revealing for the first time in *The Alternative*, is to become President of the Longines Symphonette Society.) Rock music from the Fifties and early and middle Sixties is currently experiencing a revival, as is illustrated by the success of the self-consciously unctuous Sha-Na-Na group and the renewed interest in Elvis Presley. One Boston FM station, WROR, now plays nothing but “Solid Gold Rock and Roll.”

Whether a fad is appearing for the first time, being revived, or, as in the case of radical chic, moribund, it should be distinguished, at least for purposes of analysis, from a political movement. A fad may have a profound effect on a society's culture, but it can be ignored or rejected by non-faddists. A political movement strives to affect a state's political and social structure. The movement's programs are directed not only toward retaining old and recruiting new members but also toward influencing the thoughts and actions of people not in the movement, especially those in positions of power and authority.

Radical chic is a fad that celebrates certain radical groups and their activities, but it is not, as Mr. Alsop implies, equivalent to the radical movement or the New Left. Leonard Bernstein's party for the Black Panthers, which is now regarded as the epitome of radical chic, and Tom Wolfe's extraordinary article in *New York* about it are of interest primarily to intellectuals and writers in places such as New York, Cambridge and Berkeley. The party and the article give the intellectuals something to think (and gossip) about and the writers something to write about. Other Americans, which is to say most Americans, know of Leonard Bernstein

from his television specials, in which he explains the mysteries of music for the benefit of children of all ages, but they have never heard of Tom Wolfe or *New York* magazine. My working-class neighbors in Cambridge have been utterly unmoved by the controversy over radical chic. It has not been a topic of conversation in their homes or at Spilewski's Market, George's grocery, Joe Gallagher's fruit stand, Reno's Sub Shop, Shea's Cleaners, or Edie's Bakery.

### Weight Watchers and Spiro Agnew Watches

Although radical chic is associated with a political movement, it is essentially a fad, and, like other fads, for example, Weight Watchers, hula hoops, Beatlemania, and Spiro Agnew watches and T-shirts, it mainly affects only those people who want to be involved with it. This is not the case with political movements. The anti-Vietnam War movement and the “peace” movement (which are not in all instances the same, either in membership or intent), the civil rights movement, the ecology movement, and that collection of radical movements known as “the New Left” have influenced the nation's laws, its foreign and domestic policies, its political discourse, and its social atmosphere. Citizens who have not been members of these movements and who, in some cases, have been opposed to these movements' objectives have had to obey the new laws and adjust to the new political and social situations these movements have helped to produce.

When Leonard Bernstein holds a *soirée* for the Panthers, what happens is that Tom Wolfe writes an article, a controversy develops, and a fad starts to fold. On the other hand, when there is a march on Washington to promote civil rights legislation or to end the war, when there are riots that, as Professor Banfield (Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City*, Little, Brown) remarks, may be “mainly for fun and profit” but that quickly are explained and excused by some as justifiable acts of political protest, when there is a massive letter-writing or intense lobbying campaign, when a political controversy is picked up by the media, or when there are acts of terrorism, such as bombing—in other words, when a political movement of any significance takes action, whether legal or illegal, peaceful or violent—there may be a response that affects people throughout the society: a bill is passed or blocked; a policy is adopted or changed; politicians, who always are talking, talk some more or

change the subject; and, if there has been disorder or violence, police and troops are called out.

Unlike a fad, which exists in and for the present, a political movement exists in the present but is committed to the future, at least its vision of the future. When a fad such as radical chic becomes unfashionable, many of its fans desert it without hesitation—parties for the Panthers are definitely out now. On the other hand, when a political movement such as the New Left suffers defeat, many of its members continue to support it, always hoping for future success, and even strengthen their commitment. Terrorism and other desperate tactics adopted by some New Leftists reflect both the failure of the New Left to attract substantial and enduring popular support and the stronger commitment of some New Leftists to the movement.

### Of Appearances And Sympathies

When radical chic was flourishing, it contributed to a cultural atmosphere that led certain observers addicted to surfaces to conclude that the New Left had more support than it actually had. These observers believed that the radical chic set really was backing rather than flirting with the New Left. These same observers also viewed every young person with long hair and bell bottoms as a participant in a “youth culture” that is simply the cultural subdivision of the New Left. This conception of a New Left movement, drawing strong support from radical chic sophisticates and a militant youth culture, was put forth by certain journalists who are misled by appearances or their own sympathies and by certain social scientists who are ignorant of culture or, at least, confuse culture and politics and who get their information on the “youth culture” from journals and magazines written by people like themselves.

Now, with radical chic moribund and with some of these journalists and academicians belatedly discovering that, whatever their faults, all young people are not cheering Jerry Rubin or bombing federal buildings, it may be easier for more people to appreciate how little solid support the New Left has.

This does not mean the New Left is finished. Some segments of the New Left continue to engage in constitutionally protected political agitation. Other segments persist in disrupting universities, bombing the bastions and “trashing” the outposts of “capitalism and imperialism,” and staging political executions, with police officers as favorite victims. And although radical chic is on its