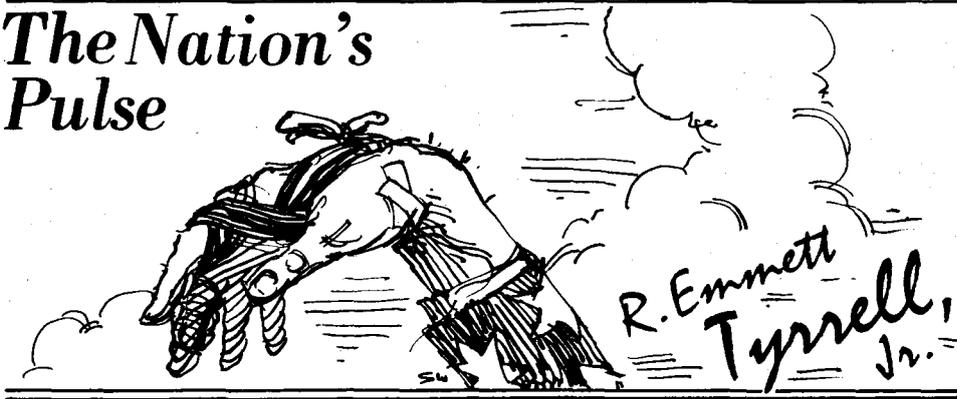


## The Nation's Pulse



### The Conservatives' Revolt

WASHINGTON — Dinned as we are by the instinctively objurgative, frequently malevolent, journalism of a thinly intellectualized news media, few Americans are given to thinking of that man in the White House as a wise man. Yet, I have no doubt that of all the presidents of this century, Mr. Nixon is one of those most capable of offering the average American wise counsel. He is a man whose basic good sense has been cultured by years of grim experience and animated by a sharp and assiduous intelligence. He is also one of the most cunning presidents of this century, a characteristic that is in itself undesirable only when uninformed by principle.

The problem with a statesman of cunning, then, is not that he is shrewd but that he might be unprincipled or that he might, in his genius, spin off from that mass of slower moving particles that form his constituency. If this happens and no therapeutic action is taken, it is only a matter of time before he spins quite beyond the wider confines of reality and so into the coffin of history.

It is far too harsh and too early to criticize Mr. Nixon for being an unprincipled statesman. One is on surer ground to state that Mr. Nixon has, in his grand policy leaps, left behind many of those loyal and industrious men and women who compose his natural constituency. History may indeed judge these policies to have been informed by his wisdom, but if Mr. Nixon does not soon pause to consult with the conservatives within his party, historians may be making their judgments of him earlier than they had anticipated.

On 29 December Congressman John Ashbrook, an ex-chairman of the American Conservative Union, announced his intention to challenge Mr. Nixon in the New Hampshire primary. In his press conference Mr. Ashbrook seemed to be expressing the opinion that Mr. Nixon has lost touch with America's self-conscious conservative movement and so, danced away from the political realities of America at this point in history. This was not the first time Mr. Ashbrook had expressed these sentiments. In a long, vividly suggestive

speech delivered on the floor of Congress on 15 December, he deposited the conservatives' complaint against the administration, averred his remedy, and in the last paragraphs adumbrated the course conservatives might follow if Mr. Nixon were to neglect his warning. We have edited this historic statement and reprint it below that our readers might gain a better understanding of the nature of what might one day be recorded as the conservatives' revolt.

#### Rep. John M. Ashbrook

IT IS ARGUED by his spokesmen that while President Nixon shares conservative concerns on the issues, he is faced with intractable conditions. He must confront, in the first place, a hostile Congress which wants to go much further in the liberal left direction than does the administration, and the administration's half-measures are intended to prevent even worse things from occurring.

In addition, there is the fact that certain things must be done for political reasons even though President Nixon himself may not like them. There is the further fact that the President has to face up to hostile pressure from the media and from marching mobs, and that some of these things must be done to placate these forces.

The invariable clincher is that any imaginable alternative to what the President is doing would be infinitely worse, so conservatives should back the President even as he is heading to the left.

On examination, each of these extenuations for the President's policies appears to be mistaken. It is not true, for example, that many of the Chief Executive's leftward initiatives are forced on him by a hostile Congress. On several occasions, indeed, as my colleagues are well aware, there have been indications that Congress was quite willing to take a conservative stand on some issue and representatives of the administration have stepped in to prevent such an outcome. The President has often refused to use his own legitimate weapons in contest with liberal initiatives by the Congress.

Equally to the point, Nixon has repeatedly failed to use the considerable leverage of his office in other ways. Assuming a continuing tension between

the White House and Congress, the obvious course for a president seeking maximum conservative results would be to make vigorous demands — a total end to OEO, deep slashes in federal spending, a "thick" ABM, and so on. The resulting compromise with the legislature would fall somewhere between the President's views and that of Congress.

The argument that the President must head left for political reasons is even less persuasive. If the things he is doing are what the American people want, and if these are imperative steps for a Presidential politician — why did he not campaign on them?

The excuses offered for this administration's performance leave out yet another factor, perhaps the most important of all—the factor of presidential leadership. While on certain matters such as taxation and rising prices public attitudes seem relatively stable, on others they are responsive to cues provided by the White House. This is particularly true on foreign policy and defense questions where information levels are low, issues complex, and the whole business remote from the man in the street. On issues such as these strong presidential advocacy can shape and alter public opinion.

In the case of Red China, to take the obvious instance, there was little or no pressure of public opinion on this administration to pursue a course of appeasement. To the extent that the American people had any settled notions on the issue, they were decidedly the reverse.

President Nixon's own course of action, however, has perceptibly softened U.S. feeling toward Red China. Thus rather than the President being pushed left by political pressures, the procedure has been exactly the opposite. He has gone left, and created pressures on public opinion to follow him. And, of course, on the defense philosophy professed by the President and outlined in detail by Deputy Defense Secretary Packard, there would be massive consternation among the American people if they clearly understood that their leaders were leaving them exposed to potential attack in order to "reassure" the Soviets.

The net effect of these observations is to deny the assertion of administration spokesmen who attempt to justify the President's policies to conservatives by saying that the President shares conservative principles and is doing the best he can amidst difficulties to put them into practice. The emerging perception is something different: That, whatever the reason for his performance, and whatever the affirmations of his heart of hearts, he clearly does not share conservative convictions — or what I would call traditional Republican convictions — on a day-to-day operational basis. And for every realistic purpose, that unfortunately is the perception which counts. Feelings the President has which do not issue in public policy are regrettably beside the point.

What many conservatives viewed with

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# THE ALTERNATIVE *February, 1972*

## The Function of Criticism at the Present Time

*Roger Rosenblatt*

WHEN I WAS a college senior debating whether to apply to law school or graduate school in English, my prospective father-in-law advised law school, and so I applied to graduate school. The first place that accepted me was Michigan, and when I told my prospective father-in-law he said that's fine, but it isn't the East. Next I was accepted by NYU. He said that's all right, but it's not the Ivy League. When Columbia came through, he told me that it wasn't Harvard, Princeton, or Yale. When I got into Princeton, he said it wasn't Harvard or Yale. When I got into Yale, he said it wasn't Harvard. When I got into Harvard, he said it wasn't law school.

Things trouble me at a later stage than they do most people. I seem to catch on to the fact that a problem exists in a certain area at just about the time its solution is imminent. Luckily, my zeal at these discoveries is so wholehearted that people mistake it for a long-running, passionate commitment which has recently peaked, and therefore congratulate me on my stamina. It took me three years in graduate school to wonder what I was doing there. Between teaching assignments, taking exams, learning three languages, writing a dissertation, taking out the garbage, losing my jump shot, noticing that my wife had given up teaching to raise two children, apparently ours, discovering an inability to stay awake past midnight, acquiring charge accounts, electrical appliances, and a few other things which signaled my future death, I gradually began to consider towards what profession my graduate student friends and I were supposed to be heading. (Most of these friends had actually considered this problem two years earlier, and are now in legal practice, earning a bundle.) One thing was certain; I had no skills. This, in the eventuality of universal draft, seemed an advantage.

As long as I kept to my own constituency, this matter of what I was doing never came to a head. All of us graduate students were in the same boat (no one wanted to make waves), and at parties — there were many, all of them desperate — we behaved like characters in Thomas Mann's short stories, unconsciously decking out our own burial ships (we English teachers can go on like this forever), without

even the tacit admission that we were all at sea. The only hope we had to go on was the fact that our mentors, the professors whom we were to become, were alive and seemed content. It was reasonable to conclude that if we behaved ourselves, we too would grow up to be alive and content, yet our elders never said exactly why they were content or what they were doing with their lives. Even had I been brave enough to put the question directly, no purpose would have been served. In university circles, the question, "what are we doing here?" is the signal to break up the party.

Modern times have not really affected this silence because we teachers are too busy reforming the curriculum to explore the existing profession. The good in this is that it preserves one area within the university where there is no danger of fist fights. On the outside, however, it is a different story, as it always is, because no matter how naturally adept or practiced you are in social evasion, there must always come a moment, after the soup, a gap in the lunch time hilarity or in the shared melancholy over world crises, when your (businessman, cop, doctor, architect, pimp, engineer, commercial artist, forest ranger) friend will look straight into your shifty eyes from the steady security of his own, and ask what it is precisely that you do. I usually try to get around this rudeness first by simply naming the courses I teach, skillfully tossing in literary jargon (anagoge, Skeltonics) in hopes that my accuser will not wish to appear ignorant before me and drop the subject. This rarely works, as the presence of a college professor like no other stimulus on earth seems always to encourage confidence in even the shakiest people. I will then try merely stating the classes I teach, again being careful to indicate that I guide graduate students and honors candidates as well as the regular run, implying by so doing that my work is really too advanced for lay comprehension. Failing these two ploys, I tell the truth, always an error. I gulp and simply say that my job is to read books and talk and write about them, to determine and demonstrate what these books mean, where they fit into the history of facts and ideas, and why or why not they are worth reading. After

I make this declaration there is an excited pause while my companion searches my expression for a sign that I'm kidding.

I won't say that there isn't some compensation for leading this mystery life, because there is. First of all, it's a great advantage with women, or so I'm told through hearsay by distant acquaintances in foreign universities. Of course, there are those who, when you tell them your work, split your sides and theirs by exclaiming, "Well, I'd better watch my grammar," but for every one of these there are five others who glow all over at the mere mention of literature, and who wriggle furiously at the drop of "poetry." Throw in Modern or Romantic, and watch out. To these women it makes not the slightest difference that they don't know what it is you do. Whatever it is, you've got to be very sensitive to do it. There is no doubt that the academic attachment to poets is the next best thing to being there. I tell women I teach Robert Browning, and immediately they begin talking in sonnets.

With men, however, you can barely strike up a conversation if they know what it is you do. Once you get past the "Well, I'd better watch my grammar" line, a special and eerie quiet comes over the scene, one in which the stranger is occupied in guessing whether you're a fairy, and you in retaliation are trying to strike poses which would indicate that you're not. It never fails that if I am cloistered with a businessman to whom I've just revealed my profession, my next move inevitably is to mention something about sports, especially football. If it would help matters I would probably tell a traveling salesman joke and wear chaps, but it wouldn't. Even by the time I've proven I'm straight I've talked so much sports that I sound like a one-track jock.

Occasionally you meet someone who has either majored in English himself (but who since law school has seen his error and now would take his conversion out on you), or whose child who majored in English is now selling lanyards in Majorca. These people are unusual in that although they do not know what you do, they do not like it and seek a fight. In the long run their hostility is easier to deal with than the bafflement of the general, because