

EDITORIAL



BIBO ERGO SUM

Alexander the Great is back in the news, and unlike so many of the notables mentioned there, the late Macedonian politico owes his current celebrity not to the artistry of clever public relations hacks, but to his own audacity and to the persevering scholarship of Prof. John Maxwell O'Brien. Writing in the current issue of *Annals of Scholarship*, O'Brien has revealed that Alexander, the youthful conquerer of the ancient world, was, like it or lump it, a common drunk.

The revelations have stirred an enormous controversy. Scholars of the period are in a stew. Americans of Macedonian descent are irritable. And then there are those members of the children's rights movement who had hoped to bring the drinking age down to conform with the voting age where such disparity still exists. After all, if an 18-year-old is old enough to vote, he ought to be allowed the tools to make a sound choice. Finally, there is the budding alcoholics' rights movement. Surely it does these reformers no good for some professor to be linking booze to the kind of antisocial behavior that characterized the late Macedonian's brief, albeit epic, career.

Yet, you can be sure that O'Brien's researches brought rejoicing on Capitol Hill. There alcoholism has been spoiling a lot of fun lately, and many a matutinal hangover must have been relieved when word spread that bibulosity has been the occupational hazard of statesmen going back to the fourth century B.C. How I would like to have heard the learned conversations in the Senate Cloakroom as the solons speculated on the role internal lotions have played in history.

Ever since the news of Alexander's guzzling got out, a surprising number of pols have stepped forward to testify to their own struggles with the hooch. Apparently alcoholism is a danger that every statesman must court in pursuing the people's business, and many seem convinced that

their struggles against the jug lend romance to the legend that they present to a spellbound electorate on Election Day. Alcoholism adds a human touch to their otherwise superhuman lives. Moreover, in an age when all sorts of unfortunate circumstances supposedly free us from personal responsibility for our rascality, booze, it appears, is seen as a plausible alibi on Capitol Hill.

In the past few weeks, no fewer

than three congressmen have claimed strong drink as their excuse for lapses in bribery, conspiracy, and pederasty. What is more, there is a host of other contrite scamps, men who promise to sin no more, running for high office in the land. In the case of some, their trashy pasts and tearful confessions actually seem to have given them an advantage over their less wayward opponents. These are great days, proving once again that, despite the received wisdom about America's puritanical political expect-

tations, we really do not mind being represented by slobs.

Consider the three congressmen who have most recently sought exoneration on the grounds of alcoholism. Like college boys on the morning after a dozen beers and a costly joyride, these distinguished lawmakers are now seeking to excuse their actions on the grounds that they had taken aboard a little too much firewater. They ask that their constituents and fellow lawmakers let bygones be bygones. They want to retain their seats in the House. There they will continue the noble business of pork-barreling and distributing enough favors to their constituents to ensure reelection. This is modern American statecraft.

"I was intoxicated. I was drinking FBI bourbon," explained a petulant Michael ("Ozzie") Myers, Democrat from Pennsylvania. So too was the Hon. John W. Jenrette, Democrat of South Carolina. Both of these convicted boodlers were nabbed in the Abscam investigation. Then there is the most egregious of this bibulous trinity, the Hon. Robert Bauman, Republican from Maryland and a vociferous spokesman for traditional American values. Alcoholism is his excuse for soliciting sexual delights from a 16-year-old boy, an adventure suggesting that the Hon. Bauman shares more than one of Alexander's indulgences. As a prominent conservative, the Hon. Bauman has been fighting back the hedonistic hordes for years, and now it turns out he was juicing with them after hours. Today he wants to use their permissive ethic to exonerate himself; he is going to continue to campaign for reelection. "I will submit myself," he rather artlessly declares, "to the judgment of the citizens of my district." On what grounds does he expect his constituents to reelect him—a sympathy vote? Is this not asking rather a lot from voters to whom in the past he has pledged a higher standard of conduct than is regularly practiced by his opponents? Of these three rogues, Bauman is quite the most intolerable.



Adapted from RET's Monday column in the Washington Post.

To offer sympathy to a wrongdoer is an act of common decency; to return him to the House of Representatives is an act of frivolity border-

ing on the infantile. It is an indication of how far along we have come in releasing rogues from responsibility for their roguishness that they would

even suggest drunkenness as their alibi. America has had enough soap opera in the halls of government. Return the melodrama to afternoon

television, and return candidates like Myers, Jenrette, and Bauman to private life where I shall gladly buy them all a drink and watch the fun. □

C A P I T O L I D E A S



THE PASSING OF THE BUCK

by Tom Bethell

Whatever the next four years may bring, we all surely owe Governor Reagan an immediate and heartfelt round of applause for bringing to an end Jimmy's dismal reign of Wimpery & Peanuttery. Well done, Governor! And to Jimmy Carter we bid Godspeed, as he embarks on what I suspect may turn out to be a preaching mission to the Third World, where he will have ample opportunity to experience at first hand the high esteem in which our nation is now held as a result of his policy of apology and accommodation.

What of Reagan's prospects, as he begins to grapple with more problems and headaches than I would ever care to face? Reagan himself is undoubtedly a man of sound instincts. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that he has qualities of greatness rarely seen in the White House. Less reassuring is the caliber of the people who are clustering around him. Put more bluntly, just as Carter's great problem turned out to be his total docility in the face of capture by the determined forces of George McGovern, who were disappointed in 1972 but victorious by proxy in 1976, so Ronald Reagan may well walk into the Oval Office firmly surrounded by a squad of Jerry Ford leftovers eager to take up where they left off four years ago.

Reagan should be severely on his guard against these people, who do

not fully share his vision of America. In some cases, their shining goal is merely to balance the budget by allowing taxes to rise. Others—non-readers of *The Congressional Record*—imagine that it will be possible to cut government spending without first putting pressure on the spenders by cutting taxes. If, in the realm of domestic policy, we see

nothing more imaginative than the trust that a repudiation of tax cuts will permit revenues to catch up with spending, then inflation will soar and Ted Kennedy or another of the left-wing Democrats will be on the presidential reviewing stand in January 1985.

Reagan and his problematical Fordites aside, now may well be the

time to undertake a brief diagnosis of the state of the nation. What are the most serious problems facing the Reagan Administration? (Here I confess to a tiny suspicion in the corner of my mind that it might have been more enjoyable to watch Carter continue to grapple with them. The presidency today has all the meteorological force of a weather vane, and so one fears that Reagan really won't be able to do a great deal with the elements.)

The first of these problems is often said to be the decline in our national defenses. But I wonder if this is really as serious as some imagine. In the first place, it seems to me that all those warhead and missile enumerations, comparative dollar/ruble expenditure totals, defense-as-percentage-of-GNP measures, and so on, mean very little, if anything. Perhaps more important, even if there is a growing imbalance in the Soviets' favor, there is absolutely no constituency in this country for blocking a remedy to the situation. As was shown in the Cold War years, most liberals can live with big defense spending.

The more serious danger, both in relation to the military and all other national problems, is the ever-growing habit of thinking of solutions in terms of additional dollar expenditures. It turns out that dollars provide us with a misleading, and often destructive, method of quantifying problems and their solutions. If we



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