

EDITORIAL



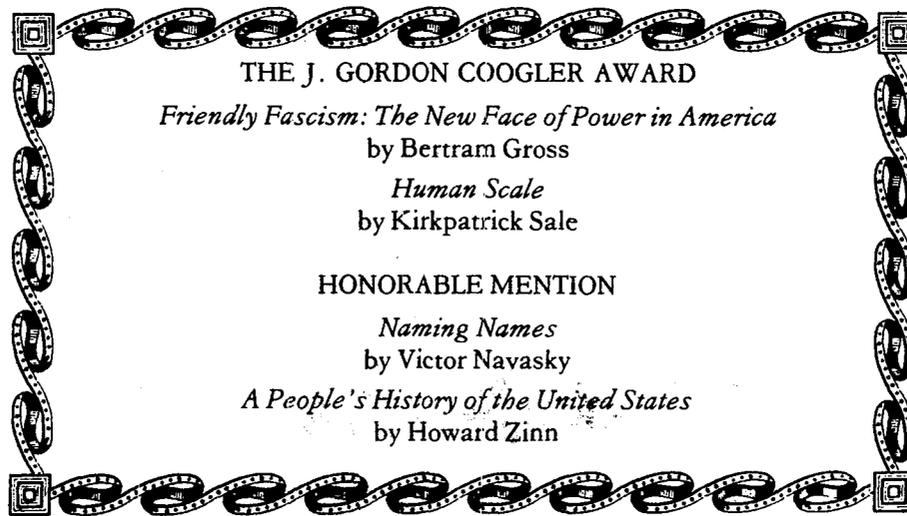
THE WORST BOOK OF THE YEAR

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

Have the eminent minds who dissect our time ever annotated and scrutinized the marvel that until very recently the great bulk of mankind's speculative thought was pretty much absorbed with aching feet, sore teeth, and allied miseries? I doubt that they have, and yet a pair of sore dogs is no trivial matter. Ask General Hannibal and his Carthaginians. Ask Rudolf Nureyev. With the advance of the podiatrist's science, with the passing of the old guard in dentistry—the executioner mentality departing, the dental-hygiene mentality stepping in—there has come about a dramatic change in the topics of popular thought. No more does the yokel puzzle and contemplate his swollen peddles. No longer can the quack make a killing by selling him a jar of foul-smelling ointment. Both have moved on to higher concerns.

Freed from the mundane miseries of his person, the yokel now often takes a college degree and settles down to a lifetime of worry over such matters as the imminent, irreversible poisoning of all life on this planet and the storm trooper potential inhering in the *Fortune* 500. Freed from confecting smelly ointments, the quack now sells the yokels propaganda to keep them anxious. Here is an astounding truth: Education spreads, science advances, medicine banishes infectious illness, and capitalism forks over the goods—nonetheless, as many yokels as ever live in terror. Quite possibly their angst is one of the eternal verities.

At any rate, today the quacks who prey on them are fully employed, ministering to lunatic anxieties of lush variety. They work with consumerist groups, ecologists, pacifists, members of the Democratic National Committee—wherever there are simpletons who have any doubts whatsoever about modern society, there you will find a host of quacks feverishly assuring them that madness, enslavement, and doom are our present condition and that things will get worse. These are the catastro-



THE J. GORDON COOGLER AWARD

Friendly Fascism: The New Face of Power in America

by Bertram Gross

Human Scale

by Kirkpatrick Sale

HONORABLE MENTION

Naming Names

by Victor Navasky

A People's History of the United States

by Howard Zinn

phists. Today they prosper. Most have actually gained what passes for intellectual renown, though it is a renown that would have been impossible in days past when our system of higher education was not so vast and pervaded by hokum.

Hurrying across a wide range of intellectual disciplines, the catastrophists gather bogus facts and idiotic arguments to cut and paste into huge incondite books, which they then hawk to the hypochondriacs and neurotics of the land. Most of these dreadful books are prominently listed on college bibliographies where they amplify the fears of wimpy college boys and gals, and where they fortify the cleverer students' assumption that the teacher is an ass. In 1980 there were published two portentous tomes so prodigiously idiotic as to elicit the unprecedented recommendation from our distinguished panel of judges that both books share the coveted "J. Gordon Coogler Award" for the Worst Book of the Year.

The first piece of catastrophist twaddle is Bertram Gross's *Friendly Fascism: The New Face of Power in America*. During the 40 or so years that this book gestated in Professor Gross's cerebrum, he and his liberal coconspirators were apparently fervently engaged in the construction of the Liberal *Paradiso*. He is proud to have been a "major architect" of the

1946 Employment Act and the 1978 Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Bill. Alack, now, with the Founding Fathers' edifice derelict and overgrown with such statist marijuana, the great architect has become unnerved. Without apologizing for the damage he has done or even acknowledging how the damage was achieved, he perceives that the American polity has become a scandalous *ménage à trois* of Big Government, Big Interests, and Big Business. He calls it "friendly fascism," for despite his high positions as Distinguished Professor of Public Policy and Planning at Hunter College and Professor of Political Science at City University of New York, he is also every inch the super salesman.

According to Professor Gross, there is an "emerging Big Business-Big Government partnership (that) has a global reach. It is rooted in Colossal transnational corporations and complexes that help knit together a 'Free World' on which the sun never sets. These are elements of a new despo-

*Formerly "The Harold Robbins Award." We rename it this year "The J. Gordon Coogler Award" for obvious reasons. Coogler (1865-1901), the illustrious poet-aster, an unintentional humorist, awed Americans for years with volume upon volume of *Purely Original Verse*, from which we pluck: "Alas! For the South, her books have grown fewer—/She never was much given to literature."

atism." And for some 400 pages he yammers along, gathering thousands of elements of Americana, trimming and embellishing them to accord with his *idée fixe*: friendly fascism.

Where are our Nuremberg Rallies? What is the uniform of our *fascisti*? Who is the *Duce*? When did the putsch get under way? Professor Gross is not telling, at least I do not recall his proffering these revelations. Truth be known, it is very difficult from his garrulous besotted spiel to recall any memorable passages, so quickly is one diatribe replaced by another—all equally replete with error and dizzying contradiction. Great haranguers like Hitler and Castro are noted for their ability to harangue on an essentially fallacious point for dozens of hours, but who recalls a line of their bilge? Professor Gross is in the same boat. He will be read by neurotics, but not even a fawning social scientist will ever be able to remember a line.

Here is *Tafel* music for maniacs. How did the fascists take over? Why do they not call themselves fascists? Are they happy? What is their next move? Is there anything we can do about them? Would the brethren in the Kremlin be of any help? The answers might be in this endless book. Then again, they might not. Perhaps I forgot. Perhaps I am trying to forget. *Friendly Fascism* is not a pleasurable reading experience.

Nor is Kirkpatrick Sale's *Human Scale*, our other prize-winning effort, a reader's delight. Yet, whereas Professor Gross, if he is right, has probably lit out for Albania or some other land beyond the CIA's grasp, Mr. Sale has merely called his opponents "giantists," people who advocate that all Americans wear size 13 EEE shoes, regardless of need.

Now this is not to say that giantists are very democratic or even very nice, but so far as I can judge from *Human Scale* they are not as political as friendly fascists. On the other

hand it seems that giantists are even more pervasive than the smiling *fascisti*. According to Mr. Sale's findings the giantists are behind

paperback books that fall apart during the first reading, home hair dryers whose plastic knobs and hooks break off, window shades that never go all the way back up, plastic "sponges" that disintegrate in a week, rotary can-openers that rip and slip, kitchen towel racks that snap off after a month, ballpoint pens that run dry the second time you use them, charcoal lighting fluid that flickers away in moments, flashlight batteries that never work, dresses with buttons that fall off after the first wearing, costly towels that

shred after a few washings, and toy trains that are in pieces by the day after Christmas.

In other words they are everywhere—in giant corporations, giant bureaucracies, giant cities, giant buildings, everywhere. They ruin Christmas and love BIGNESS. One must even have edited Mr. Sale's book; it runs along like this for over 550 pages. Like *Friendly Fascism*, no element of Americana is left unused if it can be fitted into the author's idiot theme. Every page of *Human Scale* has a lunatic passage like the above. How any normal human being could read

such a book and depart feeling informed I cannot say. It left me with a ringing in the ears.

Assuming for the moment that these men are sincere—and it is a difficult assumption to entertain—we have here two authors who see no validity in the present whatsoever. One believes that people live in large cities merely out of thoughtlessness. The other believes that 220 million Americans are the unsuspecting victims of a *coup d'état*. We have here either two nuts or two quacks.

I choose to think that they are quacks, though I shall not take issue with the charge that they are also nuts. More importantly, they are selling their propaganda to a multitude of inflamed half-wits. If our Coogler laureates and their customers have their way, popular thought will again be taken up with meditations on primitive miseries, for under them America would return to primitive times. Our laureates long for the times when yokels still lived under sod roofs, and, midst flies and staphylococci, waited for the dusty-foots. □

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



A STRANGE NEW RESPECT

Federal budgeting now involves five-year projections, mark-up, spend-out, bipartisan chumminess, dawn-to-dusk staff meetings, concurrent resolutions, puzzled senators reading staff-prepared speeches that they only half understand, reflow estimates, outlay reestimates, aggregate targets, functional totals, and, finally, the reconciliation process. All this results in—what? A nice fat budget deficit: Once again the government has spent more than it takes in. Liberals then all join hands and sing in chorus: "The budget process must at all costs be preserved!" Conservatives rejoin with their lame response: "Balance the budget! Cut spending!"

Last week, as the Senate reconvened for its lame-duck session, budgetary deliberations were resumed after being so rudely interrupted by the election. I decided to observe the proceedings from a perch in the press gallery.

Budget figures come out in January nowadays. But these mean nothing any more, notwithstanding the massive and unrepeated press coverage of the moment. The figures are then revised steadily upward

throughout the rest of the year, with a large chunk of spending packed in at the last minute to make the differential between the new year and the old seem smaller than it is. Fiscal year 1981 began on October 1, but here the Senate was on November 18 "reestimating" the '81 budget, as it will continue to do until next September.

The main actors on the floor were Senators Fritz Hollings of South Carolina, Henry Bellmon of Oklahoma, and next year's chairman of the Republican-controlled Senate Budget Committee, Pete Domenici of New Mexico.

According to any criterion you use, the so-called "budget process," enacted in 1974, has failed lamentably. The total deficit in the five years since its inception has been \$300 billion—two and one-half times larger than in the five preceding years. Average inflation and unemployment rates have similarly risen. But somehow the "process" is everywhere extolled. For the allegedly adversary press, the budget process has become a touchstone of liberalism. (Consider, for example, a recent, baffling article in the *Washington Post* by Helen Dewar headlined "Hill's Budget Process Grows

Stronger With Every Passing Deficit.") The budget processors use the language of stringency, austerity, and tough choices. But in practice, these choices are never made; instead, the process creates a rationale for everlasting and ever-enlarging deficits. Let us join the senators in their deliberations. Sen. Hollings has the floor:

The press gallery will soon see indignant news releases issued by righteous fiscal watchmen condemning their spendthrift colleagues for throwing the balanced budget away. We cannot pull out the props from under an economy that is expected to be in the early and fragile recovery stage in fiscal 1981. We cannot make billions of dollars of additional spending cuts when the cuttable cloth just is not there.

Hollings recommended a budget deficit for 1981 of "less than \$18 billion." (Last April, it was zero.) This would "stick to the spending discipline and steady plan for continued restraint that will balance the budget as soon as it is practicable to do so," Hollings intoned, throwing in the comforting words "responsible and measured approach," and "fiscal responsibilities of this body." As for tax cuts, "until such spending restraint, provision in this budget for a tax cut would be premature." The Senate was advised to "exercise



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