

EDITORIAL



BULBOUS TIP

I have been wrong to call House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill Congressman Falstaff. I apologize. There is indeed buffoonery in his yelps and furies over Reaganomics, but there is also an affecting quaintness. In his campaign to slam down a \$700 limit on the final installment of President Reagan's 25-percent cut in personal tax rates, Mr. O'Neill came across as nothing so much as a rotund Michael Foot, sans dog, English walking stick, and frayed raiment but with the same woebegone 1930s vision of working classes struggling under the lash of the Big Bosses while their children pad about barefoot, dirty, and with tears rolling down their cheeks.

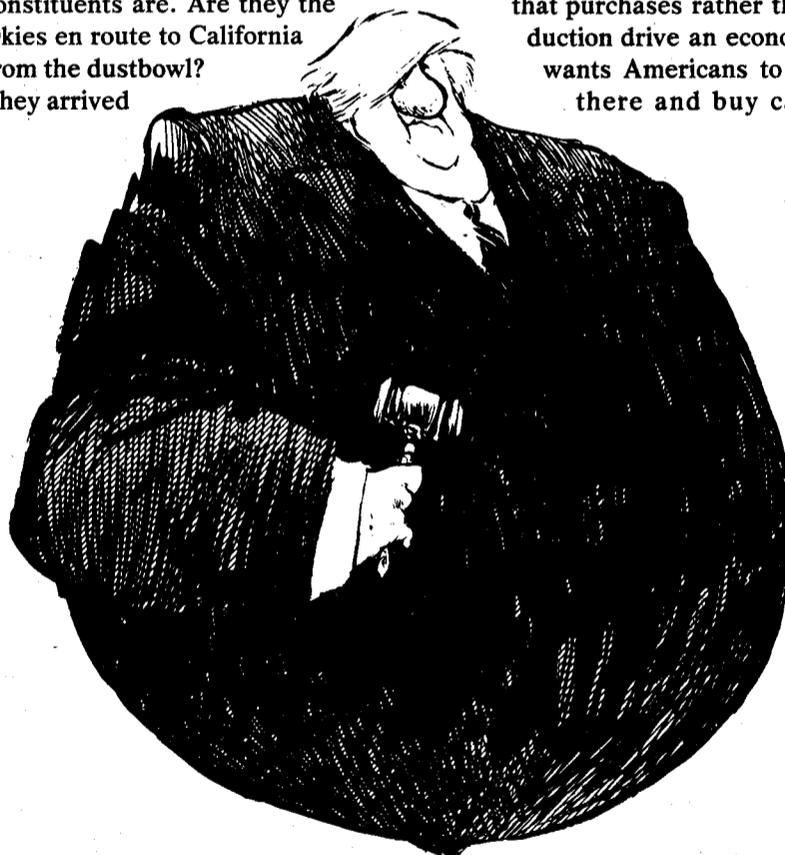
When Speaker O'Neill promises to deny "the rich" the third round of the Reagan tax cuts he is talking about households with yearly incomes beginning around \$35,000. To his mind this is the starting income of "the rich." Doubtless he sees the household with \$50,000 of yearly income as the manse of the super rich. Yet after mortgage payments, automobile payments, educational expenses, and the welfare state's taxes have been paid there are very few of these households whose members are as Speaker O'Neill sees them.

A lot has changed in the American economy since the 1930s when Mr. O'Neill was first educated to the political economy of Robin Hood. Middle-income families are often forced to send not one but two breadwinners into the work force. The average household with a yearly income of \$50,000 has at least two wage earners—occasionally more. It is eminently possible that Mr. O'Neill's \$700 cap would hit the home of a blue-collar worker whose wife is a schoolteacher or secretary.

Is a middle-income family really

rich? Well then, why are so many of Mr. O'Neill's fellow congressmen grumbling about the difficulty of living in Washington on yearly incomes of \$60,700? Mr. O'Neill's supporters believe that when the President vetoes the aforementioned \$700 cap, the Democrats can then depict Mr. Reagan as the defender of the rich. It is a fate Mr. Reagan should eagerly welcome.

After listening to Speaker O'Neill's drivel about the rich, one begins to wonder who he believes his natural constituents are. Are they the Okies en route to California from the dustbowl? They arrived



there decades ago. Apparently he believes that he speaks for those on the lowest rung of the economic ladder, but those people need not stay there forever. There is, as George Gilder the author of *Wealth and Poverty* is given to pointing out, an enormous amount of motion in a modern economy. Some of those with apparently low incomes are retired people with few expenses and considerable assets. Others are young people just

starting out. If Mr. O'Neill has his way these young people will not get very far, for his high tax rates will just about destroy economic growth, by discouraging investment, and the young wage earner's dream of joining middle-income families in a higher-income bracket, by dampening his ardor for work.

Not only is this a quaint and static view of economics it is also muzzy-headed. Mr. O'Neill is enough of an old-fashioned Keynesian to believe that purchases rather than production drive an economy. He wants Americans to get out there and buy cars and

and Speaker O'Neill can run to them with ever more lucre filched from the middle class. This is how Michael Foot saw the world before his Labour party went down to Prime Minister Thatcher with over 50 percent of Britain's trade unionists voting against him.

On Capitol Hill right now the old gang of taxers and spenders is making a desperate attempt to save its way of life. It preaches economic gloom, though more and more economic indicators suggest optimism. It claims that the Reagan cuts have been flagitious, though as the *Wall Street Journal* asserted last month, from 1980 to 1983 income-transfer payments grew from \$283 billion to \$408 billion. It derides Reaganite supply-side economics, though it makes perfect sense that a cut in taxes will spur economic activity. Consider the evidence. Up until now only the truly rich have had tax relief, and in fiscal year 1982 their economic activity picked up sufficiently to return the federal government 11 percent more from them in tax revenues than was expected. Now it is time for the middle-income working class to get a tax cut. If Speaker O'Neill cannot bear to witness these orgies let him join Michael Foot in retirement. □

PEDALPHILIA

I have been accosted in the public print by a maddened bicycle rider. I shall not divulge where the assault took place, for I do not want to encourage the fanatic. His enduring passion against me, however, is noteworthy. It is symptomatic of a widespread spiritual and political disorder that afflicts the West, accounting for—among other boons—Margaret Thatcher's huge victory last month, the disarray of Germany's Social Democrats, Ronald Reagan's palmy prospects, and much of the amusement that I derive from an otherwise near monastic existence. I

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refer to the religious fervor and political energy that the reform-minded zealot now drains off into trivia. He remains a pest, but think how much more dangerous he would be were he to forsake his absurd enthusiasm and become a cooperative, liberal Democrat willing to compromise.

Consider the militant bicycle riders—and here I have in mind solely the militants, not those who ride for recreation or out of economic hardship but those with the ulterior motive of making moral or political statements. There are more such fantasios than you might think.

Over two-and-a-half-years ago, I wrote a column congratulating my favorite big city mayor, New York's illustrious Mayor Koch, for having grown and changed with the new decade. Bowing to reality, he had just ordered the removal of New York's dangerous bicycle-only lanes from city streets. The subsequent salvo against that column from militant bicycle riders was withering. No

other group has ever put on such a riot against me in the correspondence sections of the great and patriotic institutions that carry this column, and bear in mind that in this space I have been dubious of over 750 other species of crank—not to mention both major political parties. It took weeks before normalcy returned.

Then last month came renewed assault from one of these two-wheeled McCarthyites. His point ran roughly: "If you think this Tyrrell fellow was unkind to cinema's phony Gandhi, witness his discourtesies to the noble bicycle some two-and-a-half-years ago." What I had written was of course very reasonable; hence his enduring gall.

Bicycles are dangerous. If it were not that Ralph Nader envisages them as a threat to Detroit he would have joined me years ago in putting them on the consumers' index of dangerous products. They are about as stable as a martini balanced on the

forehead of a drunk. People fall off bicycles onto hard and congested pavement. People do not fall off Oldsmobiles, and the sturdy Olds has no handlebars to damage the soft, vulnerable parts of the body. Bicycles provide no protection to their riders, and their brakes are less reliable than those put on the Model T generations ago. Finally they are a threat to urban pedestrians and to that occasional canine companion who might be answering nature's call at curbside, for the bicycle is eerily silent while in motion and—face the facts—many urban bicycle riders glide along in a confused state owing to their heroic delusions or to airborne objects such as insects—bicycles do not have windshields!

With the passage of time and the accumulation of provocations I have come to the further judgment that reforming the bicycle is impossible. Urban cycling should be banned or greatly restricted. As often as pos-

sible, the urban cyclist ought to adhere to the walk patterns of pedestrians, and in many situations he ought to be ordered to walk his bicycle. Though we often apply the laws governing motorists to the cyclist, he flouts these laws regularly; and, in truth, they do not apply. Bicycles are not autos. They are slow and unprotected. In brief, they are an anomaly, suited for neither the sidewalk nor the boulevard.

Let cyclists confine their pedaling to country lanes where it is probably useful for maintaining fitness, at least of one's cardiovascular system and the lower body. For all around fitness I still prescribe the Royal Canadian Air Force exercises, or better still a summer at Marine Corps boot camp. That would separate the fanatics from the wholesome riders, who surely exist. The fanatics could then move on to heliotherapy or some other such nonsense. We certainly do not want them to grow reasonable, not about politics and things that matter. □



PRESSWATCH

HONEYMOONING AT WILLIAMSBURG

by Fred Barnes

Not to belittle President Reagan's performance last month at the economic summit in Williamsburg, Virginia, but the nearly unanimous praise that he received in the press was as much the result of shrewd White House schmoozing of reporters as it was of painstakingly objective assessment by the assembled American journalists of his dealings with the leaders of the six other industrialized democracies. Sometimes Presidents and their minions actually succeed in their relentless, obsessed efforts to shape the kind of news coverage the White House gets. It doesn't happen often, despite the inflated sense that some presidential aides have of their ability to influence the media. Enormous their ability isn't.

So how did they succeed this time? Basically, the stars were in the right alignment for a reasonably tranquil

summit, whether Reagan was impressive in his contacts with the other six leaders or not. The economic summit of 1982 in Versailles had been rancorous—real issues were thrashed out and disagreed on—and this meant that the session this year was likely to be relatively harmonious. After all, bickering isn't exactly in the best interests of any of the leaders. Back-to-back summits marked by discord help nobody, except maybe the Soviets. Even François Mitterrand, the troubled French president who first blamed the American recession for his

country's economic decline and now blames the American recovery, didn't want to be too noisy in his dissents this time.

In media terms, the point to remember here is that reporters demand harmony among allies; in fact, they often demand it among adversaries. I have always dated the end of the honeymoon period between President Jimmy Carter and the Washington press corps from that day in May 1977 when the Soviets responded loudly and negatively to his proposal for deep cuts in strategic nuclear weapons. This guy can't get

along with the Soviets, the press concluded, which led to the more sweeping conclusion that Carter didn't have the foggiest idea what he was doing. True, the get-along standard makes no sense at all; a President can get along swimmingly with everyone, and especially the Soviets, if he knuckles under at every opportunity. But life and journalism don't always make sense. Carter may have been a poor President, but he was also treated unfairly by the press.

Given the likelihood of good relations at Williamsburg, all the White House needed to do was go with the flow. And as choreographed by William P. Clark, the national security adviser, and Michael K. Deaver, the deputy White House chief of staff, that is what happened. Clark planned and Deaver leaked. Wisely, Reagan aides didn't characterize his every action and utterance as heroic. Reporters had laughed derisively when they tried that at Versailles.



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