

EDITORIALS



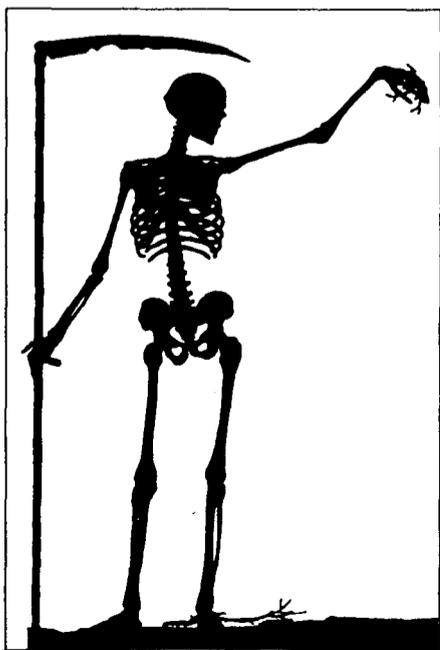
SICKLE CELL AMNESIA

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

I should think that back in the Kremlin these days there are patriotic types who find the American press's sudden discovery of the suave Gorbachev vaguely offensive, a reminder, if you will, of just how pervasive the hellish anti-Soviet mentality really is in that faraway land where the bankers hold sway. The Yankee press may find General Secretary Gorbachev stupendously superior to the average Soviet *shishka* in terms of wit, winsomeness, and tailoring. But in Moscow wit and winsomeness abound, and there has always been a quiet pride taken in the traditional three-button Soviet suit with its dashing cube-look and exquisite materials—light tarpaulin for summer heat, collision matting for the chill of winter.

If our journalists think that they are sweetening the Soviets up by oohing and aahing over Gorbachev's unique social graces, they are regrettably in error. Chernenko, Andropov, and Brezhnev were all hail fellows well met by Soviet lights, and as for Gorbachev's haunting beauty, there is not a man on the Politburo who does not compare himself very favorably with the present

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General Secretary. The press's tendency to express astonishment over the virtues of each incoming Soviet leader is obviously beginning to irk the Soviets. They think they live in a very charming land, and now the redoubtable *Time* magazine reports that Gorbachev seems to sense their pique. Through an aide he has insisted that "There is no Gorbachev style. . . . There can be no new style of leadership."

To see the stalwarts of the American press corps all goose-stepping together once consensus has been established does weaken one's faith in the need for the First Amendment. It may protect free expression, but it certainly has failed to encourage diversity of opinion among the media's major voices. During and immediately after the General Secretary's visit to Paris, America was suffused with balderdash about his style and "image." If there was any dissent it was played pianissimo. The *Wall Street Journal's* editorial page did record hilarious American estimates of past Soviet leaders: Khrushchev, surprisingly well-tailored, a potential leader of American labor, or, in industrialist Cyrus Eaton's eyes, "head of one of our greatest corporations"; Brezhnev, earthy, eager, and, according to *Time*, comparable to LBJ; Stalin, friend of the underprivileged, champion of the masses, and, in *Life's* words, Russia's "combination of Tom Paine, Horace Mann, Henry Kaiser, and Jim Farley, rolled together with Clifton Fadiman, George Washington, Henry Wallace, and Paul Bunyan." But the *Journal's* editorial page is unique, serving as a kind of *samizdat* for the 60 percent of the electorate that voted for Ronald Reagan in 1984.

The European press, supposedly so decadent and soft on Communism, dealt soberly and skeptically with Gorbachev's travel to Paris. The French even snickered, ribbing Mrs. Gorbachev for lapses into dowdiness and on one occasion for failing to change her linen. *Liberation*, a popular radical paper, got a good laugh out of how Gorbachev

slurped oysters, his little finger pointing idiotically toward his forehead. If back home the scribes were solemn to the point of being sentimental one reporter, upon beholding the leader of the world's preeminent dictatorship, gibbered of Gorbachev's "quiet authority . . . expressed in subtle ways: the soft, authoritative voice, the deferential attitude of his aides; even the way he stands, feet slightly apart like a boxer ready for a new sparring partner." Gangway, I am in need of a restorative!

There is here a huge egotism that is longstanding and not unique to American journalists. As the *Wall Street Journal* has demonstrated, Americans are forever traveling through foreign lands, imagining the locals to be just like us. Thus dictators are seen as Presidents, a Soviet head of

state on a propaganda sally is seen as a campaigning American pol, honing his "image." Yet there is more here than egotism. The childish conformity of the press as it serves up the week's big story suggests that its members suffer from what the shrinks call *abulia*, the inability to decide or to act independently. Poets have suffered it before. Verlaine was made pathetic by it in his last days. Why should the poets of America's media be considered free of the disorder, especially when they so slavishly manifest its symptoms? Consider this: Of all the 100 or so famous faces of broadcast media there is only one who might be regularly identified with the views of Ronald Reagan's 60 percent, George Will. How he has shaken *abulia* I do not know. Perhaps he has an unusually effective psychiatric counsel. □

IN DEFENSE OF THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE

Modern America is always aburst with political change. In recent years there appeared neoconservatives and populist conservatives. Neoliberals have flumped into our midsts, and now there are the reactionary progressives, those being the champions of 1970s stand-pattism. The policies of the recent past are sacred to them, no matter how futile or palpably pernicious. All that the reactionary progressives would change is the funding, which is never sufficient to the task at hand. Anyone who seeks fundamental change is suspect not only of impiety but also of being a clandestine Scrooge.

That is how Secretary of Education William Bennett's proposal to change the federal government's bilingual education policy is being greeted by critics. They would rather not take up his argument that present policies have proved futile. Instead they claim he secretly plans to cut back the \$140 million now spent on bilingual programs, despite his assertion that "If Congress is willing to grant us more flexibility, I would be willing to ask for an increase in appropriations,

something along the lines of 10 or 15 percent." In effect they are saying one cannot trust this innovator. He lies.

This is the way the debate over policy change has been waged for some years now. If a policy-maker claims that change is needed in civil rights policies owing to changes that have taken place



in society, the champions of stand-pattism assert that the innovator is a dissembler and an opponent of minorities. If a policy-maker claims that change is needed in welfare policies to bring the poor out of the ghetto and into productive lives, the champions of stand-pattism assert that the innovator is an opponent of the poor—and you know how many of your fellow Americans are out to get the poor. Think of all the anti-poor jokes one hears and the plots to keep the poor wretched.

Bennett insists that his changes in bilingual education are “to ensure that students learn English.” He hopes to increase flexibility in bilingual programs so that “local school districts” can “pursue whatever educational methods they judge best suited to help

non-English speaking students learn English.” Current policies “rely almost exclusively on instruction in the youngsters’ native language,” leaving students with English skills that are “no better than the skills of those who simply remained in regular classrooms where English was spoken, without *any* special help.”

This should come as no surprise. Learning a foreign language is arduous and uncertain. Foreign language instructors always prescribe perseverance and full immersion in the language being taught. Why should such prescriptions not apply, at least occasionally, to youngsters learning English?

The truth is that many Americans, even many teachers, do not care all that much about English or about any other

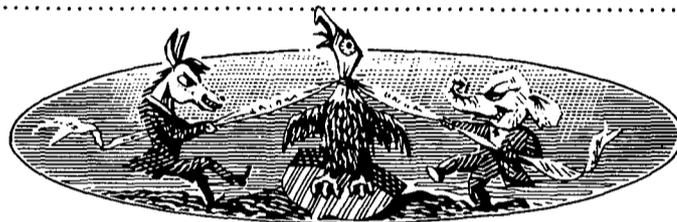
language as it is spoken and written on these shores. This is not France where the native language is revered. Nor is it the British Isles where practically everyone contributes to the music of the spoken word. This is America where grammar and diction are sacrificed by the vulgar urge to emote rather than to speak vividly and correctly.

Thus we hear news and sports commentators as they reduce spoken English to a series of yells, and the verb as a part of speech seems to have disappeared completely: “Marino, back to pass. The pass, to Moore. Touchdown, Moore.” Next to this patois, Dizzy Dean was Shakespeare. The problem today with bilingual education, as with so much else in American life, is not that we have the wrong values but that

we have no values, at least none that we will resolutely defend. It is hard to believe that Bennett’s critics care all that deeply whether, say, Hispanics learn English. If they did they would note the unpromising results of present policy and throw in with Bennett’s less rigid approach.

Bennett values higher education and is serious about improving it. He is himself learned and thoughtful. Not many years ago he was a liberal Democrat. Today he is doing the same thing he would have been doing in his liberal days, namely: suggesting reforms to advance opportunity for all. Bilingualism has failed to make a sufficient number of foreign-speaking students bilingual. It is time to let local authorities try new approaches. Only the reactionaries object. □

CAPITOL IDEAS



LUNCHEON REVERIES

by Tom Bethell

It’s surprising to find someone like Congressman Jim Courter, a conservative Republican, representing the congressional district that includes Princeton, New Jersey. Although Princeton itself votes inevitably for the Democratic candidate, Courter wins comfortably in his district, capturing 66 percent of the vote in 1984. His voting record suggests that congressmen have more philosophical attitude than is generally recognized. But another way, most liberal legislators from the Northeast are that way not so much because their constituents want them to be as because they want to be.

I had lunch with Mr. Courter recently in one of those subterranean dining rooms inside the Capitol Building, where clocks light up, buzzers ring very few minutes warning of impending votes, and everything happens at about double speed of normal restaurants, for half the price.

Courter is surely a “comer” in conservative politics. Most conservatives don’t appreciate the issues at an instinctive level. Courter can really articulate them. He is 44, and was first elected in 1978. Before that he was in the Peace

Corps in Venezuela, and worked as an assistant prosecutor in Warren County. Now he is making a name for himself as a member of the House Armed Services Committee. One of his main concerns these days is the use of the 1972 ABM treaty to obstruct development of the strategic defense system known as Star Wars.

“Incredible” was the word Courter used to describe the present situation. Since the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles in the 1950s we have lived in this shadow of worry

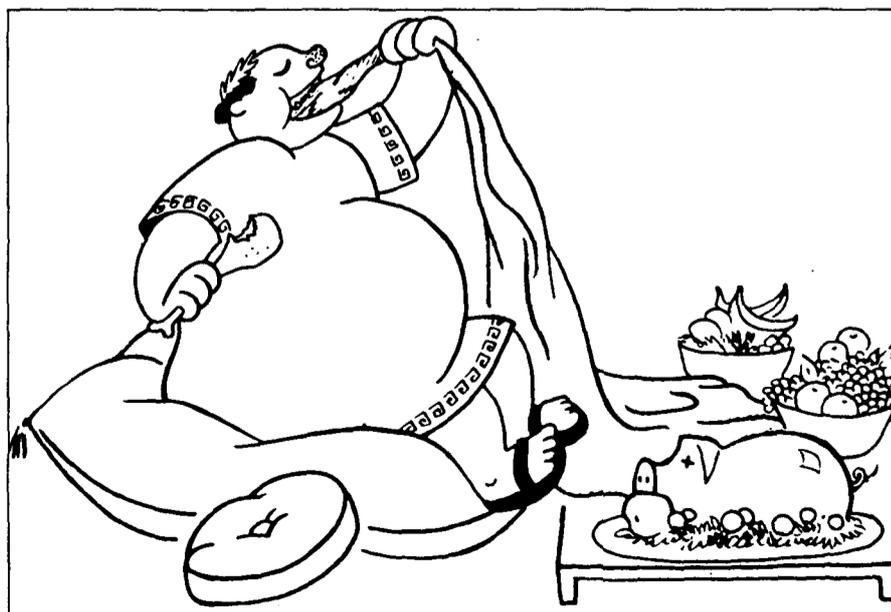
about a potential surprise attack by the Soviet Union, a country which has aggressively sought world domination since 1917 and doesn’t hesitate to say so. In the 1980s comes an unexpected deliverance: the technological capacity to destroy these missiles in mid-flight (an offshoot of the computer revolution). So how do we react?

President Reagan is keen on the idea but President Nixon is not (he signed the ABM treaty, after all), and Nancy Reagan . . . well did you know she has been strolling the beaches of Martha’s

Vineyard with Katharine Graham and Bill Styron (*the* Bill Styron) . . . and playing kiss-and-make-up with the whole Martha’s Vineyard set? Because she wants to be, how should one say, *accepted* . . . invited to the right parties by those gloriously languid, thin, and powerful people at the Social Summit. Don’t talk about the Geneva summit, Samovar & Dialogue with the Marxist-Leninist Philosophy Professor, Raisa, and her tubby hubby . . . And of course what the Vineyard Crowd tells Nancy is quite simple and straightforward: “Nancy, if the President can be persuaded to give up Star Wars, don’t worry. We can guarantee him an Assured Place in History, and a handshake with the King of Sweden, although he’ll have to share the latter with Mikhail, of course . . .”

“It’s incredible,” Courter was saying, his voice, the winking clocks, and buzzing bells finally piercing the fog of my reverie. “We argue that putting up defenses is intimidating to the attacker. Defenses are threatening!”

That was it, you see (I went slinking off playing mental hookey again, although I was sitting there nodding agreement whenever the Congressman said anything) . . . The Americans are



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