

merican constitutional politics. The Roosevelt campaign hummed along lawlessly, but few campaigns have attracted more literary attention, and to this day many of us recognize James Farley's jest: "As Maine goes, so goes Vermont."

No such jests mark the 1984 landslide, nor will you find as many books written about RR's first five years as were written about FDR's, though the Reagan Administration represents a similar disjunction with the past. After overcoming such fantastic figures as Gary Hart, Jesse Jackson, and George McGovern, the Hon. Walter Mondale

headed possibly the most liberal ticket of the century, only to blow up in a puff on election day when the voters opted for one of the century's most conservative tickets, Reagan-Bush—not the equal of the fabulous Coolidge-Dawes ticket of 1924, but admirably conservative nonetheless. What is more, the Reagan Administration's policies have been bold departures from the social engineering that had reached an apogee with affirmative action, from spiraling taxation, and from the passivity of the Carter foreign policy. Still, books, articles, and even television commentaries on these amazing events are scarce.

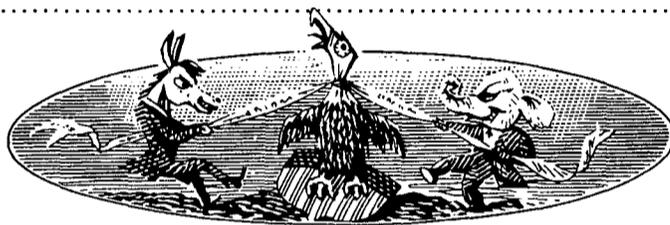
What makes this a mystery is that

the Reagan Administration could make such a gripping legend. Radicals could bring together all their fears of impending doom: starvation in the streets, upheaval amongst the masses, suddenly comes America's Marxist Dawn! But radicals have contemplated the Reagan regime for five years and are too fearful now to write of such calamity and rebirth. Conservatives, too, could turn out a tolerable legend: a septuagenarian Prince Charming, a pretty and stylish First Lady, liberty renewed, the American eagle soars anew—a Camelot for clock-stoppers! Yet conservatives seem speechless. In Washington they fret over jobs and live with the melancholy knowledge that few of

their colleagues read, so why write about Ronald Reagan?

The real question is why the consensus commentators in the middle do not write interesting books about the last five years of Reaganism. Instead they write sleep-inducing tomes such as Jack Germond and Jules Witcover's aptly titled *Wake Us When It's Over*. Is this owing to a massive loss of imagination, or has it to do with their source in the Oval Office? Perhaps Ronald Reagan does not want books and articles written about him. Upon close inspection, there always has been a mysterious reticence around Ronald Reagan, and it intensifies the closer one gets to him. □

CAPITOL IDEAS



ARABESQUE

by Tom Bethell

The American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee is or purports to be one of those civil rights groups that we hear so much about, forever accusing the rest of us of insensitivity or worse. It was founded by James Abourezk, the former senator from South Dakota, in response to "stereotyping, defamation and discrimination directed against Americans of Arab descent." There was another founder, called Jim Zogby, but he seems to have disagreed with Abourezk, and then he left to become vice chairman of Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign. The ADC (as it is called) is now Abourezk's baby, with no trace of Zogby remaining.

I decided to attend ADC's annual convention, held this year at the Washington Hilton on Connecticut Avenue. Many interesting speakers were scheduled to appear, either in person or by satellite hookup. Here is a partial list, and ask yourself as you read what these people have in common (what is the defining characteristic of the group): former undersecretary of state George Ball; Tom Brokaw of NBC; Washington mayor Marion Barry; *Nation* columnists Alexander Cockburn and Christopher Hitchens; Congressman David Obey and former Congressmen Pete McCloskey and Paul

Findley; folk singer Pete Seeger; Yassir Arafat, the well-known Palestinian, and Vanessa Redgrave, the actress.

Surveying this list, I found it hard to believe that all these people were appearing at the Hilton because they were exercised about the negative stereotyping of Arab-Americans; for example, such "documented instances of harassment" as the claim that on the week of June 16-22, in the thick of the hostage crisis, a radio talk-show host in San Francisco referred to Shiite Muslims as "camel jockeys" and "rag heads," as a result of which he "was forced off the air for one day but was back the next and refused to apologize."

No, there had to be something rather more pressing on the minds of this well-dressed throng pouring into the Hilton ballroom to have lunch and hear network anchorman Tom Brokaw speak! Israel, I submit, preoccupied

them rather more than the tent-and-camel stereotype. This hypothesis gains in plausibility when one recalls that the star speaker at last year's gathering was Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam, who arrived with six bodyguards, promised that Jerusalem would be the center of World War III, and was hailed with a thunderous standing ovation.

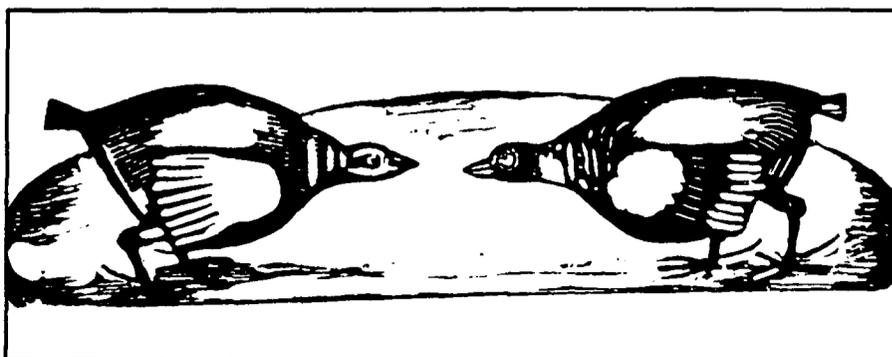
Abourezk I have known for years and I have always thought him a genial fellow, although I would say one of the least victimized people I have met in Washington. He was already seated at the dais so I said hello and told him that he did not look particularly discriminated against to me. "Well, I'm not," he said, "but my clients are."

On behalf of his clients, the ADC took out three full-page ads in the *Washington Post* in June—the week the foreign aid bill came up for a vote—objecting to the high levels of U.S. aid to Israel. These ads alone (and there

were others across the country) cost Abourezk's clients \$100,000, so they must be rich even if they are oppressed.

Brokaw spoke decorously, although scarcely concealing his hero-worship of Hafez Assad, the Syrian dictator, whose strongman status in the Middle East has earned him enormous respect in the U.S. media. And since it is this year's fashion, Brokaw was also deferential toward the Soviet dictator Gorbachev, whom he described as being "not just a hostage to the past." It seemed odd in a way that we should be sitting there so respectfully as this youthful newsreader gave us his *aperçus* about international relations—testament, of course, to his ability to decide, at least in part, where to cast the spotlight of attention, and where *not* to cast it. (The media is a collection of spotlights, not floodlights. The general idea seems to be to get all the spotlights aimed at the same place, such as South Africa. This creates an intolerable glare, an aura of crisis, and a sense of mission in the press corps: They know when that happens they are not merely describing events but helping to make them happen.)

Brokaw spoke longingly about the prospects for "successful peace negotiations" in the Middle East—success here to be thought of as the Administration bringing pressure on Israel to undermine its own security. Brokaw saw that such pressure and therefore



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such "success" is not likely to be immediately forthcoming, one reason being that "the U.S. at the moment is a benign and not a forceful presence in the Middle East." In general, Brokaw thought, the Middle East should be put "on the superpower agenda," which would subject decisions in the area to Soviet approval and veto.

Abourezk introduced Mayor Barry

as "a good friend of ours—to tell you how good a job he does, the *Washington Post* denounces him every day." (One had thought they let him off lightly.) The mayor congratulated the assembled company for deciding to march in protest in front of both the South African and Israeli embassies. And he received a warm round of applause when he said that "peace can

only come" to the Middle East "when justice has prevailed." He added that there was a bill in the hopper to rename a part of Massachusetts Avenue, that infamous section of Embassy Row which is home to the British and South African embassies, "Nelson and Winnie Mandela Avenue."

The panel discussion including Cockburn and Hitchens ("How the

Media Covers the Middle East") was attended by at least 600 people. Standing room only. Crowds jostling at the doors. (By comparison, a panel on Arab-American "outreach" had four attendees, and one on "legal remedies to employment discrimination" had forty, which tells you something about the organization's true direction.) I couldn't help comparing this large crowd with Reed Irvine's Accuracy in Media conferences, where panels devoted to media criticism are attended by a small fraction of ADC's eager hordes. I say this to caution those who suggest that ADC is not to be taken too seriously. It is growing rapidly, it has influential supporters and wealthy backers, and its goal, succinctly stated, is to bathe Israel in a glare of hostile attention comparable to that now experienced by South Africa.

It seemed to me there was a moment of tension in the room when Cockburn explained why he had always "felt somewhat attuned to the problems that people of Palestinian and Arab descent have had." Although Irish he was born in Scotland, he said, "and my father was unable to be present at my birth because he was a member of the British Communist Party and"—a sudden stillness in the room here—"at that time in 1941 he was not permitted to visit the north of Scotland because it was thought that he might in these remote highlands somehow attack capitalism in a way that would affect Britain's performance in the war." (Laughter.) "So he had the privilege of seeing me for the first time on Euston Station when I was about three months old." Later Cockburn evidently also suffered at the hands of unfair British stereotypes about the Irish. So he was after all saying nothing more than that he too had felt the sting of oppression, and was in solidarity with his fellow sufferers. For a shocking moment I wondered if he was about to appeal to a rather different sense of solidarity . . .

No doubt there were at the conference a good many "state of mind Communists" (in Gus Hall's useful phrase), some I dare say in the room even as Hitchens and Cockburn spoke. One speaker at another equally packed session, "South Africa and Israel," used the word "struggle" so many times per sentence that it became quite ludicrous listening to her.

Christopher Hitchens was no less interesting than Cockburn. Having praised Noam Chomsky extravagantly ("the only living American intellectual with a world claim to be considered an original intellectual thinker") he had something to say about *Double Vision* by Ze'ev Chafets, Menachem Begin's former press aide. Hitchens noted that



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this book Chafets had "listed the name of every Jew in the media . . . in order to prove [his thesis that the media bias] against Israel is so strong because 1 of these Jewish people are self-haters who have to overcompensate for their Jewishness by adding to the mass of calumny and distortion that is dished up heaped upon the Jewish national cause."

In this, Hitchens believed Chafets displayed "a very serious case of clinical paranoia." And yet it was striking to me at least that Cockburn raised to the skies a Jewish chemistry professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel Shahak, who turned out to be in the audience as Cockburn poke and who later addressed two other panels. Shahak was a great hero to the assembled multitude because he translates from the Hebrew material that might be thought damaging to the Israeli cause.

When he contributed to the forum on "The Future of Palestine," Shahak (aged 53, from Poland, and a concentration camp survivor) spoke thus: "The political and social situation inside the Israeli-Jewish society in Palestine—and I will add the United States but this is not my subject—is being characterized by the rise of what I call the Jewish Nazis." Later he claimed: "That Jewish Nazism exists is no longer in dispute, certainly not in Israel." And more in this vein.

We heard also from Rabbi Elmer Berger, currently residing in Sarasota, Florida, who was introduced as "one who has influenced our thinking tremendously," and "a pioneer in the field of understanding Zionism." He boldly opined that Israel, "which still exists as a state in the Middle East through the exploitation and the beneficence and the political cowardice of the leaders of the United States government, continues to threaten and intimidate all of the Middle East." It was my impression that Shahak and Berger provided a degree of corroboration for the Chafets thesis.

Cal Thomas of Moral Majority was I think the only unsympathetic speaker at the conference, joining in a panel on "The Unholy Alliance: Right Wing Evangelicals and the Arab-Israeli Conflict." There was much booing and hissing when he said, courageously: "West Bank Arabs have more civil rights than citizens of any Arab country. They have access to impartial courts and the right of Habeas Corpus. They enjoy freedom of the press, of movement, and of peaceful assembly."

No doubt this is true, and no doubt it will carry as much weight in the public prints as the claim, equally plausible, that blacks have more civil

rights in South Africa than in any other African country except perhaps Botswana. In any event, let me conclude with the observation that the Arabs will find it extremely difficult to establish the rule of law, hence property rights, hence economic advance, in any Middle East state dominated by the Muslim faith. This religion, at least in its present phase, legitimizes a Mullah class

that is itself above the law, leaving no contracts secure. The oil-derived wealth of recent years will quickly dissipate into the Arabian sands, as already is beginning to happen.

For these reasons, the destruction of Israel, which I take to be the number one item on the Arab agenda, can only be achieved with Moscow's assistance. This is the basis of the growing

Arab-Communist alliance, which in turn is strengthened by and dovetails with the Soviet Union's natural fear of Israel; a fear that is paradoxical in view of Israel's socialist origins and the Soviet Union's support for Israel at the U.N. in 1948; but real enough, nonetheless, and the basis of a growing antagonism between the two states. □

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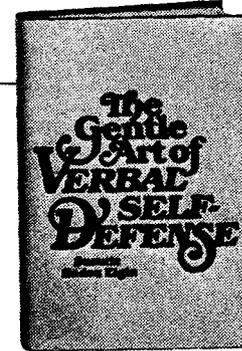
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Psycholinguist Suzette Haden Elgin has presented her innovative self-defense principles in a variety of formats. She has given workshops and seminars all over the U.S., including verbal self-defense sessions for doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. Dr. Elgin has also created a self-defense tape and a training manual for people who teach her self-defense techniques.



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GAMES ANTI-NUKES PLAY

The Government Accountability Project's assault on nuclear energy.

On December 22, 1983, ABC's "20/20" featured an expose of alleged "bizarre activities" at the Palo Verde nuclear plant being constructed in the Arizona desert. According to "Secrets of the Desert," as the segment was called, the Bechtel Corporation, prime contractor for the plant, was engaged in secret massive dumping of new or barely used tools in a giant landfill on a scale so large that it could go at least part way toward explaining the project's huge cost overruns. Several earnest-sounding former employees came before the camera to contend that they had themselves been involved in regular evening burials of electric tools, portovans, acetylene hose, hard hats, welding gloves, boots, wrenches, tape measures, saws—some of them still in crates. ABC's reporter, Tom Jarriel, held up large whirring tools in each hand to illustrate the useful character of the machinery Bechtel had entombed in the shifting Arizona sands.

What was the motive for Bechtel's peculiar management decision? In explanation, "20/20" offered the theory that the tools were supplied by a company Bechtel owned. Bechtel buried them unused or barely-used so as to be able to buy more tools from its subsidiary company, thus increasing profits.

On the program, one of the workers declared, "We know what size the pits are and where they are." The state attorney general vowed to Jarriel that he would find some way to dig up the desert dump site, but lamented the absence of any funds at his command to do so. After the program, the Bechtel Corporation, stung by the dreadful publicity, paid \$300,000 for the attorney general's office to dig up the sites pinpointed by its accusers. In

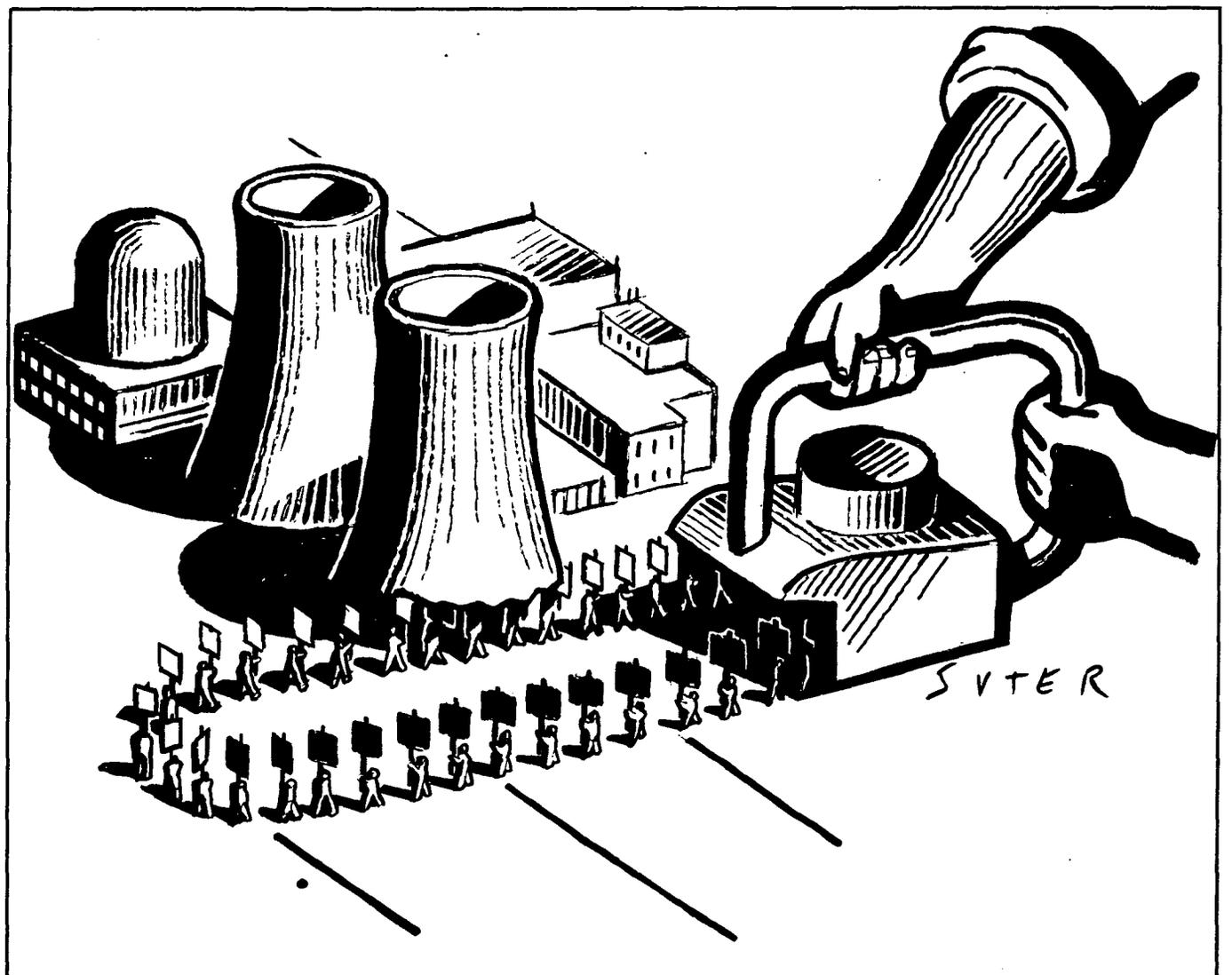
December 1984 the attorney general's office issued its report, which said that apart from a few broken hammers and pieces of wire, it had found nothing at all. Despite the wide publicity accorded the original charges, the revelation that the charges were without substance was confined to such journals as *Highway and Heavy Construction*. While "20/20" could not totally ignore the conclusion of its own story, it used the fruitless search for buried tools as a means to put the knife into Bechtel once again. On March 7, 1985, in the context of yet another attack on the Palo Verde plant, this time focusing on

"rate shock," "20/20" complained loftily that the ratepayer had to pay for such controversies, which "drive up the cost of the already over-budgeted project."

ABC may have extricated itself with admirable agility, but what had led it to broadcast the report in the first place? The source of ABC's story, it seems certain,¹ was the Government Accountability Project (GAP), at the time part of the Institute for Policy Studies, the Washington, D.C. based "think-tank" which for two decades has served as the intellectual hub of radical activism in the United States.

(Like other successful IPS projects, it has now formally "spun off" from the mother organization, although its headquarters remain in the IPS building.) GAP has become the most successful anti-nuclear organization in the country, stopping at least one multi-billion dollar project cold (Cincinnati's Zimmer plant), playing a role in stopping Consumers Power's Midland facility in Michigan, and running up many millions of dollars in costs for other plants whose operations it has delayed by a variety of means.

GAP's *modus operandi* in the tale of buried tools was a variation on its nor-



Rael Jean Isaac's most recent book (with Erich Isaac) is *The Coercive Utopians (Regnery Gateway)*.