
EDITORIALS



BEAUTY AND THE BEASTS

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

One very reassuring truth has emerged from the epic controversy between feminists and this fellow Al Neuharth, to wit: deeply rooted social values cannot be obliterated by ideological campaigns. Neuharth is the publishing genius whose creation, *USA Today*, has proved that newsprint can be just as vacuous as a television screen. Now his comments on the declining beauty of the Republic's female flight attendants have set off a debate. In any other civilized country the debate would be over the truth of his allegation or the nature of beauty, but in America, where the Puritans once roamed, the debate is over banishing beauty from life.

It is a matter of ideological dogma among feminists that female beauty is a piffle, never to be valued as a requirement in employment or, so far as I can ascertain, in any other human relationship. Hence the feminists' thought patrol has fallen on Neuharth for having expressed the notion in *USA Today* that the beautiful "sky girls" of yesteryear have been replaced by "aging women who are tired of their jobs or by flighty young men who have trouble balancing a cup of coffee or tea."

The First Amendment is well and good, says the thought patrol, but Neuharth's statement goes too far. One lady executive at his own news corpora-

Adapted from RET's weekly Washington Post column syndicated by King Features.

tion notified him that his column would have been spiked were she his editor. That is the press policy of Mrs. Imelda Marcos and of various tin pot dictators of unhappy memory, and it is about time that America's militant reformers come out and admit that what they really favor for America is a one-party state.

Apparently Betty Friedan is doing what she can to advance dictatorship in America. She and her colleagues are establishing a media center at the University of Southern California to monitor how women are hired, promoted, and covered in media. Woe to the woman whom the gods have endowed or to those others who believe that beauty has its place on the evening news, primetime television, or wherever else Friedan's agents might strike. When her dictatorship is in place, plain women and unsightly men will replace all the pretty faces in America. Good-looking Americans will be on hard times. The cosmetics and fashion industries will founder.

But is this last great civil rights campaign warranted and is it even feasible? It seems apparent that most Americans, no matter what their personal endowments might be, value comeliness in both the male and the female of the species. My guess is that even the feminist heart skips a beat when a good looking man or woman enters the room. Americans value personal appearances so highly that there are vast industries devoted to assuring lush and

lustrous hair, eyes that Goya would be proud of, terrific skin, and statuesque figures.

The feminist campaign is an exercise in self-delusion. Is there one out there among Neuharth's critics who herself has not inherited some element of pulchritude that she would not readily put to a useful purpose when the opportunity arrived? I have never heard of any woman, even a feminist, crowing about her bad looks or inferior taste. All Americans are taken by beauty and no ideological campaign against it has a chance.

What true progressives might do is widen the American conception of beauty. Broaden it from the sterile obsession with the Barbie-doll look in women and whatever the exemplary look is in men, rather than banishing all concern for physical charm as some

rancorous mullahs might. Think of the great Grover Cleveland, William McKinley, Sarah Bernhardt, and all the most arresting sopranos of yesteryear—Lilli Lehmann at some 200 pounds was one of my favorites. There was a day when Americans deemed corpulence a mark of beauty and admired it in entertainers. Graying hair and bald pates were also highly esteemed, if done just right.

If the feminists believe Americans will ever countenance plainness in those who cavort before them, they are mistaken. Neuharth may have fallen for the contemporary delusion that there is but one standard of beauty, but he is right to claim that looks matter. What is more, it would be a grave injustice to penalize Tom Brokaw because he is an Adonis or Diane Sawyer for her well-turned ankles. □

GORBY OF MAYBERRY

Frequently an international news story is received differently in different parts of the world. Here in America the unfolding drama of Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms is a soothing story. In London this summer the drama evoked alarm.

Here we take the stories of Soviet strikes, ethnic unrest, and ideological squabbling *cum grano salis*. President Gorbachev's commanding presence in Moscow reassures us. A generation of Americans accustomed to television sitcoms and docudramas—all with reliable beginnings, middles, and ends—has arrived at the judgment that Gorbachev has brought perestroika through its beginning. Now he is leading it and his country through an exciting middle. Eventually, after the show breaks for a deodorant commercial, and perhaps a bran cereal commercial too, the screen will brighten with a happy ending: Mikhail and the smiling Gorbachev family, standing on the front porch, all waving back at their American audience. The Soviet Union has been transformed into a Slavic America!

Perhaps it is the sunny way in which the American media cover the Soviet Union that encouraged the buffoons in the United States House of Representatives to thrust aside serious minds and transform this summer's deliberations over the defense budget into high farce. Essential weapons were cut, along with research and development funds. Idiomatic pork-barrel programs were slipped into the budget, as were such militarily dubious programs as day-care centers and minority set-asides. Yes, the Honorable Nick Mavroules (D-MA), who is no friend to military spending, has taken an expansive interest in the military this time around. He filed an amendment to the military spending bill requiring minority set-asides for the "disadvantaged." I suppose this means that henceforth Congress is decreeing that the American military must, in every battle, ensure that a prescribed ratio of the "disadvantaged" be killed, injured, or decorated.

Meanwhile, in other parts of the world the news from the Soviet Union is having a sobering effect. This summer's strikes among Soviet coal miners



highlighted the worst season of industrial unrest in Russia since Lenin's time. The ethnic violence in the Caucasus and in Central Asia continues and with growing fury. The unrest will go on, for there does not seem to be anything that Moscow can do to end it short of resorting to the military, an expedient that will only exacerbate the regime's dire economic problems. Moreover, anger is spreading over shortages, specifically food shortages.

In the Soviet Parliament criticism now besets Gorbachev on all sides.

Boris Yeltsin leads a group that chides him for going too slowly. The far more ominous Yegor Ligachev leads a group that forthrightly urges a return to censoring the press and suppressing Gorbachev's democratization. How serious are the challenges to Gorbachev? Well, while we Americans consumed our press's good news from Moscow, a lead story on the front page of the *Sunday Times* in London reported: "The battle in the Kremlin has become fiercer than at any time since Stalin ousted Trotsky and in-

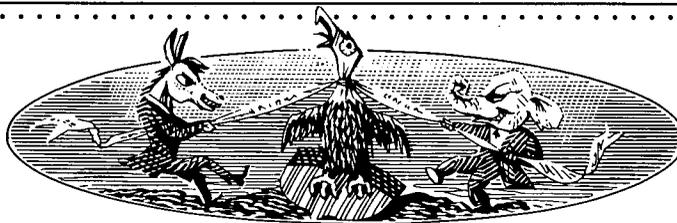
stalled one-man, one-party rule." The report went on to reveal that Gorbachev had been sorely pressed by Ligachev and his supporters in an acrimonious meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist party.

A recent issue of the *Economist*, the British newsweekly that is probably the world's most informative, gloomily reports a growing dissatisfaction within the Soviet Communist party. That is not particularly good news, for the group most likely to gain from Communist party decline is the very

group backing Mr. Ligachev and the champions of repression, the Soviet military.

The difference between American and British coverage of this summer's momentous events in the Soviet Union is arresting. If the American press is right that things are going swimmingly for reform, I shall be grateful. But somehow I feel that the British tone of skepticism is better justified. It is not just the power that lurks behind Ligachev that makes me worry. It is the fate of reform in China. □

CAPITOL IDEAS



DIVIDED OVER DEFENSE

by Tom Bethell

In recent months the confusion that is U.S. defense policy has become worse than ever. The basic problem is that we have something called the Department of Defense, which spends about \$300 billion a year, but we do not have any defense. One reason is that we signed in 1972 an extremely unwise treaty (the ABM treaty), which postulates that the country is safer if undefended. As a result, our so-called defense spending is little more than an elaborately disguised public-works and middle-class welfare program. One would be inclined to recommend the court martialing of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were it not that they are rightly subordinate to civil authority, and it was the civil authorities who supported, signed, and ratified the ABM treaty. Since then four presidents have submitted meekly to its provisions, even while claiming that the Soviets have violated the same treaty. (And the Soviets now admit to such violations.)

But then again, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have not been entirely innocent. There was some sentiment in the Reagan Administration to repudiate the ABM treaty, but this was rebuffed by the Joint Chiefs on the peculiar grounds that the Soviets, once unconstrained by the terms of the treaty, would be better positioned to take advantage of the change by reconfiguring their military forces. In short, the Joint Chiefs believe they face an adversary that is constrained from acting more

aggressively by a signed piece of paper. All such adversaries are implicitly law-abiding, and therefore not a serious cause for concern.

Today the situation is worse than ever. Not only have we not given up on arms control treaties. Current weapons acquisition is driven by prospective arms control treaties. We supposedly need certain new weapons now so that we will have the option of negotiating them away in the future. This turns out to be the Pentagon equivalent of the Keynesian public-works remedy for a depression: dig holes in the ground and fill them up again. The latest muddle surrounds the vulnerability of our land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles. These are placed in fixed silos, and it is supposedly the case (and may well be the case) that Soviet missiles are now accurate enough to score direct or disabling hits on them.

Just as we have earth, air, and water, so (military doctrine teaches) we must have a "strategic triad" of land-based,

air-based, and sea-based missiles. The first of these is now believed to be vulnerable; and so (to preserve the triad) this vulnerability must be repaired. How? By making the land-based missile mobile. The Soviets themselves have put some of their own missiles on railroad cars, others on trucks (the SS 24 and SS 25, respectively), and these can obviously be hidden with ease. So (Pentagon planners argue) we must make our missiles mobile, too. By putting them on rails, or on roads? The Bush Administration pondered this problem earlier this year and came up with an expensive solution. We would procure both a "rail-mobile" MX missile and a "road-mobile" Midgetman missile.

It was interesting to note the news media/congressional reaction to this decision. "Bush Moves To Compromise On U.S. Strategic Missiles," was the *Washington Post's* page one headline. Resolving the difficulty of choosing

between two options by choosing both is not normally called a compromise. But that is the word that was used, time and again, by people who are not normally enthusiastic about additions to the U.S. strategic arsenal. Conservatives should have been suspicious at this point, but few seemed to pay any attention.

The fourth paragraph of the *Washington Post* story (by R. Jeffrey Smith and David Hoffman) read as follows: "The decision to pursue an MX-Midgetman combination also reflects what high-ranking officials describe as a desire by the administration to resolve the issue soon so it can draft a negotiating position at the U.S.-Soviet strategic arms talks." On an inside page we read: "Obtaining broad backing for a missile modernization plan is considered by many officials to be a prerequisite to completion of a new arms treaty, because U.S. and Soviet negotiators have disagreed about whether mobile missiles should be allowed. If Bush decides to pursue the mobile weapons, it will presumably pave the way for a superpower agreement on how to constrain such missiles and verify compliance with the constraints. Substantial progress on this issue has been blocked in the past by U.S. opposition to mobile missile deployment."

The tail of arms control is wagging the dog of procurement. Here is the plan, in plain English: the Soviets have two mobile missiles, and we wish they didn't. Therefore, the best way to get rid of them is to get some ourselves, and then negotiate away both theirs

Strange New Respect

Lucy Rudenborg, a reader in Wisconsin, has nominated Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) as recipient of the 1989 Strange New Respect Award "for signing on as a co-sponsor of Sen. Chris Dodd's multibillion dollar income redistribution/social engineering scheme, the so-called Act for Better Child Care." Do readers have other evidence of Sen Hatch's growing sensitivity, compassion, etc.? Or is he innocent of the charge? Would the senator care to explain why he is *not* eligible for the award? If readers have any other nominations they should let me know by mid-October.

—TB

Tom Bethell is The American Spectator's Washington correspondent.