

EDITORIAL

IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"



On global warming, the Bush team talks out of both sides of its mouth

Last week, in his first diplomatic meeting since being confirmed, Secretary of State James A. Baker 3rd told a 17-nation working group and representatives of 23 other nations that the time is ripe to take steps against the greenhouse effect caused by global air pollution. Almost committing himself to action, Baker said that "we can probably not afford to wait until all of the uncertainties have been resolved before we act." Scientists must still "refine the state of our knowledge," he said, but "time will not make the problem go away."

Baker reportedly chose this gathering to signal that the new administration puts a high priority on addressing the problem of global warming and climate change. It was also an opportunity—one of several seized upon by officials since President Bush's inauguration—to distinguish the new president from the old one. While scientists are gathering more information about global warming, Baker said, international policy makers, even in the absence of climatic changes, should "focus immediately on prudent steps that are already justified."

They should include steeper cuts in the production of chlorofluorocarbons, which may contribute to global warming and are the major suspect in the depletion of the ozone layer that protects the Earth from excess levels of solar ultraviolet radiation. In addition, he said, fossil fuel use should be reduced through greater efficiency in the use of energy and more trees should be planted to absorb excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

The words were welcome, but actions speak louder than words. In a meeting of the working group following Baker's speech, administration officials proposed a plan that echoed the Reagan approach to this and other environmental issues—more research and delayed action. Members of the working group from other countries criticized the American proposals, saying they contradicted Baker's words and would delay meaningful action for too long.

Observers tried to put the best light on the contradiction between Baker's remarks and his subordinates' suggestions. In an apparent desire to provide a graceful way out of this discrepancy, they speculated that the mid-level officials who formulated the American plan were holdovers from the Reagan administration who had not yet assimilated the new administration's views. A representative of the Environmental Defense Fund, who attended the meeting as an observer, put it this way: "Secretary Baker's statement was very important and seemed completely consistent with what George Bush said during his campaign. But the work plan presented by the bureaucracy sounded like it was proposed by a completely different government."

A State Department spokesman insisted that the American proposals would be considered by a seven-nation panel of the working group along with other nations' alternatives. "We would not characterize the comments of other nations on the U.S. approach as criticism," he said. Nor would he comment on the apparent inconsistencies of the administration position.

So we are left not knowing whether the Bush administration is breaking with the Reagan tradition of talking environmental protection but finding ways to do nothing, or whether foot-dragging holdovers sabotaged the new guys. This, of course, is no small matter. As reporter Dick Russell has pointed out in his three-part series on the greenhouse effect (see page 7), once global warming reaches the stage where it is obvious to all, it will be too late to protect against it.

It's not as if there were any question about what needs to be done. Baker's comments, vague and general as they were, indicated a consensus on that. Nor does any serious scientist question that action must be taken before things go too far. As the Swedish chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said at the working group meeting, policy makers do need more "details" from scientists about the greenhouse effect, but added that "we should not fool ourselves that we need all the details before decisions are necessary."

Bush said that he wanted to be the environmental president. What he instructs his secretary of state to do and how he follows through on this crucial issue will be the test of his sincerity.

It's a kinda gentler administration

With all the transition-time brouhaha about the death of women and minorities among Bush appointees, another human deficit has gone virtually unnoted: we're now faced with a decline in the number of Cabinet-level Jews. Despite all the scripted blather about a kinder, gentler nation, the result so far can at best be described as a kind of *gentler* administration. While Reagan's Hollywood connections created openings for Jewish advisers, Bush's Waspy, polo-pony, yacht-club milieu is hardly a traditional Semitic stomping ground. Of course, it's not just Jews, but also women and minorities who are receiving scant or token representation in the new government. The elite, members-only cast of Bush appointees serves further to blister the president's already peeling veneer of folksiness, which at any rate had been only an illusion conjured by opportunistic, if media-savvy, hirelings. A moment of nostalgia for Ronald Reagan is a strange and terrifying thing, but it seems that Reagan's boyish charm has given way to something less charming and decidedly more *goyish*.

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LETTERS

Be happy, do nothing

DICK RUSSELL'S FIRST INSTALLMENT OF "THE ENDLESS SIMMER" (*ITT*, Jan. 11) is so entertaining that I hate to cavil, but like Jerry Garcia said, it seldom turns out the way it does in the song. The real community of experts does not accept even the "fact" of a rising global temperature.

Consider this: 97.5 percent of U.S. weather stations are in metropolitan areas where urban heat production is rising. (Note that this is different from the solar absorption effects of buildings and pavement that Russell cited.) Russell thinks that because city "heat islands" don't affect the world's weather—which is true—then he, and we, can dismiss the "few scientists [who] even continue to argue that there isn't enough evidence for alarm." Those cranks are just some damn climatologists, who are no match for NASA chiefs and Worldwatch doomcriers when it comes to catching the media's ear.

The climatologists can only repeat that the other 25 percent of U.S. weather stations that are in undisturbed, rural areas have shown a consistent, significant cooling trend since 1940. Heat islands don't influence the world's weather, but they do affect most of the world's thermometers.

This negates half of Russell's article, mostly the fun part about the sky falling and the people uprising. The part that's left is still chilling news: nobody knows what the greenhouse gases will do to us. It follows, then, that all of Russell's "experts" are either indulging in clearly avowed speculation (an honored activity that scientists call "arm-waving"), projecting scenarios like good soldiers but on the basis of false assumptions, or grandstanding to get more money out of somebody else.

The real scientific community knows all of this. That is why, for instance, Don Anderson, president of the 22,000-member American Geophysical Union, recently called for better coordinated research on ozone depletion, buildup of greenhouse gases, ocean pollution and deforestation (*Earth in Space*, December 1988)—not seawall construction. Or why William Tanner of Florida State University's geology department, reporting on a climatology meeting, noted a "general dissatisfaction with currently popular misuse of the greenhouse concept" (*Eos*, Dec. 27, 1988).

The scientists will tell us when they've made up their minds. Until then, all the steps we can take as individuals to consume fewer resources—including critiques of capitalism—are worth doing for their own sake; but the government should "don't just do something, stand there." And press and public alike, when listening to the latest batch of Chicken Littles, should keep firmly in mind what the Firesign Theatre's Happy Harry Cox told us: "All I know is, everything you know is wrong."

Andrew L. Alden
Concord, Calif.

Dick Russell replies: Andrew L. Alden's implication that urban "heat islands" have not been taken into account in global climate models is untrue. Scientists at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies have found that, without correcting for such urban effects, global warming over the past century has risen 0.7 degrees Centigrade. When all cities with a population of 100,000 or more are factored out of the same model, global warming is reduced only slightly, to 0.6 degrees

Centigrade. Similar conclusions have been reached independently by a team of British scientists.

It is correct that the U.S. as a whole did experience a cooling-off period between 1940 and 1970, following the hot, dry "Dust Bowl" era of the '30s. But since 1970, the temperature rise in this country and elsewhere around the world has been marked. The '80s have witnessed the five hottest years since recordkeeping began more than a century ago.

As for Alden's mention of Don Anderson's call for better coordinated research into the greenhouse effect and other environmental problems, Dr. Anderson responded in a telephone conversation with *In These Times*: "Yes, I have called for studies to understand more about our planet. But this certainly does not contradict the evidence of the greenhouse effect. There is controversy over whether global warming has begun, but no controversy at all that greenhouse gases are building up. It is just a matter of time before there will be no controversy about the higher temperature effects being real. I am not calling for more research to avoid doing anything practical about this. We definitely can't afford to wait until all the results are in."

If Alden's call to "don't do something, stand there" continues to be the policy of governments around the world, that stand will likely be remembered along with Custer's—if there are any historians left to chronicle the folly. Or, as a song long predating Jerry Garcia put it, "it won't be water, but the fire next time."

Facing Germany's past

DIANE JOHNSTONE'S REPORT ON THE JENNINGER affair (*ITT*, Dec. 7, 1988) repeats a common misunderstanding of GDR policy. She states: "For the first time, the German Democratic Republic has agreed to pay compensation to Jewish victims, as the Federal Republic has done for years."

This is incorrect. Since the founding of the East German state in 1949, the GDR has paid compensation to all Jewish as well as Gypsy, Social Democratic, Communist and other victims of fascism living in the GDR. Compensation has consisted of special pensions, special housing privileges, medical care, social services and other forms of public recognition, including regular invitations to speak to junior high school classes about their experiences. In early 1953, the Federal Republic cut off payments to Jewish victims living in the GDR as part of a campaign to encourage emigration from the other German state.

In November 1988 the GDR agreed to make restitution payments to Jewish victims living outside the country. Unfortunately, Johnstone's article perpetuates the

mainstream press prejudice that the FRG has somehow been more forthcoming in acknowledging the past.

The GDR was indeed quick to assume the mantle of anti-fascism after the war, primarily because the majority of its postwar leadership had spent the war either in exile or in concentration camps. Toward the end of the war, Germans had many reasons for preferring to surrender to the Americans rather than to the Russians or even the British. As anti-communism rapidly became more important to the Western allies in the post-war period, the remaining higher and mid-level Nazi functionaries rapidly left the East (where they were actively pursued and prosecuted and barred from public service), expecting and receiving much more sympathetic treatment in the West. As a result, higher level Nazis were not present in the East after the early '50s.

What did not change in either the Eastern or the Western parts of Germany was the broad mass of the population which either actively supported or acquiesced to Hitler and continued to harbor the same racist, nationalist and anti-Semitic sentiments as before. Whether the GDR's constant emphasis of the tradition of the Communist Party and the anti-fascist resistance (celebrated in film, drama and literature) has been more successful in transforming this basic social consensus than the FRG's payments to Israel and insistence on freedom from collective guilt remains to be seen. Both approaches gloss over the sticky question of individual responsibility.

To date, the most important book addressing the fascist past from the viewpoint of a young, "ordinary German" in Nazi Germany, Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* (translated as either *A Model Childhood* or *Patterns of Childhood*) was written and first published in the GDR. Wolf was still a teenager in 1945, as was Peter Jenninger. Jenninger's recent spectacular failure to present the response of an average German to the 1938 Kristallnacht pogrom, illustrated the West's continuing dilemma. Fifty years of guilt and denial have left it as incapable of confronting itself as it was in 1945. Before the West Germans can "master" their past, they will have to look it in the face.

Dorothy Rosenberg
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Portland, Ore.

Abortion

DENSE RINALDO WOULD NOT BE SO PUZZLED about the lack of public enthusiasm for abortion (*ITT*, Dec. 21, 1988) if she took more than a cursory look at national polls. For years Gallup has consistently shown

about 25 percent of Americans in favor of abortion without restriction; some 20 percent reject it under any circumstances. The majority accept it in cases of rape, incest or maternal health problems. In facile analysis these percentages can appear to mean overwhelming support for abortion.

When it is recognized, however, that the special circumstances the majority consider important apply only to well under 1 percent of all pregnancies, the fallacy of such analysis is glaring. The fact is that three out of four Americans reject abortion on demand—which is the point at issue.

Edward M. Corbett
Commerce, Texas

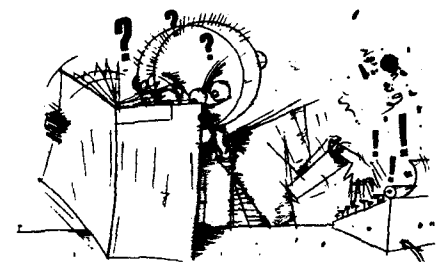
Non sequitur

YOUR HAUGHTY DISMISSAL OF WHAT YOU TERM "sect" parties (*ITT*, Dec. 7, 1988)—Socialist, Socialist Worker's, etc.—manages to conveniently ignore that in two decades of working with the Democratic Party, Democratic Socialists of America has also achieved diddly-squat, unless of course you look at Mondale and Dukakis as being victories.

Working as I do in a non-unionized factory for low wages and few benefits, I can attest that things down here among the peasantry have gotten worse, not better. My buying power is deteriorating, my expenditures are increasing, and if Blue Cross and Blue Shield go up again I probably will no longer be able to afford health care for my family (I now pay \$70 every other week).

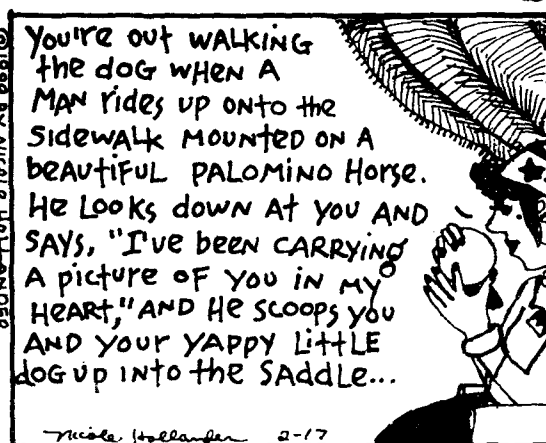
So what I am attempting to point out here is that all your grand strategizing of "taking over" the Democratic Party and turning it somehow into a force for socialism has not aided me or my family or the people I work with one bit. We still punch the time clock, still put in eight miserable hours for little return, still scrape to get by. You should try it sometime.

Jeffrey M. McHale
Throop, Pa.



Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you want to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

SYLVIA



by Nicole Hollander

