



The In These Times Index of Indecencies

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Father Nature

As El Niño battered the West Coast this winter, an elderly Nipomo, Calif., man named Al Niño says he received numerous calls from angry Californians who blamed him for the mess. "It's happened at least a half-dozen times," Niño told the *Los Angeles Times*. "It's always something like, 'Why are you doing this?' And I say, 'Well, I didn't really have nothing else to do. I thought maybe it would be kind of fun.'"

Death of a Salesman

Charles Cornell was, by all accounts, the very model of a modern British salesman: clever, hard-working and aggressive. Unfortunately, after a recent car accident, his personality changed—for the better. A court in London recently awarded Cornell \$535,000 in damages after hearing testimony that the salesman had become much "nicer to be around" and "too nice" to work effectively, London's *Daily Telegraph* reports. "The accident has taken away the competitive edge," Cornell's counsel told the court. "His relatives find him a more pleasant personality—less aggressive. He now muddles through life. ... Not a good image for a salesman."

Fired Up

This hurts me more than it hurts you: A recent study of heart-attack victims conducted at 45 hospitals across the United States from 1989 to 1994 explored the

link between work and heart-attack risk. It found that the most stressful events were deadline pressure and firing people. According to Dr. Murray A. Mittleman of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, the risk of a heart attack doubled for managers in the week after they fired someone.

And the Winner Is ...

After watching *Chicago Hope* star Christine Lahti miss her big moment at this year's Golden Globe Awards because she was in the bathroom, the makers of Kaopectate hit on a novel way to get their product in the spotlight during the Oscars in March, according to a press release. The company sent custom-made "Kaopectate Oscar Relief Baskets" to some of the top nominees—hoping to help them give a "solid performance" during the nerve-wracking event. ■

the right

The End of Innocence

BY FREDERICK CLARKSON

Over the past six months, Barnes & Noble has been simultaneously targeted by a Christian Right censorship campaign and vilified as a corporate predator that overruns traditional independent bookstores. As fate would have it, Barnes & Noble's public relations problems have collided at the Rev. Jerry Falwell's Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va.

It all started with Operation Rescue head honcho Flip Benham. In addition to their usual intimidation tactics at abortion clinics, Benham and his militant membership have been busy plastering high schools all over the country with posters picturing gory fetuses.

Meanwhile, Operation Rescue has joined with Focus on the Family and the

American Family Association in a direct-action campaign against Barnes & Noble for selling what it calls "child pornography." In particular, these groups object to books by photographers David Hamilton and Jock Sturges.

When Benham was invited to speak at Liberty University last fall, he led a group of Liberty students down to Lynchburg's E.C. Glass High School, where they blocked the doors to the building and were arrested for trespassing. This got Benham six months in jail and irked Falwell by disturbing town-gown relations.

When Benham was thrown in the hoosegow, his colleagues converged on Lynchburg. They discovered that none

other than Barnes & Noble had taken over Liberty's campus bookstore, where—Lo and Behold!—they found a copy of Hamilton's *The Age of Innocence*, a book that got the chain indicted in Alabama and Tennessee for selling child pornography.

Now, Operation Rescue has called for a similar indictment in Lynchburg against the campus bookstore and Falwell. "It is a sad commentary that Dr. Falwell would not condemn child pornographers," says Keith Tucci, the former head of Operation Rescue. "In fact, he invited them onto his Liberty University campus. Yet, he has condemned the Rev. Flip Benham for preaching the gospel at E.C. Glass High School." ■

The Nurses' New Deal

BY DAVID BACON

Ending more than a year of strikes and conflict, California nurses reached an agreement with Kaiser Permanente, the nation's largest HMO, at the end of March. The four-year agreement excludes Kaiser's demands for serious wage concessions and contains an innovative provision that moves toward the most controversial and hardest-fought of the nurses goals: giving the union a role in monitoring quality-of-care issues.

The agreement, which covers more than 7,500 nurses in the state, creates 18 paid, independent "quality liaison" positions for nurses selected by the union. These nurses will monitor quality-of-care conditions that affect patients, including staffing levels. It is the first contract in the country that gives nurses the ability to monitor care and influence decision-making on this issue.

The previous contract between Kaiser and the California Nurses Association (CNA) expired in January 1997. Kaiser, with 2.7 million enrollees in California, took a very hard line in bargaining, demanding 15 percent reductions in the salaries of hundreds of CNA members.

The CNA countered with a high-profile campaign that focused on the declining quality of care for Kaiser patients. As Kaiser has sought to cut costs and compete with other health plans, its hospital closures and staff reductions have dramatically increased job stress, particularly for nurses.

At the same time, Kaiser has closed a number of its older hospitals in urban neighborhoods, especially those serving largely minority communities, while opening others in wealthier suburbs. The CNA not only accused the HMO of "medical redlining," but dramatized cases where closed emergency rooms led to the deaths of patients as they were transferred to other medical facilities farther away.

The CNA initiated a series of one- and two-day strikes to highlight the nurses' situation. The nurses avoided an all-out strike, during which an HMO can actually make money since it doesn't have to pay strikers and continues to collect its monthly premiums. The limited strikes, however, forced Kaiser to scramble to keep its doors open, costing the HMO an estimated \$10 million per day and driving administrators crazy with scheduling logistics.

During the strikes, other hospital employees generally respected the nurses' picket lines. Tensions rose, however, when the Service Employees International Union (SEIU)—along with other AFL-CIO unions—signed a partnership agreement with Kaiser. The agreement was strongly criticized by CNA for, among other reasons, restricting the ability of participating unions to raise patient-care issues (see "Whose side are you on?" August 11, 1997).

In early March, SEIU Local 250, which represents other Kaiser hospital employees, reopened its contract early and signed a new agreement with the HMO with no concessions and three percent annual wage increase. This contradicted claims Kaiser made in full-page ads attacking the CNA, which insisted that the company needed concessions from the nurses.

In addition to establishing the quality liaisons, the nurses' new contract includes three percent annual wage increases. The union also agreed to enroll its retirees in Kaiser and conceded that new hires in Santa Rosa and Sacramento would start at a lower tier, taking seven years to reach the top scale instead of the current five.

"We just wore them down," CNA Executive Director Rose Ann Demoro says. "We didn't need a partnership. It was a victory for good, old-fashioned collective bargaining." ■

It's Over

The longest-running labor dispute in the country finally ended on March 22, when the United Auto Workers (UAW) approved a six-year contract with Caterpillar.

The UAW had worked without a contract since 1991, striking twice only to return to work without a deal. While workers walked the picket lines, Caterpillar racked up record profits as thousands of scabs rushed to the plant for higher-paying jobs. Many considered the struggle to be the biggest setback for labor since President Reagan fired striking air-traffic controllers in 1981.

But the rank and file persevered, rejecting two union-brokered deals, including one in late-February, when the company refused to reinstate 50

fired strikers (see "It's not over ... 'til it's over," April 5).

Caterpillar eventually agreed to rehire the 50 strikers, and the deal, which covers around 13,000 workers, was approved by 54 percent of the union voters. The pact also ensures job security until 2004 and provides for a lump-sum wage increase.

In exchange, the union dropped its 400-plus complaints before the National Labor Relations Board, accepted a two-tier wage system and agreed not to penalize workers who crossed the picket lines during the dispute.

Caterpillar also dropped its closely watched Supreme Court case, which would have ruled whether companies must pay employees that work full time for the union.—C.A.

Press Pass

Bauer Power?

BY CRAIG AARON

When Ralph Reed resigned as director of the Christian Coalition last July, Gary Bauer, head of the ultra-conservative Family Research Council, stepped in to fill the vacuum.

In December, a slobbery profile by Fred Barnes in *The Weekly Standard* declared Bauer "Washington's Most Formidable Conservative." Now, apparently dissatisfied with the GOP's big tent strategy, Sunday-morning punditry and mere inside-the-Beltway notoriety, Bauer is pondering a run for the White House.

He admits that he's the "longest of long-shots," but this unapologetic ideologue could really shake things up in the Republican primaries. "Bauer is the quintessential social conservative," writes Michelle Cottle in the April issue of *The Washington Monthly*. "He opposes abortion, gun control, gay rights, no-fault divorce, women in military combat, bilingual education, and the National Endowment for the Arts. He supports school choice, school prayer, abstinence-only sex ed, the death penalty, an increase in the per-child tax credit, tougher obscenity laws, and tax breaks for stay-at-home spouses."

But, Cottle points out, Bauer is no "run-of-the-mill right-winger." Unlike many of his fellow Republicans, he recognizes the role government can play in advancing the conservative social agenda. Bauer has irked the Republican establishment with his outspoken opposition to social security privatization, free trade with China and the flat tax. In turn, he has forged unusual alliances with everyone from House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt to actor Richard Gere.

But what has really turned heads in Washington is Bauer's fund-raising clout. Since he took control of the Family Research Council in 1988, it has gone from a \$200,000 organization

with 3,000 constituents to a \$14 million institution with a constituency of half a million. Meanwhile, Cottle reports, his political action committee, the Campaign for Working Families, raked in \$2.6 million in 1997—a non-election year. If he runs for president, he'll likely enjoy the backing of conservative Christian radio host James Dobson, president of the 2.2 million-member Focus on the Family, who has already threatened to remove his support from the GOP for abandoning social issues.

Of course, Bauer has about as much chance of being elected President as Ralph Nader. The group he threatens most are the Republicans who have settled in to what *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen calls "a permanent presidential candidacy." Barnes reports that both Dan Quayle and Bay Buchanan, Pat's sister and campaign manager, have asked Bauer to stay out of the race.

Bauer has already caused enough trouble for the Republican leadership. In January, the Campaign for Working Families helped ultra-conservative Tom Bordonaro defeat Brooks Firestone—Newt Gingrich's candidate of choice—in a California special primary to fill the seat of Rep. Walter Capps, a Democrat who died in October. Bauer's group poured \$100,000 into TV ads attacking Firestone for voting against a ban on partial-birth abortion.

The big winner? Capps' widow, Lois, who beat Bordonaro in the March 11 election by a margin of 53 to 45 percent. The Democrats held onto the district (which, ironically, is the home of Ronald Reagan) thanks largely to the votes of moderate Firestone supporters.

Hello, President Gore.

"The wars, for now, are over," writes editor Anthony Borden in his introduc-

tion to the March issue of *WarReport*, a journal that for the past six years has provided some of the best coverage of the conflicts in the Balkans and the Caucasus. In April, the journal will be absorbed by *Transitions*, which focuses on the changes in post-Communist societies throughout Europe and the former Soviet Union.

The final issue of *WarReport*, which includes dispatches from Christopher Hitchens, Roy Gutman and a host of regional journalists, reflects on the lessons learned in the war years and the future prospects for the region. "The persistence of immediate security risks, the depth of the fundamental problems and the continuing inadequacies of the international effort suggest that—despite all of the attention and the tragedy—sufficient lessons have not been learned after all," Borden writes. "By conspiracy, catastrophe, or a combination of the two, the effect of the international involvement was exactly the opposite of what was intended: not to halt the bloodshed, but, in fact, to help drive it." The limp international response to the atrocities in Kosovo is only the most recent example.

In his R. Crumb-meets-gonzo-journalism style, cartoonist Joe Sacco provides a completely different take on the former Yugoslavia in his latest comic book, *Soba* (Drawn & Quarterly, P.O. Box 48056, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H2V 4S8). Near the end of the war in 1995, Sacco spent five months in Sarajevo, where he met Soba—an artist, musician, man-about-town and planter of land mines. The book relays the harrowing everyday realities of Sarajevo's youth in the war and its aftermath. "My life is ruined," Soba tells the author in one scene. "Our generation was sacrificed. Half of my friends no longer exist." ■