

# b r i c k b a t s

**F**rom the Poetic Justice Department: Howard Daniels, a 24-year-old Bronx, N.Y., gunman, shot himself in the groin during a struggle with his intended rape victim.

**M**artha Jean Steinberg may have the solution to the nation's crime problem: prayer—with a vengeance. The Detroit gospel radio hostess didn't exactly turn the other cheek when some nonbeliever stole her brand-new car. Instead, she took to the airways and threatened to call down the wrath of the Lord against the car thief and anyone who witnessed the crime but didn't call the police immediately. When Miss Steinberg returned to her Home of Love Church, she found the car parked in its usual place—with the gas tank filled.

**W**hen the alcoholic beverage industry was offered a gift of almost total deregulation by the Reagan administration, the nation's distillers, brewers, and vintners turned the color of Ripple. These captains of the grain and grape spoke right up and said they do not wish to be freed. Instead, they'd like the federal government to set basic standards and preempt the 50 states' passing their own laws. Deregulation would save the government about \$12 million a year, but the brewers say they *want* the government to tell them what they can put in their bottles and on

their labels. Richard B. Thornburg, spokesman for the National Beer Wholesalers Association, said, "The industry has grown up with regulation and feels very confident with it." It's almost enough to make one a teetotaler.

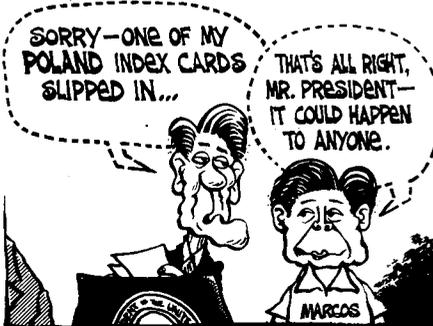
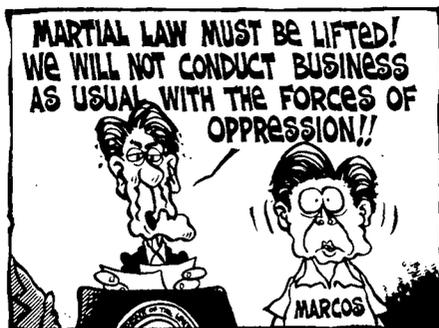
**T**arzan, everyone's favorite king of the jungle, got tangled in the vines of Yugoslavian censorship. Why? Old movies of the counterrevolutionary in loincloth have so corrupted the minds of socialist youth that they're jumping out of trees and aping the blood-chilling cry of Johnny Weismuller. Belgrade newspaper *Politika* quoted a leading orthopedist as saying the number of broken limbs and other injuries was up 15 percent during the month the movies were shown on television. *Kojak* may be next on the censor's hit list: the state lollipop collective couldn't handle it.

**C**anadian bureaucrats are no slouches when it comes to proposing idiotic regulations. The Canadian Transport Commission thinks that airlines should be obliged to provide a special seat at no extra charge to accommodate an obese passenger and a free seat to an escort of a handicapped passenger. There's been no word yet on exactly how the airlines are supposed to determine how fat a person must be to qualify for the benefit, but they're working on it—probably over lunch.

**B**eing a federal government deadbeat hasn't stopped one young bureaucrat in the Department of Education from securing other forms of credit. Senate investigators say the unidentified wastrel has steadfastly refused to pay a dime on a \$40,000 graduate school loan he received from the government. This creative financier is one of 36,000 federal employees who've been able to avoid paying their debts because up until now, a federal law protected their paychecks from garnishment. A new law has been passed, but it remains to be seen how many employees will now pay up. Oh, our friend in the Education Department: He had no problem getting an \$18,000 commercial loan to buy a Porsche. Now when he takes Uncle Sam for a ride, he'll be able to do it in style.

**D**iplomatic immunity means never having to say you're sorry. Nam Chol Oh, third secretary at the North Korean mission to the United Nations, is free as a bird, and there's nothing the cops can do. He is accused of sexually abusing a Bronx, N.Y., woman at a park while several members of the mission staff were picnicking nearby. The woman was grabbed from behind, thrown to the ground, and beaten as the diplomat attempted to rape her. She made a positive identification, but the State Department stopped police from arresting the vermin. We certainly wouldn't want to offend the North Koreans, with whom we haven't had formal relations since the 1950s.

**W**hy can't you find a cop on a New York subway? Because they're too busy handing out summonses to owners of clean, safe, and efficient vans that compete with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. The MTA is afraid it will lose \$50 million this year from riders who prefer the vans to the city's subways and buses. City bus drivers who fear losing overtime as business sags have on occasion forced vans off the road. Plainclothes cops from the city's crack anticrime squad have taken more than an hour to write up summonses—usually at rush hour. Most of the tickets have been thrown out of court, but the cops are under orders from Mayor Koch to keep writing them up. Now *that's* protection for the subways.



—MARK EDWARD CRANE



# TRENDS

## SILVER LININGS ON ELECTION-DAY CLOUDS

Mario Cuomo, an otherwise unexceptional New York pol, made one memorable comment during the 1982 election season: "All political campaigns get involved in smoke and mirrors, but this is a cloud of unprecedented density." The cloud to which he referred extended far beyond the borders of New York State. Even so, there was some very encouraging news in the election results, often in the unglamorous but noteworthy initiatives and referenda that were voted on in several states.

There were instances where voters showed a healthy regard for preserving individual liberty. Midwestern bluenoses suffered defeats at the polls as Minnesotans voted to legalize parimutuel betting on horse racing, and North Dakotans approved a measure that will keep alive their legal right to play \$2-a-hand blackjack. A well-publicized handgun control initiative failed in California. Less well known is the fact that voters in Nevada approved a constitutional amendment that guarantees the right to keep and bear arms "for security and defense, for lawful hunting and recreational use and for other lawful purposes." And New Hampshire voters approved a similar constitutional amendment by a resounding 72 percent.

Voters were generally far more suspicious of government spending boondoggles than they would have been even 10 or 20 years ago. Alaskans tossed out a proposal for an igloo Brasilia that would have meant the spending of as much as \$2.84 billion to move their state capital from Juneau to a tiny town 580 miles away called Willow. In a slightly warmer climate, Dade County, Florida, voters voted by a two-to-one margin against a sales tax increase to finance construction of a new Orange Bowl.

The spirit of California's tax-cutting Proposition 13 didn't carry the day in every instance—indeed, in California itself, all five bond issues on the ballot passed—but there were some victories for proponents of tax decreases. Texans approved a proposal to repeal the last remaining statewide property tax. Idaho voters okayed a referendum that exempts from taxation 50 percent of the value of their residential property. And

West Virginians passed a constitutional amendment that will base property taxes on 60 percent of the property's assessed value, thus nullifying an earlier decision by the West Virginia Supreme Court. Ohioans declined an opportunity to raise their state sales tax by a penny to finance 150-mph bullet trains connecting the state's largest cities.

Happily, some obnoxious interferences with the free market bit the dust in November as well. A proposal in Washington State to limit consumer interest rates to 12 percent was turned down by voters, and in four states, measures that would have required deposits on soft drink and beer bottles were defeated.

So even clouds of unprecedented density can have their silver linings. Incidentally, Cuomo, hardly the most liberty-oriented candidate in the country, ultimately had little reason to complain: he's now the governor-elect of New York.

## CHOOSE YOUR PHONE SYSTEM

There are phones in your future—multiple phones. For the first time since about 1910, when exclusive franchises were granted to local telephone companies, we're about to have a choice of local phone systems again. That's the word from no less an authority than *Business Week*, whose October 11 cover story profiled these explosive telecommunications developments.

First of all, 21 companies are now seeking permission from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to build what are being called "digital termination services"—microwave and radio-based local communications systems designed to connect homes or businesses to long-distance voice or data services. The firms include Graphic Scanning, GTE, Isacomm, ITT, MCI, RCA, Satellite Business Systems, Tymnet, and Western Union.

Another approach is to use fiber optics to connect local customers to satellite long-distance services. That's what Merrill Lynch and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey plan to do with their \$300-million Teleport project on Staten Island. Teleport will harbor 17 earth station dish antennas serving 22 or

more satellites. Using a network of fiber optic cables, it will link Manhattan's financial district, Jersey City's business district, and eventually even Long Island, southern New Jersey, and Albany to the earth stations. Initially only large firms will have their own fiber optic "tail," with others having to rely on local phone lines. But eventually, says Merrill Lynch's Stan Welland, every home could tie in directly via cable TV lines, bypassing the phone company completely.

The third alternative is the soon-to-begin cellular radio technology. Initially limited by the FCC to two companies per city—the existing phone company plus one radio common carrier—the cellular systems will aim first at the huge pent-up demand for mobile phones. The initial walkie-talkie-size units cost about \$2,000. But soaring demand, fierce competition, and microcircuit technology are likely to yield rapid reductions in both size and cost—for example, to \$100 wrist radios à la Dick Tracy. At that point, competitive pressures will very likely make a legislated duopoly unsustainable, and a real free market will be permitted.

Given these competitive realities, keeping the poor local telephone companies under rate-of-return regulation is a prescription for disaster. The last thing they need is to have to clear each pricing and service decision with a big-brother regulator. Telephone investors ought to face the reality that what their newly spun-off firms need most is freedom to compete.

## LET A HUNDRED MAIL CARRIERS BLOOM

Sylvia Porter has joined the ranks of the converted.

Porter, a widely syndicated columnist and one of the most respected authorities in the country on personal finance, "finally exploded" a few months ago when a first-class letter mailed to her 8th Street address in New York City from 38th Street took 11 days to arrive. She wrote in her column, "Why does Congress still give the Postal Service a monopoly on delivering first-class mail? Why not find out what would happen if we open up this business to competition, as we have with package delivery,