

ADDING UP TO GOOD READING

BY MARTIN MORSE WOOSTER

Suppose you have \$200 a year to spend on magazine subscriptions. You'd like to get journals that are informative but not dry; I assume you prefer publications that are not dumbed down, that assume you can understand words with more than two syllables. What should you buy? Here are my choices.

1. *The Economist*. I don't like American news magazines; with the exception of *Insight*, the weekly published by the *Washington Times* organization, they seem to be places where bureaucracy long ago triumphed over individual initiative. (According to *New York* magazine, Time Inc. is now so suspicious of its employees that armed guards have been placed in the employees' cafeteria to prevent the silverware from walking away. If *Time* can't trust its staff at lunch, can it trust them in the newsroom?)

The Economist, however, does things differently. Its staff reports and writes, eliminating the distortions that result when a reporter's copy is given to an in-house writer for "polishing." (Peter Drucker, in his engaging autobiography *Adventures of a Bystander*, tells of the occasion when he was the subject of a *Time* cover story; the "polisher" had, without seeing the dog, transformed Drucker's pet Pekingese into a bloodthirsty German shepherd.)

Moreover, *The Economist's* writers are allowed to express their opinions. Most reporters have beliefs, of course; and if they aren't allowed to express them directly, they frequently sneak personal views into their copy. *The Economist*, however, thrives on opinionated prose. Not only are its editorials, or "leaders," small gems of concentrated analysis (and, as a bonus, mostly market-oriented), but the statist thugs of the Third World are regularly portrayed as, well, thugs. If you want to learn about government mismanagement in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, *The Economist* is probably the single best source.



Lastly, *The Economist* provides a non-American perspective. Most U.S. publications tend to see the world as a stage on which Americans can create comedies or tragedies. So U.S. reporters rarely visit large portions of the world (South America unless people deal or use drugs; India; the black-ruled nations of Africa). But in recent months *The Economist* has reported, for example, on such phenomena as Latin America's turn toward Spain and the flood of emigrants who leave the poorer nations of Southeast Asia for the more well-off Persian Gulf states. These are stories that, because they don't involve the United States or its citizens, would not be covered in depth in the American press.

When I read *Time* or *Newsweek*, I feel like I am trapped in a public-television talk show, where journalists with egos the size of Jupiter (gas giants, like Hodding Carter or Elizabeth Drew) endlessly debate the meaning of the news. When I read *The Economist*, I feel like I'm at the end of a giant conference table, as scores of minions give me inside information from around the world. Perhaps this is why I read every word of *The Economist*—even the parts, such as the Finance section, that I don't fully understand.

At \$85 a year, *The Economist* takes a big bite out of your \$200, but it's worth it.

2. *The New Republic*. This magazine does it differently, too. Whereas *National Review* is as likely to run a piece questioning America's overseas military commitments as *The Nation* is to publish a defense of Charles Murray, *The New Republic* wisely hires writers and editors who disagree politically, then lets them slug it out.

For socialists, there is the reliably statist Robert Kuttner. For hawks, there are editors Charles Krauthammer and Morton "Yes, I'm Still a Democrat" Kondracke. And there are others whose paths are less predictable; Henry Fairlie, for example, had

burned out for years but recently wrote splendid articles on how news of the American revolution spread throughout Europe and the growing clout of the senior citizens lobby. (The title, "Greedy Geezers," illustrates another *New Republic* trait—gratuitous offensiveness.)

Best of all, *TNR* regularly hires market-oriented journalists to bash right-wing statisticians. In the past few months, for example, James Bovard did a splendid attack on Dan Quayle's major "accomplishment" in Congress, the Job Training Partnership Act, which uses tax dollars to pay businesses for moving plants from 100 miles north of the Indiana border to 100 miles south of it.

I read a good many political magazines. *The New Republic* is one of the few that I enjoy. At \$56 a year, it brings your tab to \$141.

3. A science magazine. Science magazines tend to have more interesting information in them than most other types of magazines. While some are dull—*Natural History* has little to recommend it besides its pictures, and *Discover* is slickness without substance—here are three that I can recommend.

The Sciences is the best-written science magazine. The art is also superb.

To my taste, its best articles are the ones dealing with "softer" sciences; in the September/October issue, for example, anthropologist Carol Molony discusses whether or not the "Stone Age" Tasaday tribe in the Phillipines was a hoax. *The Sciences* recently won a well-deserved

Atlantic's reputation!" the editors, so I was told, promptly remove the "questionable" material.

Maybe it's the same judgment that led the editors, in the past, to publish articles on arms control written by 10! count 'em, 10! authors. But the political articles, with

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National Magazine Award for the best magazine with a circulation under 100,000.

Technology Review is the most political science magazine; the regrettable Lester Thurow has a regular column, and the editors delight in running pieces by the Institute for Policy Studies' Michael Klare on defense matters. But it is not predictable. So, for example, it also publishes Manhattan Institute fellow Peter Huber on how biotechnology regulation has needlessly blocked new products from coming to market. And one issue last year featured ecologists Michael Dover and Lee Talbot, who showed that traditional agricultural practices in the Third World are both more productive and more ecologically sound than methods imported at vast expense from the West. These surprises help make *Technology Review* the most unpredictable science magazine around.

Scientific American is the dull boy on the block. While never trivializing the issues, *SA* frequently errs on the side of stolidity. Still, the articles are worthwhile—if sometimes hard to follow.

The most one of these science magazines will put you back is \$24, leaving \$35 in your magazine kitty.

4. *The Atlantic*. I was once told a secret that explains why *The Atlantic* at times seems so dull. It turns out that most articles published in the magazine are sent to outside reviewers. If the reviewer says, "You can't say that! Publishing this will seriously damage *The*

the exception of those by Nicholas Lemann and James Fallows, are not *The Atlantic's* strong suit; what makes the magazine first-rank are the nonpolitical essays and reportage, on everything from mathematics to beer.

Note to economists: until recently, *The Atlantic's* subscription rate was \$9.95 a year—the same as in 1971! Now it's \$14.95. And that still leaves the astute magazine buyer with enough to get a year of *REASON* and a gourmet banana split.

A postscript on the dilemma of succession: Roy Childs recently discussed in this space (July 1988) a changing of the guard at *National Review*, where John O'Sullivan has become that magazine's editor. A succession also seems in the works at *The New Republic*. Editor Michael Kinsley is taking a six-month sabbatical to do a stint as editor of the American Survey section of *The Economist*. Robert Wright will be filling in as editor; the "TRB" column will be written by Hendrik Hertzberg.

Why Wright? "Look at the masthead," says an insider. "All the other *New Republic* editors are TV stars, and Bob is the one who stays in the office and works."

Wright may or may not make changes in the content of the magazine, but I hope he continues the Kinsley practice of allowing free-wheeling debate. These liberals want to regain the presidency, but if they are ever to do so they must abandon the principles that convinced many

voters that liberals love to tax success and subsidize failure. Controversy is *TNR's* lifeblood; block the debate, and the magazine will stagnate.

John O'Sullivan, meantime, would do well to follow Kinsley's example and open up *National Review's* pages. There are as many divisions on the right as on the left, but you'd never know it by reading *National Review*. The retirement of publisher William Rusher may encourage more openness; Rusher believed Ronald Reagan was infallible, thus ensuring that most critiques of the administration were spiked.

The George Bush administration will probably be much like Gerald Ford's—run by decent traditional Republicans who abandoned their philosophical principles long ago. But a centrist Bush presidency should give both left-wing and right-wing journalists plenty of time to reconsider what they stand for. I look forward to enjoying the debates.

Contributing Editor Martin Morse Wooster was previously Washington editor of Harper's and an associate editor of The Wilson Quarterly.

FYI

The Economist (weekly, \$85/year)
P.O. Box 58524
Boulder, CO 80322

The New Republic (weekly, \$56/year)
P.O. Box 56515
Boulder, CO 80328

The Sciences (bimonthly, \$13.50/year)
New York Academy of Sciences
2 E. 63rd St.
New York, NY 01121

Technology Review (8 times, \$24/year)
Mass. Inst. of Technology
Building W59
Cambridge, MA 02139

Scientific American (monthly, \$19.97/year)
P.O. Box 3186
Harlan, IA 51593

The Atlantic (monthly, \$14.95/year)
P.O. Box 52661
Boulder, CO 80322

THE LEANING TOWER OF STATISM

BY ANTONIO MARTINO

Political rhetoric is changing fast in Italy. Twenty-five years ago the country was moving away from the "center" government, which had presided over the economic miracle of the 1950s with a largely laissez-faire policy, toward a "center-left" coalition government, based on an alliance with the Socialist Party and the exclusion of the classical liberals. The slogans declared that liberalism, with its emphasis on the free market, was not enough. The economic miracle had to be replaced with a social miracle, and for that purpose "modern economic policy" had to supplant the traditional reliance on market forces.

The leader of the Italian Socialist Party, Francesco De Martino, declared on TV that if his party won an absolute majority it would nationalize all economic activities, with the possible exclusion of barber shops. Statism, in other words, was the consensus of the overwhelming majority of politicians of almost all political parties. Those of us who dared to challenge the prevailing wisdom—which relied on deficit spending, national economic planning, nationalization, and direct government intervention—were labeled reactionaries and ignored by the new mandarins.

Statists of all parties have had a go at it: from 1960 to 1987, government spending increased 68 times in nominal terms—almost 6 times in real terms—climbing from one-third of gross domestic product to 52 percent. Despite a huge increase in revenue during the same period, the deficit exploded: from nearly 2 percent to 12 percent of GDP. In real terms (1987 prices), total public debt outstanding went from \$82.3 billion in 1960 to over \$700 billion in 1987. Regardless of how it is measured, government in Italy has grown very rapidly in the past quarter century.

The results of this spectacular growth seem to have disappointed its promoters, however. On July 12, 1987, the leftist weekly *L'Espresso* published a debate be-



Rome: Even Italy's Communists have begun to criticize statism, which party head Achille Occhetto calls "the true burden which both social democrats and communists must avoid."

tween Claudio Martelli, deputy leader of the Italian Socialist Party, and Achille Occhetto, then deputy leader (now leader) of the Italian Communist Party. In the course of the debate, Martelli said: "It's simple: both in the East and in the West we see the crisis of a philosophy that's been common to both social democrats and communists: statism." To which Occhetto replied: "I agree with you more than you do!... Statism, as you say, is the true burden which both social democrats and communists must avoid."

This is not an isolated episode. In his concluding speech at the Communist Party annual festival, Occhetto stressed that the party has "severely criticized the traditional statism of the working class." The productive energies of the country, he said, must be allowed to operate in the private sector, as well as in the public and cooperative sectors. Occhetto is clearly eager to distance himself from his party's traditional statist policies.

The new philosophy is also beginning to show in actual policy proposals. In presenting his plans for a new budget, Giuliano Amato, Socialist minister of the Treasury, advocated extensive privatization of government-controlled corporations, health care and other social services,

communications facilities, and even postal services. Not surprisingly, some Liberal Party members suggested that Amato should be given honorary membership in their ranks.

It is too soon, however, for free-market advocates to celebrate. While the rhetoric has changed dramatically, policies have not changed much. No one seems to believe in socialism wholesale, but when it comes to socialism at the retail level, so to speak, the organized action of pressure groups inevitably results in yet more government intervention. For example, while there is general agreement that the National Health System has failed miserably (it is "the scandal of the century," says

L'Espresso), the bureaucrats and their unions will make sure no one dismantles it anytime soon.

The real hope for the future of freedom in Italy rests more on arithmetic than on rhetoric: statism is financially bankrupt. Interest payments on government debt amount to 15 percent of total public-sector spending. Taxation on labor income has reached 45 percent, and organized business and labor interests are beginning to protest high taxes. At the same time, government's failure is underscored by the tremendous success of private enterprises that compete with it.

Even government agencies resort to private carriers for reliable mail service. And according to CENSIS, an independent research institute, more than half of the people entitled to "free" public health care instead purchase it from private suppliers. Private health insurance is a growth industry and private schools are booming.

As Italy's financial problems get worse, the prospects for a free economy improve. The call for reform will be too strong to resist, and the new rhetoric of limited government will translate into policy.

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