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# The State of the Movement: The Implosion

The end of a Presidential election year is a good time to take stock, to ask ourselves how our movement is going, and therefore how it may be shaping up for the future. All right: so how goes our movement? The quick answer is, not very well. For the last four years, the movement has been suffering through a severe contraction, reaching during 1983 and 1984 the status of what wordsmith Sam Konkin has called an "implosion." The recent implosion, however, is no reason for despair. No ideological revolution proceeds on a continuous straight line from birth to triumphant victory. Every such revolution proceeds in a zig-zag manner. The modern libertarian movement took off into explosive growth in 1969-70, and accelerated that growth during the 1970's. During the 1980's we have been in a zag period. The zag period can only bring despair to those who unrealistically expected Quick Victory, or who were lured by honeyed promises of such Victory to plunge into activity with short-run fervor, only to burn out in disillusion when the triumph never came. We must understand that liberty is a lifetime commitment, and not a quick ticket to fortune and glory. To the extent that the summer soldiers and the sunshine libertarians have left the fold, the movement is better off for this recession, better off to remain with "cadre" (i.e. knowledgeable activists) who are inured to temporary reverses and who can rise above the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

## 1. Why the Implosion?

Before surveying the terrain in detail, let us summarize the reasons for this movement recession. They can be summed up as three-fold: the change in the *Zeitgeist*, the Reagan phenomenon, and the vagaries of the Kochtopus. The first and second causes are, of course, interrelated. The 70's were a decade of endemic discontent with the system and with the U.S. government. Being a time of discontent, it was a decade of searching, of passionate interest in ideology and in exploring alternatives to the status quo. Hence the enormous explosion of interest in libertarianism, and therefore of growth in the movement and in the fledgling Libertarian Party. The 1980's, however, has marked a return to the smugness, the contentment with "America," that had characterized the 1950's and the Eisenhower Era. On the

campus, there is virtually zero political activity, and equally zero interest in ideology of any sort. As in the 1950's, careerism is back with a vengeance.

An anecdote will illustrate the ideological and political apathy these days on the campus, as well as everywhere else. I've been spending this year teaching in Sin City, Las Vegas. When asked by a national LP leader what activity there was on our campus during the 1984 campaign, I replied that there was good news and bad news. The bad news is that there was no LP or Bergland activity whatsoever. The good news is that there was no activity for the Democrats or Republicans either.

The Reagan re-election campaign exemplifies this new smugness and lack of interest in ideology. As we have detailed in the *Lib. Forum*, the entire campaign, and particularly the Reagan effort, was the most odious Presidential campaign in American history. There was not even a feeble attempt to discuss ideology or issues. The all too successful nub of the Reagan campaign was, like Carl Lewis at the equally repugnant and flag-waving Olympics, to wrap himself in the American flag, to make himself "America's candidate" running on the ticket of "America's party," nominated in the home of "America's (football) team." The Republicans successfully carried out the strategy detailed in the June, 1984 memorandum of Richard Darman, a leading White House aide: "*Paint RR*," he wrote, "*as the personification of all that is right with, or heroized by, America*. Leave Mondale in a position where an attack on Reagan is tantamount to an attack on America's idealized image of itself — *where a vote against Reagan is, in some subliminal sense, a vote against a mythic 'AMERICA.'*" (Italics Darman's. *Newsweek*, Election Extra, Nov.-Dec. 1984, p.88).

The 1970's was an era of explosive growth in the libertarian movement and Party because everything came together in 1973-75 to spread a healthy disgust among the American people for the U.S. government. First, during those years came the big inflationary recession, the first sign that inflation was now permanent in American life, even in the midst of a deep recession. As a result came the breakup of the Keynesian consensus, and the search for alternatives among economists, as well as the general public. Something had gone radically wrong after four decades of arrogant fine-tuning by statist economists. Second, the United States, during this same

period, suffered its first losing war, a retribution for its unjust imperial intervention and mass murder in Vietnam. The American public was as fed up with foreign intervention as it was with inflation. The third mighty blow to the American State came, once again, during the same crucial 1973-75 period: the glorious bringing down of the mighty institution of the Presidency over the crookeries and tyranny of Watergate.

Those three events — inflationary recession, Vietnam, and Watergate — happening coincidentally at the same time, exerted a synergistic effect in spreading massive disillusionment in the American State. Surely it can be no accident that this was precisely the beginning of enormous growth in the modern libertarian movement. Americans got increasingly repelled at high taxes, saw that marijuana laws were counter-productive, and became far more concerned with civil liberties after seeing the peccadilloes committed by the FBI and CIA during Watergate. A healthy distrust of politicians spread throughout the land. Increasing interest in libertarianism came as the public grew intrigued with a movement dedicated to getting Big Government "off our backs."

Things began to sour during the last two years of the Carter Administration, even while, on the surface, libertarian sentiment escalated among the American public, and the Movement grew apace. The powerful, war-mongering forces of neo-conservatism began to dominate foreign policy opinion in the Democrat Party, symbolized by the dovish Cyrus Vance losing out in the Carter Administration power struggle to the hawk Brzezinski. The desperate Russian attempt to keep Afghanistan in its sphere of influence proved to be the spark that reignited anti-Soviet and pro-foreign intervention hysteria in the Democrat Party and in the country as a whole, leading to Carter's ill-advised grain embargo and his scuttling of the 1980 Olympics. Then, the Iranian hostage case inspired an apparently permanent resurgence of jingoist hysteria, paving the way for Carter's collapse and the Reagan victory. Finally, Carter's restoration of draft registration awakened little furor, and thereby helped to stimulate a rollback of civil liberties during the Reagan Administration.

Finally, it was in the late 1970's that the Moral Majority grew into a mighty force, and formed a powerful element in the Reagan majority. Theocracy was now a vital part of the conservative movement as it had not been during the entire post-World War II period.

The stage was set for the Reagan victory, which was able to co-opt much of the anti-Big Government, pro-free market sentiment, and cement it for the Republican Party. Reagan's masterful manipulation of rhetoric was enough for what Lawrence Dennis perceptively called the "dumbright;" to keep the fervent support of the dumbright masses, it was not actually necessary to *implement* that rhetoric in action. Pure verbiage was enough.

The advent of the Reagan Administration intensified enormously the malign underbelly of the later Carter years. The famous Reagan personality, that has inspired an outpouring of unconditional love and affection from everyone in America except the tiny staff of the *Libertarian Forum*, did the rest. In trying to explain the unanimous enthusiasm for the Great Cretin, Chicago columnist Mike Royko speculated that Reagan delivers the "snappiest salute to the Marines that

he had ever seen," even including an authentic general, Ike Eisenhower. The consequence is that Reagan has managed to bring with him an Endless Summer orgy of flag-waving and jingoism, has given even greater life to the theocrats of the Moral Majority, and has managed to convince the quasi-libertarians among the masses that he has actually rolled back Big Government, all failures being successfully loaded onto the hapless Democrat Party.

As we wrote in our early analysis, "Movement Depression" (*Lib. Forum*, April 1983), Republican Administrations always bring a financial setback to the Movement, since many movement-inclined businessmen immediately conclude: "Why educate? We've already won." This phenomenon, which set back the movement in the Eisenhower Administration and in the early Nixon years, has been particularly virulent under Reagan, since Reagan's right-wing rhetoric has intensified the misconception that Victory has already arrived. We also wrote that the Reagan recession of 1981-83 set back financial support for the movement. Unfortunately, the 1983-84 boom does not seem to have worked the other way, to revive financial sources for liberty. Partly this is because many of the libertarian business supporters hailed from the old smokestack industries of the Middle West which have never recovered and are in secular decline.

But there is more to the debacle. For there has been a deep ideological shift among many of our business and wealthy individual and foundation patrons. Many of the quasi-individualist Old Right supporters have died off, and have been replaced by trendy young neo-conservatives, and hence the flow of funds has changed accordingly. In contrast to libertarians, neo-cons are nothing if not Respectable: Respectably anti-Communist and war-mongering, respectably in favor of the welfare state (if more efficient and a bit tighter), respectably in favor of theocratic and anti-"subversive" censorship, and oh so respectably in favor of the Beloved Little "Democracy" in the Middle East. The neo-cons are respectable because at every step of the way in the careers of this handful of ideologues beginning in the early 1940's, they have been in the mainstream of respectable opinion: Trotskyites at the beginning, then pro-war Social Democrats, then liberals, then Humphrey Democrats, then centrists, then Reaganite conservatives. In the entire lives of these shrewd and opportunistic careerists, not once have they gone one millimeter beyond respectable opinion, while at each step of the way loudly wrapping themselves in the mantle of being in a heroic "minority." Few in number but ensconced in key positions in academia and in the media, cunning and effective organizers who honed their skills in the Marxist sects of old, the neo-conservatives have been able to bulldoze dumbright wealthy businessmen into turning their funds and their very values over to neo-con control. It is not only the Crane Machine but virtually the entire movement of conservative and quasi-libertarian supporters who have sacrificed principle for respectability and alleged pragmatism. It should always be remembered that neo-conservatives are in no sense libertarians; indeed they are our polar opposite. What they are, as they themselves often proclaim, are Humphrey Democrats, i.e., they are once and present and future liberals. Or, as we say in New York, they are "liberals who have just been mugged." That is, they are liberals reacting in permanent hysteria against all the mixed values and movements of the New Left: i.e., civil rights (affirmative

action); anti-war and anti-draft sentiment; hostility to the public school system; and "liberation" for every allegedly "oppressed" group under the sun. For neo-cons, these obsolete battles of the late 60's are overlaid on top of their previous permanent trauma: the anti-vs. pro-Communist battles at the origin of the Cold War in the late 1940's. It is only these gangs of New York liberals for example who can still wax passionate over such long-dead and unimportant questions as the Rosenberg Case.

## 2. The Anatomy of the Implosion

We have talked about the causes of the implosion; it is time to detail the grisly anatomy of the implosion itself. For it is precisely one of the hallmarks of this massive implosion that there are no longer any institutions or organs of opinion to convey news and analysis of what is going on to movement members. For much of the implosion occurred in our newsletters and magazines, indispensable institutions of cementing the libertarian movement, and conveying news and information as well as analyses to movement members. How do you keep the movement from fragmenting if there are no means of regular communication? Note the following deaths of magazines and newsletters in the last two years. (Some of these defunct periodicals were hardly among my favorites, but all together their loss is a devastating blow to the movement.)

*Inquiry*

*frontlines*

*Free Texas*

*Caliber*

*Competition*, along with its organization, the effective and principled Council for a Competitive Economy (for more, see below).

*Libertarian Vanguard* (if not dead, moribund, along with its organization, the Radical Caucus of the LP),

*The Voluntaryist* (if not dead, moribund).

Various Konkin magazines

*Libertarian Review*

*Update*

*Literature of Liberty*

Libertarian institutions have either collapsed, greatly contracted, or abandoned principle in a generally unsuccessful attempt to corral more support and more funding (known in the trade as focussing on "outreach" — and to hell with inreach, i.e. movement activity). Thus, our premier organ of opinion, *Reason*, not only remains as our sole outreach magazine now that *Inquiry* is dead. It has also become much softer core and much less movement-oriented, even aside from the killing of the movement newsletter, *frontlines*. It has gotten so soft-core, and so outreachy (to say nothing of even more boring), that it is now scarcely discernible as being libertarian at all.

The various think-tanks in our movement are limping badly, most of their "activities" (when they are not being sellout) confined to fund-raising of one form or another. (And what must we call an organization in which fund-raising has become an *end* rather than a *means*?) One leading exception to this ghastly trend is David Theroux's Pacific Institute, which has managed to publish a number of reasonably hard-core, well-edited and widely distributed books. But, on the other hand, the Institute for Humane Studies has had to shut down its once substantial book-sponsoring and publishing program, and has sold off its

inventory of books. And it has had to kill its scholarly journal, *Literature of Liberty*.

One example of the implosion that I am particularly familiar with is the almost total collapse of the libertarian movement in New York City. The Libertarian Party (a topic I will deal with in a future issue) has long been very weak in New York City, and now some of its leaders, after a lengthy string of declines in votes and members, are actually talking of not running a mayoralty candidate at all in 1985 (Particularly ironic since the first major race in the nation was an excellent run by Fran Youngstein for Mayor of New York City in 1973!) But more dramatic has been the collapse of the rest of the New York movement. The Laissez-Faire Bookstore, which for a decade has been the social center of the New York movement, is expanding to larger quarters, but it will no longer be a store-front bookstore. Dyanne Petersen's Libertarian Supper Club, once meeting monthly in Manhattan, now hardly meets at all. And the Center for Libertarian Studies has moved out of New York to the more cordial and supportive clime of the San Francisco Bay Area. (New address for the CLS: P.O. Box 4091, Burlingame, CA 94011.)

## 3. Big Changes in the Kochtopus

We have mentioned as the three basic reasons for the big zag in the movement in the last few years: the Zeitgeist, the Reagan phenomenon, and the vagaries of the Kochtopus. In our "Movement Depression" article we have already described what might be called the "Kochcycle," the "Austrian business cycle" that the Koch family engendered in our movement by pouring in millions within a few years (largely 1977-80), followed by a severe contraction of funding in the years ever since. Partly as a result of that contraction and of the general implosion in the movement, there have been no news organs to inform the movement about the enormous and highly significant changes that have taken place within the Kochtopus in the last year or two.

Until this moment, news of these vast changes in the Kochtopus has been largely confined to excited phone conversations among friends. It is high time that the movement as a whole found out what was going on. Once again, the *Libertarian Forum*, mindful of its responsibilities to liberty, to History, and to the "Movement's Right to Know," steps forward to supply this vital gap in movement knowledge.

But first: probably only our oldest and most faithful readers have any idea of what the "Kochtopus" is (named, once again, by Sam Konkin, who has contributed such deathless words as "minarchist" and "Partyarchy" to the libertarian vocabulary). The Kochtopus used to include the Crane Machine (CM) as the clique of "professionals" that once ruled the Libertarian Party and was vanquished at the mighty and titanic PresCon at New York City in September 1983 (For the full story of the PresCon, told in loving and exuberant detail, see "Total Victory: How Sweet It Is!" in our September-October 1983 issue.) Since that PresCon the CM has left the Libertarian Party. But the CM, while the most visible and dangerous tentacle of the Kochtopus, by no means constitutes its entire body, and the time has come to focus on the "organism" and the enormous changes that have been recently wrought within it.

#### 4. Origins of the Kochtopus: the Founding of Cato

The Kochtopus began when Charles G. Koch, young multi-millionaire scion of the Wichita-based Koch oil empire, was converted from a passive LeFevrian view of libertarian strategy (he had been converted as a youth to libertarianism by LeFevre) to an activist stance. This latter transformation was largely effected by Ed Crane, on the strength of Crane's running of the MacBride presidential campaign in 1976. I myself had been urging Charles (C.K.) to adopt a more activist strategy, so that perhaps I might gain some of the responsibility for this second conversion.

Before then, C.K.'s ideological activities had been minimal and very low-key, and were run by his Wichita-based assistant and servitor, one George Pearson. After the death of F.A. ("Baldy") Harper in 1973, Koch became President of Harper's scholarly Institute for Humane Studies, and he also became involved, with Pearson as his satrap, in sponsoring various programs and conferences promoting Austrian, or Misesian, economics.

The Kochian burst into ideological, and even political, activism at the end of 1976 launched the "Kochtopus." The focus of this new activism was the San Francisco-based Cato Institute, headed by Crane, which also became the nucleus for Crane's continuing domination of the Libertarian Party. (Crane had been, and for a while continued to be, national chairman of the LP, and managed to keep dominating the LP until the titanic struggle at the national convention at Denver in 1981.) Cato's initial focus was twofold and intellectual: the creation of the glossy, intelligent semi-monthly *Inquiry* magazine, which would win an audience of intellectuals and academics to an appreciation of libertarianism; and the forging of a university cadre of libertarian faculty and students. The obvious location for this kind of ideological journal-and-think-tank was New York City; but Crane, in those days dedicated to San Francisco, insisted on locating there. "Cato" was named, at my suggestion, after the Roman opponent of Caesar who had inspired a corps of libertarians in Britain and America in the eighteenth century, and whose ideology in turn inspired much of the American revolution. The board of Cato had, and still has, a low-key inner cadre of stockholders possessing the ultimate legal power to fire and reconstitute the governing board of directors. The original stockholders were the three founders of Cato and carriers of the Cato vision: C.K., George Pearson, and myself.

What was this guiding vision of the new Cato Institute, and of other institutions that were rapidly created, during 1977, to form the massive new Kochtopus? The idea was that C.K. would (as he indeed did) pour in millions into creating institutions that would find and gather the best and the brightest of the libertarian movement, mobilized by the supposed organizing ability of Eddie Crane. The object was to promote a consistent ideology of hard-core and uncompromising radical libertarianism, of which Misesianism was the economic arm. For a movement that had long languished in abject poverty, this was a dazzling vision indeed, and the first year or so was a glorious time for those of us caught up in the excitement of it all. *Inquiry* was founded — a great magazine considering its relatively meager resources and shoddy publishing management, and some excellent editors passed through its ranks: notably Bill Evers, scholar, journalist, and early top Crane Machiner, who put

his own personal stamp on *Inquiry* as editor-in-chief that lasted remarkably for years after his ouster; Professor Ralph Raico, who lasted from beginning to end and managed to give to *Inquiry* the finest back-of-the-book section in the country; and Professor Ronald Hamowy, thrown willy-nilly into the task of being Evers's successor, who did a splendid job under trying circumstances.

To "Cato proper," to the academic cadre section, came David Theroux, fresh out of University of Chicago's MBA program; his assistant Robert Formaini, out of University of Virginia graduate economics; and Leonard P. Liggio as editor of Cato's new scholarly journal, *Literature of Liberty*.

This was the group housed at the posh quarters of Cato on Montgomery Street in San Francisco. Just down the block, another very different, and culturally lumpen-proletarian, group began to form in an old warehouse run by Crane but not officially connected with Cato. In this "warehouse" was placed our raffish brethren. The movement magazine, *Libertarian Review*, had been purchased from its founder Bob Kephart by C.K., with Roy A. ("Roychick") Childs as editor inherited from the Kephart era. It soon became clear to Crane and the others that, despite his potential talents, Roychick as editor and meeter-of-deadlines was in dire need of supervision (In current educationist jargon, Childs might be called the prototype of a PINS, a person-in-need-of-supervision.) And so Childs and *L.R.* were brought from New York to the warehouse down the block on Montgomery Street. Housed with him in this barracks-like office was the newly created Students for a Libertarian Society (SLS), a then radical libertarian group pungently termed by a perceptive critic a "general staff in search of an army." Young Milton Mueller, an unemployed film editor out of Chicago, was plucked from the Windy City, made head of this mighty army of "students," and blessed, at least in the heady first year, with an enormous budget of \$1 million. The LP of San Francisco also found rental quarters in the warehouse, and this entire bloated and overpaid crew, festering together in a bizarre stew, pushed each other into increasingly weird cultural and ideological positions. Jeff Riggensbach was also brought up from Los Angeles to take charge of Cato's mighty radio propaganda effort, now still plodding its way through the unheeding airwaves.

In the heady excitement of the first months, it was all too easy for us to overlook the pitfalls that this vision of the Best and the Brightest would inevitably stumble into. Overall, there were two major flaws which would all too soon take over and bring the entire vision down: (1) A monopoly of any movement lacks the essential feedback and checks-and-balances that competition always brings; for what happens if the top leader or leaders make mistakes, fall prey to temptation to give up or alter their principles, or, in some way, sell out? The answer is that the entire movement can well be destroyed on the rock of such errors, and we must remember that errors by any person or group are inevitable. (2) Almost comparably to government action, throwing lots of money at a problem doesn't always solve it. C.K. threw enormous amounts of money too fast at people (many of whom turned out to be turkeys) who scarcely deserved it. And what happens when the inevitable disillusionment sets in?

Add to these systemic problems the fact that this collection of the Best, the Brightest, and the Kookiest was a gathering of what is known euphemistically as "strong personalities."

With the exception of Liggio, there was not one of us who would rank in the top deciles of any "Mr. Nice Guy" contest. And so clashes of temperament were not only inevitable, they came thick and fast. But certainly the effort was doomed from the start by the fact that the Organizer, Big Eddie Crane, couldn't organize or manage his way out of a paper bag, and in addition was by far the most abrasive of us all.

But in the first months or years the Kochtopus expanded and seemed to flourish. Cato Summer Seminars were founded to educate and recruit likely new people to the Best and Brightest ranks, and out of the first of them, at Wake Forest University in the summer of 1977, came two who would become leading Kochtopusians: Jule Herbert, a young Alabama lawyer, and Sheldon Richman, a scholarly-inclined journalist from Wilmington, Delaware. Herbert was soon set up in Washington as head of the National Taxpayers Legal Fund (NTLF), a spinoff of Jim Davidson's National Taxpayers Union. In addition, Richard ("Rich") Wilcke, who had founded an institute for free-market agriculture, was taken off that track and brought to Washington to head up the Council for Competitive Economy (CCE), designed as a purist group to educate and lobby for genuine free competition, and to express candid opposition to all government privileges and subsidies to business.

### 5. The Early Kochtopusion Power Structure

Before the advent of Crane and Cato, the "power structure" of C. K.'s ideological activities was simplicity itself. There was C. K., The Donor, and his faithful aide, Pearson, who ran, supervised, and helped fund Austrian and other scholarly activities. Now, suddenly, there was deep change. Now there were two co-equal viceroys reporting to Koch: Pearson, still in charge of scholarship, and Crane, now in charge of activism. (The one exception was Wilcke, who was independent, and presumably continued to report to Pearson or to Koch himself). There undoubtedly was and still is no love lost between Crane and Pearson. The power relationships between them were complex. On the one hand, Crane was the rising star, the carrier of the glamorous new vision, and he commanded an enormously greater Kochtopusian budget than did Pearson. And, in the course of the new dispensation, Pearson found himself also moving out of Le Fevrianism and into LP activism, at least on the Kansas level. But although the advantage seemed clearly with Crane, Pearson had one lasting and decisive edge: namely, he was and still is based at Mother Wichita, a direct employee of Koch Industries as well as of various Kochian foundations (including Koch-name foundations as well as the Foundation for the Advancement of Studies in Liberty (FASIL)).

### 6. 1979: The Paradigm Shift

Around the spring of 1979, a radical, systemic paradigm shift occurred throughout the entire Kochtopus, a shift that has accelerated and intensified to this day. As in the case of most such shifts within bureaucratic empires, the transformation occurred unheralded and unannounced, yet it was no less profound for all that. Most libertarians are all too familiar with the drastic change in outlook, beginning in early 1979, of the Crane Machine within the Libertarian Party. What they do not realize — largely because no one has ever

informed them — is that the same drastic change has occurred in all layers of the Kochtopus, from Cato proper through the rest of the ranks, including scholarship in Austrian economics. And the thrust everywhere is precisely the same: abandonment of principle, from radical libertarianism all the way to Misesian economics. In short, a cataclysmic metamorphosis from an organization pressing for hard-core principle, to a mealy-mouthed, soft-core yearning for Establishment respectability.

Being in the middle of this monstrous switch was extremely unpleasant, not the least because none of us in the unregenerate Old Guard who cleaved to principle could understand what in hell was going on, or precisely who was responsible. Looking back on it, however, and weighing the entire Kochtopusian switch in perspective, it is possible to piece together this horror and to sum up its broad features.

The key to the puzzle (and countless are the man-hours that were wasted at the old San Francisco Cato trying to solve it) is not the inept, blustering subordinate Crane but the motivations of The Donor, C. K. Once, while grousing for the nth time to an old friend on The Question: Why does Charles keep this blundering incompetent (Crane) as his unquestioned viceroy? The old friend went to the heart of the matter: "The trouble is that you've been assuming that Charles' motivations are the same as the rest of us (i.e., the advancement of the cause of liberty in the most efficient manner.) Crane sure doesn't fulfill *our* goals but he might be first-rate at promoting *Charles's*. "But," I asked, "what *are* Charles's goals?" "I don't know", he replied, "*that's* what we have to figure out."

From what we can gather, Charles's goals in all this have been unique and twofold. (First, as one long-standing Kochologist has euphemistically put it, "Charles is control-oriented rather than results-oriented." Yes, indeed, *control-oriented!* What Charles demands above all is absolute, unquestioning loyalty; and that is something that Crane, above all others, was equipped to give him. In this pursuit Big Eddie has not been hobbled by ideological scruples. Those few — all too few — who were so hobbled, those who placed the cause of libertarian principle above going along with the latest twist and turn of the Kochtopusian program, have all been ruthlessly cast aside. Those who refused to go along, Crane, the inveterate hatchet man, accused of "ingratitude" to the man who supplied them with their daily bread.

Hence, the series of purges that have plagued the Kochtopus ever since its 1979 paradigm shift; for these were the people who, in the immortal Craniac phrase, "failed to go along with the program."

Control for C. K. also means the willingness of his top managers to speak to him as hour every day, to go over and clear with the Donor every aspect, no matter how minor, of the day's decisions. Continual daily checking with the Donor is a high road to Kochtopusian success. Those poor souls who, either out of integrity or independence or diffidence about taking up so much of a multi-millionaire's time, failed to perform this daily task eventually found themselves on the beach, one of the Purged.

It is a sad commentary on our movement that in a group of supposedly committed hard-core and intransigent ideologues, that the great majority of them should have turned out to be gutless toadies, willing to cast aside supposedly cherished principles at the first whiff of the Long Green. Well, that's the

way it is, and bad cess to them. In this whole grisly saga, the real villain is not C. K., but the legion of men and women who proved so willing to sell their minds and their souls for a bit of gruel. I suppose that this is common is the history of ideological movements, but it surely happened much faster and more thoroughly than usual in our fledgling little movement.

All right, so C. K. wanted control above all, and hence the purges of the minority who would not go along with the transformation. But why *this particular* shift? Here we come to the second putative part of this pattern of motivation: Namely, Charles wants total control of the movement's institutions, but he wants *others* to fund them. On its face, this is a grave inner contradiction, for almost always with the flow of money goes the flow of control. But that is what Charles has sought for the last five or six years, and what he cannot and will never obtain. After one or two years of lavishing funds on these new organizations, C. K. appeared to panic, and to look around desperately for ways to get *others* to fund his own institutions. On the one hand, this aim might appear perfectly understandable, since he had already poured five or ten millions into libertarian institutions, and was tired of being the sole Donor. But then we must stop short and realize the full implication: that ten million dollars to C. K. is roughly the equivalent of what the rest of us would spend for one month on gasoline. Once put that relative proportion in perspective, and C. K.'s panic at his lavish funding becomes far less supportable.

I am hardly saying that mistakes were not made. In particular, too much was trundled too fast at incompetents, and C. K.'s top honcho, Crane, seemed to have no sense of cost whatever. For example, it was absurd for C. K. not to realize that *all* ideological magazines incur a deficit, and that therefore that deficit (for *Inquiry*) should have been foreseen from the very beginning as permanent. On the other hand, Crane compounded the problem by failing to hire a business or circulation manager for the magazine, for then the half-million a year *Inquiry* deficit could have been considerably lowered.

In fact, the first big crisis at Cato came only six months after it was founded. C. K., appalled at *Inquiry's* deficit, mandated a sudden death slash of the magazine's budget in half. Crane, covering his rear, blamed Evers for going over budget. Evers, however, had never been permitted so much as a peek at the budget. But Evers then proceeded to commit the truly cardinal Kochtopusian sin: protesting C. K.'s actions rather than loyally proclaiming his gratitude and going along with the program. That was the beginning of Evers's long-drawn-out expulsion from Eden.

In the spring of 1979, C. K., in increasing shock at the failure of others to join him in donating to the Kochtopus, effected the Great Paradigm Shift. From all indications, he apparently concluded that the main reason why no one else was contributing is because no one else — either big businessman or mass of small businessmen — was a hard-core radical. Koch was learning the lesson he of course should have known from the very beginning: hard-core radical libertarianism is not a very popular creed. It might be a noble creed but it is also a lonely one. Hence the new, dawning conclusion: *the way to get other people to contribute is to soften the creed.* The way to get funding is to become respectable, non-threatening; and the way to become respectable and non-

threatening is to Sell Out. To Sound Like Everybody Else. Hence, the opportunist sellout of the Crane-run Clark Campaign. In short, you can be very, very rich and still Sell Out principle; all you have to do, regardless of your wealth or income level, is to hold the obtaining of outside donations or payments higher than your own cherished principles. And then you have made your Faustian Bargain.

The precise etiology of how the Kochtopus made this decision is still unclear, but reports are that the guru, the theoretician who formulated and sold C. K. on this transformation was none other than Roychick Childs. Childs had always been hard-core, but also he had always lived on the margins of existence. Now, Roychick on Montgomery Street felt a strong, heady whiff of Power. He had the ear of King Koch, and, he felt, by formulating the honeyed vision of Other People's Funding, he could ride the Kochtopus to the heights of absolute Power. Visions of sugarplums, of hegemony, of riding the Kochtopusian train to total power began to dance in the Childsian noodle. He began to talk about running for Senate in California on the L. P. ticket, indeed of actually *becoming* Senator. And after that, who knows? Hell, with Kochian billions, and with Crane as the organizer, all things were possible, all things provided that such inconvenient baggage as hard-core principle were quickly buried and forgotten. For this was the Real World at long last, and Roychick was going to be up there running it. Roychick had come into his own. In preparation for his historic task, he began to groom himself as the great demagogic orator of the LP, he who would sweep millions off their feet with his masterful oratory. Also in preparation, Childs began to cultivate the steely look of his Master and mentor, Ed Crane.

And so 1979 saw the beginning of the radical paradigm shift within the mighty Kochtopus, i.e., the accelerating abandonment of hard-core principle in order to attract outside funding. And that, of course, is virtually the classic definition of opportunism or "sellout" in ideology or politics. It began with a cloud seemingly no bigger than a man's hand: namely, the hiring of an anti-Austrian Friedmanite at Cato (David Henderson); followed by the Muellerite SLS coming out against nuclear energy *per se* in order to try to attract the left-liberal students on campus. And the opportunist betrayal has escalated from there ever since.

## 7. Enter D. K.

The new Kochtopusian Line soon brought its first — and indeed, up till now, its *only* — success: the attraction into the movement of Charles's younger brother, David. David is nothing if not soft-core, as is shown by his curt public refusal to support the Bergland ticket in 1983-84 if Bergland should come out with such radical and "crazy" proposals as abolition of the income tax. (Which Bergland, and Lewis, promptly did, to their eternal credit.) It could surely not be an accident that the entry of D. K. into the Kochtopus in a big way coincided with the abandonment of the old hard-core line by the Charles Koch-Crane forces.

And so the Clark — David Koch ticket was duly nominated in Los Angeles in 1979, and D. K. gave approximately \$2.1 million to the Crane-run presidential campaign. The Crane Machine was truly in its glory.

Phase II of the New Order occurred after the Presidential election. With Reagan and conservatism ensconced in power,

it was apparently determined to move the entire Kochtopus (with the exception of Mother Wichita) to Washington, D. C., where Crane and his various institutions could cozy up to Big Daddy and slither along the Corridors of Power. The massive shift of the Kochtopus to D. C. symbolized and physically embodied the shift of the Kochtopusian Line toward the State and toward Respectability.

And so Cato, which had previously emphasized *Inquiry* and the building up of a cadre of intellectuals, shifted radically to become just another conservative policy-studies Think Tank trying to Make It in D. C. *Inquiry*, whose intellectual and leftist tinge was becoming an embarrassment to Cato anyway, was hived off to the Crane-run Libertarian Review Foundation, (LRF). In fact, the entire tactical perspective of tailing after the liberal Left, which had motivated the nuclear power stance in SLS, and had permeated the Clark campaign and *Libertarian Review*, now had to be dropped amidst the new climate of conservative victory. The new Rightward shift after the Reagan victory perhaps had something to do with the killing of *Libertarian Review*, and merging it into *Inquiry*. Also both Cato and Charles Koch were relieved of financing the massive *Inquiry* deficit, which was now being picked up by D. K. This allowed Cato proper to expand without C. K.'s having to enlarge his contributions, and perhaps also meant an accelerated implosion and the final dumping of SLS.

And so, from 1981 to 1983, Eddie Crane set astride the entire Kochtopusian world like a Colossus. All of activism, except the CCE, was his. There was the powerful Crane Machine in the Libertarian Party; *Inquiry* was his through the LRF; his servitor Jule Herbert was ensconced as head of NTLF; and *Update* was founded under LRF to be the Machine newsletter and to do the hatchet work within the LP. At the center of the power web was Crane's Cato, located in an historical landmark mansion in Washington. Cato began to hold the usual ultra-soft-core conferences, and to push such soft-core sleeves as Pete Ferrara's Social Security Plan (keep forcing older people on Social Security and try to transfer youth to private insurance), and to publish a monthly *Policy Report* as well as a tri-annual *Cato Journal*. With the conference and the journal, Crane began to intrude heavily on the Austrian economic and scholarly sphere once allocated to Pearson, the excuse being that this was scholarship *applied* to policy questions. These applications, however, were incredibly sellouty; the featured speakers at these conferences were invariably Friedmanites or even Keynesians, and a few marginal Austrians were let in around the edges, as commentators. More and more, Cato began to take on the dimensions of yet another Reaganish Washington think tank, except, of course, that it was much less amply funded than, say, AEI or the Heritage Foundation. In fact, a case could be made that, at this point, Cato is *less* libertarian, at least on domestic economic questions, than the closely Reagan-connected Heritage, and that is One Hell of a Note indeed.

### 8. The World of "Scholarship": Enter Richie Fink

In the meantime, curious things were happening in the Pearson-run domain of scholarship, a part of the Kochtopusian world on which the light of publicity has never really shone. The Kochtopus had played a major role in reviving Misesian Austrian economics, with high level

Austrian conferences in the summer of 1974, 1975, and 1976, and instructional conferences after that. Also, Austrian fellowships and programs were promoted at New York University, where Misesian economist Israel Kirzner happened to be located, and then later at George Mason University in Virginia, where a small Center for Market Processes (CMP) was set up under Kochtopusian auspices. Then, even before Cato cut loose for D. C., Leonard Liggio's scholarly quarterly *Literature of Liberty* was shifted, logically enough, to Menlo Park's low-key libertarian scholarly organization, the Institute for Humane Studies (IHS).

IHS did not begin as a Kochtopusian organization. It was founded by the late hard-core libertarian Dr. F. A. ("Baldy") Harper in the early 1960's, and it struggled for many years, with little or no funding, buoyed up solely by Baldy's lifelong and heartfelt dedication to the cause of liberty. The Board of IHS was manned by old friends and colleagues of Baldy's. After Baldy's death in 1973, Charles Koch, who had been on the board, agreed to become President, and after that, IHS gradually became drawn into the Kochtopusian orbit, run by George Pearson as Treasurer and through Kochian contributions via FASIL. When Liggio moved the *Literature of Liberty* operation to Menlo Park, he became President of IHS, and in another year, Walter Grinder was taken on at IHS as Liggio's assistant in academic affairs (succeeding our own ex-publisher, Joe Peden, who had been at IHS for a year.) Grinder, who had taught economics at Rutgers, Newark, had dropped out of graduate school at NYU, and then gone to University College, in Cork, Ireland for graduate work. There, he had fallen ill, and, his and his family's medical treatments paid for by Charles Koch, he eventually moved to IHS to Menlo Park.

Despite strong Kochian influence, IHS was not yet under full Kochian power. Not only did much of the Board predate Koch, but also the extensive summer fellowship program was largely provided by the totally independent (and also increasingly soft-core) Liberty Fund, which was personally friendly to Liggio. By 1983, however, Liberty Fund, emboldened by changes in the tax law permitting foundations to accumulate part of their income, drastically cut back its overall funding, with the result that IHS was one of the first to suffer. The loss of Liggio's personal financial base, so to speak, apparently emboldened the Kochtopus to seize total control. The IHS Board began to meet very rarely, with all important decisions now taken by the Koch-controlled Executive Committee of the Board. And one of its major decisions was to remove Liggio from all power in IHS, while retaining him as President as a kind of figurehead, and moving their faithful and loyal servitor Walter Grinder into the post, not only of Vice President, but also of CEO of the Institute.

The time has come to highlight, for the first time, the Kochtopusian engineered change in Austrian economics. For precisely what Crane did to libertarianism in the LP, other Kochtopusians were doing to Austrian economics and also to my revered mentor, Ludwig von Mises. For Mises was, in economics, the quintessence of uncompromising hard-core-ness, both in laissez-faire and in methodology. Mises and opportunism have always, both in his lifetime and now in death, been totally and diametrically incompatible. And so Mises had to go.

Mises has been quietly ditched throughout the world of

Kochtopusian scholarship. At NYU, Professor Mario Rizzo, who popped up as a Ravenal delegate at the 1983 PresCon, has led the way in dropping Mises altogether and in transforming Misesian economic thought into a wishy-washy pastiche of "evolution" and what could be called mildly conservative institutionalism. But Kirzner has been resisting the New Dispensation. At George Mason's Center for Market Processes, however, this new Kochtopusian paradigm could proceed unchecked and untrammelled. Instead of the name or the concepts of Mises or laissez-faire scaring off academics or spoiling the new scramble for mainstream respectability, most Center "Austrians" speak only vaguely about "market process", and of "evolution". Nothing threatening *there*. Leading the parade in this betrayal of Misesianism from within was young NYU graduate student Richard ("Richie") Fink, who had studied under Grinder at Rutgers, Newark. Grinder of course gave his blessings to this New Order. A manifesto for the new paradigm, which Mises would have scorned brusquely as "anti-economics", was an as yet unpublished but widely circulated essay co-written by Fink and by his student at Rutgers and then George Mason, Tyler Cowen, now a graduate student at Harvard and widely touted by the burgeoning Fink Machine as The Comer in Austrianism.

And so the important point to note here is that the Crane Machine sellout is not unique; that it has its precise parallel in the world of Kochtopusian scholarship. With Fink in charge at George Mason and Grinder at IHS, the Fink-Grinder apparatus began to dominate the scholarly arm of the Kochtopus.

### 9. — The Big Change: The Coming to Power of the Finktopus

Richie Fink, in his academic maneuvering at George Mason, in hanging on at least part-time despite his failure to attain a doctorate, began to catch the eye of C. K. In particular, what apparently captivated C. K. was a new plan of Richie's, another, very different way of attracting the Outside Funding that C. K. had long craved. Richie's idea was to set up a lobbying outfit in Washington (where he already was, George Mason being in a Virginia suburb) — the Citizens for a Sound Economy (CSE), which would do for soft-core (very soft-core) libertarianism what Common Cause had already done for Establishment liberalism, and what Jim Davidson had done with the National Taxpayers Union: create a flourishing membership organization. If no Big Businessman except D. K. seemed to fall for the soft-core Kochian paradigm, then maybe the masses out there, the updated little old ladies in tennis shoes, could provide the desired funding, leaving C. K. of course in even more secure total control than if other big businessmen had been donors. Whoopee! What could be better, from C. K.'s point of view?

So young Richie was now the shining star, the Comer in the Kochtopus, but how would he find the funding, the seed money, the nucleus, to get launched? C. K. was surely not going to provide much anew; in fact, he was presumably busy contracting his overall giving rather than expanding it. What better than using CCE as a launching pad? There were good reasons for this. In the first place, CCE was already there, in Washington, with some money and an organizational nucleus, already doing lobbying. But its head, Rich Wilcke, had fallen out of Kochtopusian favor, and had to go. Why? I

can only think of two main reasons. One, Wilcke, unlike the rest of the Kochtopus, had never "leaked", i.e. had always maintained his hard-core, uncompromising, laissez-faire perspective. And two, Wilcke was not a Kochian Loyalist. He did not Clear Everything with C. K. for an hour every day. He had mistakenly thought that his job was to manage CCE himself and to do well with it. For these two unforgivable errors he had to be purged.

Getting rid of Wilcke, however, was not easy, and the execution turned out to be a bloody mess. Wilcke did not go quietly, and C. K. was reluctant for a long time to use the famous Stockholder Ploy which he had used to dump me from the Board at Cato. It is true that here at CCE he had even tighter control than at Cato; for while Cato had had three Ultimate Stockholders, of whom I was one, Charles had taken the precaution at CCE to have only *one* stockholder when CCE was founded: himself. (All this conjures up an amusing picture: C. K. enters a phone booth, strips off his jacket and shirt, and reveals a red shirt with S for Stockholder on it, after which he springs into action.) But C. K. was apparently reluctant to use his Ultimate Stockholder power at CCE because it would have meant firing the entire board, including a number of Big Businessmen he was trying to get funds from. But finally, the messy deed was done, and poor Wilcke, whose only sin was to be both highly competent and highly principled, was booted out, without so much as a penny of terminal pay from the organization he had built up and run successfully for years.

The path was now cleared for young Richie, and the Great Kochtopusian Reorganization now occurred, during the spring and summer of 1984. The baby Finktopus, son of the Kochtopus, was born. First, Richie became head of CCE; then CCE was liquidated into the new, mighty CSE, which *also* incorporated unto itself the old lobbying activities of NTLF. Fink now heads up the lobbying-activist program, luring the masses into supporting the new activism. But to get the masses you can't be hard-core, at least so runs Kochtopusian conventional wisdom. And so it looks as if Finktopusian activism will be even softer core, and more sellout, than Craniac activism. Reports are, for example, that the two planks that will be pushed heavily by the CSE are (a) the flat tax — a rotten program also endorsed by Big Ed, and (b) widening IRA's for Social Security — a cosmetic that would leave the SS intact.

But soft: whatever happened to the basic allocation of power in the Kochtopus: Crane in charge of activism, and Pearson, or later Pearson-Fink, in charge of scholarship? The answer is that this allocation, this "job-description" to use management lingo, is now *kaput*. All bets are off. Richie Fink is now in charge, not only of most scholarship (and through his friend Grinder, virtually *all* scholarship), but also in charge of most Kochtopusian activism. Consider the dramatic change that has occurred in 1984 in the relative power positions of Crane and Fink. Fink, we are reliably informed, now reports directly to C. K. himself, circumventing Pearson. In addition, Fink, now in charge of CSE, the old CCE and NTLF, the Center for Market Processes, and through Grinder of IHS, now bestrides the Kochtopusian world like a new Colossus. And Eddie Crane? Consider his current status: *Inquiry* is now gone, *Update* is gone, SLS is gone. The Crane Machine deserted the Bergland-Lewis ticket and, at least for now, in effect has left the LP. Crane is left in charge only of Cato.

Not only that: but the latest hot news is that IHS itself will, in the fall of 1985, be moved to affiliate with George Mason University, and will be housed in the same building as the Center for Market Processes. Virtually all of Kochtopusian academia will then be under Finkian control, both spiritually and in its physical embodiment in or near Washington, D. C.

**10. Exit Craniacs**

Nothing can better testify to the enormous slippage of Crane's power within the Kochtopus than the fate, in the watershed year of 1984, of two of Big Eddie's most faithful satraps and servitors: Jule ("The Tool") Herbert and Roychick Childs.

For Jule is now reportedly On the Beach: let go from NTLF when Fink acceded to power. Our informants tell us that Crane pleaded with Fink for months to take on Jule in some capacity in his expanded CSE organization, but no dice. Why then did not Cato hire Jule? Presumably either for budgetary reasons, and/or because his hiring was vetoed by C. K. Whatever the reason, good or bad, Jule is out of favor, and Crane could not save him. Other former top Craniacs have earned Big Ed's lasting emmity by accepting jobs in Fink's new CSE: Bob Capozzi, Kent Guida, and Sheldon Richman.

In a sense even more interesting is the recent dismissal of Roychick, once so close to the Pinnacle of Power, he who thought he always had the C. K. ear. I heard from a highly placed source at the PresCon that the command decision had already been made to fire Roychick, presumably because very little foreign policy analysis had been forthcoming from Cato's Foreign Policy Analyst. I didn't reveal this in the *Forum*, because to the query, "when?", the Highly Informed Source said that the timing had not yet been decided. Crane told Roychick in the fall of 1983 that his firing was imminent, but the other shoe did not drop until the following summer. Why the firing took so long, whether out of humanitarian sentiments or to let Roychick twist slowly, slowly in the wind, is anyone's guess. But at any rate, exit Roychick, the end of an era. How the mighty have fallen!

And now? Roychick has returned to New York, there to work at the Laissez-Faire Bookstore, and to live in one of Howie Rich's apartments. The Childsian parabola, his meteoric rise and fall, his coming full circle, can only be fully understood by being put in historical and sociological perspective. For over the years, the Laissez-Faire Bookstore has become the place where young lads begin their libertarian career. It is the place where budding libertarians hope to make their mark in the movement, and begin their rise to something like fame and fortune. It is from the bookstore, for example, that young anarchist Lance Lamberton began as a clerk and book-packer and then rose in a few short years to the pinnacle of power as a renegade in the Reagan White House, only to be dropped shortly thereafter. Indeed, Roychick himself began his own career in libertarianism very similarly — as a young bookpacker in the old Libertarian Review Book Service. And here we are, a decade and a half later, and here Roychick is,

returned to the status of clerk and bookpacker. But the bookstore, one hopes, is a place where one begins, *not* where one ends up, not a refuge to which one returns in one's late 30's, an aging boy wonder after having once hobnobbed with the mighty and dreamt great dreams of Total Power.

Whither Roychick now? Does he deserve yet another One Last Chance? Will he redeem himself, become regenerate, and Build a New Life? Or will he tax the patience of his indulgent employers, fail to show up at the Bookstore, and finally be reluctantly let go, then to sink to Lord knows where? Who knows? Present guesses depend on one's view of human nature in general, and of Roychick's nature in particular. One long-time Roychickologist puts the hard line on this question with great gusto: "They who keep giving Roy 'One More Chance' have been preventing the noble workings of Social Darwinism from giving one of its most convincing demonstrations."

Tune in to the *Lib. Forum* for the next installment of this continuing, Not Quite Ready for Prime Time Soap Opera saga that is the Libertarian Movement.

**11. Whither the Kochtopus?**

And what of the Kochtopus itself? And of the Crane Machine? What will happen to them? Will the Crane Machine try for an LP comeback in 1985 at Phoenix? Or at the next great PresCon in 1987? And even if it *wants* to try, will it be able to commandeer the Kochtopusian resources to do so? Considering the waning of the Craniac star, this prospect begins to seem dubious at best.

And what of the Finktopus? Will young Fink continue, in future years, to dominate the Kochtopusian world? In our view, the answer depends on the success of his Grand Plan to sucker the panting masses into supporting the CSE. Answering *that* question depends on how clear our crystal ball may be. But our strong hunch is that the Fink Plan is going to be a floperoo. The success of Jim Davidson's National Taxpayers Union was based on the fact that there is a strong constituency for the neatly-titled NTU, and that, despite its excessive moderation, NTU *has* been doing good and fairly consistent work in the direction of a clear-cut goal: lowering taxes and government spending across the board. But a big constituency for a very soft-core "sound economy"? Not hardly. If our analysis is correct, then the handwriting is on the wall for the Finktopus. As for Fink's future as head of academia within the Kochtopus, the prognosis, as usual in academia, is far cloudier. A lot depends on such factors as the dubious prospect of Fink getting his doctorate, and on whether George Mason University is willing to bet heavily on the glittering but highly unlikely chimera of lots of Kochtopusian money pouring into the new combined CMP-IHS. But at any rate, we would remind young Richie of the lesson already learned painfully by Childs, Herbert, and by Crane himself: *sic transit gloria mundi*, or, Put Not Your Trust in Princes. ‡

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# Why the Apotheosis of Ronnie?

There is no surcease; every occasion is taken in the media for wave after wave of adulation of the Big Boob. Now that the election is over, even his quasi-enemies have thrown in the towel. Even left liberals, even the *New York Times*, have nothing but admiration for the Boob's greatness, his political wizardry, his lovability, etc. Even those who retain one or two nagging doubts about the wisdom of Reaganism join to sing the praises of Reagan the man, our wonderful All-American hero. "Of course I don't like his policies, but *he's* such a great guy." Is there no rest? And even if we have to concede the majority, where in hell are the Reagan-haters? After all, even at the height of popularity and adulation for FDR, there was always a militant minority of embittered Roosevelt-haters to whom one could turn for solace amidst the horrific avalanche of enthusiasm. Looking back on these four years of Reagan I, we can see all too clearly that the historic function of Reagan, the "Reagan Revolution" if you want to call it that, was to wipe out as if it had never been the 1970's mass disillusion with the U.S. government in general, and with the Presidency in particular. By spreading this disillusion, Nixon and Watergate did more for libertarian sentiment in the U.S. than anyone else in this century. And now, this disillusion is all washed away, and the American people are back in their rotten, disastrous love affair with their Sovereign Lord, the President of these United States. In the same way, the lessons of Vietnam have been washed away in the jingoism of Ronnie's heroic conquest of teeny Grenada, that Grand Fenwick without an army, navy, or air force, where yet a handful of Cuban construction workers were able to hold off the massed might of U.S. Imperialism for a solid week. Ronnie has managed to recreate jingoism and flag-waving, literally and figuratively, with the willing collaboration of Fritz the Pits and the Loyal Opposition. And do we wonder why the Libertarian Movement is at a low ebb in America?

If we search, in our bitterness and frustration, for *some* solace, for some small beacon light in the all-encompassing darkness, we will find nothing. But hold! There *is* something. In the January 29, issue of the *Village Voice*, there is an article by J. Hoberman, "Stars and Hype Forever", that warms the cockles of our heart, Hoberman usually functions as the *Voice's* movie critic and spokesman for the wierdo *avant-garde* cinema.

Well, perhaps it takes someone familiar with *avant-garde* absurdism to do full justice to the meaning of Ronnie and his mass adulation by the American public. For once, even Hoberman's crazed left-Freudianism seems almost plausible. For the appeal of Ronnie Reagan is so irrational, his being a walking, talking contradiction so starkly evident, that its almost as if the irrationality is the essence of appeal. As Hoberman puts it:

"Is Ronald Reagan the greatest American who ever lived, or is he only the most American? Only a few recalcitrant minorities seemed able to resist the spectacle of a 73-year-old ex-actor waxing nostalgic for God, neighborliness, the nuclear family, strong leadership, the work ethic, and the

small-town community. Especially since — as everyone knew — he himself seldom attended church, rarely gave to charity, was divorced by his first wife, communicated badly with his children (and indeed everyone else if there was no script), failed to control his own staff, kept banker's hours, hung out with a passel of corrupt billionaires, and had fled the small town (scarcely a Norman Rockwell paradise but a place where his hapless father had been the local drunk) for the fleshpots of California at the first opportunity."

Hoberman suggests that the American masses love Ronnie precisely *because* he's a walking contradiction, a boob, a nice guy, etc. Because that is what *they* are. He notes that Douglas Fraser, head of the United Automobile Workers, told *Time* magazine last August that it's a mystery to him, but that Reagan is "very, very effective with the American worker." Hoberman suggests that the mystery could be cleared up in an explanation given by a UAW regional director in the same issue of *Time*: "He looks good and he's an actor. He's the kind of guy you could strike up a conversation with if he lived in the neighborhood." Back in the 1940's, Hoberman reminds us, Ronnie the movie-star told the fan magazines: "I'm no Flynn or Boyer. Mr. Norm is my alias." "Mr. Norm" indeed! The mystery begins to clear, As Hoberman explains:

"At Camp David, *Time* recently reported in its Nancy Reagan cover story, 'the two former movie stars cozy up on a sofa in the dark, holding hands and sharing a bowl of popcorn as they watch good, wholesome films.' . . . 'I never suggested where the weapons should be or what kind. I'm not a scientist', he said when questioned about his star wars program. His confusion of countries in South America, his blatant ignorance of arms control (which handily keeps him from implication when talks collapse), his proud lack of cultural sophistication endear him to the public. Far from threatening, the gaps in the president's knowledge are positively . . . normal."

Brilliant! And now we begin to see where poor Jimmy Carter went wrong. Because until Ronnie, the American public, in its respect and admiration for the office of the President, desired to put in there someone greater than they, someone larger than life, someone whom they could admire and look up to as their Sovereign. And Carter tried so hard worked hard as a beaver, studied, knew a lot, and he looked so worried as a result. Because, after all, that's what Presidents always were supposed to do. They were supposed to know a lot, and work very hard and take the cares of the American people upon their own brows. Hell, they were *supposed to age* in office, in order to show how much they cared, how responsible they were for what went on. Unlike Ronnie, they weren't supposed to be some kind of Dorian Gray.

But Ronnie broke the mold, or perhaps the American masses broke it for him. For Ronnie is just the opposite, and

the masses love, adore, worship him precisely because he is so, aw shucks! dumb, cretinous, friendly, *normal*, just like they are! Perhaps the numskull Senator Roman Hruska (R., Neb.) was an unwitting prophet during the Carswell appointment hearings for the Nixon Supreme Court. When his man was charged with being "mediocre," Senator Hruska rose to the occasion. "Well," he complained, "why can't the mediocre people have representation on the Supreme Court?" He was laughed at by the liberal media, but he may have been a harbinger of the 1980's. Well, if every conceivable group in American life deserves its quotal representation: the blacks, Hispanics, women, elderly, handicapped, one-eyed Albanians, etc., why not the mediocre? After all, there are a hell of a lot more of *them*. Why not Mr. Norm? Mencken, Mencken, thou shouldst be living at this hour?

Hoberman goes on, with a scintillating analysis of Ronnie Reagan as media creation, as the ultimate product of the movie star system and of Hollywood-California politics. He cites a yuppie quoted in the *New York Times* as favoring Reagan because he is "a John Wayne type," and "standing for the values of the men" as against women. Hoberman notes sardonically that, while Reagan and Bush posed in cowboy hats in Texas with a pair of sexy cheerleaders, Fritz played into his opponent's hands by appearing "in the *Mondale Family Cookbook* wearing an apron . . ."

But there is much more to Ronnie as media creation. For, Hoberman adds,

"Like any modern politician, Reagan's image is pure feedback. He shows the visage that every other-directed person in America might present had he the benefit of scientific polls, demographic statistics, and an endless knowledge of old movie cliches. Even his post assassination ripostes were quotations: 'Honey, I forgot to duck,' he told Nancy just as Jack Dempsey had quipped to his wife after losing to Gene Tunney in 1926. Faced with death, he thought of the epitaph on W. C. Fields's tombstone: 'All in all, I'd rather be in Philadelphia.'

And then, came this illuminating sentence: "Perhaps because he himself is so utterly a product of American mass culture, mass culture has proved unusually responsive to Ronald Reagan.

As a movie critic, Hoberman sees and points out, for the first time, that the Republicans waged the Presidential campaign in pop-movie and pop-culture imagery, and that they "won the battle" to seize that imagery for 1984. Indeed, running through the Hoberman article are quotes from the wildly popular song from *Ghostbusters*. Hoberman continues:

"The 1984 campaign was dominated by movie imagery. 'Star Wars' and the 'Evil Empire' remained buzz words while Vice-President Bush mocked the Democratic convention as the 'Temple of Doom' and Reagan appropriated the slogan that made his erstwhile employer Warner Bros. famous. 'You ain't seen nothin' yet, he affably threatened the screaming crowds that turned out to see him — the slogan, in its proudly illiterate use of the double negative, echoing the punch line of the summer's number one song, 'I ain't afraid of no ghost!' (from *Ghostbusters*). Yes, as everyone in America was lining up for the same film, both Democrats and Republicans realized on some level

that the party that controlled *Ghostbusters* would win the election — and the Democrats had about as much chance of that as Walter Mondale of wearing his apron to Wyoming and serving the cowboys quiche."

Hoberman goes on to analyze *Ghostbusters* as an arch-Reaganoid film. Since I haven't seen it, you will have to turn to the article for explanation.

So far, so wonderfully clear and perceptive. Now comes the murky left-Freudian part, which still seems to make a substantial amount of sense. Basically, it holds that Jimmy Carter's most basic and fatal error was to "secularize the American myth," to reduce "America" to the level of common sense," in the words of Sacvan Bercovitch. In short, Jimmy tried to explain to us soberly that "America" was no longer all-powerful, omnipotent, king of the walk, a truth that was beginning to dawn on the American masses after a quarter-century of Vietnam, Watergate, assassinations, "black and sexual revolutions," and "humiliation at the woggy hands of OPEC sheiks and Iranian mullahs." Reagan came to the American masses as America's projected savior, the agent of its religious and theocratic "rebirth," its return to greatness. America, in the fundamentalist-pietist image, would be "born again," once more to achieve the certainty, in the words of Hoberman, that "the president has made quite clear with his chilling assertions that the U.S. was God's country and folksy reassurance of an after life. (*I ain't afraid of no ghost.*)"

Hoberman continues:

"Reagan pandered to a latent aggression waiting to be released. To be truly reborn, America would have to (as George Bush said, reasserting his manhood after the humiliation of having to debate Geraldine Ferraro) kick ass. Where ineffectual Carter chose to scold America for its indulgence, Reagan would show us how to punish the weak to make ourselves feel strong."

Instrumental to the success of this "salvation," Hoberman goes on, was the Hinckley assassination attempt upon Ronnie. By remarkable coincidence, he points out, both *Time* and *Newsweek* featured cover stories on "America's climate of violence" *the week before* the attempted assassination. It was a media "message," opines Hoberman, that someone like Hinckley might well decide to act upon. Combined with the widespread popular belief in the "die-in-office" jinx on anyone elected President in a year ending with zero, "his ability to take a bullet in the gut and live gave him an almost divine aura." And: "If America's problems could be said to have begun on November 22, 1963, with the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Reagan's miraculous survival made him a kind of JFK redux."

Fascinating! Could *this* be the reason (along with JFK's media-created personality) that Reagan and conservatives — they who once hated the guts of JFK — keep praising Kennedy and trying to cast Ronnie in the mould of JFK, as well as Truman and FDR?

Having surmounted the assassination, having become reborn, "having proved himself strong enough to contain the nation's violence, Reagan was mandated to wield it." Hence, for Hoberman, the enormous military buildup, and the repeated bullying actions of Reaganite foreign policy. Reagan began his campaign of rebirth through violence in the summer

of 1981 with "two carefully staged events, attacks on symbolic (and appropriately weak) targets — the labor union PATCO and two Libyan jets . . . ."

However, in late 1981 came a grave setback to Reagan's popularity — the Reagan recession, and his approval rating began to decline. How recoup? In the words of Hoberman, "When the social fabric is straining at the seams, when capitalism (sic) reneges on its promise of universal abundance, when humiliation is in the air, military nationalism is the time-tested recipe for the new unity." Specifically, as war fever arrived with the excitement over the Falklands war and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Ronnie unleashed two monstrous, saber-rattling speeches in March 1983, his "Evil Empire" and "Star Wars" addresses, which, as Hoberman calls them, were "masterpieces of applied irrationality." He goes on:

"As one conjured up the menace of an implacable deadly foe, poised to strike, the other raised the promise of risk-free nuclear war should we, understandably, choose to smash the aggressor first."

During the summer of 1983, Reagan heated up the propaganda against Nicaragua, obviously seeking a war-incident there. Then, in September came the KAL 007 caper, in which, as Hoberman correctly notes, U.S. "War fever reached an almost hysterical crescendo, reminiscent of the anti-Khomeini madness of 1980." Shortly after KAL 007, Reagan began moving toward war in Lebanon, baiting the Syrians until we found that we couldn't pin the Islamic Jihad's blowing up of the American Marines on the Syrian government it was at that point that Ronnie Baby found a

safely puny and powerless victim for U.S. blood lust: little Grenada. For then.

"A few days later, the marines landed in Grenada and America went berserk. At last, Reagan had provided a war. The remarkable thing about Grenada, cited again and again during the 1984 campaign as Reagan's supreme triumph, was its disproportionate effect upon the American public. Tawdry as the spectacle of the greatest power on earth subduing the tiniest nation in the Western hemisphere may have been, it actually sufficed to get America 'standing tall.'"

Hannah Arendt once wrote that the whole point of the Vietnam War was to enable the U.S. government to "create for itself an *image* which would *convince* the world that it was indeed 'the mightiest power on earth.'" Hoberman writes that Reaganism is a replay with this slight difference: the desire of the U.S. to "create images which will convince *itself* that it is the mightiest power on earth." In 1966, Ronald Reagan mused that "Politics is just like show business. You need a big opening. Then you coast for a while. Then you need a big finish." Grenada's was Ronnie's big finish. The silver lining in the cloud is that it could have been worse. Thus Hoberman:

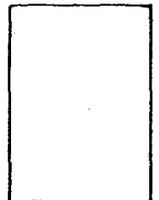
"Considering how infinitely more costly wars against the Sandinistas or Syrians — not to mention a confrontation with the Evil Empire itself — would have been, one actually has to be grateful for Grenada. If all it takes is shooting down two Libyan jets a year to keep Reagan from nuking Moscow — then, by all means, fire away."

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