

bespeak poor understanding on our part not so much of power politics as of the fundamental social realities that ought to have shaped our policies in the first place.

We need two things in our foreign policy: first, a more subtle, more systematic, more trenchant analysis, country by country, then region by region, and only finally geopolitically, of the social forces that affect our interests. Policy abstractions (like "geopolitics") are useful because they define the larger contexts in which particular events need to be seen and understood. But they can obfuscate as well as inform if Nicaragua is equated with Vietnam or if Angola is equivalent to Zimbabwe. The geopolitical similarities between, say, Ethiopia and Iran could mask rather than illuminate the differences that characterize their revolutions and our consequent policy options.

In particular, Marxist regimes differ from one another. The events in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Poland should remind us that not every Marxist regime, even in Eastern Europe, need be a Soviet proxy. Indeed one of the benefits of our new relations with the People's Republic of China has been the consequent exacerbation of the rift between the Soviets and the Chinese. The Marxist regimes in Mozambique, Angola, and Zimbabwe have exhibited a substantially pragmatic and nationalist as well as socialist character. The "Burmese road to socialism" must seem as peculiar to the Soviets as it does to us. And, following a full-scale invasion, the Marxist government of Vietnam (backed by the Soviets) has just deposed its "fraternal" neighbor, the Marxist government of Kampuchea (backed by the Chinese). Perhaps most important, Marxist factions, even predominant ones, are often only one among many. Their strength differs from country to country, situation to situation, and so too therefore does their latitude. The varieties of Marxist doctrine together with the variation of local contexts in which they evolve invite a policy that explores their differences rather than one which bullies them into a common front.

Second, we need a more consistent, long-term evaluation of our options and objectives. Perhaps it is utopian to expect a return to some form of the bipartisan foreign policy we experienced before Vietnam, but our general interests—ideological as well as geopolitical—are fairly stable. Whatever our disagreements about whether, when, and how to recognize the People's Republic of China, for example, no one suggests a reversal of that basic policy now. The issue remaining is only the tactical one governing the character of our relationship, and of course that of both of us with Taiwan. Similarly, whether it is called détente or not, who now disagrees with the fundamental promise that we must find ways of coexisting with rather than demolishing the Soviets? Or that between us there will be many areas of conflict and potentially some areas of cooperation? Or that one of the highest priorities of our foreign policy is to maximize the cooperation while seeking arrangements for structuring—and limiting—the conflicts?

Even the present dispute over military power will turn out to be exaggerated. The differences between military superiority, parity, and effective equivalence will, from a practical perspective, prove more one of appearance than of reality. The Soviets would not sit by idly while we tried to turn effective equivalence into superiority. On our side, no administration would want to stoke a real arms fire, and, if it did, none would want—or be able—to commit enough resources to achieve real superiority.

Again our basic interests, if not the strategies by which they can be achieved, are fairly clear. As De Gaulle was fond of saying (paraphrasing Talleyrand), nations have no permanent allies, only permanent interests. But the com-

prehension of those basic interests—our long-term relations with the Soviets and the Chinese; the posture, structure, and purposes of our military forces; the nature of our Atlantic and Pacific alliances; the shape of a Middle East solution; our position in Asia and Africa; our role in the Americas—that comprehension is not well served by a Chicken Little complex in which, each week, the sky is falling on someone else.

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## EXCURSUS 2

### Sy Syna on "THE LAST YIDDISH POET"

As a career critic, I have viewed innumerable plays and films dealing with the Jewish experience, yet none has ever so moved me as *The Last Yiddish Poet*, recently performed Off Off Broadway by A Traveling Jewish Theatre.

I wept, laughed, and was moved in myriad ways as I witnessed this compound of Yiddish folk songs and poems by Rochl Korn, Peretz Markish, Itzik Manger, Mordechai Gebirtik, and several pieces by Jacob Glatstein—poets unknown for the most part in the U.S. Threaded through these poems and songs are the visionary words of Nahman of Bratzlav—played as a towering figure in white mask and black caftan—who perceived the ambivalences of existence and passed them on in stories to his Hasidim. (Later they were to influence Franz Kafka.) And looming over all is the female puppet figure of "Mamaloshchen," the spirit of Yiddish, who says, "Sometimes I cry and sometimes I sigh, but mostly I sing."

These many elements—together with a pair of stand-up comedians with false noses; a mime episode; music played on the saxophone, harmonium, and pieces of pipe; and dialogue arrived at through hours of experimentation and improvisation—are the achievement of Corey Fischer and Albert Greenberg, two remarkable actors working with an equally remarkable director, Naomi Newman Pollack. Not for nothing is the play subtitled, "An Incantation Against Woe." It is steeped in pain. The pain lurks behind the comedians' smirks; peeps out of Nahman's fables, which juxtapose the seeming presence with the seeming absence of God; cries out in the music of a jazz improvisation, welling up so strongly that the saxophone strains to express it.

In the most harrowing episode Fischer clutches what appears to be a Torah covered with a burgundy-colored cloth, while Greenberg recites the poet Glatstein's lines, "God gave the Torah to Jews on Sinai"—part of his poem "Dead Men Don't Praise God." Suddenly the poet speaks of the gas ovens—"But we gave it back at Lublin"—and at once Greenberg opens the cloth, releasing a tumbling mass of dirty, broken-down shoes. The burgundy covering, we realize, is not velvet but blood. Simultaneously now, in English and Yiddish, the actors finish out the poem, speaking of all the Jews, those dead and those not yet born, who died again at Lublin.

At that moment the entire audience is both Holocaust victim and survivor. Not the saxophone, the harmonium, the pipes but we, the audience, are the instrument this



company plays most skillfully. The performance ends with the figure of Mamaloschen singing a little Yiddish ditty about seven mice. That it is nonsense is not important; what is important is that she sings!

I want to see this play again. I want my children to see it. I want every Jew to see it, and every non-Jew. It is a play to remind every group of what it was like to travel with "a panicky passport in my pocket" and see its culture and way of life slip past. Success and security in America have their pain too—the falling away of tradition that is often the price of assimilation.

Though based in Los Angeles, A Traveling Jewish Theatre fortunately travels. They play San Francisco throughout January, will be in Chicago in February, and in Minnesota for a while during the summer. A spring European festival tour is planned, as is a fall American college tour. Not to be missed.

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## EXCURSUS 3

### Thomas Land on VANQUISHING RIVER BLINDNESS

The first villagers are cautiously returning to their abandoned homes in the Volta river basin of West Africa, marking the end of the initial phase of a long and expensive international campaign to rid a potentially rich agricultural area of *onchocerciasis*, the scourge known to the local people as river blindness.

The disease has affected more than a million people in a 700,000 square kilometer area spanning parts of Benin, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Togo, and Upper Volta. The fertile river basin had been virtually abandoned to the disease-carrying black fly, but it is now being reclaimed in

a twenty-year, \$120 million program financed by the World Bank, the U.S., and many other countries.

First results—agricultural, medical, and ecological—surpass the planners' expectations. Indeed, the scheme has proven so successful that it may well be copied on a somewhat smaller scale in the Senegal river basin, also in West Africa. And the International Labor Organization in Geneva has now joined the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Health Organization, and the U.N. Development Program—the specialist sponsors of the scheme—by contributing toward the rehabilitation of the handicapped farmers in the newly cleared areas. More than seventy thousand inhabitants have been completely blinded by the disease, dubbed "river blindness" because the tiny black fly *simulium damnosum* usually lays its eggs in fast-flowing sections of waters.

Human blood is essential for its survival. As the fly bites its victim it deposits a thread-like worm under the skin. Repeated bites cause terrible itching. Developing under the skin, the worms form nodules where they multiply. Their larvae spread through the body. When the parasites reach the eye, they cause lesions which, if untreated, usually destroy the victim's sight.

Many villages in the fertile valleys, abandoned for the unproductive plateaux, have been cleared of the fly and rebuilt to meet the needs of modern agriculture. Upper Volta alone hopes to treble its export revenue from cotton, which is shortly to be grown in the area. Families chosen among the volunteers for resettlement tend to be young because they are the most likely to be receptive to new farming procedures.

The resettlement project has been made possible by entomological studies that concluded the flies are vulnerable to attack, since their breeding grounds can be identified precisely. Ecological considerations have ruled out a massive use of persistent pesticides over such an extensive area. Specialists have chosen Abate, a biodegradable compound lethal to the black fly larvae but harmless to humans and other nontarget organisms.

And the program has already achieved a 75 per cent reduction in the disease carriers. The original action plan was approved by the seven West African countries in 1973; systematic spraying began a year later. Its success rate—carefully monitored ever since by a scientific backup staff of several hundred—has been so great that the four Senegal river basin countries also affected by the disease have asked for a similar program.

A \$1.25 million feasibility study to explore the proposed extension of the scheme is now under way. A research program is meanwhile coordinated in Geneva for the development of new drugs to be deployed in the mass treatment of affected populations. The existing chemotherapy is suitable for only limited clinical use under constant supervision by medical staff.

Some unexpected, hopeful signs are already emerging from the initial phase of the project. In more than three-quarters of the Volta river basin the project has effectively arrested the transmission of the disease. There are no new cases in children under five years of age.

For the moment the key to the economic development of the area remains the control of the disease itself. But for the long term the specialist agencies advising the seven West African partners have prepared an extensive list of recommendations for preventing the outbreak of other potentially disastrous diseases—such as sleeping sickness—in the areas reclaimed for their inhabitants.

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