

A VIEW OF THE WORLD

Abraham Martin Murray

CANADA. The silly season in Canada continues to accelerate. Thoroughly reactive passions dressed up as "emerging nationalism" are rallied to defend Canadians from unfair competition (read competition) from across the border. Thus, when passed as expected, a new tax bill will prevent *Time* and the *Reader's Digest* from putting out Canadian editions. The same nationalism, emerging for at least a decade but as yet without much positive form, prompted the hysterical reaction last December to U.S. Ambassador William Porter's restrained remarks about strains in Canadian-U.S. relations. Parliament rose to cheer as Prime Minister Trudeau declared the obvious with an adolescent's sense of fresh discovery: "We are not a colony of the U.S.!" Anti-Americanism has become the first refuge of the unimaginative. To be fair, Pierre Elliott Trudeau did show some imagination in January when he had to backpedal on his earlier announcement of greater government control over the economy. He was not calling for socialism, he assured business leaders; the attack, he said, was not on the "free enterprise" system but only on the "free market" system. Very subtle, that. In February Trudeau sought respite in simpler societies, where leadership means never having to say you're sorry. In Cuba Pierre said of Fidel: "I'd rate him A-1. All kinds of superlatives. I've never seen a charismatic leader before. I'm really impressed." Not so impressed with Mr. Trudeau are U.S. friends of Canada, who think he is in fact turning an important and eminently sensible alliance into yet another nuisance factor.

CHINA-WATCHING. A year or more ago there was an outbreak of candor among American economists, who were forced to admit they had no convincing theories to cover hybrids like "stagflation," simultaneously rising inflation and unemployment. Maybe the next candor epidemic will be among Pekingologists and sundry China-watchers, who have usually been able to keep their grand theories just one step ahead of the news. But even the fastest academic card sharks are limited by the lead time between ready copy and getting erudition off the press. For instance, the University of California's *Asian Survey*'s January issue arrived just in time, with a scholarly explanation of why it was inevitable that Teng Hsiao-ping should have been rehabilitated from Cultural Revolution disgrace in order to replace Premier Chou En-lai. In fact eight theories are offered by Berkeley Professor John Bryan Starr, with preference given to the proposition that Teng was "the perfectly remolded...product of the rectification process." The reader hardly had time to digest this exercise in retrospective expertise

when it was announced that Teng was again in disgrace and that the premiership had gone to Hua Kuo-feng. But do not worry. By the time this column sees print *Asian Survey* will no doubt have explained why the elevation of the previously unknown Hua held no surprises for the expertly hindsighted.

CAPITALISM. A source who has it from one who was there tells about the Chinese students studying at the Institute of Chemistry in Moscow in the early fifties. Although they applied themselves with stunning diligence, the Chinese got lower grades than their easier going Russian counterparts. The reason, they discovered, is that the Russians were cheating on exams. The Chinese took the matter to the Russian authorities, who at first denied there was any cheating but finally acknowledged that, if there was cheating, it was to be explained as a "remnant of capitalism." Dissatisfied, the Chinese asked why they, after only a few years of socialism, had eliminated cheating while the Russians had not. "Just wait a little longer," answered the Russian official, "and you too will have remnants of capitalism."

THE PRESS. Whether it was Macaulay or Burke or Carlyle who said it first, the idea that the press is the Fourth Estate is today much in vogue. "And that's the way it is," intones the dull thick oracle of CBS each evening at 7:30, and at his voice those who innocently thought themselves elected to govern tremble. The Fourth Estate, we are daily assured by the Fourth Estate, ends wars, topples tyrants, and liberates the oppressed. Edward Jay Epstein (*Between Fact and Fiction*, Vintage Press) and others have demonstrated conclusively that the communications media have in fact done very little of what they take credit for. But never mind, two-thirds of the American people get their view of the world from television news, and are apparently in no mood to have their idols demythologized. The self-importance of television news knows no bounds. KGBH Boston puts together the captioned version of ABC news late at night for the hard of hearing. The broadcast concludes with a full minute or more of credits, giving names and pictures of the fifteen or so talents responsible for this remarkable achievement, including three "captioners." Presumably cutting down on Harry Reasoner's verbosity is no little job. But also from the Fourth Estate there are refreshing moments of candor. When, at the height of Watergate, the *Washington Post* refused to publish a too controversial installment of "Doonesbury," it explained in an editorial: "We cannot have one standard for the news pages and another for the comics." Just so.

FOREIGN AID. The Interreligious Taskforce, composed of leadership types from the several denominations, has written to Secretary Kissinger protesting an announced State Department policy of penalizing countries that vote against the U.S. in the U.N. and elsewhere. Reportedly, development aid to Tanzania and Guyana has already been held up. Bread for the World, the Christian citizen's movement on world hunger, says State is drawing up a "zap list." As the Taskforce points out, there is something unseemly about the crass use of aid, especially food, for political purposes. Crassness is in part a matter of degree, and no one should be so naive as to think aid can be entirely divorced from considerations of national interest. The point is that it is very much in the national interest of the U.S. to be credible when it says it is responding to human need. What is needed, also in terms of national interest, is that need should have priority over calculated self-interest in the distribution of development aid and food. Realism that overlooks the dynamics of altruism is not very realistic.

THE GOOD LIFE. According to surveys conducted by the Joint Center for Urban Studies at MIT and Harvard, Americans think you belong to the "success elite" if you make \$59,000 a year; \$37,000 means you are "doing very well"; while \$25,000 will buy you "the good life"; and \$18,000 means a "comfortable existence." "Just making it" is \$12,000, and "a hard time" is \$7,500. The authors say "the average" American (blue collar, \$16,000 to \$20,000) hopes for "the good life" but is not interested in what he believes is the hard work and anxiety required to reach the heights. Envy, it would seem, gives way to a rather commonsensical view of convenience in contemporary America. However, we will continue to be told by some, evidence to the contrary, that the victims of a consumption-mad society are on the verge of revolutionary rage over the inegalitarian distribution of wealth. It is estimated that, were the total personal income of the U.S. equally distributed, each family would end up with about \$17,000, which is considerably below the take of some of our more eminent critics of inequality. And, of course, such a redistribution would be a one-shot deal. Presumably we could then start all over again, and our descendants could celebrate another year of absolute equality a century or so from now.

KICKBACKS. "Everybody does it so why not us?" This is the response of some U.S. business executives to revelations that Lockheed Aircraft and other corporations have been exceedingly generous with kickbacks, bribes, and other overseas hanky panky. A different and wiser view is offered by the vice president of a construction firm doing business in the Third World: "We expect our people to avoid the trap of buying their way through [bureaucratic] obstacles or paying for social privileges.... This practice may

result in delays and irritating situations, but it prevents the company from being marked as a ready source of extra legal income." The tattered old notion that if we didn't do it we'd lose the business to someone who did doesn't wash. Corporate self-discipline, reinforced by the threat of regular exposure and prosecution, could change the name of the competitive game. What is at stake is the future of the transnational corporation, which some people claim is the most promising, and least understood, institution for building a global structure of economic justice. Whatever that potential may be, it will be fatally jeopardized if it is assumed that the corruption of other governments is a necessary and inherent part of the way transnationals operate. One right step might be the enactment of Arthur Burns's suggestion that bribing foreign officials be made a crime in U.S. law.

POLITICAL ASSASSINATION. William Kunstler, lawyer champion of sundry radicalisms, was quoted as telling a Houston audience he thought the killings of John and Robert Kennedy may have been good for the world, since they were very dangerous men. Kunstler wrote the *New York Times* protesting the story and affirming his devotion to democratic process. He did not, however, deny having said what he was said to have said. It is hard to explain that kind of statement by "putting it into context." The *Times* editor responded by reprinting the full Associated Press dispatch. Mr. Kunstler, it is to be feared, is the kind of man who likes to be in on every act, and the killing of Camelot is no exception.

AMNESTY. Ending on a more hopeful note, we like very much Morris Udall's proposal for amnesty for resisters, deserters, and others now underground, in prison, or exiled: "The authority for clemency determinations will be consolidated in one civilian authority.... Clemency will in most cases be granted to all those who sign sworn statements that they violated the law or military orders because they were conscientiously opposed to the war. Only if there is evidence to establish a lack of good conscience will the Board be empowered to look beyond the applicant's affirmation.... Alternative service will be an option available to the Board in those uncertain cases when it finds substantial evidence that the applicant was motivated by reasons other than conscience but still feels that clemency is warranted. All individuals desiring to participate in the clemency program will be free to enter the United States for that purpose. In the few cases where clemency is not granted, the applicant will again be free to leave the country." All right, so it isn't really amnesty, but it's a lot better than what we've got at present. We hope other candidates pick up the proposal, if or when Mr. Udall is retired from the race.

Abraham Martin Murray is the collective name of those who contribute to "A View of the World." The opinions expressed sometimes coincide with those of the editors.