

EDITORIAL

Reagan's sanitizers still seek contra aid

President Reagan's phony war against terrorism—and his real war against Libya—and the still-developing Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster have monopolized the media these past several weeks. But even though it is out of the news, the Reagan war against Nicaragua is still being pursued. Administration efforts to get congressional approval of \$100 million in aid to the *contras* remain a priority item on the president's agenda. Two defeats in the House—one in March, the other in April—have not put the matter to rest. *Contra* aid is alive and festering.

In the House, the Democratic leadership will probably allow a compromise aid proposal to be attached to a military appropriations bill now scheduled for a vote June 9. The leadership's reasoning is that the least they can give Reagan is a compromise providing the *contras* \$30 million in "humanitarian" aid right off, while withholding another \$70 million in overtly military aid until Congress certifies the sincerity of administration efforts to negotiate with the Sandinistas.

Meanwhile, the administration is trying to clean up its actors. Last week, after an investigation whose thoroughness can only be surmised, the Justice Department gave the *contras* a clean bill of health on charges that they have engaged in gun running and drug smuggling. A few weeks before that a campaign to sanitize the *contras*, whose corruption and campaign of terror against Nicaraguan farmers and vil-

lagers have given them image problems even on Capitol Hill, came to a head.

It seems that the United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO) was not united. Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo, the two "respectables" in the three-man leadership, were being ignored by Adolfo Calero, the man close to the *contras*' real leader, Enrique Bermudez, a former colonel in the Somoza National Guard. This embarrassed the administration in its attempts to present the *contras* as "freedom fighters." So Assistant Secretary of State Elliot Abrams, with the help of true lovers of democracy like Robert Leiken of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, engaged in some heavy-duty cosmetic work. The three UNO "leaders" were told to cooperate, or else. If they didn't "present a more attractive image" to Congress, Abrams warned, they could forget about the \$100 million being debated in Congress.

Cruz and Robelo are necessary window dressing because both served in the Nicaraguan government after the Sandinista victory of 1979. As disillusioned demo-

crats and foes of Somoza, their presence gives the appearance of a more broadly-based opposition. But last August, when these two nominal leaders of the UNO visited a *contra* camp in Honduras, they were virtually ignored and treated with contempt by Bermudez and his fellow officers. "They could have been from the Miami Chamber of Commerce," said one Nicaraguan who was there. Bermudez, on the other hand, is appreciated by the administration as "a good organizer and a manager type not replaceable at this time." He is "not replaceable," of course, because he commands the only real troops the *contras* have: the most vicious and brutal remnants of the old National Guard. They are the *contras*. And because they are subservient only to Nicaragua's wealthiest families and the executives of American corporations with Nicaraguan operations, they are what Reagan wants.

But they are not what the American people want. As a major *New York Times*/CBS poll discovered last month, Americans oppose aid to the *contras* by more

than two to one (62 percent to 25 percent). A majority oppose aid in all sections of the country and in all social and political categories. Even Republicans are opposed by 51 percent to 36 percent. (Among Democrats, opponents of aid outnumber supporters by almost five to one.)

In a democracy, of course, this should mean that *contra* aid is dead in the water. But while the American people have little or no interest in neocolonialism, not so their corporate-sponsored leaders in both parties. In Congress, the majority of members know where their campaign contributions come from and who controls the media. There are a few Democrats who actually believe that as a nation we should recognize Nicaragua's right—and the right of all nations—to determine their own fate, even if this means an unfavorable climate of investment for our multinational corporations. But there aren't many. Most members of Congress would not hesitate a minute in helping overthrow a revolutionary government that was not suitably supine. If they could get away with it.

But members of Congress must seek reelection this year, so they cannot afford to flout public opinion too openly. That's why the image cleanup of the *contras* is so important to the administration and its collaborators. And that's why it is equally important for those opposed to *contra* aid to remind their representatives of where the American people stand on this issue. ■

Lower back pain

RUTH GELLER WAS FORTUNATE TO HAVE had such an agreeable conversation with her chiropractor about aid to the *contras* (*ITT*, April 16). I had quite a different experience when I wore a "Hands Off Central America" button to a recent gynecological exam at my local clinic.

The doctor, whom I had never seen before, questioned me on my views about that day's House vote on *contra* aid as he began the pelvic exam. He informed me that he had recently seen Reagan on TV and "that's all I need to hear. The Communists are taking over Nicaragua and will invade America if we don't stop them." Etc., etc.

I have cervical abnormalities caused by DES, a synthetic hormone given to many pregnant women from the '40s to 1971 in an attempt to prevent miscarriages. Like many other DES daughters, I have to undergo expensive and painful examinations every six months to check for signs of a type of cancer caused by exposure to DES in utero.

I am struck by the similar motives behind the indiscriminate administration of an inadequately-tested drug to millions of women and our government's efforts to destroy a small country that is trying to take care of its people rather than cater to the interests of multinationals. The quest for profits is a powerful motivator indeed.

It is difficult enough for me to find a doctor sympathetic to my DES-related medical needs—now it seems I must also guard against hostile political exchanges while I'm on the examination table.

Reagan isn't the only one who gives me a stomach ache, Ruth!

Kathy McKay
Newark, Del.

Still partisan

THE ENCLOSED MODEST CONTRIBUTION to ease your financial difficulties comes from a 78-year-old retiree, a former journeyman wage earner, in recognition of your outstanding efforts to promote enlightenment in order to achieve peace and social justice.

I am particularly pleased by Diana Johnstone's articles because I was born in Europe and during World War II was a partisan with Tito.

Anthony Olivari
San Diego, Calif.

LETTERS

Thanks, John

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK JOHN JUDIS FOR his very informative piece concerning the U.S. and Libya (*ITT*, April 23). He gave much background information that helped shed light on current U.S. policy in the Mideast. The Israeli-Palestinian-U.S. involvement was explained especially well. Keep up the good work.

Ben Meyers
Baton Rouge, La.

Forlorn little thermometer

WHEN I SEE THE FORLORN LITTLE THERMOMETER on page 2, it makes me wonder if all the non-contributors out there are crazy. In *These Times* is the difference between informed sanity and social despair for me. I recently used John Judis' article on the "rollback" doctrine in a speech. I was moved and inspired by the recent long analysis of *Hannah and Her Sisters*; Saul Landau's article on the Sandinistas ("Neither saints nor devils") I have been sending around to friends. I wish I had \$1 million to give you.

Bud Gerber
Boone, N.C.

Scandalous cheap shots

I HAVE ENJOYED EACH ISSUE OF *IN THESE TIMES* for the past year and hope to see more of your hard-hitting reporting. However, the article, "Rainbow lightens up, broadens its base," by Salim Muwakkil (*ITT*, April 30) contained many cheap shots.

Muwakkil states that, "despite a moment or two of chaos and some rancorous debate—the kind to be expected at a gathering of such opinionated people—the delegates accomplished what they intended." How scandalous to characterize members of the National Rainbow Coalition as opinionated. Is that what populists are by definition? If so, does it follow that wealthy, highly-privileged people—in

contrast to the poor and unwashed—are reflective and thoughtful?

Muwakkil continues, "That kind of candor was the rule rather than the exception and marked a departure from the blind sycophancy often displayed at Jackson-inspired gatherings." Using the term "blind sycophancy" to characterize the strong support for Jesse Jackson is ridiculous.

Did Dr. Martin Luther King create a mass of blind followers when he courageously articulated the issues of race, poverty and repression? Isn't Jackson doing essentially the same, tapping generations of pent-up energies through inspiration. The crunch comes because these energies are being directed against the established order. This invites all sorts of attempts to discredit the movement.

Dennis W. Brezina
Harwood, Md.

Purple whitewash

I APPRECIATED SALIM MUWAKKIL'S (*ITT*, April 9) and Pat Aufderheide's (April 23) comments on the film *The Color Purple* and the controversy surrounding it. Here are some of my own.

I was outraged by the film. Like many other blacks, I took the film personally. Yet for me the outrage of *The Color Purple* was not what I was asked to confront, or remember, but what I was asked to forget: the contexts of race and class.

More than ignoring race and class, the film *The Color Purple* whitewashed both to get on safer ground. Spielberg's gross sensationalism went a long way toward accomplishing this pseudo-reality. But the film's ideology is clearest in the crude portrayal of Celie's husband as a well-to-do farmer, who just happens to treat his wife like a slave. By giving him middle-class trappings and concealing behind spacious interiors and paneling what would have been the real hardships of his existence, we are cued that race and class had nothing to do with his exploitation of Celie. When he finally cries, after Celie decides to leave him, "You're poor, you're black, you're a woman and you're ugly,"

the statement seems like a joke.

Although Muwakkil writes about the development of black feminism that made possible *The Color Purple*, the roots of the film *Purple* are not so much the 20th-century literature of race and sex and class from which Walker's novel emerges, as the middle-class feminism of the media, of which the film industry is so obvious a part. I would hazard the guess that Spielberg's exploitation of media feminism is a key reason for the film's popularity among whites.

Offering to audiences the rare opportunity to view black characters in black society, the price of *The Color Purple* is, once again, to strip black (and, derivatively, white) experience of its many dimensions and replace it with more comfortable stereotypes. I can only hope that the success of *The Color Purple* will prepare us for more honest attempts.

Katherine Sciacchitano
Washington, D.C.

Punk criticism

AS A DEVOTEE OF THE PUNK SUBCULTURE, particularly its current, progressive form known as "hardcore," I was very disappointed with Simon Frith's article (*ITT*, April 23). Frith, reading the *New Musical Express* at his university, apparently believes punk began and ended with the Sex Pistols and the Clash. In fact, after the anti-social shock value of punk's attitude lost, inevitably, some of its edge, the majority of punkers got down to the business of changing the way they live, and not just their clothes and hair. Today, worldwide, the hardcore scene is very strong. If Frith doubts this, I suggest he take a look at the letters column in *Maximum Rock and Roll* (devoted, unlike *NME*, to substance, not style), or any of the hundreds of other independently produced hardcore publications. He might even leave his university and go talk to the kids at a Dead Kennedy's show.

Hardcore promotes thinking over following, action over apathy, and socialism over Reaganism. These are the things that should have been covered in an *ITT* article on punk; not the sour-grapes ramblings of a lazy intellectual. Next time *ITT* considers punk, get someone to write who cares.

William Mueller
Durham, N.C.

PERSPECTIVE

By Lawrence Kootnikoff

ON FEBRUARY 24, 1986, A giant of Canadian socialism died a quiet death in his home in Ottawa, after a long battle with cancer.

T.C. (Tommy) Douglas did not have the impact that Olof Palme and other European social democratic leaders had on the world scene, but this fiery, diminutive (5'5"), Baptist preacher is, perhaps, a more significant figure for North American socialists. He formed the first socialist government on the continent, in the province of Saskatchewan, in 1944, and later became the first national leader of the New Democratic Party (NDP) of Canada.

Socially, culturally and politically, Canada has much in common with the United States. However, for more than fifty years a democratic socialist party has been government or official opposition in four of ten Canadian provinces and one territory, and has played an important role in national politics.

How is it that the NDP and its predecessor, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), have managed to form government and become an accepted part of Canadian society, while across the border similar American attempts have withered and died?

To answer this question completely would require a book (several have been written), but much of the answer lies in the style, character, and contributions of Tommy Douglas.

Born in Falkirk, Scotland, in 1904, Douglas and his family came to Canada in 1910 and settled in Winnipeg, Manitoba. In 1924 he decided to enter the Baptist ministry, and upon graduation from Brandon College in 1930 was posted to a church in Weyburn, Saskatchewan.

Religion played no small part in the formation of Douglas' socialism. Through his studies he had been exposed to the social gospel, which was gaining adherents both in Canada and the United States. The social gospel held that Christianity was a social religion, and that to save a person you had to save them body and soul, in this world as well as the next. "Many fine Christian people," Douglas later said, "have taken the position that they should divorce themselves from the struggles and problems of society and concentrate upon their own spiritual growth and development. They forget that while the Kingdom of God means a new relationship between God and man, it also means a new relationship between man and his fellow man." Douglas came to look on socialism as no more than "applied Christianity." The social gospel was and is one of the most important strains of Canadian socialism, and as Clement Atlee said of the British Labour Party, it owes "more to Methodism than to Marx."

As the Great Depression gathered force in rural Saskatchewan, the young minister became active in relief work. He became increasingly committed to political action and in 1933 participated in the founding convention of the CCF in Regina, the provincial capital. In the 1935 federal election he ran for the constituency of Weyburn as the CCF candidate and won.

Social gospel

The pulpit has proved a good training ground for more than one politically inclined church minister, and this young MP was no exception. In a country noted for its orators, Douglas was one of the best. Today, in the age of the 30-second TV clip and packaged personalities, we forget what an important weapon the spoken word was for the politician of the pre-television age. As one of his biographers, Dale Lovick, puts it, "In the absence of television and movie theaters politics was

Tommy Douglas: NDP founder

a major source of entertainment. A political meeting, a public debate or a radio broadcast was a community event." Douglas thrived in this environment, and his mastery of it explains much of his success. His oratory and debating ability could sway the uncommitted and move and inspire the faithful. "Surely if we can produce in such abundance in order to destroy our enemies," he told an audience in 1943, "we can produce in equal abundance to provide food, clothing and shelter for our children. If we can keep people employed for the purpose of destroying human life, surely we can keep them employed for the purpose of enriching and enhancing human life."

Political leader

He served as a member of Parliament until 1944, when he returned to Saskatchewan to lead the provincial CCF to a stunning landslide victory, capturing 47 of 52 seats in the legislature. During the 17 years of Douglas-CCF government, Saskatchewan became known as the "social laboratory of North America."

Premier Douglas and the new government made medical, hospital and dental services free for all senior citizens and took over the cost of treatment for cancer, tuberculosis, mental illness and venereal diseases. In 1947 the CCF implemented the first universal hospitalization plan in Canada and in 1961 socialized all health care (the rest of Canada followed in 1969). The Trade Union Act, which made collective bargaining mandatory, was called by the UAW's Walter Reuther "the most progressive piece of legislation on the North American continent." Standards were established for workers' compensation, minimum wage levels and mandatory holidays. Co-operatives were encouraged, and rural electrification and development and publicly-run auto insurance were brought about by new "crown" (publicly owned) corporations. Sweeping education reforms were also carried out.

When in 1961 the decision was taken to bolster the sagging fortunes of the federal CCF by forming a new party in alliance with the Canadian Labour Congress, Premier Douglas seemed the natural choice for its leader. The New Democratic Party was trying to broaden its base with an updated, slightly watered down socialism, and Douglas had proven leadership abilities and had shown that he could put socialist ideas across in a simple, easily understood and non-threatening way.

The NDP's fortunes in the '60s disappointed many. Despite high hopes, the new party has not been able to break out of third place on a national level, and Douglas himself suffered personal defeat twice in his own constituency. During the turbulent '60s the party, representing the "old left" of working-class social democrats, seemed unable to come to terms with the "new left" of students, youth and intellectuals.

Historically the CCF/NDP has faced the dilemma of trying to decide whether it is a social movement or an electoral party trying to win office. This, combined with left-right struggles and east-west disputes, caused much division within the party, yet Douglas always remained a unifying force. He was very much an old-fashioned grassroots politician, with a phenomenal memory for names and faces. With the NDP becoming more of a "party" concerned with electoral success, Douglas was still the prairie populist, whose gentle humor, self-deprecating wit, easy-going

smiling style and brilliant oratory won him the respect of his opponents and the adoration of his followers.

Tommy Douglas in many ways was democratic socialism in Canada. How important was his personal contribution?



The Democrat

T.C. Douglas campaigning for office

Canada's leading socialist, Douglas led and inspired his party.

Consider the facts: Douglas headed the first socialist government in North America. When he stepped down as leader that government was defeated. During his 10 years as a federal leader of the NDP his leadership was never seriously questioned, and by the time he stepped down in 1971 the party was firmly established on the national scene, whereas 10 years before many had wondered whether a party of the democratic left was viable in Canada.

While failing in his dream of forming a federal government and leading the NDP beyond third-party status, Douglas probably had more of an impact on national policy than most prime ministers. Many of the pioneering measures first adopted under his government in Saskatchewan later found their way across Canada, and the national system of universal Medicare will remain his enduring legacy.

"I learned long ago," he once said, "that you had to decide whether you were going to stand with the sheep, or with the fellow who was shearing them." This simple line could sum up Douglas' socialism. While more doctrinaire members of the Canadian left have criticized it as too simplistic and theoretically unsound, it should be understood that Douglas was never a theorist. He saw it as his role to define and popularize the party's message in terms average Canadians could understand.

Could Douglas, or someone like him, have succeeded in the United States? Perhaps. Certainly American socialists have much to learn from their Canadian counterparts. Douglas resembles many populist and non-socialist figures in American history. His socialism was pluralist and non-sectarian, something that American socialism must be if it is to succeed. Douglas and the CCF/NDP built a broad coalition of progressives and socialists in Canada, and progressives and socialists in the U.S. could look farther afield and find less relevant examples to emulate.

Lawrence Kootnikoff is a researcher, party activist and editor of *Forward* news-magazine, published by the British Columbia Young New Democrats. He sits on provincial council and executive of the British Columbia NDP and on the New Democratic Party federal council.

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