

LE MOINDRE #39

from

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For FAPA mailing #173 February 1981

The Seventies are over, and with them some of the bubblethink of the period. Gary Trudeau summarized one idiocy of the time in a Doonesbury Sunday strip a couple of years ago. It portrayed some people keening over the plight of a "political prisoner." In the final panel it was revealed that his "political offense" was extracting a "political donation" at gunpoint from a supermarket cashier.

If somebody robs a bank, and goes to prison for it, he is just a convicted criminal. However, in the Seventies, if the robber were a member of a self-proclaimed "political" group, then Bubbleheads would raise cries of outrage about this poor, put-upon, "Political Prisoner."

Another phenomenon of the Seventies which now seems to be no more, is accused yelling in Court, "This is a Fascist Court, and has no right to try me." Was the judge expected to reply, "Yes, this is a Fascist Court. Release the prisoner." ?

But one Seventies stupidity is still with us: "White man's law." "Oh, those poor black prisoners," the Bubbleheads cry, "they are imprisoned under White Man's Law." The implication seems to be that under Black Man's Law, such things as rape, robbery with violence, and murder would not be illegal.

Of course, some people regard some murders very lightly. A few years ago a number of Basque terrorists were to be executed for murder. There were large protests and outcries from some quarters. A lot of people have strong views against capital punishment. But why, I wondered in conversation with somebody, were people protesting these particular executions, but not those which were taking place in other countries. "But these Basques are Freedom Fighters" he replied indignantly. "Freedom Fighter" hardly seems the term to apply to a group of terrorists whose announced aim is to set up a repressive dictatorship. I note that these so-called "Freedom Fighters" are still killing innocent civilians.

Yes, protests over the execution of terrorists for the murder of civilians, but I didn't note any protests from the same quarters when the Ayatollah Khomeini was executing people for being "Enemies of God."

For years there was much breast-beating over Rhodesiaa few hundred thousand enfranchised Whites, and a few million unenfranchised blacks. I make no support for that state of affairs, but I wondered, and still wonder, why were people picking on Rhodesia only. Excluding the Arab countries, there are over 40 countries in Africa. Only about five of them are not dictatorships. Quick now, which ones are not? Uh-huh.

For years, there was much wailing about Colonial Rule. Now that Colonial Rule has been replaced in Africa by dictatorships, why has the wailing ceased? Can it be that the wailers considered white colonial rule was bad, but that black dictatorships are o.k. even to the murderous excesses of the now-deposed rulers of Equatorial Guinea and the Central African Empire?

For a change of pace, a Toronto news item:
A bar in Toronto changed hands. The new owners decided to make it an exclusively homosexual establishment. (What sort of test would they apply for admission, one wonders.) So, the new owners fired the waiters to replace them with homosexual waiters. Unfortunately for the new owners, along with the bar came a contract with the Waiters Union. The union complained to the Labor Relations Board. The Board recalled a previous case where the new owners of a bar decided to turn it into an Irish Pub, and fired the waiters to replace them with Irish waiters. The board had allowed the change, ruling that being Irish was Significantly different. However, in this case, the Board ruled, being Homosexual was not Significantly Different.

Mt. St. Helens must be very frustrating to bureaucrats and environmentalists. A volcano can't be tied up for years in red tape and hearings before being allowed to erupt. It can't be prosecuted for failing to file an Environmental Impact Statement. There is nothing to be achieved by picketing, demonstrating, or protesting....although it's a wonder some haven't tried it.

If some of the more extreme environmentalists put all their tenets into practice, they'd lead a pretty grim life.

Food: No meat. It's wicked to kill animals, (unless you're an Eskimo.) Fish is o.k. (baby seals eat fish) but eat it raw. Fires pollute. Fruit and berries are permissible, but can't grow crops. Musn't disturb the ground cover.

Clothes: Wool only. Can't use animal skins or grow cotton. Yes, shoes will be a problem

Shelter: Live in caves, or build shelters from dead trees. It's wicked to cut down live trees.

About the only places where one can live by these rules are tropical islands, which is rather elitist.

Speaking of elitism: a few years ago a song popular at folk-type songfests went....

Little houses
Little houses made of ticky-tacky.....

and the audience would snigger and feel superior about the ticky-tacky houses and the people who lived in them. Of course, if the houses were larger and more expensively constructed, those same sniggerers would complain the People Can't Afford Them. But also, these houses are built in the suburbs (in the sense of residential areas outside Downtown) and elitists sneer at suburbs. Where are the ticky-tacky dwellers to live then? In apartment buildings? No, elitists don't approve of apartment buildings for The Masses....impersonal, you know. There isn't room for them all Downtown. There isn't room for them all on the tropical islands with the ultra-environmentalists. Maybe they are expected to just disappear.

I was watching on TV a production of Die Fliedermaus, in the original German. Being an operetta, there was some spoken dialog. Occasionally, after some lines were spoken, some of the audience would go Titter Titter Titter. I pondered three possibilities:

1. Some of the titterers didn't understand German, but gathered that the exchange was meant to be funny, and wanted to give their neighbors in the audience the impression that they understood it.
2. Some of the titterers did understand German, had never heard the operetta before, and were genuinely amused.
3. Some of the titterers understood German, had heard Die Fliedermaus before, but were genuinely moved to laughter again by the "funny lines."

I gather that audiences for Serious (or Semi-Serious) Music are fairly easily amused.

I once mentioned the works of "P.D.Q. Bach" (written by one Peter Schikele) to a friend who is an aficionado of Serious Music. He pontificated to the effect that to understand and appreciate the Humorous Subtleties of P.D.Q. Bach, one needed a Deep Understanding of Serious Music.

So eventually there came on TV a program of the works of P.D.Q. Bach. I turned it on, eager to listen for the Subtle Humor. But what was the audience laughing at, in their genteel Serious way? They were laughing at the Serious Music equivalent of Spike Jones. (Spike Jones and His Orchestra, mainly in the 1940's, made a number of records which were very broad burlesques of popular songs. -"I don't know whether they're funny, but there's lots of burps and glug-glugs." -Radar O'Reilly.) I later read that Schikele is a fan of Spike Jones. So much for deep humorous subtleties.

Another composer of "Humorous" Serious Music is Gerald Hoffnung, who writes compositions involving Funny Instruments such as vacuum cleaners. Local Personalities are roped in to run the vacuum cleaners. Oh what jolly fun. The audience titters and giggles madly. Not only are these Funny Instruments being employed, but there are the Mayor and the Noted Newspaper Columnist running them. Newspaper columnists are favored for this sort of thing, (also as stretcher bearers in The Nutcracker) as they then write Funny Columns about their experiences, garnering publicity for the orchestra or ballet company.

Linguistic fads come and go. Remember when "Dichotomy" was an In word? And then for a time, some people couldn't use an abstract noun without adding "-wise" to it. ("Dichotomy-wise....")

For a while now, the fad has been to add "street-" before a noun. So we have people prattling away, using:

Street people	Street dirty
Street wise	Street talk
Street smart	Street drugs
Street tough (adj.)	Street law
Street tough (noun)	Street food

A food columnist in a Toronto magazine, who normally writes a very good column, became so infected by this fad that in a recent issue he wrote a column on "street food." Torontonians are not attuned to the "gritty

reality" (?) of street-food, he proclaimed. Why, when a Torontonian buys a slice of pizza, he-she actually eats it in the store. He then went on to quote an expatriate New Yorker who said that in Toronto she misses the pizza-slice papers blowing around the streets. Gosh, I guess that next we are going to be told we should hang our heads in shame over the paucity of dog shit on Toronto streets.

We no longer hear the clamor of those who were constantly braying that they Wanted To Get Their Heads Together (in the singular sense.) Presumably, these erstwhile Humpty Dumpties have been made whole, even without the help of All The King's Horses and all the King's Men. It would also appear that all those who were loudly proclaiming that they wanted to Find Themselves, and find out Who They Were and Where They Were At have recovered from their amnesia and confusion.

A new cliché of newspaper and magazine writers is "Three piece suits." One sees constant references to "Business men in three piece suits" and "lawyers in three piece suits" and "restaurants full of three piece suits" etc. ad nauseam. The three piece suit has been around for a long time. Why has it become such an item to be noted? Is it considered to convey Status and Power, or are the writers using it as a term of opprobrium? I have never worn a three piece suit. Am I to gather that I should, or I should not? I don't really care.

I suppose conspiracy buffs are harmless if they quietly nurse their delusions, but they become a nuisance when they sneer at others for not sharing their paranoid fantasies. "What, you don't believe that all Mohammed Ali's fights were fixed? How gullible can you be?" "You mean you really don't believe that we are surrounded by flying saucers full of little green men? How naive."

My, how rock fans and the rock press have mellowed. Around 1966 a rock group called The Monkees was assembled, by advertising, for a TV series of the same name. Rock-dom was outraged. A group assembled by advertising, instead of growing up together in South Philadelphia or wherever! Even worse, they (horrors!) Didn't Write Their Own Material! This attitude struck me as about as ludicrous as though Serious Music Lovers denigrated the New York Philharmonic because the members of the orchestra didn't all grow up together in the Bronx, and didn't write their own material.

A couple of years ago, Meat Loaf (he's a rock singer, Walter) made an LP backed by studio musicians. The LP sold heavily. So, to cash in, Meat Loaf should go on tour. But the musicians who made the LP were not available. So a new group was assembled. How? By advertising. Rock-dom uttered not one peep.

Last time I wrote material for FAPA, I was in the early stages of recovery from a life-threatening illness. To save my membership, I would haul myself from my sickbed, and until the weakness became too great (imagine some sobbing strings here) blearily force out a few lines for FAPA. Thus I managed to produce *Le Moindre* #38. I had noted the circumstances under which it was written. But did Speer take this into account? No, he quibbled as usual about sentence structure. Speer, you would interrupt the last words of a dying man with quibbles about his sentence structure. In the words of our Perpetual Prime Minister, "Mangez de la merde."

SPEER: I have very fine hair, and it looks best if washed frequently. Persons with a different type of hair no doubt can get by with less frequent washing. However, as I always shower (I hate baths) it takes but a moment to wash the hair while showering, and thus my hair gets washed daily anyway. But standards of cleanliness seem to be relative. While touring in France with a specialized study group after the Season, I was relating to Brian, the assistant group leader, my difficulties with English plumbing. "Oh," drawled Brian, "the English are not a very clean people, anyway. You know, 'Saturday night is bath night,' and that sort of thing." He then went on to relate an incident. An Australian woman athlete was being interviewed on television. After some remark the interviewer said, "I suppose now you'll be marrying an Englishman." "Oh no," she replied in a horrified tone. "Why not?" he asked, shaken by the vehemence of her reply. "Well, Englishmen are not very clean," Instant uproar. Letters to newspapers containing lines such as, "What does she mean, 'Englishmen are not clean'? I take a bath every two weeks."

Now, hold on, all you who are reaching for your typewriters. Brian said all that, not me.

In one mailing, I quoted, as a basis for a joke, the announcement by the World Health Organization that smallpox had been eradicated. Subsequently there was an outbreak of smallpox in a research laboratory in England. Due to carelessness, a smallpox virus was let loose in the lab. On the basis of this, some readers informed me that I had been premature in announcing the eradication of smallpox. The prevalence

of the King's Messenger Syndrome (blame the bearer of the news) is amazing.

Jack, when you ask what is the difference between a "sick headache" and a migraine, are you really looking for an answer? Often, I have learned, when somebody asks a question, he really doesn't want an answer. This especially applies when people say things like, "Why are They doing this" or "Why can't They Do (that)?"

WARNER: I think you were looking for an answer to one question, though, so...."In the study of landforms and landscapes it is convenient to picture a complete series of forms developed during the process of down-wearing of the land by erosion, and land surfaces corresponding to nearly every stage of such a series are known in nature. The successive landscapes, or aspects of the landscape, produced by erosion following uplift of a portion of the earth's surface of whatever form above sea-level comprise a cycle of erosion or geomorphic cycle. The surface upon which eroding agents begin to work is the initial surface and its relief is the initial relief. At ~~the~~ the other end of the sequence after valleys have been cut by erosion and the residual relief thus produced has been destroyed by a continuation of the same process, the thoroughly worn-down surface eventually resulting is termed a penplain. Development of a penplain depends, however, on a long immunity from further earth movements, and if we were to judge of the frequency of such occurrences by the visible evidence of recent movements of the land in mobile belts of the lithosphere, the conclusion would be inescapable that no cycle can reach an advanced stage. In relatively stable regions such as Africa, western Europe, and eastern North America, and even in parts of what are now the mobile belts, the geomorphic cycle has proceeded far enough in the past, however, to develop very extensive penplains. Portions of these still survive, though they have been attacked by erosion in new cycles." (Geomorphology - C.A. Cotton.)

In an issue of HORIZONS you were speaking of Ngaio Marsh, to whom you ~~were~~ referred as "he." Obviously you did not know that Ngaio Marsh was a woman. (I use the past tense, because she died recently.) You were very astute in your observation that she appeared to have had a background in Little Theatre. She was on the faculty of Christchurch University, and directed University drama productions and possibly other drama groups, which would come under the general definition of "little theatre". I read only one or two of her books, when for a while I was looking into detective fiction. One was called A Surfeit of Lampreys (involving a family named Lamprey) and another (or it may have been the same one) involved

the killing of somebody by squeezing him to death in a wool press. (a wool press is a large press used to squeeze two or three large bales of wool into the size of one unpressed bale, to save room in shipping.) Her books I read I did not care for, being the puzzle type of detective fiction, involving much talk of who was where when doing what.

I've seen pictures of those TV sets where the picture was viewed by reflection in a mirror set in the cabinet lid, but I don't know whether the picture was actually enlarged by this process. However, , I doubt that the principle is the same as projection TV. I gather that the system was not very popular.

Out Our Way, by J.R. Williams, is not an "old time comic." It ran in a Toronto newspaper until, I think, the early sixties, if not later. The hardiness of comic strips is amazing. In travelling about, one is likely to find in local U.S. papers strips which one hasn't seen for years.

I can't understand your reported zooming in the price of opera vocal scores. Presumably the plates for the scores were made long before the recent burst of inflation, so only the printing costs would be affected by inflation, and inflation hasn't been enough to account for the prices you quote. I have a full (miniature) score of L'enfant et les Sortilèges, and the price on it is under \$10.00 at current exchange rates. I don't know when that price applied, but all the expensive engraving of the plates must have been done at that time.

I find I am becoming more and more interested in opera. The other night on TV there was a film of Monteverdi's The Coronation of Poppea. I didn't remember it was on until 10 pm, thus missing the first hour, but I started in to watch it. About 11 pm I started thinking I should go to bed, but I was so fascinated by its Scoop and Power that I watched it to the end. I was a little puzzled during the course of the opera, though. Ottone (a male part) sounded like a contralto, and the Nurse sounded like a tenor. Was there a touch of English Pantomime (which many Americans think erroneously has something to do with Mime) in it, I wondered. (In English Pantomime, the hero, called "the Principal Boy" is usually played by a girl, and the Pantomime Dame is played by a burlesque-type male comedian in drag.) However, according to the credits, Ottone was sung by a male, and the Nurse by a female.