

MORDECAI RICHLER: "T - ME IS ON MY SIDE"

Now even Time magazine has gone liberal on us. How can you bear the pain when your best enemies suddenly turn into friends?

Traditionally, we expect to suffer lost leaders. Our heroes will betray us. The firebrand of the opposition, once voted into office, is reborn responsible, a mature and wiser man, his appetite for reform so satiated by a feast of state secrets that within months his government's policy is more or less interchangeable with the one he has booted out of power. Even our aging athletes sell us down the river. Ted Williams has tipped his cap to the Boston fans and surely Cassius Clay is destined to end his days as a youth adviser to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. We are also aware that young artists who rage against the establishment now will seek honours tomorrow and those who make impassioned objections to commercialism are the very ones who will push their books with the most ardour on TV talk shows.

All this, and worse perfidy (say, the New Yorker resorting to an index), we have learned to endure, saddened but amused. Speaking for myself, I not only expect my heroes to betray me, I thrive on it, if only because it makes me feel more generous about my own adjustments to reality. But what was never in the cards, what is absolutely insufferable today, is that even our enemies, the bastards you once cherished and counted on, have begun to sell out.

After all these years, old John Wayne, once a safe target for ridicule, has become an actor. The ineffable Richard Nixon is going to ditch Saigon and put us all in his debt. In Montreal, the boring, pedestrian Star, once predictably stuffy on every issue, has become lively, which is to say, I am not altogether surprised to have lived to see a man on the moon, but I never expected, in my lifetime, to discover "shit" written plain in the Star. Worse news, Time, after Luce, has gone liberal. It's on our side now.

What next, you may well ask. A Reader's Digest abridgement of Candy? Diefenbaker standing up for pot in parliament? Roly Michener packing in his job, saying one hired town fool in Vancouver is sufficient unto this day in Canada? Walt Disney Studios making a film with an unhappy ending?

I have been a Time addict for years, each issue nicely inflaming me, the Eisenhower-Dulles era being especially vintage for viciousness and inspired literary judgements, Herman Wouk making the cover. But now I pick up the magazine and, reading it, am inclined to nod, saying yes to myself, quite right, which is bloody intolerable. Time, for as long as I can remember, did more than Franco or South Africa to justify liberals to themselves. Once a week, it roused our hate juices. We were outraged, consoled ourselves with another drink, and enjoyed catharsis. And so if Time had truly, really and truly, swung over to our side, I, for one, would be appalled.

Happily, I am now able to reveal it isn't so. Time, ostensibly pinko these days, is in fact more pernicious than ever before. The crucial difference is it now requires the skill of a Kremlinologist to illuminate connections and decipher the reactionary message between the ingratiating lines. Take the issue of July 4, for instance. Sainly Cesar Chavez was on the cover and the grape workers' strike, the plight of the Mexican American in general, was sympathetically observed in a long, objective story. By no coincidence, the major story in the Canadian edition, "Indians: to end a bitter heritage," examined the Indians' dilemma with an even more New Statesman-like concern. But — — but — an exacting scrutiny of the text reveals not only the traditional Time obloquy, it also shows the heavy hand of the CIA, on one side, and Time's continuing dependency on life insurance advertisers on the other.

In the Canadian Indian story, we read on page 15, "To be an Indian is to have a life expectancy of 59 years, compared to the national average of 63." In the Chavez story, "The Little Strike That Grew Into La Causa," we read on page 28: "If he is a migrant farm worker, the Mexican American has a life expectancy of about 48 years vs. 70 for the average U.S. resident." One more significant fact, this one buried in the "A letter from the Publisher" section. One of the reporters or, dare I say, agents, at work on the Chavez story was Martin Sullivan, formerly a Time correspondent in Montreal and author of Mandate 68, an account of Trudeau's campaign.

Realizing a boyhood dream, I have at last stumbled on a scoop, no less than the first trial balloon in a plot to oust Trudeau before he recognizes Red China. Look at it this way. If Time's statisticians are not speaking with forked tongues, then the seed they are implanting in our minds is that our Indians' life expectancy is much better in relation to white Canadians than all of our mortal expectations are in relation to real Americans, including Negroes. What they are saying is, the many untimely deaths in Viet Nam notwithstanding, the average American can expect to live seven years longer than us, while we can only hope to outlast our Indians by four years.

If true, this is totally unacceptable. If not true, it is still a brilliant piece of intelligence, what Richard Crossman used to call black propaganda in Second World War days, for it serves several functions at once.

1. It demonstrates to young American draft dodgers who have found refuge in Canada that, while they no longer run the risk of death in battle,

a very long shot, they have, by fleeing to Death Valley, knocked seven years off their life expectancy.

2. It gives American-owned insurance companies in Canada a big edge, enabling them to demand higher rates, because our life expectancy is purportedly more modest than theirs.

3. More subversive, most dangerous, it puts the lie to Trudeau's concept of the Just Society, for there can be no justice in this or any society when Richard Nixon, Spiro Agnew, Norman Vincent Peale, Shirley Temple, Al Capp, and other unspeakables can, as a natural birthright, expect to live seven years longer than us.

Put plainly, what Time is saying is Canadian citizenship is a health hazard. Like chain-smoking. And the longest unarmed frontier in the world is a death trap.

Fortunately, to be forewarned, as they say, is to be forearmed. If Time's frightening statistics are correct, we can turn them to our advantage.

We can replace medicare with a much more economical, and hopeful, self-help plan. On his sixty-second birthday every Canadian should be offered a \$500 bill and a ticket to anywhere in the U.S. He thereby adds seven expected years to his life and saves us vast outlays in health and pension costs, which would enable Trudeau to lower taxes for the rest of us young but doomed swingers.

Or, not that I'm the vengeful type, we could sue for union with the U.S. and with one beautiful political act lower their life expectancy and raise ours.

(Reprinted from Saturday Night, September, 1969)



"I've put some money in trust for you. You will be able to collect it when you are thirty, if, in the opinion of the trustees, you have sold out to the establishment."