

In a dark time the eye begins to see.

- Theodore Roethke

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NERVE GAS

by Gretchen Eick

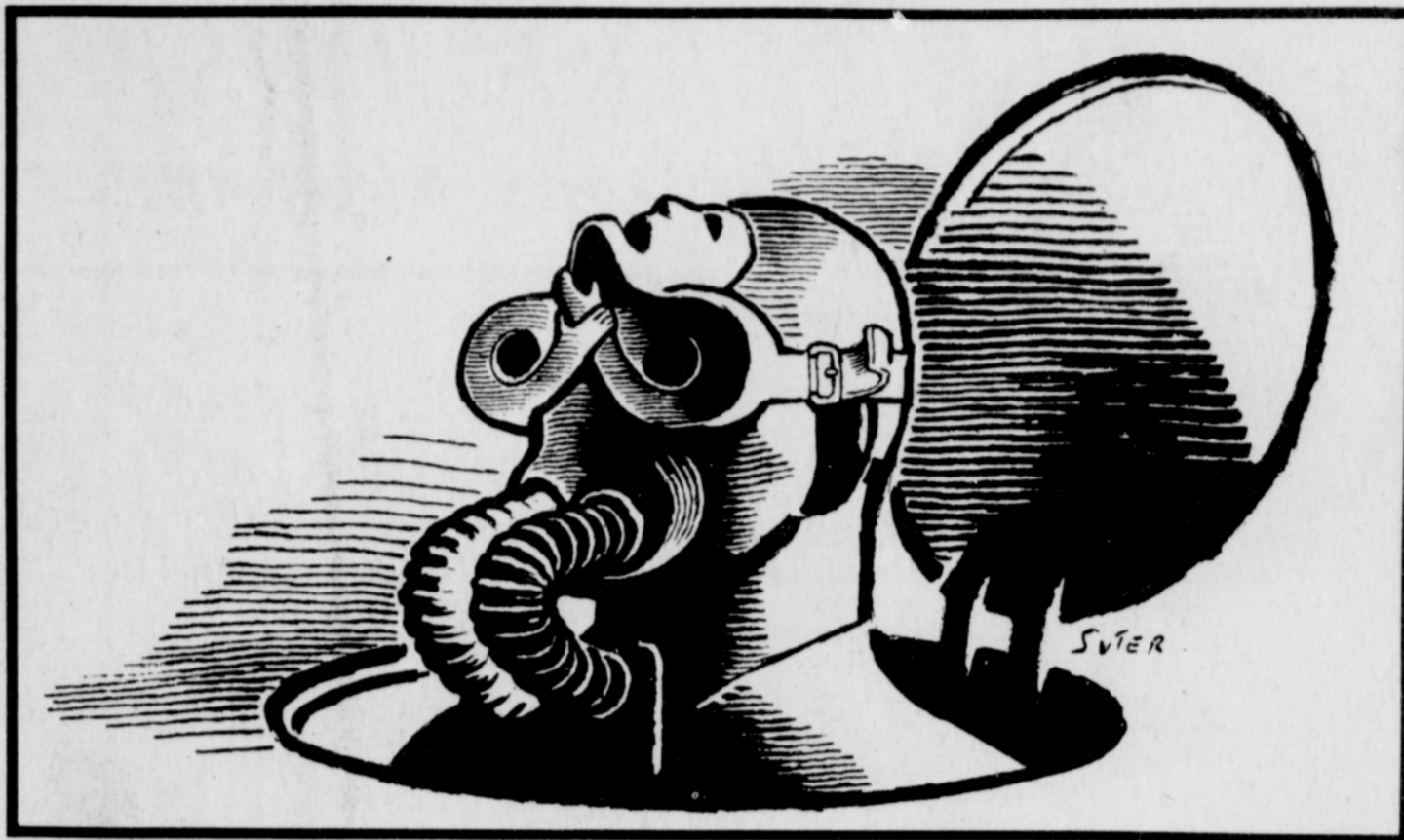
The House of Representatives approved a one hundred and eighty-eight billion dollar military spending bill yesterday, which included authorization for building the first twenty-one MX missiles and reversal of a fourteen year unilateral U.S. ban on producing chemical weapons, which includes binary nerve gas type weapons.

Chemical weapons are as deadly as tactical nuclear weapons, according to computer simulation done by the Pentagon.

Whereas with nuclear weapons or highly explosive weapons, soldiers and civilians both are killed, chemical weapons kill primarily unprotected civilians; soldiers wearing protective clothing and masks are unharmed.

The United States has at present a large stockpile of chemical weapons. The amount stockpiled at only one of the ten chemical weapons storage sites — Tooele Air Force Base in Utah — is enough to kill almost three and one-half trillion people. About half of the U.S. stockpile is in bulk storage which could be used to fill new munitions if more was really needed. Instead the Pentagon wants to build more chemical weapons with new, additional nerve gas, this time dividing the two primary ingredients into separate cannisters which would only mix and become lethal when they are loaded and fired. These are known as binary weapons.

The primary military use of chemical weapons is to force enemy troops to don protective clothing, which slows down their movement.



David Suter

Just a small percentage of chemical rounds in total artillery fire is enough to force an enemy to stay in protective clothing. The present U.S. stockpile is so large that we could continually fire enough poison gas for eight months in a war in Europe.

The Army argues that we need new 155 mm. howitzer artillery shells and Bigeye bombs because our current stockpile is leaking. In fact, 155 mm. howitzer artillery shells have had virtually no leaks and were classified Condition Code A by the Army (i.e., "serviceable — fully meets all other military characteristics. Issuable without limit or restriction.") The other type of chemical weapons the Pentagon wants to build, Bigeye bombs, would aug-

ment our present Weteye nerve gas bombs which Senator Jake Garn (Republican, Utah) reports have had virtually no problem with leaks. Garn visited their storage facility in his state to ascertain whether leaks were a problem. "We have had that stock there for more than thirty-five years. There has simply been no accident of any kind to anyone under any circumstances during that period of time." (The portions of our stockpile which have had problems with leaks are chemical rockets which are being demilitarized.)

Chemical weapons need to be forward-deployed, which is not possible in light of European

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HOT DEATHS IN A COLD WAR

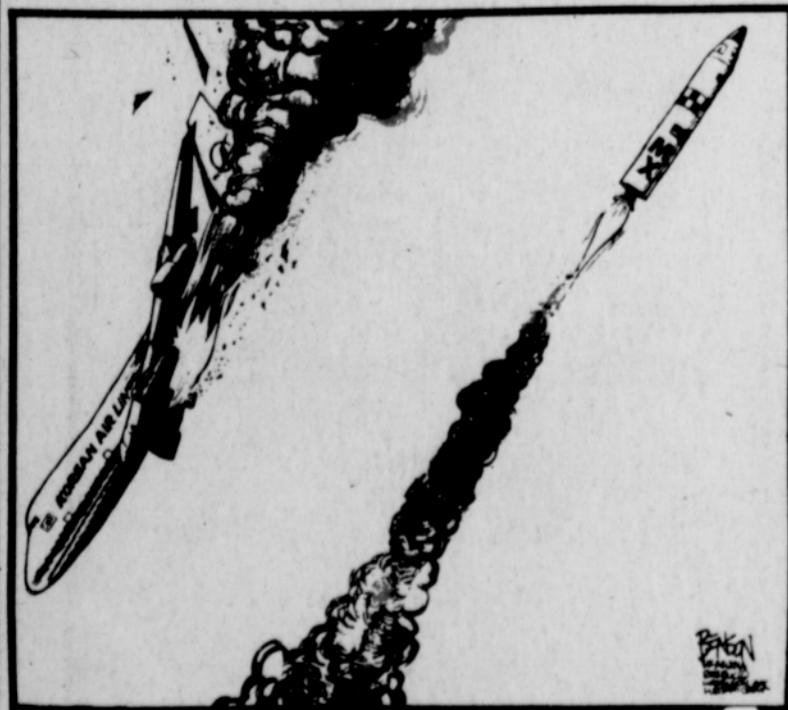
by William Appleman Williams

Black humor is defined by an imaginative appreciation of a combination of Shakespeare, the best of rock and roll (as with the Doors on "Texas Radio") and poor white truths translated into deaths of "colored" people in the ghettos of the central cities of this global empire.

Having grown to maturity in a white middle-class family suffering multiple traumas of the Great Depression, and yet hanging on to its commitment to equality, I say simply that I like black humor. It reminds me of truths I have lived.

Black humor informs my life. I consider it a modern version of classic irony: a way of trying to force us to come to terms with the reality of our inabilities. I think of that marvelous line written by Alexander Pope, a great mind invaded by references to his peculiar body:

"Laugh where we must, be candid where we can."



The destruction of a Korean civilian airliner by Soviet defense forces offers us a rare opportunity to be candid. Let us try to learn something from all those deaths.

Say it bluntly: The Soviets should not have done it, and they should pay prompt and generous reparations to Korea and to the families of the passengers and the crew.

Let us acknowledge that we certainly do not now know, and may never know, what happened. It is a bootless chase over red-hot spikes. Surely you can write your own scenarios.

The radio and other communication systems failed (so much for modern technology). A Soviet fighter pilot may have overreacted to his standing orders. The Korean pilot may have persistently ignored Soviet orders to leave their airspace — or land someplace (say Vladivostok) for a check. Soviet defenders may have allowed the plane to intrude to the point where they had to have high command decisions, and the high command gave the order to blow the intruder away.

So with Pope let us be candid. If the deaths of those people are to serve any purpose, if their deaths are to be consequential, then we must confront the major issues. We might approach it this way:

First, no matter which explanation you consider closest to the truth, you are nevertheless left with the question of why the Soviets were so hypersensitive if not paranoid. We can begin to answer that question with the flippant remark that tells us that "just because you are paranoid doesn't mean you don't have enemies."

The Soviets have had many enemies. They have been attacked from the West and from the East. They have lost countless millions of lives and productive facilities from attacks by the French, the Germans, and even the English. They have fought many skirmishes with the Chinese and the Japanese.

Beginning with President Harry S. Truman they have been defined and confronted as the source of all troubles in the world. Reagan is

only the last of a long line of American leaders who have defined the Soviet Union as the source of all troubles in this world. I repeat myself because that is precisely the way our leaders have defined Russia: the source of all the troubles in this world.

We have gone further than that: We have said that if we could control the Russians, then the world would be sweetness and light. That is so silly that all one can do is to honor Pope: "Laugh where we must, be candid where we can."

The Russians are scared. They overreact. They do brutal and inexcusable things.

A good many years ago the poet Archibald McLeish wrote an essay called "The Conquest of America." He said we Americans were going to become ever more like the Russians. There would be no invasion, no nuclear war: We would just slide away silently into pale copies of the Russians.

I fear he may turn out to have been correct. We display no nerve, no imagination, no willingness to honor our tradition of taking a risk.

The risk is to say, and mean it, that we must stop this nonsense. We have invaded Soviet airspace on a regular basis. Let us now agree to stop that activity. Let us then agree to stop the escalation of technology that creates the paranoia.

Let us agree once more with Pope: Laugh where we must, be candid where we can.

And so a bit of modern black humor: Laugh at our leaders, be candid about what needs to be done and then simply do it. Surely we have had enough of this nonsense.

William Appleman Williams is professor of history at Oregon State University and the author of several books, including "Empire as a Way of Life." He also writes regularly for the Statesman Journal in Salem, from which his article is reprinted.