



CUMMINGS, WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

## MEETING THEM HALFWAY

Very few of humanity's billions will ever be remembered for very long or be recorded for more than village histories, and the names who momentarily preoccupy our age will as surely vanish. Of our century perhaps only Hitler or Gandhi might remain for the future — perhaps as icons of its darkness and its light.

Only recently have women's claims to history been taken seriously and in Western society it is still difficult to entertain any other than a caucasian cosmology. The epic human struggle is usually portrayed as East against West; of Yellow Peril against White Is Right; of Crescent against Cross; of Communism against BankAmeriCard. The only real significance of the eternal conflicts is the epic flow of blood, the slaughter of millions at each turn of history's pages for reasons as brief as their lives. The names of the multitudes are lost, only their numbers are marked, aggregates of killers and killed.

History's dark glare shines now upon two white men who have risen to the top of the superheap, each and both claimants to titles of Princes of Light and Dark, the Laurel and Hardy of the Nuclear Age. In the month of the Blue Moon they met at a summit in Moscow to discuss such arcane matters as whether the differences during this most recent incarnation of East versus West should result in blowing the world apart.

"Welcome to the Evil Empire," a Russian said to have greeted the American President who after dinner chastized Bolshevism for its evil ways. The President, who sees no evil in his own empire or among his friends, sermonized about freedom and human rights to the exasperation of his host and counterpart, the Soviet Premier, and urged Russian dissidents to press on with their struggle although he is usually intolerant of dissent back home in the USA.

The Reagan era has in fact been among the most culturally and politically repressive in the short history of the American republic. A few white men of wealth have made an intolerable grab for power and reinstitution of a suburban form of aristocracy that has severely eroded much of the basic fiber of democracy. They have looted the public treasury of billions while increasing poverty, joblessness and homelessness, and their shortsighted greed has burdened future generations with a crippling national debt that will further limit options and freedoms for millions of yet unborn citizens.

In the meantime the Russian people begin to slowly move from under a long history of oppression toward political freedoms torturously struggled for in the West for centuries. At the very moment the Russian people start to throw off the heavy yoke of their history the

Western democracies seem to fritter away their hardwon freedoms, perhaps because our liberty has so long been taken for granted that we are unaware of what life is without it and therefore cannot imagine that we could ever lose it, especially by our own indifference and indolence. Yet within our society are groups and individuals (and arguably an entire sex) who have seldom been accorded the freedoms or opportunities the American President boasts about. We do not have to look to Russia to witness oppression nor should we hold the Russian people in contempt for seeming to wait so long before tasting the first wines of freedom. Perhaps as they struggle through the long process toward freedom we will at some point meet them halfway in our unfortunate trajectory of democratic decline.

In many respects the two nations are as different as day and night but the Earth is now too small and fragile for these titanic clashes of superpowers. After all, despite the differences, we are all accidently who and where we are. The rest of it, the ideological and intellectual baggage of prejudices is a post-womb injection, and whatever else might be genetically scripted and replicated, hatred is not: perhaps the will to hate, but not specifically what or whom. That comes with education.

— MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER