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In a dark time the eye begins to see.
- Theodore Roethke

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DRAWING BY NANCY DONIGER

ABUSING THE PEOPLE

BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

Not since the Port of Astoria attempted to blow up an old flour mill because it was going to fall down any moment has Astoria enjoyed such national embarrassment as with the current case of the Clatsop County District Attorney. Only Oregon Senator Packwood tops her.

In the sense that politics do indeed make strange bedfellows, District Attorney Leonhardt and Senator Packwood share the same pillow. Both are abusers, he of women, she of intelligence; both abuse the public trust.

Each should resign. Each has lost the confidence and support of their constituencies, and special elections should be held for both positions because each has almost a full term yet to serve, too long for non-elected appointees.

Leonhardt can be recalled if she refuses to resign. Packwood as yet cannot because federal officials are protected from voter recall. It is incumbent upon Oregon voters to modify the law to make it possible to remove corrupt or inept congresspeople as well as local district attorneys. (Recall is often used capriciously or with vengeance; yet without it the electorate is helpless to amend mistakes made at the ballot box.)

Astoria was wise to disallow Packwood from appearing at a local forum. Every city, town, hamlet and gas/saloon crossroads in Oregon should freeze him out to demonstrate the public no longer considers him their Senator.

District Attorney Leonhardt's case is more complex. Many clamoring for her head represent a repudiated political network she was elected to replace, and if her newer corruption or malfeasance disturbs the voters who put her into office, the club she shoved out would be mistaken to think they are wanted back. (Local political squires are in denial; there is no such club, they say.)

Some of the people who wish to remove the District Attorney from office would like all women to vanish from public life. The problem is that Leonhardt's troubles will be used against women who seek or serve in public office: In this instance women are in a position similar to blacks, Jews or gypsies -- each is judged as representative of all women whereas a man's indiscretions are regarded as his own. (Though it might be hard to believe, a few women are probably as corrupt or inept as men.) Leonhardt should be judged in the same manner as her predecessors -- not as a woman but as a person, woman or man, who is or is not worthy of the office to which she was elected.

Perhaps most damaging to Leonhardt is her refusal to speak directly and plainly about the accusations against her,

which include falsely accusing police officers of a crime and using her influence as district attorney to interfere with the legal process on behalf of her husband. She is responsible for a public explanation to the public who elected her. Instead she relies on a heavyhanded satire (a "Fairy Tale" indeed) written and distributed in the mail by her husband, she places paid advertisements in a local Nickel Ads, and she sends contradictory indictments of almost everyone in local politics to the U.S. Attorney General and CBS' "60 Minutes," claiming she is victim of a conspiracy to hound her out of office. Her explanations to local officials about her activities are just as confusing; and she asserts that her office is bugged.

While Leonhardt indulges in byzantine fantasies, Packwood awaits judgement by his Senatorial peers. He might be censured for his boorish and assaultive behavior toward women -- almost 30 so far have made complaints; he might be even asked to resign from the Senate, though that is not likely unless an avalanche of critical public opinion makes forgiveness of his sexpasses politically incorrect. If that happens the sardonically named ethics committee might dramatically reenact Pilate. Earlier (and perhaps still) Packwood tried to uncover dirt on his accusers -- the old hypocrisy that sexually active women are assumed smirched, discreditable and, as every rapist claims, "asking for it."

Packwood long pretended respect and advocacy for women's rights and has used this rather hypocritical claim as a defense for his disrespectful sexual advances. His career as Senator has been as a front man for anyone with money enough to pay for his expensive and influential services. His richly lucrative breakfasts with lobbyists, who lay out large sums to break bacon with him, are famous.

Lately Packwood's visits to his constituency in Oregon have been as furtive as a fugitive in flight. Though his peers in the Senate, not wishing to curb or be examined for their own questionable behavior, might let him go free, the people he betrayed and lied to in his last campaign should have the final judgement. Turning him out of office, however stiff the legal and political obstacles, should be the goal of every Oregon voter.

The Erotomaniacal Senator. The "Bumpkin" District Attorney (her husband's description of her in his "Fairy Tale"). Union busting in Astoria. The OCA and its "Son of 9" ballot measures targeting intolerance, prejudice and bigotry. Measure 5 gutting schools, the more useful public agencies and services. Not a great year for Oregon or for its reputation as a clean state and pioneer in civil liberties and political ethics.