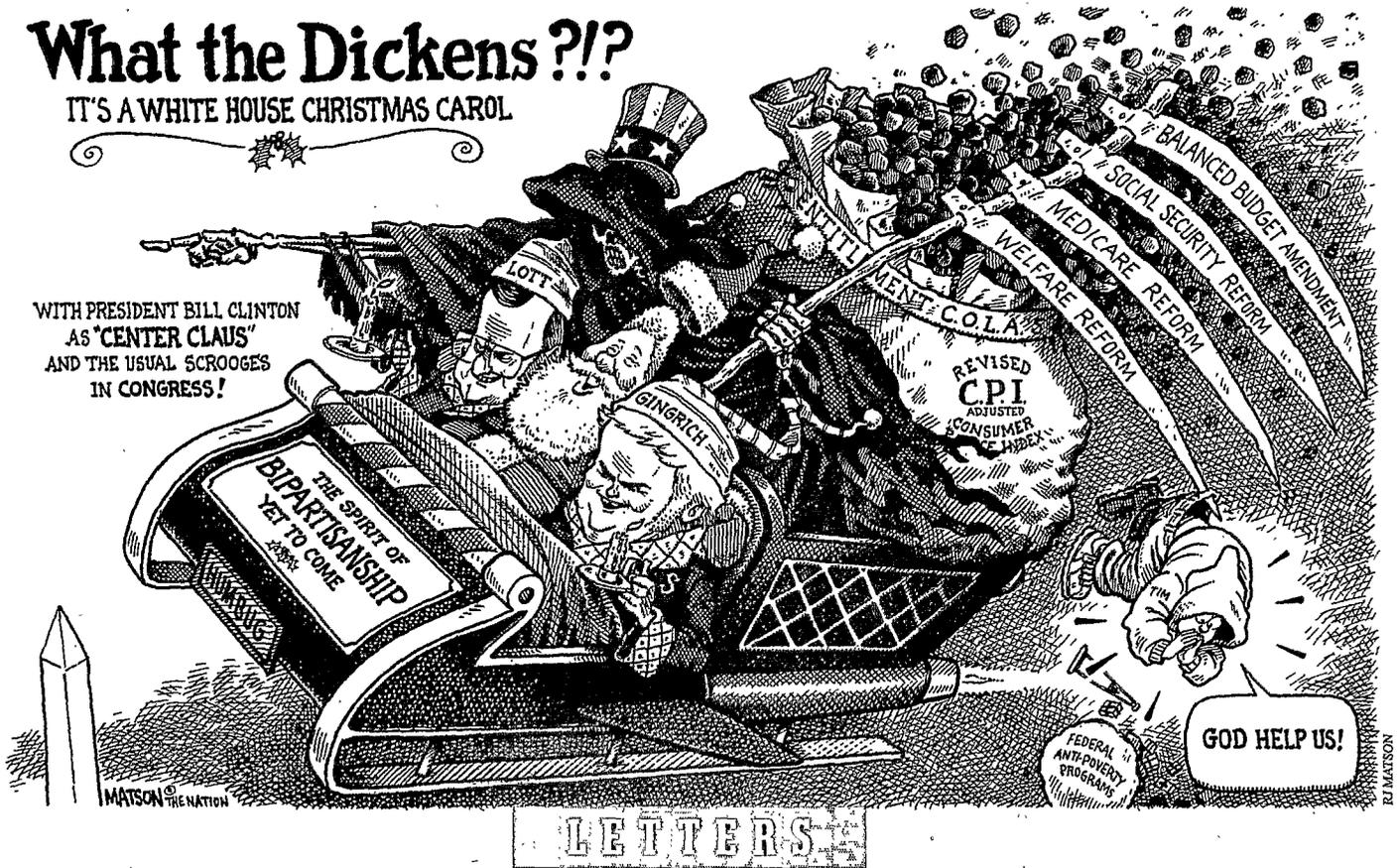


# What the Dickens?!?

IT'S A WHITE HOUSE CHRISTMAS CAROL

WITH PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON  
AS "CENTER CLAU"  
AND THE USUAL SCROOGES  
IN CONGRESS!



LETTERS

## WELLSTONE'S DAMAGE CONTROL

New York City

David Corn, in his analysis of Paul Wellstone's victorious re-election campaign ["Wellstone's Appeal," Dec. 2], neglects to mention one of the Senator's less impressive performances: his vote for the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), lending his good name to the idea that it's O.K. to pass laws preventing homosexuals from marrying one another. Is his support of this outrageously unconstitutional bit of G.O.P. fag-bashing part of his "populist message"? Why did the courage and decency of the Senator who opposed the welfare bill fail him when it came time to defend the rights of homosexual Americans? Ask Wellstone and you get this answer:

"I voted...in favor of [DOMA] because...I do not believe we should change the definition of marriage. I also cosponsored...the Employment Non-Discrimination Act" (ENDA).

Why on earth shouldn't the definition of marriage be changed? Like his President, this "populist" doesn't have the guts to hold fast to the government's historic role in protecting the rights of minorities, at least not all minorities. In the face of popular disapproval, or rather in the face of the Republicans' states' rights/theocratic agenda, even a Wellstone is willing to sacrifice the queers. ENDA is immensely valuable, but not as a ploy for politicians ducking their moral obligation to oppose dreck like DOMA. And G.A.O. reviews are fine, too, as long as they lead to legislation and aren't simply busywork to shore up a senator's progressive

credentials. Progressives don't vote for DOMA. When in the next year will we see Wellstone, or Charles Schumer in the House (another DOMA sellout), sponsoring a bill to guarantee homosexuals the same rights as other Americans, including the right to marry? Until then, we're very happy to see Wellstone back in the Senate, but his record as one of the few respectable legislators in Washington has been tarnished. *The Nation's* definition of populism should include homosexual people; progress isn't progress if it leaves us behind.

TONY KUSHNER AND CRAIG LUCAS

## CORN REPLIES

Washington, D.C.

I fear that talented playwrights Tony Kushner and Craig Lucas have confused populism with progressivism, but they're hardly the same (ask Pat Buchanan). Generally, populism is a challenge to concentrated power, particularly economic power. Senator Wellstone has done a bang-up job of confronting corporate special interests. His victory should be encouraging to those alarmed by unhindered corporate muscle and money politics. I, too, would rather Wellstone had voted against the obscenely named Defense of Marriage Act. When I covered his campaign I reported that his vote for it had cost the Senator a few volunteers and does tarnish his progressive credentials. It is a stretch, however, to ask if "fag-bashing" is part of his populist message (again, ask Buchanan how to combine fag-bashing with populism). The obvious

goal for *Nationites* is to marry populism with progressive ideals and notions. That's a tough task—one that the left has failed at miserably. For progressive populists to have any chance, they at least need a clear understanding of the terms of engagement.

DAVID CORN

## TIME AND TIME AGAIN

Washington, D.C.

Can't Alexander Cockburn get anything right? In his thoroughly unbinged and slanderous reply to my letter ["Letters," Dec. 2] regarding his "Beat the Devil" column on the *Dusko Doder v. Time* case [Aug. 26/Sept. 2], he all but ignores my corrections—not to mention my request for support of his claim that I had reason to "do Doder dirt"—and commits a whole new set of factual errors.

(1) In his reply, Cockburn reports that there was a trial of Doder's lawsuit against *Time* at which it was proved "beyond all reasonable doubt" that the magazine's "editors" knew the Doder story was false. The *Time* editors involved with this story knew no such thing, and there was never a trial of the Doder case. No one was "sworn." No one "testified." No "evidence" was "developed." There was an out-of-court pretrial settlement (though the court had to approve it), dictated, in the view of *Time's* lawyers, by Britain's notoriously repressive libel laws. The material Cockburn refers to consists entirely of unsworn, un-cross-examined statements submitted prior to the settlement by at-

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level obtaining in 1980, or even to the rates prevailing in Europe (about 50-55 percent), the government could raise an additional \$20 billion to \$30 billion annually.

Another way to tap this revenue source is to levy a tax on total wealth—on the net worth of those at the very top [see Friedman, "A Modest Proposal to Net the Rich," May 31, 1993]. In his study, Wolff points out that eleven European countries (including Germany, Sweden and Switzerland) have a combined wealth and income tax, as well as an estate or inheritance tax. Taxpayers must declare not only their income but their total wealth, which is then taxed at comparatively low levels—1 to 3 percent. If the same system were adopted in the United States, even at the lowest rates prevailing in Europe, the federal government could easily augment its revenues by \$50 billion per year or more.

Unfortunately, however, the Constitution prohibits a direct tax on individuals based only on their wealth: Article 1, Section 9 reads: "No capitation or other direct tax shall be laid," except in proportion to population. (That's why a constitutional amend-

ment was needed to impose the income tax in 1913.) One way around this obstacle would be to levy a one-time excess-profits tax on the increase in wealth over a specific period of time, which is simply a variation of the income tax. A 20 percent tax on the increase in personal wealth made over the past thirteen years by the richest 1 percent would raise \$800 billion, more than the total needed to balance the budget by 2002. A 40 percent excess-profits tax would collect \$1.6 trillion. That amount would not only eliminate the annual deficits but reduce the total national debt, thus lowering the annual interest payments. It would cover all projected Medicare payments, allow current government programs to continue and still provide a tax cut for the rest of us.

A significant increase in taxes paid by the very rich would not only generate large revenues required to balance the budget but would represent the fairest method of allocating burdens in this society. Congress has already squeezed the poor, and workers have borne the pain of corporate downsizing. Now it's time for the very rich to bear their fair share of deficit downsizing. ■

## LETTERS

C O N T I N U E D

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attorneys for both sides. Most of the statements on Doder's behalf, moreover, are opinions or character testimonials and have little or no bearing on the basic facts in *Time's* story, most of which remain unchallenged.

(2) Cockburn says the story "rested" on two quotes from former U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union Arthur Hartman. That is false, as any disinterested reading will show.

(3) Cockburn claims there were no statements on *Time's* behalf in the Doder matter from people "not on [*Time's*] payroll" and that "no *Time* Moscow correspondent" was prepared to back up the story. Both assertions are false. There were statements on *Time's* behalf from a former C.I.A. Director, a C.I.A. officer and Hartman. And I was a Moscow correspondent for *Time* and knew Doder quite well when I worked there. (Cockburn may have meant no current Moscow correspondent, but that's not what he wrote, and I'm not sure what his point was in any case.)

(4) The *Time* article no more accused Doder of being a "paid agent and traitor" (Cockburn's current version) than it accused him of "espionage and treason" (Cockburn's original version). The main issue in *Time's* story was journalistic ethics in the cold war, not espionage or treason.

(5) Strobe Talbott, who had an entirely peripheral involvement with the Doder story and for whom Cockburn has an obvious personal animus, was not my superior when I was Washington bureau chief. *Time's* admittedly complicated pecking order is one of any number of things that Cockburn does not seem to understand.

(6) Cockburn stubbornly repeats that I was forced to leave *Time* as punishment for my involvement with the Doder story and now asserts that after my retirement I took a "new job" with

the Pew Charitable Trust, which he slyly suggests must have been more important to my "livelihood" than my book writing. Wrong yet again. As I explained in my first letter, I retired from *Time* on December 31, 1993, at the age of 57. More than eighteen months after that, in late June 1995—as my wife and I were winding up our work on the manuscript of *The Murrow Boys*—I agreed to accept a nine-month position with the University of Maryland Foundation as executive director of a demonstration project administered by the U.M.F. and financed by a Pew grant. Both the project and my association with it ended on March 31, 1996. Since then, my employment has consisted solely of writing, as well as researching a new book with my wife.

Cockburn still has not had the courtesy, let alone the ethics, to pick up the phone and call me to see if he has his facts straight. By continuing to publish things about me and the Doder case that are demonstrably untrue and quite easily checked, he has totally misrepresented my record, who I am, and what I stand for as a journalist. In the process, he has exhibited the very malice he falsely claims that I bear Dusko Doder.

STANLEY W. CLOUD

Washington, D.C.

■ I write as someone who has known Jay Peterzell for many years and in response to Alexander Cockburn's name-calling, distorted account of the lawsuit filed against *Time* magazine by Dusko Doder. To cite just one egregious perversion of the truth, anyone who knows about U.S. versus English libel law knows that Doder had no case here. For Cockburn to claim otherwise is laughable and relies on a tendentious misrepresentation of the evidence submitted to the British High Court of Justice.

One doesn't have to agree with the decision to publish the story to acknowledge that Peterzell wrote his account with a scrupulous regard

for the facts. (Ben Bradlee's memoir confirms Peterzell's story and adds new details: a formal decision by U.S. intelligence agencies that no one should talk to Doder and their refusal to lift the ban unless he passed a lie detector test.) Under U.S. law, libel is the publication of falsehood with negligence or reckless disregard for the truth. Peterzell and *Time* were not guilty of that, and Doder and his lawyers knew it, which is why the suit could be filed only in Britain.

The journalistic issue posed by the Doder story is this: Should an allegation from a credible source about improper ties with a foreign government that led to a serious and still unresolved F.B.I. investigation ever be reported? (Conventional wisdom to the contrary, Vitaly Yurchenko's information was exhaustively vetted and everything that could be checked proved accurate.) Clearly the press does report such things if the person in question is a government official, viz., the case of Felix Bloch. Are journalists, by virtue of their profession, exempt?

It's not an easy question. But it hardly taxes the synapses to imagine Cockburn ramming such a story down the throat of, let's say, Tom Friedman, if a credible source accused the *New York Times* man of accepting gratuities from the Mossad.

MAX HOLLAND

## COCKBURN REPLIES

Petrolia, Calif.

■ Since the editor now imposes what is in my view an entirely arbitrary length of 300 words (sometimes grudgingly extended to 500 after tedious palaver) for letters replies, thus ending a fine polemical tradition, I am dealing with Cloud and Holland in my column this week (page 9). Supposedly readers chafe at long replies; at least that is what the editors tell me. Well, do you? The readers I meet say they love the battles.

ALEXANDER COCKBURN

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