

In Search of a Kindly Light

by Syed Maqsud Jamil

"L'ETAT cest moi". I am the state arrogantly declared Louis the xiv, the Sun King of France. The abominably absolute powers of a monstrous monarch was finding expression in a paranoid statement. France was enjoying an eminent position in Europe, the colonies were bringing resources and revenue and Louis was enjoying an unassailable suzerainty. In a way, he was a blessed man. Still the people of France were in pain, the economy was in deep distress, the nobility was ravenously plundering the country, the clergy was remorselessly corrupt. The root cause of these ills was in fact a single man. The Sun King himself. He was morbidly in love with power and its attendant vices. The more he got, the more it whetted his appetite. It was a glorified captivity. Louis could not see beyond it and was oblivious of his duties towards his country and the people. His vaunted ego made him incapable of understanding the perishable and transient nature of mundane possessions and powers. His heart was impervious to the kindly light of humility, fairness, sagacity and tolerance. Thus he laid the ground for the cataclysmic doom that overpowered his progeny. Louis the xvi, and the people of France in the form of an apocalyptic fury called the French Revolution. Oh! poor Louis the xvi! had his grandfather remembered that saying: "For successful living keep your heart softer than your head."

The gentleness of heart is a trusted redeemer of mankind. It manifests itself in many virtuous actions and disposition. They represent a vast range of human qualities which save human beings from many disgraceful pitfalls and most of all from a tragic end. Humility, civility, fairness, sagacity, sensibility, moderation, tolerance, kindness, love and charity are the virtues that readily come to our mind. These are the builders of a model society, a great country and of course an ideal human being.

In rational human beings, fear remains within normal bounds and is generally benign in nature. But for some, it is carried to extremity. The calamity starts there. A siege mentality develops. The need for worldly possessions and power becomes a pathological obsession. It is such a state where there is little regard or concern for the fairness of the means and the pain it may inflict. The brute might of ego scorns the idea of virtuous actions. Families are devastated by it, societies develop festering wounds and fall into a state of moral torpor, countries plunge into horrendous civil strife of Rwandan kind.

There are many examples to illustrate these tragic spectacles. Let me start with the family, preferably of the most prosperous society of the world. The husband of Lorena Bobbit was not happy with the sexual gratification his wife was offering him. He demanded more from a woman of apparently frail constitution. She could no longer put up with the animal lust of her husband. Mr Bobbit's genital was severed by his desperate wife, Munir, a scion of a noted and wealthy physician couple of the country was not content with the life of plenty and a beautiful wife. He brutally murdered her and paid with his life. He certainly lacked a humble and gentle approach towards life. The kindly light was missing in his life.

The most recent case of domestic tragedy to jolt the Americans is that of O J Simpson, a celebrated football star. He is suspected to have killed his ex-wife Nicole and her lover Ronald Goldman in a gruesome manner. The shock of Lorena Bobbit and O J Simpson was so compelling that it led Barbara Ehrenreich to cast doubt about family as an ideal moral foundation, in her TIME magazine essay "Oh, Those Family Values". She observed, "Only with occasional celebrity crime do we allow ourselves to think the nearly unthinkable: That the family may not be the ideal and perfect living arrangement after all — that it can be a nest of pathology and cradle of gruesome violence. Surely the hearts of Lorena Bobbit, her husband and O J Simpson were not filled up with the kindly light. They were consumed by murderous rage and yes, even love takes hold of human mind.

How does it look when it

happens on a broader scale in the society? The cult of power, or more specifically, the cult of might is right and usurp law into themselves-humuch harm they can do to the society. Sometimes, the scenario may become demonic in its brutality. Baruch Goldstein, a Zionist bigot entered into the Hebron mosque armed with assault rifle. The Muslims were saying their early morning prayer in the holy month of Ramadan. The Israeli guards nursing hatred in their hearts against the Arabs forgot their duty and did not prevent his entry. Baruch shot wildly with the rabid fury of blind bigotry at the worshippers prostrated before God, the same God he worships and killed 29 faithfuls. He was the child of a state philosophy which advocates the creation of Eretz Israel on the lands of others. He did what he learnt from his society.

In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, five suspected military cops open fire on 50 meninos de rua (street kids) deep asleep on the city pavement in the dead of night. The hapless kids wash windshields, selligum, run drug, beg or steal in order to eat. Eight of them are killed. This was self righteous bravado of a macho culture.

Should we turn our attention to the society of our country? I have little taste for politics. It is not my cup of tea. Have we pondered over the alarming number of gullible youths we have sacrificed on the altar of campus battles and cadre wars? Was any one of them a scion of any political

leader, even of the lesser kind? When will the time come to say ENOUGH. It does not take great wisdom to say that kindly light is missing from our society.

Let us recall what iniquitous Belgian colonial policy for the perpetuation of power has done to Rwanda. All their favours were showered on the tall and light skinned Tutsi cattle lords who constituted only 15% of the population. The dark and stocky Hutu majority were abandoned to till the soil. Education and eventually public office became the privilege of the favoured Tutsis. When their backwardness and deprivation were hurting the Hutus, the Belgian colonists left in a hurry, leaving behind a country where hatred, mistrust, discontent grew thick and fast. It will perhaps not be unfair to believe that the Belgian colonists failure in leaving behind a legacy of kindly light is largely responsible for the Rwandan carnage.

Way back in 1989 in his inauguration speech, President George Herbert Walker Bush, the 41st President of the United States of America, spoke of the vision of a kinder and gentler government; he also spoke of thousand points of light. It was a lofty ideal, a noble call. But four years later, President Bush lost the election to Bill Clinton, apparently a political dwarf. From a seemingly unassailable position after the display of remarkable leadership in the Gulf war, he saw his dizzy popularity rating crash into unbearable defeat.

What actually went wrong with him? His answers was "The economy." I tend to think it does not speak the whole truth. He perhaps did not act on his call of kinder and gentler government, thousand points of light, made at his inauguration speech. Within one year, he went back on his promise of not raising taxes. His rad my lip statement on tax raise badly dented his credibility as a caring man. It was perhaps difficult for the American people to believe that a president who can go back on his promise within one year and not offer any humble explanation was really capable of building a kinder and gentler government in a recession hit country. The image of an uncaring and unkind man, perhaps settled even deeper into the public mind by his brutally disparaging remark

about Clinton's foreign policy knowledge. "My dog Milli understands foreign policy better."

By the time election was held, the enduring image of President Bush was that of an uncaring leader of the elites and the rich. All his illustrious credentials, the son of an senator, an ivy leaguer, White House chief of staff, UN Ambassador, CIA Director, Vice President for eight years. President for one term could do little for him. He was not the kind and caring leader the Americans were looking for.

Can there be a better prescription for good leadership than the one offered by eminent Chinese sage Lao-Tse? While speaking on leadership he said "I have three precious things which I hold fast and prize. The first is gentleness, the second is frugality, the third is humility which keeps me from putting myself before others. Be gentle and you can be bold, be frugal and you can be liberal, avoid putting yourself before others and you can become a leader among men". It is a tested fact that one cannot be a good leader if one does not hold in one's heart the kindly light of gentleness and humility.

Hasrat Omar (RA) the second caliph of Islam was the model of a humble leader in his living habits, his conduct and his utterances. When Jerusalem fell to the Muslims, he went there to take charge of the city. In course of it, while visiting a church, it became time for Zohr (midday) prayer. The Christian custodians of the city proposed that he could say his prayer in the church. Hasrat Omar (RA) declined the offer with great humility, saying "If I offer my prayer here, my people will afterwards convert it into a mosque". While describing the moral foundation on his caliphate, he said, "even if a single famished dog goes unfed in the farthest corner of Euphrates, the moral responsibility lies on me."

Abraham Lincoln said in his second inauguration speech "But let us judge not, that we be not judged". Indeed, we should not be harshly critical of those with whom we differ. There is great redemption in treating them with humility and gentleness. It is the kindly light which dispels the darkness of hatred, makes it easier for us to take the sting out of bellicose behaviour.

The business of governance

is no less easier today. It is no longer a question of dealing with the covetous territorial designs of your neighbours. The world has become an irreversibly integrated entity. Insular existence like Stalinist Albania is a prescription for retrogressive decline. Politics and diplomacy have developed into a highly sensitive craft, for some countries they are like highly combustible incendiaries. It is a high voltage field. Good and wise leaders find it convenient to tread firmly but gently.

They display a remarkable degree of self containment, studied restraint, imperturbable poise, ennobling moderation and tolerance, above all sensibility and gentleness of disposition. Vaclav Havel, a noted playwright and the last President of united Czechoslovakia, who conducted himself with much grace and dignity during the division of the country into Czech and Slovak Republics, made an ideal statement on the sensible attributes of a leader. He calls it good taste.

He observed "I have found that good taste, oddly enough, plays an important role in politics. Why is it like that? The most probable reason is that good taste is a visible manifestation of human sensibility toward the world, environment, people. I came to this castle and to other government residences inherited from communism and I was confronted with tasteless furniture and many tasteless pictures. Only then did I realize how closely the bad taste of former rulers was connected with their bad ways of ruling. I also realized how important good taste was for politics. During political talks, the feeling of how and when to convey something, of how long to speak, whether to interrupt or not, the degree of attention, how to address the public, forms to be used not to offend someone's dignity, and on the other hand, to say what has to be said, all these play a major role. All such political behaviour relates to good taste in a broader sense. What I really have in mind is something more than just knowing which tie to choose to match a particular shirt". What he said is not a tall order even for an ordinary person. What a leader needs to do is to cultivate sensible habits and hold a kindly light within. The task becomes so clear, the goal looks so within reach.

Let the world follow the path of kindly light, and build a blessed world at peace with itself. The realities may be depressing. But the hope remains. Because there never was a better alternative.

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Wit's End Cafe

by Etesham Huda

Wit's End is packed today
There ain't too many glowing cigarettes, but there's too much smoke

"No Smoking" signs are gone, it never made sense anyway
You can hear some familiar tunes, but it's not the Smiths
Sipping your coffee when you look at the window outside
You can see a Fuji blimp on the Boston sky.

The Czechs are playing their daily Back Gammon.
With a Marlboro in her fingers and a quick glance at your eyes

Radka would casually throw the dice
Mira and Jay are discussing politics, war games and fame
Frequently I heard Saddam's name
On the black chairs made of cane.

A girl call Mikka from Delft, sits next to my friend
Who's stands petrified, absorbing a tear jerking scene
Of French military executions on the TV screen
Behind me are Jeannine, Angela and Joanne

Who call themselves the "California Blondes"
Strangely today they are discussing where some exotic metals come from

While Alan on a table near the door
Will crank out queer passes at you more and more

I'm trying hard not to stare, but
Ten feet away on a chair

is a beautiful girl in dyed jet black hair [Veronica]
She's got Mikki glasses and an Armani coat in grey
Astonishingly fancy she is and adorable like a doll.

She could play Yo Yo with her heart, to make many of you crawl

But no way she can tell she's making my heart beat more
I realize now, that it's only because of her I'm writing this song

Rob is her friend, today he ain't that high
Paco too is here, but not Paco de Lucia

There comes Sandy with Ellen and her new Mexican friend
Who will study about the deforestation of New England

"Yo maan, coolin coolin, respect" Dan screams in the long cue

"Maan it's time my coffee is due"
Behind the counter the grinder's going wild

Look at Dave, he'll toss the cup in a style
Marcela and Romie talk about swan dives

Joaquin says in Barcelona a cat never has nine lives
My pal Big John "Bluetile" walked in with a cowboy hat today

It was all of our kick of the day
He dogleaps through the door

Says "Hey E. T. my coffee flask is all stoked"

My books are heavy and my jacket is soaked

Now Odette gently grips my shoulder with a hand that's cold

Says, this Dire Straits tune is never gonna turn old

Well I guess it has come to such a point

Maybe we should all step out to roll a "big fatty" joint.

We change with the times, but we should not change our values.

Then there was the brewery ad which really set the advertising world on fire. It showed bikini-clad film star Pooya Bhatt in a provocative pose. However, this particular ad was pulled out before long on orders of the Securities and Exchange Board of India.

An official said: "What has Pooya got to do with the product?"

Women's reactions, nonetheless, are quite interesting.

According to Vimla Patil, former editor of the widely-circulated magazine *Femina*. "Sexism is not offensive to women. It's fun. Even cat-walk presentations — the bra look and bustier look — are acceptable. No one can stop the trend, not even the women's groups."

Indeed, some of the ads are cute and humorous.

But Mr Chaturvedi is still angry. He says: "Where are we headed for? Have we forgotten our values, our culture?"

So the rash of advertising gems, most of them aimed at tickling the imagination of the consumer to induce him or her to buy, flow almost endlessly from the fertile minds of PR agency geniuses.

This appears to be the reason why India's public relations people, perhaps like their colleagues all over the world, have latched on to this marketing ploy. After all, if tourists flock to India to satiate themselves with temple art, why not sexy ads to sell a product?

Mr Chaturvedi, for one, believes that the shedding of clothes and inhibitions is a cheap method of selling a product. He says there have been highly successful campaigns which did not resort to such gimmicks.

Take Lalitaj (the Surf ad woman), for example. She's an ordinary woman, but how effectively she conveys the message. You don't have to remove her clothes to sell the product. Or the Liril ad — the woman in a bikini. But there is a touch of class. The message about freshness comes through.

But where does one draw the line between artistic freedom and vulgarity in the name of creativity?

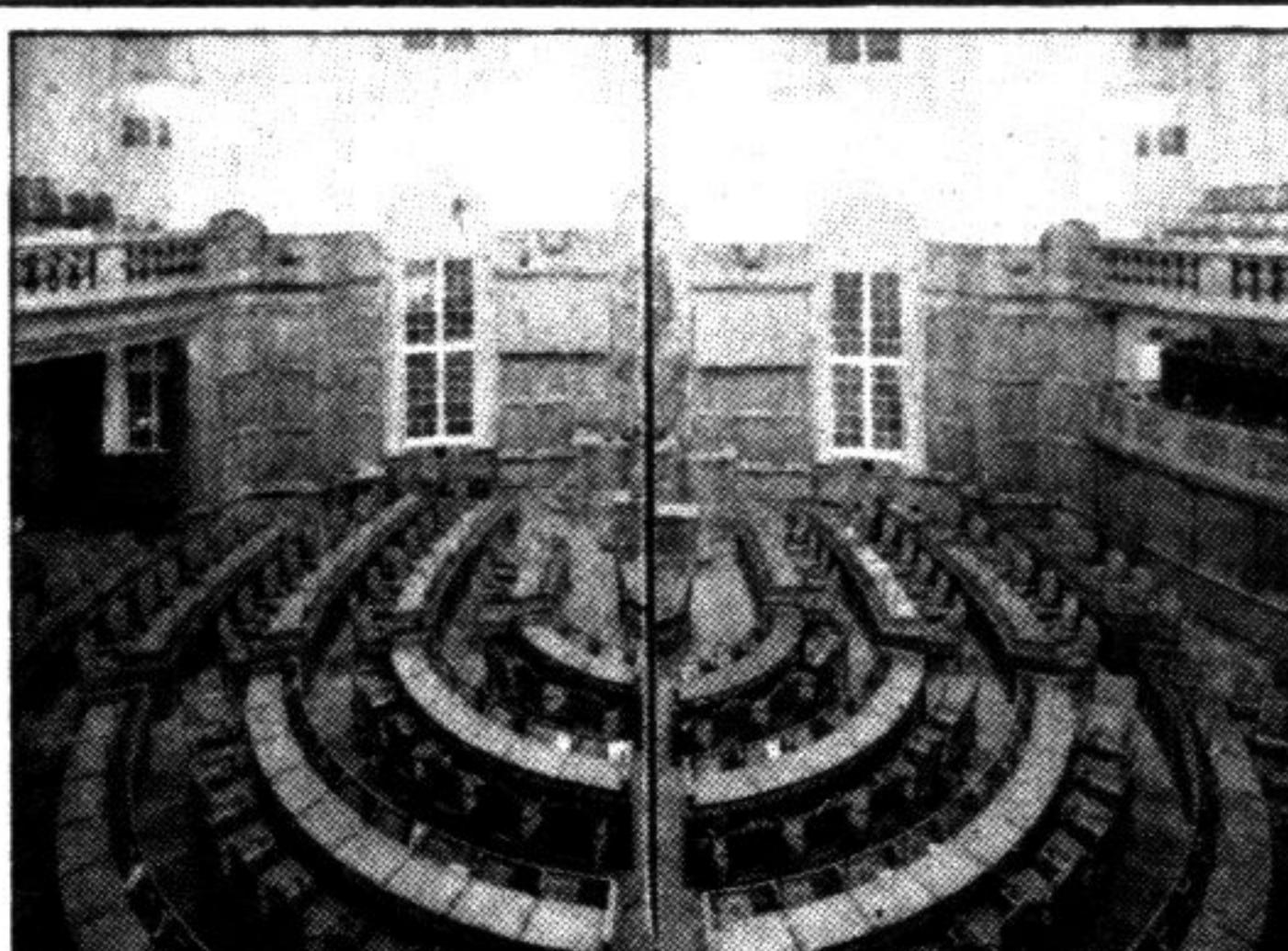
Says Mukesh Gupta, chairman and managing director of IB & W Communications: "I believe that one should not go that far. Only to the extent that it is relevant to the product. It is actually a question of how it is executed. It should not be vulgar, not obscene. The onus is on the communications people to practise self-discipline, to follow a code of conduct."

Incidentally, Mr Gupta's agency was among the first to walk the thin line that separates creativity from vulgarity with a 'bold' campaign for Cliff shirts. The ad shows an entwined couple in a car with a shirt on the bonnet. The caption reads: "A great shirt is not always worn."

The visual and the caption leave very little to the imagination. Would one call that vulgar or creative?

Says Mr Gupta: "In the case of Cliff, it has a certain sex appeal. We believe the ad is relevant. There is just a touch of romance."

— *Depthnews Asia*



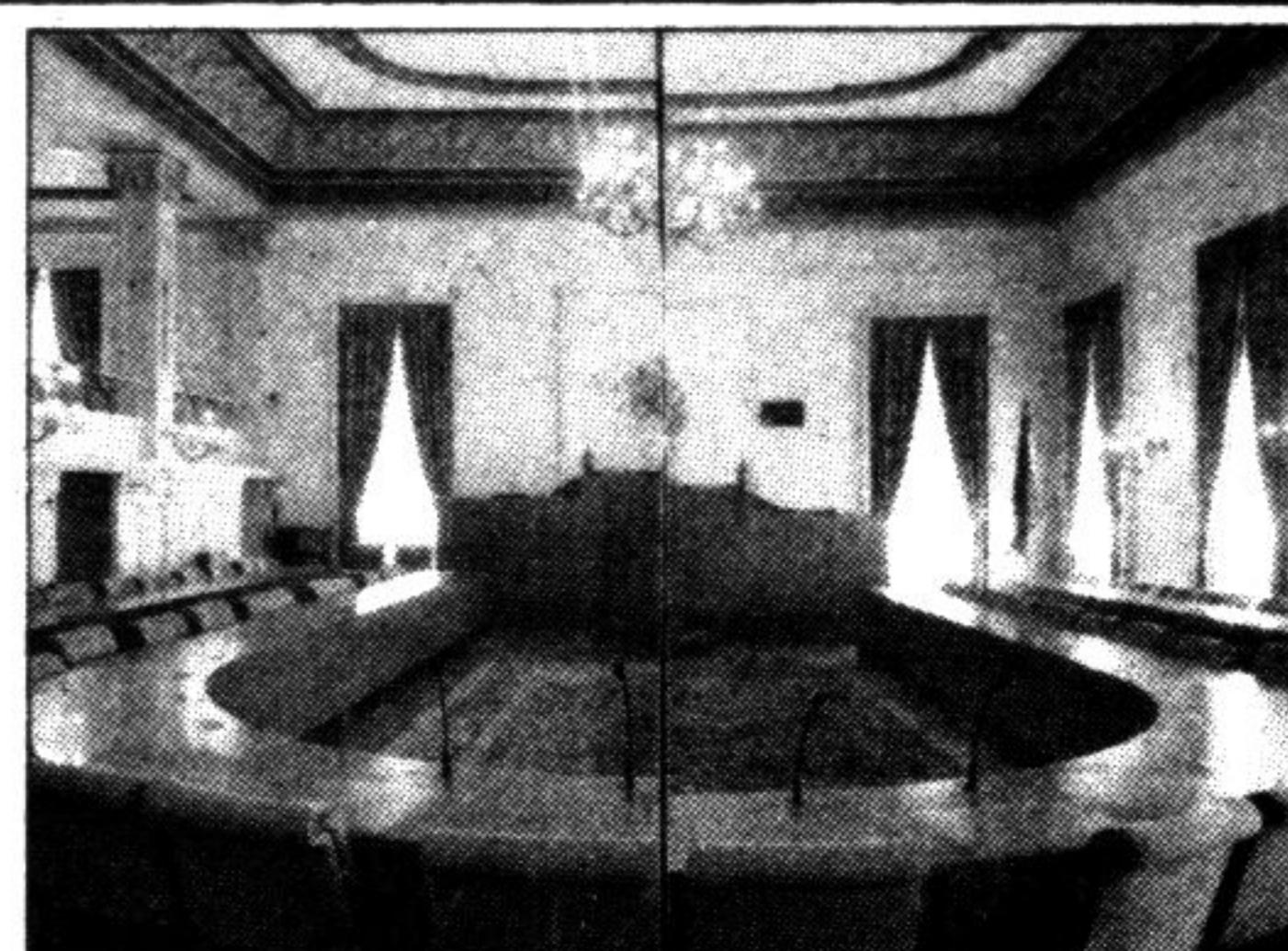
Congreso de los Diputados. Madrid.

BUILDING DEMOCRACY

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was allowed to move into the Royal Christiansborg Palace in Copenhagen. It was built between 1731 and 1740 on the ruins of the medieval castle of Bishop Absalon and stands on a palace island surrounded by canals. In addition to the parliament, it also houses royal reception rooms and the supreme court.

The relatively small total of only 179 deputies means that their seating can be arranged



Folketinget. Copenhagen

Debating culture

in an intimate horseshoe pattern. The Folketing presents amazing similarities to the Belgian parliament in Brussels. It resides in a former palace, a well proportioned classicist building which was designed by the architect B. Guimard in the years 1779-83 and restored by the architect Hendrik Seyaert following a fire in 1883. Here, too, members of parliament are grouped in a horseshoe arrangement.

will appear one day, particularly works that were not considered interesting because they were not by dissidents or budding post-modernists. But nobody clamours for post-petrovka prose, and the literature

sitting on elevated benches opposite.

The argument about whether it is possible to make better policies in old or new, in circular, oval, horseshoe-shaped or square parliamentary chambers is not only a question of significance of architecture, but also one of practical functionality. Some believe that the juxtaposition of actors and audience as in the theatre represents the ideal form for the parliament-

ary confrontation between government and opposition, of ministers and deputies. Others believe that the brotherly circle, as in Bonn, is the best democratic parliamentary form, because it favours joint problem-solving rather than aggressive confrontations.

However, one fact must surely be undisputed: the more intimate their structure, the more vigorous and productive parliaments are.

— Courtesy: Deutschland

which writers were a central part.

With the coming of reform, the intelligentsia ceased to act as the voice of people denied the right of expression through the ballot box.

It also forsook its uncompromising hostility to authority (by accepting a share of power in parliament and political parties) and its superb

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Poets Go for Apartments Rather than Stadiums

Nina Bachkatov writes from Moscow

that were optimistically awaited at the dawn of *perestroika* (restructuring) — books that publishers, or writers, were supposed to have kept in the drawer."

It is still possible that some



Alexander Solzhenitsyn:
Attacked for returning