

## George Bush may be forced to eat his broccoli yet

by Kathleen Klenetsky

The man who thought he was God has entered into the roughest political waters of his life. The U.S. economy is in a desperate free fall, and neither he nor his vast army of advisers has the faintest idea what to do about it. His Caesaresque march into the Persian Gulf is threatening to become a political liability, with opposition, both at home and abroad, mounting by the day. Members of his own party turn tail and run when he shows up to campaign for them. And, to the extent opinion polls can be believed, the so-called "popularity President" is suffering one of the swiftest declines in approval ratings in recent memory.

Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the sharks are circling. Bush is coming under some of the most severe criticism yet heard since the final days of Jimmy Carter, and is heading toward the same political bottomless pit into which the hapless Carter tumbled back in 1979-80.

### Gods of Olympus warn Bush

Bush has apparently fallen into such disfavor with some portion of the policy elite that even James Reston, the former *New York Times* columnist who inherited Walter Lippman's mantle as the Establishment's media oracle, came out of retirement to deliver a broadside against the President. Writing in the Oct. 21 *New York Times*, Reston charged that Bush has created a host of "not only avoidable but predictable troubles for himself," which have "hurt him because they raise questions about his judgment."

Accusing the President of stupidity, flippancy, and lack of foresight, Reston went on to knock what are supposed to be Bush's greatest foreign policy victories: his raid on Panama and his invasion of the Persian Gulf. In Operation Just Cause, Bush "invaded Panama against his treaty commit-

ments to the United Nations in order to capture a two-bit dictator, and he didn't know what to do with him when he caught him." Then, "having defied the U.N. in Panama," Bush relied on it for Operation Desert Shield. "It wasn't enough for him to blockade Iraq and punish Saddam Hussein as 'another Hitler,' but he insisted on sending the biggest U.S. Army since the last war into the desert, not knowing how to get it out and facing once more the taunts of the armchair warriors, who say he must not only restore the independence of Kuwait, but also get rid of Saddam Hussein and the threat of Iraq's Army as well."

This is a "dangerous place for a President dropping in the popularity polls and facing both a deficit crisis and a midterm election," commented Reston, adding, in an allusion to the secret Yale society of Skull and Bones, that Bush sometimes is "all bones and no skull. In such a pickle, a little half-time skull practice won't hurt."

Any number of scandals exist which could bring Bush down, the Panama invasion being just one. On Sept. 23, CBS News's "60 Minutes" aired an exposé about the thousands of civilians who had been killed needlessly by U.S. soldiers, which hit Bush hard. Although hushed up in the U.S. media—*EIR* was the first to break the story last January—the fact that so many innocent lives were destroyed by American forces was hardly a secret. Thus, the decision to broadcast the story signaled a potential move against Bush.

The same theme has now been taken up by Norman Cousins, the former editor of *Saturday Review* and member in good standing of the Establishment's liberal wing, in the Oct. 16 *Christian Science Monitor*. Citing the "60 Minutes" segment, Cousins wrote: "The question logically arises whether the President was part of a coverup," and suggested

that the U.S. government was involved in war crimes, and that appropriate action under the law should be taken if CBS's charges prove true. "The Panama episode is part of a continuing series of events pointing to a fundamental change in the relationship of government to the American people," he charged. "The big difference between what happened in Nazi Germany and what is happening now is that the American people not only have the opportunity to redress despicable actions, but have a mandate to do so."

Moreover, the scandals around the S&L antics of Bush's sons Neil and Jeb have popped up again. The same issue of the *New York Times* which carried Reston's warning shot, also ran a lengthy article on Jeb's less-than-savory dealings with a now-bankrupt S&L in Florida, while the case of Neil's involvement in the Silverado thrift bankruptcy is still simmering away.

### Depression daze

While Reston may be right that most of Bush's troubles were predictable, whether they were avoidable is another question. After years of flat-out lies that the United States was experiencing an economic recovery, the reality of the national depression has finally caught up with Bush in the form of the budget mess. Bush's fundamental problem is that he adamantly refuses to drop the policies that led to the current catastrophe.

The flip-flops, temper tantrums, and other infantile indulgences—epitomized by his contemptuous "read my lips" remark—with which Bush has responded to the economic crisis underlying the budget fiasco, has been read correctly by many Americans as indisputable proof that the man in the White House can't do his job.

Bush's budget follies have drawn an extraordinarily negative response. His inept handling of the budget has made him a "wounded President" who may never recover, says CBS television news, and has created "high anxiety" internationally, according to a recent *Time* magazine cover story.

As a consequence of the President's incredible performance, the Republican Party is headed for disaster in the November elections. "I'm afraid we're in a free fall," a top GOP campaign consultant confessed to the Oct. 11 *Washington Post*. "With the President waffling on the tax issue, our base is eroding and the Democrats' base, especially among senior citizens, has a real chance to firm up." Said another GOP strategist: "We're really getting slaughtered, because the President looks indecisive and the administration looks rudderless." Some analysts predict that the Republican Party will lose 15-20 seats in the House—which would mark their worst congressional showing since 1982.

Bush has become such a political pariah that Republican candidates are actually refusing to show up with him at pre-scheduled joint campaign appearances, or, in some cases, are going ahead with the event, but denouncing the President in his presence.

The polls paint a bleak picture. A *Los Angeles Times-Mirror* survey published in mid-October showed that Bush's approval rating had plunged 21 points since early August, to 55%, the lowest rating of his presidency. According to a survey taken by the Wirthlin Group for the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), 69% of voters think that the country is headed in the wrong direction. This is the highest number the Wirthlin poll has turned up since the last months of the Carter presidency.

More recently, an ABC News-*Washington Post* poll found that nearly eight out of ten persons questioned believe that the U.S. was "pretty seriously off on the wrong track." The President has undergone his sharpest decline among the elderly and blacks—those sections of the population which are being hurt the most by the depression and the administration's pathetically inept response to it.

And things will just get worse. Even though it seemed, as *EIR* went to press, that some form of budget accord was about to be reached, that will only resolve the immediate problem of whether the government will continue to operate a little longer. Otherwise, reports about the agreement's contents indicate that it typifies the same tax hikes and spending cuts approach which will simply exacerbate already severe depression conditions.

### Cry havoc

Ironically, Bush chose to launch his Operation Desert Shield partly to divert attention from the country's economic woes. Yet, what is happening instead is that Bush's inept handling of the budget is setting off a train of thought in the mind of many people that goes like this: "If the President is doing such a rotten job on the economy, can we really trust his judgment when it comes to the lives of thousands of American soliders, and maybe the world's oil supplies?"

A spate of recent polls suggests that Bush's dirty little war is becoming increasingly unpopular among average Americans. A CBS News-*New York Times* poll taken in mid-October, showed that those who disapprove of Bush's handling of the Gulf crisis had risen dramatically, from 17% in August, to 34% in early October. Bush's biggest decline in approval ratings on the Gulf crisis registered among Americans 65 and older—hardly hippie leftist types. In an ABC poll conducted a week later, 64% surveyed said they support Bush's policy in the Mideast, down 14% in a month.

Meanwhile, anti-war activism is on the upswing. On Oct. 20, tens of thousands of people bearing signs reading "No Blood for Oil" and "Fill Stomachs, Not Body Bags," poured into the streets of 20 cities to protest Bush's imperialist intervention into the Persian Gulf. In New York, where an estimated 10,000 people turned out, former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark told the crowd: "We're here because we have an imperial presidency as unrestrained as any military dictatorship that ever lived. . . . We're here because we have a paralyzed Congress."