

but deciding to run in 1988 is not one of them. In fact, it is one of his few redeeming qualities. Of course, there was William Jennings Bryan—three time loser. And Hubert Humphrey, who ran unsuccessfully in 1960, 1968, 1972, and desperately wanted to run in 1976 but was unwell. And George McGovern, who ran in 1968, 1972, 1984, and only reluctantly decided against another run in 1992.

There was also Franklin Roosevelt, vice presidential loser and victim of smears. Adlai Stevenson's crushing loss to Eisenhower only positioned him to secure the nomination again four years later. In the meantime, John F. Kennedy tried to grab the vice presidential nomination, was denied, but would not be deterred for long. Lyndon Johnson ran unsuccessfully for president in 1956 and 1960. In 1984, with Ronald Reagan at the peak of his popularity, a whole stable of Democrats ran. Gary Hart's losing campaign put him in the classic position of being the frontrunner next time—and would have been had he not been forced out by scandal.

This lesson of running also applies on the Republican side. Consider Richard Nixon's presidential races. He ran every chance he could get. So did Reagan, who ran unsuccessfully in 1968 and 1976, and finally, at an advanced age, campaigned twice more. Such is the record of political success stories. Duck-and-cover is not the credo of the usual nominee of either party.

One of the factors intimidating the Democratic non-candidates is the popularity of George Bush. But part of that popularity is due to his being unchallenged. Week after week passes in which his political vulnerabilities are unexplored, a lacuna that is not merely bad for the Democrats, but for our democracy as a whole. Bush's policies, or lack of them, ought to be inspiring the instinct for combat, not paralysis. Take his decision to support those trying to prevent women in Wichita, Kansas, from getting abortions—exercising their options as protected by law. No Democrat has stepped forward to attack Bush's cynicism. Isn't there a Democrat with something to say on this subject?

And one day soon, *someone* will be the nominee. Whoever the candidate, and however he fares, he will have one clear advantage over any newcomers to the nomination in 1996. He will have run. In 1992 the Democratic politicians have nothing to fear but fear. And in 1996 the voters owe those who absented themselves in 1992 precisely nothing. They deserve the miserable fate unhappy warriors almost always meet. Having taken no risks, they will have made no enemies. And nobody, including this magazine, will love them.

NOTEBOOK

PRISONERS' DILEMMA: Congratulations to the hostages who are finally free, and to their families, and to the diplomats who succeeded in arranging their release. But we must confess to certain feelings of dis-

comfort. For a start, is the foreign policy of the United States again to be pre-empted, redesigned, and oversentimentalized by the fate of these individuals? The distortion of American foreign policy by an obsession with hostages—an obsession that only strengthens the hand of hostage-takers—was one of the greatest mistakes, and led to some of the greatest embarrassments, of the late Carter and first Reagan administrations. The media, of course, love these moistening narratives. And the administration doesn't need to be dragged kicking and screaming to another national high, either. That is our second suspicion about this sudden breakthrough: it is politically a little serendipitous. Recall that George Bush's secretary of state was also George Bush's campaign manager. It is hardly a stretch to impute to James Baker the belief that the release of the hostages will clinch the campaign that is (with any luck) about to begin. The yellow ribbon strategy, you might call it. Baker is a man with an eye for the main chance, and this time the main chance was the cynical realignment of Syria with the United States as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Syria controls Lebanon, and is only irritated by these Iranian-controlled terrorists and kidnappers; Syria has influence with Iran, its old ally against Iraq; Syria requires the good offices of the United States to recover the Golan Heights from Israel. For local geopolitical reasons, in short, these hostage releases sort of figure. And so does their inevitable diplomatic accompaniment: American pressure on Israel. This has taken the form of a demand that Israel release its Arab prisoners without any guarantee that Syria (or whoever) release, or even provide information about, its Israeli prisoners. There is something grotesquely reflexive about the pressure this time, and something grotesquely inhumane. We understand that Americans value the lives of Americans more than the lives of Israelis. We do not understand that Americans expect *Israelis* to value the lives of Americans more than the lives of Israelis. Baker's roughshod ride over the sensitivity of Israel in this matter does not bode well for the peace conference to follow, and nobody should be surprised if the Israeli government makes this observation, too.

PAPER CHASE: Harvard Divinity School needs to institute a special course for politically insensitive enviros. As part of a campaign that reportedly included asking professors to integrate recycling themes into their lectures, bins were placed around the campus for "white" and "colored" paper. Someone, either a hypersensitive ecologist or a PC prankster, crossed out "colored paper" on one recycling bin and scribbled "paper of color." The student recycling coordinator responded in the divinity school's newsletter, "If this was a joke, I don't think it's funny. If it was done because of a legitimate concern about language usage, please let me know...." The conflict was conveniently resolved when the bins were relabeled "bleached paper" and "dyed paper." Now, for that ethnically insensitive white mail ...

CODA: With his essay "The Sight of Music" in this issue, Edward Rothstein ends his tenure as music critic of *THE NEW REPUBLIC* and begins the dark and lonely work of senior music critic of *The New York Times*. We congratulate our colleagues at the *Times* on their catch. Mr. Rothstein's writing will be sorely missed in our pages, and we will do our best to make it up to our readers. A successor will be announced very soon. •

NEW DELHI **POSTCARD**

GANDHI CREST

By *Sunil Sethi*

NEW DELHI

"Rain? Any Day Now, Says Weatherman," declared a recent headline, the latest in a series of weak reassurances. Temperatures here have hovered around 104 degrees since May, when Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated. A yellowish dust haze envelops the city all day. There are frequent power cuts, sporadic water shortages, and the threat of a cholera epidemic in the outer suburbs. The southwesterly monsoon, which has hit most of the subcontinent with full force, is inexplicably delayed here in the north, where the cooling rains normally arrive by June.

Parliament House and the other pink sandstone structures the British created before their departure in 1947 shimmer in the mirage of melting asphalt. Delhi's patch of power runs from these domed, colonnaded buildings to a couple of square miles of low, white bungalows, inhabited by a few hundred of the ruling elite. Although the bungalows were built in ascending order of homage to the British viceroy, many of the occupants represent less and less the notion of rigid hierarchy. Seven out of ten prime ministers of free India have moved for reasons of sentiment, convenience, security, and even because astrologers advised it. Still, each time a government changes (as it has three times in the past year and a half) many ministers refuse to vacate their bungalows. Some are evicted; others battle the bailiff; still others jockey for job extensions to keep their homes. Deputies owe the government thousands of dollars in unpaid rent. It may be an apposite metaphor for the collapse of the postcolonial order: rulers so preoccupied with abusing privilege that the country's federal structure no longer holds.

Others say India is ungovernable because of its resistance to change. Delhi, the seat of centuries'-old autocratic rule, clings to an imperial style. Since 1947 no non-Gandhi has kept the job of prime minister for

more than fifteen months. Already the unofficial source of power is Sonia Gandhi, Rajiv's widow. Little is known about her except that she was born an Italian, was a model wife and mother, and restores paintings in her spare time.

The new prime minister, Narasimha Rao, is an experienced politician (a senior minister in the Cabinets of both Indira and Rajiv Gandhi), an able administrator, a scholar of distinction. He promptly ended clumsy government controls on industry, welcomed foreign investment, and halted the slothful machine of decades-old Socialist planning. His gesture of consulting the opposition on key domestic issues—and sharing authority in his own party—promised a break with the arrogant politics of the Gandhis. Yet almost perceptibly power is beginning to slip from his hands. Rao, an old, sick man, heads a minority government; he lacks the vote-catching magic of the Gandhi name; his colleagues regard him as a passing interlude until Sonia Gandhi ratifies her role.

Ever since Tamil militants killed Rajiv, Sonia has shuttered herself in the mold of the grieving widow. She has shunned public contact and made no public speech. But the self-imposed seclusion has only enhanced her influence. She made one silent televised appearance: sitting in the marble rotunda of the presidential palace like a Madonna in a sari, receiving the country's highest honor, Bharat Ratna, on behalf of her husband. Millions of viewers watched transfixed as the power elite paid tribute to her nascent authority.

Her unspoken presence is felt everywhere as the intricate net of Indian politics closes in. Immediately after the assassination she was offered the presidency of the Congress, the 125-year-old party of India's nationalist struggle, in an obvious effort to garner sympathy votes in the election. She declined. A minority Congress government was installed in late June, but there has been a dramatic shift in mood since. Two factors, both Gandhi-related, explain it. First, had Rajiv not been killed, polling data from the two phases of voting show his party would have fared worse in the election. Second, Sonia is rapidly shedding her reticence to enter politics. Every minister in the government sought her blessing before being sworn in. Close party allies and Rajiv hangers-on were given key berths in the Cabinet. Hordes of Congress Party delegates from far corners of the country line her doorstep every day, urging her to contest from Amethi, Rajiv's vacant parliamentary constituency. The by-election is due in November, and she has until late September to declare her intentions.

The signs so far are that she is slowly gearing for battle. A careful campaign of photo-ops and press releases—rather like the issuance of court circulars—is being built up: Sonia receiving Julius Nyerere of Tanzania at home; Sonia convening a meeting of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, which she heads; Sonia-supporters urging strict security for her and Rahul, her son, now a sophomore at Harvard, and Priyanka, her daughter, an undergraduate in a Delhi convent.

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