

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Conservative clowns stage phony debate

The so-called conservative movement, which spent much of the past 25 years riding on the fame and fortune of Ronald Reagan, is now staring into a grim future. The 14th annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) here drew only 300 hard-core faithful, and most of them were cynical, at best, about the revelation that the man they'd given their money to over the last decade, Terry Dolan, died of AIDS recently, after maintaining what turns out to have been a particularly decadent homosexual lifestyle.

Stalwarts were distressed, since the cornerstone of the "conservative" movement's appeal to the masses has been the restoration of traditional family moral values. But beneath this rhetoric, the real agenda of these "conservatives" is the immoral hedonism of "free market" economics—the economics of the dope trade.

For all the pro-family talk, it is the replacement of the American System economics of Alexander Hamilton and Abraham Lincoln, with the corrupt economics of Adam Smith and the Viennese monetarists, that has destroyed the economic underpinnings of the American family—and the deep wounds that have been inflicted are not going to be healed with mere ideology.

At CPAC's three-day conference, President Reagan spoke, quoting the Viennese economist Ludwig Von Mises—unaware, perhaps, that he is the father of the school that hopes for

a crash of the U.S. monetary system. But more than the President's speech, or the speeches by most of the potential Republican candidates for the 1988 presidential election, the CPAC audience was thrilled by the prospect of the "big media debate."

It was going to be better than any professional wrestling match, pitting conservative columnist Robert Novak against ABC-TV's Sam Donaldson, the boogeyman of conservatives. The room was jammed to the rafters. Novak spoke first, and charged Donaldson with the crime of being prejudiced against the Reagan administration. All the knees in the room jerked, and the roar of approval was deafening.

The banality of Novak's charges made it easy for Donaldson to acquit himself. "So what?" he parried, and produced copies of Novak's column with headlines attacking the administration, to show that Novak was just as much against the administration as he was. If being "for or against the administration" is the criterion for judgment, said Donaldson, then anyone who is against Secretary of State George Shultz (as everyone at the CPAC conference was, including Rep. Jack Kemp, their darling for President in 1988, who called for Shultz's resignation), is also against the President, because Shultz serves at the pleasure of the President.

This reporter, who sits daily in the White House press briefing room within six feet of Donaldson, can certainly vouch for the fact that Donaldson harbors a deep resentment against the President. But if the conference organizers were serious about exposing the corruption and perversity of the national media, they should have done so directly. That would have meant exposing the interlocking directorates of elites controlling these institutions—not focusing on a run-

of-the-mill media whore like Donaldson. This, apparently, they were not willing to do.

In short, "the great debate" was a sham: proof of how a handful of manipulators, like Paul Weyrich and his late friend Terry Dolan, are suckering patriotic citizens into a dead-end cause.

But the good news is that their day in the sun has passed.

Republicans preparing for a 'dark horse'

Strategies for the 1988 Presidential race are firming up quickly in both parties.

Republican "conservatives" are rightfully panicked by their dim prospects for victory—thanks to the economic crisis and the "Irangate" scandal—and are working feverishly to pull their act together behind Jack Kemp—with Pat Buchanan not only denying he'll run, but refusing to even show his face at the CPAC conference, to avoid drawing any attention away from Kemp. Even evangelist Pat Robertson is being shunned in this climate of desperation.

However, it is a foregone conclusion that this is a losing battle. If Vice-President George Bush falters, the mantle will go not to Kemp, but to Kansas Republican Sen. Bob Dole. But if Dole, a weak campaigner, can't cut it, then the Republicans are prepared to move to a "dark horse," someone with no links to the current embattled administration. Earlier, this column suggested Rep. Bob Michel (R-Ill.), but he has aged significantly in the past year. A more likely candidate for the "dark horse" position is Donald Rumsfeld, the former defense secretary, or one of two or three strong Republican governors.