

Issue is power, not Tower

Politicians, like bankers or undertakers, try very hard to look staid and sober. Such was certainly not the case in recent weeks, as the Towering Inferno drama reached its fiery conclusion.

John Tower was rudely blackballed for the job of U.S. secretary of defence by the Democratic-controlled Congress. The tiny Texas Republican was tarred and feathered with charges that he drank up a storm, womanized like Casanova, and played footsie with defence contractors.

Question: why would a senior member of the Senate old boys' club, a Washington insider and an authority on defence matters, be turfed out on his ear by his ex-pals in Congress?

First, as the French so rightly say, *cherchez la femme*. The pudgy Tower, all of five foot and a hint tall, was accused of being a fornicator, adulterer and bottom-pincher. Frankly, I find it hard to envisage a nude Tower, with some dangerous temptress. If he did succeed, then more power to him and hurray for mind over matter. Still, Tower as a Washington sex machine? Please.

Rumor — highly placed rumor, at that — has it that Tower's ex-wife was the source of much of the smut about him. She, it is said, went to the FBI and announced that her ex would be secretary of defence "over my dead body." Truly, the ire of a spurned woman is more dangerous than Mikhail Gorbachev's missiles.

Democrats in Congress saw a golden chance to: a) embarrass the new president; b) leave no doubt who was really in charge in D.C.; and c) get back at Tower whose unlovely personality had made him many secret enemies. Like Brutus and his boys, they were just waiting to stab him in the Senate cloakroom.

And, of course, there was the women's vote. Women voters don't like womanizers, even though you can't womanize without the co-operation of women. Politicians, these days, are expected not only to be poor, sober and demure, but also chaste and God-fearing. Rogue hormones have no place in public office, say the lady voters. Those who break this code will soon hear the clacking needles of Madame Defarge's knitters and the thud of the guillotine.

Right you are, girls. Womanizers are unfit to lead nations. Why, look at that horrid little man Napoleon Bonaparte. I mean, there were all those poor women, and wives, and princesses and empresses. All twelve-timed, jilted and ditched. There's no way such a rat could ever manage a pastry shop, not to mention France.

Happily, there are men in public life who remain straight and true to their loved ones. There was that nice Mr. Hitler, for example. He had all this career and lifestyle stress but he never womanized. Nope, he went home to his bunker every night with Eva Braun. Best of all, when the chips were down, Hitler married Eva. Now there's a man fit for office.

Having scourged the fornicators from office, the Democratic Senate will now train its big guns on George Bush. The long civil war between Congress and the executive over who's really in charge that

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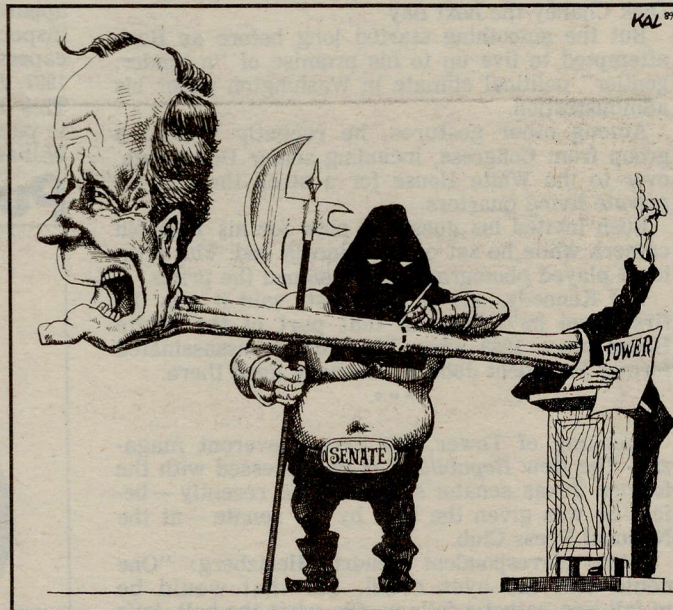


began with Watergate will now go into high gear.

In the old days, the Soviets used to test each incoming president to see what he was made of. Richard Nixon turned out to be a man of iron and John Kennedy a pretty wimp. Now that the Russkis are behaving themselves, Congress has taken up the custom. So Speaker of the House Jim Wright has thrown down the gauntlet.

Ol' Texas Jim is telling Bush that he and his Democrats will decide on domestic and foreign policy. He illustrated the lesson by leaving Tower's severed head on the White House lawn.

But angry Republicans won't roll over and play dead. They've got their own investigation into Wright's smelly personal finances which have all the probity and moral rectitude of a West Texas used car lot. Come to think of it, Wright's head, his slicked-down hair neatly parted down the middle, would look pretty good on the White House lawn, too.



If Congress ran only Peoria or Wabash, such shenanigans wouldn't be so bad. Alas, what Congress does — and what it prevents President Bush from doing — will affect the rest of the world.

Outsiders looking at Washington may rightly suspect that the Democrats in Congress are determined to paralyze the Bush administration. If this happens, progress on vital issues like Mideast peace, trade relations with Japan or Central America will become stuck in the Sargasso Sea of Congressional inertia.

As the cynic Ambrose Bierce noted a century ago, "Politics is the conduct of public affairs for private advantage."