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ON PAGE 2-D

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JOHN LOFTON

Tip takes a look at himself

Admittedly *Rolling Stone* magazine was not a place I expected to see an interview with outgoing House Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill Jr. But there he is in the Dec. 18/Jan. 1, 1987, issue, proving, with a vengeance, that what was said of the Bourbons can be said of him — that he has forgotten nothing because he has learned nothing.

For openers, the Tipper says he's an "old type of liberal," a "belly liberal" whose philosophy is "based around the home and the family, keeping it together." As a "Roosevelt liberal," a "people's liberal," he says he has wanted to "keep the family together," he has wanted Americans to "get a better home, a better education." And to accomplish all this the Tipper is clearly proud of the fact that he and others have vigorously used the power of the state and "changed the life of America in response to [all together now — J.L.] the will of the people."

The Tipper confidently predicts that by the time 1988 rolls around, "the conservatives will be dead." And the country will be either "moderate or progressive."

Well, now. One thing is for sure. The success of the Tipper's Big Government philosophy — though deplorable — has, indeed, changed America. No doubt about it. But these changes have in fact accomplished the *opposite* of what he says he is for. The modern welfare state has severely damaged the American family. It is more difficult than ever for young people to buy their own homes. And public education in America stinks.

Peering through his rose-colored glasses, and denouncing President Reagan for not believing in "the old priming of the pump," the Tipper assures us, however, that economically we will never again have "anything of the severe nature we had in the '30s." Why not? Because "there's too much knowledge. The nation's too huge." This, of course, was the precise view of many who argued that there was no way the Roman Empire could collapse. But it did.

John Lofton is a staff columnist for The Washington Times.

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Ironically, there are moments in his interview when the Tipper seems to realize that what he believes in is hogwash, or at least is thought to be hogwash by millions. For example, he gives this advice: "If you're a politician, don't go to sporting events and let yourself be introduced. Don't give them a target. No matter where you go, people love to boo politicians. It's an American trait, and they enjoy it."

Oh? But if the Tipper and others of his ilk have merely been responding to "the will of the people," then why in the world would "the people" love to boo him?

On foreign and defense policy, the Tipper is just as stupid as he is on domestic issues. He flatly denies that America's defenses were ever weak as regards the Soviets, observing: "There was never any window of vulnerability." But even Jimmy Carter acknowledged this problem. When Mr. Carter left office he proposed a defense budget increase which was about the same size as the one actually accepted by President Reagan.

On Vietnam, the Tipper says that he told President Lyndon Johnson that he was "absolutely wrong." He says he told LBJ: "How the hell can you run a war when you can't walk north of the line, and you can't shoot when you're shot at, and you don't mine the harbors, and you don't knock out the bridge coming in from China and the power plant. What the hell kind of a war are we in?"

What?! Tip O'Neill a *hawk* on Vietnam?! The mind boggles.

But to answer your question, Mr. Tipper, the kind of war we were in against Communism in Vietnam, sir, was a *no-win war*. You know, the kind of no-win war you now favor against Communism in Central America.

Indeed, we should have done, early on in Vietnam, all those things the Tipper complained about to President Johnson. But when President Reagan has tried to do some of these same things against the Communist Sandinistas in Nicaragua, the Tipper has screamed bloody murder. What a hypocrite!

The Tipper says that in Nicaragua we should have tried to negotiate with the Communist Sandinistas. And he faults the CIA, noting: "What they should have done was go down there with our Madison Avenue approach and really run a campaign. That's what they should have done."

Aaaaaaaaargh!

Communism in Central America will be defeated by a Madison Avenue-type public relations campaign?! The Soviets will be driven out of our hemisphere by some cleverly written advertising jingles? Truly a mind *is* a terrible thing to waste.

The Tipper says that Alexander Haig had been secretary of state for only three weeks when he (Mr. Haig) told him that Nicaragua ought to be "cleaned out." But, says the Tipper proudly and smugly, he can say now that it's six years later and "we're not in Nicaragua. I played a part in that, and I feel pretty good about it."

Well, there's no doubt the Tipper played an important role in keeping the Sandinista Communists in power in Nicaragua. But this is *not* something to feel good about.

And last and certainly least, the Tipper reveals himself to be a mud-slinging demagogue. Talking about the so-called "social programs" of our federal government — which in many ways are *anti*-social and which, alas, have either grown or stayed the same size under President Reagan — the Tipper says of Mr. Reagan that his cutting of these programs has proved that "he's more influenced and more interested in the greedy people of America than he is in those who are trying to work themselves up from menial jobs and get an education and help the rest of their family."

What a crock! But not a surprise. Because the one thing Tip O'Neill could never be accused of is being smart.

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