remembering, the camera followed one such woman as she picked up her bomb, stowed inside a basket, and carried it through the narrow streets of the Casbah, across the checkpoint (undetected), down into the broad, leafy avenues of the cosmopolitan part of town, and into a café packed with breezy, insouciant French colonials. She set down her basket by her feet, under a bar stool, nudged it under the bar counter, and then, in accordance with her instructions, dallied for a few moments, so as not to provoke notice. And here's where Pontecorvo's lucidity entered, because during the next minute the camera adopted her point of view. It would have been easy to populate those seconds with her perceptions of flirting, cocky soldiers or rich, spoiled colonial kids. Instead, Pontecorvo had his woman's gaze come to rest on a manifestly innocent toddler, lapping at an ice cream cone. She continued watching that child, and some other people, for a few seconds more, then got up and ambled away, out into the street and down the avenue; some moments passed (the camera returned to the café for one last look at the child, his cone now finished), and then there was a tremendous explosion. Pontecorvo seemed to be saying, "Yes, such tactics were perhaps necessary, but, my God, the cost! The terrible cost, and the awesome responsibility!" He didn't allow his agitprop characters any easy evasions.

It's that refusal to evade responsibility which has haunted us these past few weeks as the Senate considered once again, and probably not for the last time, the question of military aid for the Nicaraguan Contras. The proponents and the opponents of extending a hundred million dollars in such aid seemed to be inhabiting different universes, so divergent were their interpretations of what is going on down there and what this vote implies. That in itself was eerie, and gave one pause. But what has really been bothering us is the sense of distance, of sublime remove, on the part of the proponents of the assistance. It would be one thing if they were saying, "My God, what a sorry pass things have come to that today we have to vote to expand a war that will inevitably result in hundreds of deaths and the mutilation of hundreds of innocent bystanders—men, women, children. It's terrible, and yet we have to do it, for such-and-such a higher cause. We do it with heavy hearts and with our eyes wide open. Still, do it we must." However, they have said nothing of the kind. Through copious recourse to euphemisms of the "pressure for negotiation" and "nurturing the movement toward democracy" variety, they have managed to empty their position of all its actual consequences. Their vote will nonetheless have terrible consequences in the real world. The legislators have simply contrived, if only for the time being, to evade responsibility for them.

• •

Secure

Exchequer courts, as void by law,
great grievances we call;
Though great men do assert no flaw
is in them; they shall fall,
And be condemned by every man
that's fond of liberty.
Let them withstand it all they can,
our laws we will stand by.

THAT verse, and some other verses, just as euphonious (and, remember, this was in the days before writing workshops), landed the newspaper editor John Peter Zenger in a New York jail in 1734 on charges that he had "wickedly and maliciously" attempted to "traduce, scandalize, and vilify the government of Our Lord the King under the Administration of Governor William Cosby." His trial, of course, was a big deal—not as big as the United States Football League trial, maybe, but certainly one of the biggest outside the realm of sports. And so when the Litigation Section of the American Bar Association visited Manhattan twenty-five hundred strong last week (an imposing sight, twenty-five hundred people who can sue you) it commissioned a dramatic re-creation of the Zenger trial from Michael Tigar, a professor at the University of Texas School of Law. We attended the play's single performance, in the packed Starlight Roof of

"First it was Maria and Arnold, then it was Caroline and Ed, then it was Fergie and Andrew, then it was Tatum and John—and now it's us!"

• •

the Waldorf, and can report that Professor Tigar went way past ham (he went *whole hog*) into eloquence in the part of Andrew Hamilton, the aged, gouty Philadelphia attorney who persuades the jury to disregard the corrupt instructions of the judge handpicked by Governor Cosby and instead to find Zenger not guilty. "The question before you, gentlemen of the jury, is not of small or private concern," he said at the finish. "It is not the cause of the poor printer, nor of New York alone. No! It may in its consequence affect every freeman that lives under a British government on the main of America. It is the best cause. It is the cause of liberty."

A few minutes later, as Professor Tigar stripped down to his red Jockey shorts before donning jeans for the cast party at Elaine's, he told us that while seditious libel has since been abolished in these provinces (that means the government can't sue you for criticizing it) Hamilton's defense remains important. "The attorney general who argued the case for New York argued it on grounds of national security," he said. "That's what governments are still saying." On the other side of the room, also changing out of his Colonial garb, was Scott Armstrong, the man who had capably played the role of the unfortunate Zenger (though, in truth, the part consisted mostly of standing quietly in the dock and either nodding or frowning, depending on who was speaking). Mr. Armstrong, who is a former Washington *Post* investigative reporter and the co-author with Bob Woodward of "The Brethren," a book about the Supreme Court, said (when we called him a few days later) that he'd enjoyed his acting début, in large measure because the issues Zenger dealt with he deals with almost every day in his new job, as executive director of the National Security Archive, a clearing house for important information extracted from the government by various researchers.

"I spent the last five years preparing a book on foreign-policy decision-making," he said. "Unlike 'The Brethren,' where you're dealing with courts, which have a natural way of summing up their deliberations and letting you see the intellectual distillate, information on national security came and went. I started using the Freedom of Information Act very aggressively, and often I prevailed, but even when I got the stuff I would find I was missing a piece. And I'd talk to some other researcher and he would have that piece but be missing something else. And it slowly dawned on me that the government is bigger than we are, and we have to take it on from several vantage points." The Archive, which will be in full operation by year's end, collects documents, groups them by subject, microfilms them, and sends them out to libraries, scholars, and journalists across the country. "We've got wonderful stuff," Mr. Armstrong said. "I've got a tape of a wonderful song prepared by the Army Psychological Operations people, at Fort Bragg. It's supposed to sound like a West Indian singer, though what it actually sounds like is what it is—a Vietnamese singer who has learned English and is trying to sound West Indian. And he's singing a folk song. The first line goes, 'Had it not been the hand of America what would have been the fate of Grenada?'—it's the folk song that 'sprang up spontaneously' following the invasion of Grenada. The really interesting thing is that the accompanying documentation suggests that it was written in August. And the invasion was in October."

Mr. Armstrong told us about a number of other examples—documents suggesting that the Cuban Missile Crisis continued much longer than almost anyone suspected, documents hinting at links between the Saudi Arabians and the Nicaraguan Contras, documents telling all sorts of truths and half-truths and interesting lies. "This Zenger thing was wonderful to do—it's renewed me, it's made me realize again just how much everything stays the same. They don't jump down your throat for reasons of national security. They jump down your throat to quell dissent." Then Mr. Armstrong, who worked as a senior investigator to the Senate Watergate committee, mentioned one transcript that was unearthed in the process of those long investigations but, like so many others not bearing directly on

the President's involvement, was largely overlooked. We went off to the public library and looked it up, and decided to reprint a small portion of it here, in part because those who forget history are condemned blah blah blah but mainly because it's funny for the same reason that the Zenger trial was funny: powerful men get so frustrated trying to keep a lid on everything. It's from a conversation on July 24, 1971, between President Nixon and his aides John Ehrlichman and Egil (Bud) Krogh—a conversation, incidentally, in which President Nixon refers to meeting with his future Supreme Court nominee "Renchburg" and "that group of clowns." President Nixon has been informed about a leak, and after inquiring if the suspected leaker is "hawkish or dovish," and urging polygraph testing of three or four hundred thousand federal employees, he begins to mull over the possibility of creating some new security classification:

PRESIDENT: Which we would call what? Let's just call it a new classifica— Don't use TOP SECRET for me ever again. I never want to see TOP SECRET in this God damn office. I think we just solved—shall we call it— Uh, John, what would be a good name? "President's Secure—" Or, uh— "Eyes Only" is a silly thing too. It doesn't mean anything anymore. Uh—

KROGH: We used "Presidential Document" before with one of the counsel we were working with, but that didn't— There's some—

EHRLICHMAN: How about— Uh, uh, looking forward to the court case, I wonder if we could get the words "National Security" in it.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRLICHMAN: So that "National," uh, just say "National Security Classified" or "National Security—" . . . How about "Privilege"?

PRESIDENT: "Privilege" is, is not strong.

EHRLICHMAN: Too soft. Too soft.

PRESIDENT: "National Security—" uh, "National Security—" uh—

EHRLICHMAN: "Restricted." "Restricted."

PRESIDENT: Right. "National Security—" and, uh—I agree to "National, Na—, National Security—"

EHRLICHMAN: "Restriction"?

PRESIDENT: "Priority."

EHRLICHMAN: "Controlled"?

PRESIDENT: Or "National Security"—"Priority"—"Restricted"—"Controlled."

EHRLICHMAN: Oh, we'll— Let us work on it.

Chief

ARRESTS soar! Local corruption endemic! Residents have impure thoughts in record numbers! Cheap restaurants close! If you live in New York, you live with trouble. So it was nice to talk last month with John O'Rourke, who retires this fall as chief of the city's Fire Department, and learn that the number of fires in New York City has fallen by an average of seven per cent each year since 1980. "Right now we're still a heck of a lot higher than we were in 1953, when I joined the Department," Chief O'Rourke said. "But we're at an activity level we can handle. We're set up for it. It's not like the nineteen-sixties, when you'd hear them on the radio saying, '*Any unit*, respond to a fire at . . .' That's not a good way to run a fire department."

Chief O'Rourke joined the Department after stints in the Navy, a Brooklyn insurance company, and a firm that manufactured the diaphragms for gas meters. "Four hundred of us joined the same day," he told us. "The city was reducing the work week for firefighters from forty-eight hours to forty-two, so they needed lots of new men. They told us we could report to the nearest firehouse to where we lived at 6 P.M. to find out our assignments. I was living in Flatbush, so I went to the station on Rogers Avenue, and they told me Engine Company 215, in Greenpoint, which meant nothing to me. I reported there—it was a quiet station. I remember the first call we went to was a false alarm. My heart's beating a mile a minute, I'm determined to go out there and do my best, and then we get there and nothing." Commuting from Flatbush was difficult—a bus to Nostrand Avenue, the subway to Lafayette Avenue, and, finally, the GG train to Greenpoint —so Chief O'Rourke requested a transfer and was assigned to Pacific Street, which was a busier station. "It was a very exhilarating time—you're young and full of energy," he said. "Those fellows there were engaged in the study processes for promotion, so I joined in, and I was successful the first shot out of the box."

As a young lieutenant, he was assigned to Brownsville. "You've heard about the South Bronx burning?" Chief O'Rourke asked, and when we nodded he said, "Brownsville was burning long before anyone had heard about the South Bronx. We went from three hundred runs a month to nine hundred runs a month in a matter of a couple of years. We didn't realize, at first, it was a trend. We thought it was

Songbird and Poet