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JOHN ANDERSON FOR PRESIDENT?

"Chairman Brezhnev is right on the issue of the [nuclear] freeze." Can a man be elected President of the United States who said that in an interview in the September Penthouse magazine? That's the question John B. Anderson was asked on a TV talk show recently, and he didn't back away from that amazing statement or its implications.

The interview convinced Penthouse that Anderson is already running his 1984 presidential campaign. "There is no doubt," the interviewer concluded, "that Anderson is gearing up for another presidential race in 1984 -- one in which he envisions himself occupying the center between a right-wing Republican candidate and a Democrat who will run on a far-left platform."

How praising Brezhnev makes Anderson a "center" candidate is certainly not clear. The Brezhnev statement left the TV interviewer shaking his head about whether any candidate could travel very far with that bit of baggage weighting him down. Brezhnev has never been considered a political asset in any American election.

Anderson's respectful commentary on Brezhnev's nuclear freeze views were balanced by a vitriolic condemnation of Ronald Reagan's views on the same subject. Anderson accused Reagan of being "insincere when he opposes a freeze" and of "arteriosclerotic thinking on the subject of disarmament."

Anderson went on to charge that Reagan is "unable to come up with new ideas, new thinking" and, in practically the same breath, Anderson himself espoused the old, tired, discredited doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction (known as MAD). MAD is the doctrine of leaving American cities completely undefended against enemy missiles in the hope that both sides' ability to kill millions of people on the other side will deter war.

MAD is probably the most immoral national strategy ever invented because it deliberately uses civilians as wartime targets and assures that, if war does occur, the maximum number of people will be killed. The people who espouse MAD are usually those who adamantly refuse to permit the building of any kind of defensive system that would shoot

down incoming missiles (such as an anti-ballistic missile system or High Frontier).

Anderson's intemperate and belittling slurs on President Reagan on a wide range of issues continued through the article. Anderson charged that Reagan is "disdainful of those who are down there on the lower rung of the economic ladder and have not been able to make the climb to the top. ... With respect to the blacks, I really don't believe Reagan cares about them."

The Penthouse interviewer served up leading questions to Anderson, which he eagerly grabbed. Penthouse: "By default, is Reaganomics racist?" Anderson: "Yes, in effect." Penthouse: "Apparently, Reagan's sympathy for the country's corporate community is fostering greed on a grand scale." Anderson: "It's almost unbelievable."

The interview is revealing in other ways. The interviewer asked Anderson if his celebrated meeting with Teddy Kennedy before the Democratic Convention was really a "blatant attempt to keep your name in the news?" Anderson answered with a flat "Yes. My meeting with Kennedy meant nothing more to me than that. ... It was purely and simply an effort to con the media into giving us some attention."

Remember how John B. Anderson in 1980 was the darling of the media? They created him, they fawned over him, they presented him in the most favorable light. Now, two years later, he admits that he took advantage of that support and conned the media into fashioning non-news into front-page news just to serve his temporary political purposes.

In the lead-in to the interview, Penthouse solemnly reminds us that his "emphasis on personal morality rather than ideology is an important factor in John Anderson's politics." It is unclear whether Penthouse would recognize "personal morality" if it came walking down the street. It's also unclear whether Anderson would recognize it, since he allowed his interview to be printed immediately following 14 color photographs of sex acts by lesbians, and in such a way that the article cannot be read without seeing a couple of dozen ads for obscene films, books and devices.

The interview opens up many fascinating questions about politics, morals, and motivation. Was Anderson using Penthouse to launch his 1984 presidential campaign? Was Penthouse using Anderson to cover its indecency with a veil of politics and ideology?