

humor By **RALPH KEYES** JESSE GOLDSTEIN looked up at the faces hovering over him that spring evening in 1971. A little representative of the South Vietnamese government would be speaking soon and the waiting University of Connecticut students were growing restless. Lined up single file in front of the auditorium, the mob cracked and undulated like a snake about to strike. A single undersized cop tried to keep order.

Suddenly, a cry rang out: "Let's get that shrimp cop!"

Click! A lifetime of simmering fury raced through Goldstein's 5'4" frame. The years of taunts, of jeers, of people telling him to stand up when he was already on tiptoe, came bubbling to the surface. Goldstein's fist shot low into the air and from his mouth came a shout soon to be heard round the world:

"Short power!"

A few months later, disc jockey Mike Miller sat in his Wichita home watching television. The Jolly Green Giant was casting peas from on high and Miller shifted his 5'3½" body uncomfortably. Then credits appeared on the screen for *The Longest Day*.

Click! Miller shot bolt upright, his body laced with agony. "Why not *The Shortest Day* for once?" The pain intensified. "And how come there isn't a Jolly Green Midget?" Miller's teeth gnashed with anguished insight. The next day, a grimly determined gremlin launched Mike Miller's Miniclub on his radio show, banning listeners over 5'4".

In another part of the country, at the same time of year, Wendell Wagner was perusing the bulletin board of New College in Sarasota, Florida, straining his toes and

*up against the wall, six-foot oppressors!
uh, not that far up, please*



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occasionally hopping off the ground to read the higher notices. There were demands posted on behalf of women, gays—

Click! Click! The sophomore lowered his heels and pulled his frame up to its full 4'10" height. The next day, a list of Short People's Demands was posted a few inches below the bulletin board. Among Wagner's proposals were a low student center, bodyguards to prevent short students from getting stepped on and mandatory courses on all aspects of tall oppression and the history of short people.

Unknown to one another, Goldstein, Miller and Wagner were firing the opening salvos in a movement aimed at the very ankles of American society: the struggle against heightism.

Evidence of heightism in American society is overwhelming. Surveys consistently show that tall people are hired sooner, paid more and promoted faster than those of shorter stature. The Little Lie prevails in sports, corporate life, schools, the media and the very fabric of the English language, as Americans are led to believe that tall is terrific, short, silly. Examples of this discrimination abound.

Sold on height: A survey of 140 sales recruiters found that 72 percent chose a hypothetical 6'1" applicant over an equally qualified 5'5" candidate. Another study, conducted by a University of Pittsburgh administrator, found that a sample of their graduates six feet and over averaged significantly higher starting salaries than those shorter. Bonuses paid by companies ran 12.4 percent for candidates 6'2", compared with 4.2 percent for candidates graduated *cum laude*.

Police and fire departments are the biggest bigots, rarely accepting anyone under 5'7" or 5'8". Detroit's Sanshiro Miyamoto, though only 5'5", wants to be a cop so badly he's been sleeping in traction trying to reach the Detroit Police Department's heightist limit two inches above him. Weights on his legs got him only an inch and a half, so Miyamoto has been having his wife pound him over the head with a board, trying to raise the other half inch. He failed.

Pituitary politics: Every American President elected in this century save Calvin Coolidge was the taller candidate. (Results of the 1972 elections were unavailable at presstime.) Over a century ago, one study of the U. S. Senate revealed that the average Senator was 5'10½" tall, a height several inches above the national average at that time.

This study, completed in 1866, came shortly after the Altamont of heightist politics, when big Abe Lincoln brutally oppressed "The Little Giant" Stephen Douglas by winning more votes and getting elected President.

Little Edgar Hoover's long reign as

FBI director provided small consolation to short people. He claimed to be 5'9", instead of his actual 5'7", and kept his office chair screwed up high, the better to hover over visitors sitting before him in a low-slung couch.

Even when someone small such as Henry Kissinger "rises to the occasion," detractors tower above them, like Robert McNamara, who is alleged to have said of Kissinger, "Henry is, above all, a short man, and that complicates him—intellectually, physically, sexually, and so forth."

Sports shorts: Sports are a nightmare for the small, basketball being only the most obvious example. Even stars such as Houston Rocket guard Calvin Murphy (5'9") and New England Patriot end Randy Vataha (5'10") were drafted late, then had to "prove themselves." After being cut by the Rams, Vataha got picked up by the Patriots only at big Jim Plunkett's behest. Some sports, of course, favor little people, but who ever hears of them? Quick—name the winner of last year's Kentucky Derby. Riva Ridge, right. Now name the jockey. Or how about Enrique Pinder? He's the world bantamweight boxing champ.

Even when a small athlete does make it big, the sneering press goes berserk:

When Miami's 5'7" Garo Yepremian kicked a field goal to beat Kansas City in the 1971 A.F.C. play-offs, reporters crawled all over themselves in search of demeaning descriptives. "Somehow," wrote *Sports Illustrated*, "it would—must, surely, on Christmas Day—come to this. That the longest game in the history of American professional football would be decided by the smallest player on the field."

Media microshots: This nation's media are the worst perpetrators of heightist stereotypes. "Feisty," usually followed by "little," is the newspapers' favorite description of any untall person who doesn't shuffle and grin like Mickey Rooney (as in "Alabama's feisty little Governor George Wallace").

Jay Rockefeller is "tall, tanned and toothy" to the press, and Miami Beach Police Chief Rocky Pomerance is "a big, bright, benign bruiser." Roman Polanski, on the other hand, is described by a "friend" as "the original five-foot Pole you wouldn't touch anyone with." Favorite press epithets for small winners include diminutive, bantam, pint-sized, sawed-off, gnomish, mousy and molelike.

Language atrocities: The English language is based on an implicit heightist bias. Compare "look up to," for example, with "look down upon." Or "getting high" with "feeling low." Why are customers never long-changed? How come a person who gets shafted isn't

ever given "tall shrift"? Must our language stoop so high?

Short rage: When George Wallace was shot by Arthur Bremer, the press completely overlooked the heightist issue involved. The contretemps was dealt with purely in terms of its effect on the elections and as a manifestation of U. S. violence. But what of the implications of a man 5'6" firing at one 5'7"? Might not Bremer have been filled with short rage and been identifying with the oppressor in a symbolic act of self-hatred? Wallace was the symbol of diminutive uppitiness, "the fighting little judge," a man of whom his six-foot mother-in-law could say: "Why, George is hardly titty-high, but he's a giant."

Such comments might be a red cape for small assassins, filled with short shame. In fact, most Presidential assassins in this country have been small—or, as a pseudoliberal report to the violence commission put it, "not tall."

Giuseppe Zangara, five feet tall, even had to stand on a chair to get a shot at Franklin Roosevelt in 1933. He missed.

Reveille for runts: When Jesse Goldstein's fist slashed the air, he stood small and solitary. Goldstein called a few rallies but each time found himself alone, arms crisscrossed over his chest, singing *We Shall Overcome*. A petite university secretary did volunteer her Saint Bernard to pull carts filled with movement people.

By the time Wendell Wagner tacked down his list of demands just months later, consciousness was changing. Several newspapers reported his efforts and he received nine sympathetic letters. Six small students at the University of California at Davis wrote: "Hurrah for genetically superior shorts (excluding Bermudas)!"

Mike Miller, for his part, received nearly 300 letters from pint-sized and proud listeners who wanted to join his Miniclub. All signed cards reading, "I, ___ feet, ___ inches, am proud to be small, and do hereby swear to look down on big people." Members agreed to boycott heightist establishments, such as restaurants that purposely install their counters above eye level.

A movement was tottering to its feet. Confused, disorganized, hard to spot—but a movement.

Power to the pips! Support began cropping up in unlikely places. Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Edwin Cohen, 5'5", suggested in a speech that Americans under 5'6" should pay only half the taxes of taller people to compensate "for the inequities thrust upon the short people of the world." Merle Haggard recorded *Billy Overcame His Size*, which described well the agony of growing up small. (An unfortunate cop-out ending

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suggested that the way to overcome shortness is to die a war hero, saving big soldiers.) More attention began to get paid to a group founded 15 years earlier, the Little People of America, long considered too militant and radical because of their under-five-foot requirement.

Activists in the movement agree that the most important task they face is muting internal debate so that an insensitive nation can be forced to confront its fundamental heightism.

Actor Billy Barty, founder and former president of the Little People of America, has been feuding with his colleague Michael Dunn. Barty feels Dunn is maintaining derogatory stereotypes of little people. Dunn feels Barty is an Uncle Tom Thumb.

Even worse than such name-calling is the tendency to height worship that is displayed by some sawed-offs. When Mickey Rooney brags about his children, what tops the list is their height: One is 6'4", another 6'3". Even worse is *Laugh-In's* 5'4" Arte Johnson:

Married to a woman 5'7", Johnson consorts with known basketball players and has even tried to become an official in the notorious National Basketball Association.

Lowering consciousness: As the movement spreads, America's small ones will be made more aware of their oppression through consciousness-lowering sessions in which participants will be urged to keep the following points in mind:

- Never respond to salutations like "Hiya, shorty" or "Right on, runt."
- Do not look up at tall people. Stare them right in the belly. Make them look down. Back away, if necessary.
- Never reach up to shake hands. Stick your hand out no higher than a 90-degree angle, even if it means hitting someone's fly. Make the humiliation his.
- Never let tall people stoop to kiss you. Back off and suggest they first get on their knees.
- Never stand on tiptoe for any reason whatsoever, as this encourages subconscious stereotyping. Understand the implicit bias built into whatever you're tempted to reach up for. Demand, instead, that it be lowered. Tear it down, if necessary.

Standing small in the saddle: In order to publicize the movement, activists have decided to give annual awards for outstanding work in the field.

The Alexander Stephens Award for Diminutive Dignity will be given in honor of the Confederacy's Vice-President. Never topping 100 pounds, Stephens was once informed by a hulking tyrannosaur of a Congressman: "Why,

I could swallow you and never know I'd eat a thing."

"In that case," replied Stephens, "you'd have more brains in your belly than you ever had in your head." This year's Stephens Award goes to:

Dick Cavett—He replied when asked if he was self-conscious about his height (5'6"), "No, but I'm self-conscious about other people's."

The Alan Ladd Only Partly Selling Out Award is given in honor of one of Hollywood's few short leading men. Though he allowed himself to be placed on platforms before kissing lady stars, Ladd did not perpetuate little-man stereotypes. The Ladd Award winner this year is:

Billy Barty—Although he continues to accept little-man roles, possibly because he stands 3'9", Barty courageously turned down the offer of a TV series because he wouldn't change his name to Billy Bitesize.

A special John Brown Friend of the Movement Award is given this year to:

Burt Prelutsky—the *West* magazine columnist who wrote, "I personally have never taken any writer above the height

of 5'7" seriously. I'm not certain just how it is that height destroys their talent, but I suspect that they're constantly bumping their heads on things."

A petit-point plan: The following five-point program should lay a foundation for the movement to redress short inequities.

1. Proportional representation for little people. The movement will be organizing to bloc-vote toward this end so there can be more candidates like Brother George Wallace and Sister Shirley Chisholm, the five-foot Brooklyn Bombshell. For 1976, visionaries anticipate a Chisholm-Wallace ticket the nation can get under.

2. A boycott of heightist institutions: Thom McAn Shoe Stores, for example, which have been pushing Hi-Guy shoes, "If you want people to start looking up to you." Picketing of John Wayne and Vanessa Redgrave movies may be undertaken, demanding that they be rated T.

3. One basket on every basketball court to be converted to a hole in the ground.

4. Lower urinals. It is unconscionable that a small man should have to aim

upward in the performance of his bodily functions. Likewise with library shelves, bank counters and public telephones. Dangling from a receiver cord robs little people of their dignity.

5. An Equal Heights Amendment, eliminating size as a requirement for any employment whatsoever. All job interviews must be conducted over closed-circuit television, focusing only on the face.

Some members of the movement's Piranha Brigade ("Small but Deadly") have more extreme agendas, such as seizing Rhode Island as a sanctuary for small citizens and requiring mandatory birth control for anyone over 5'6". So far, there is little support for such proposals. So far.

But to lower the consciousness of an apathetic nation may, indeed, require dramatic and extreme acts. And once the sky begins to run red with the glow of burning elevator-shoe factories, the American people—especially those over six feet—should listen for a new, angry cry: "Off the Bigs!"

