

## Hoosier Cantos

The sanguine are saying that the turbulent sixties are behind us; we face a new era now. Welcome tidings these, but I am dubious. Few of yesterday's illustrious charlatans and busybodies have taken down their shingles. In fact some have actually enlarged them with new breakthroughs in quackery, and others like Ralph Nader are busily diversifying—safe automobiles, his first racket; safe ideas, his next. Still, as Jerry and his fabulous family abscond for the ski slopes and the Wonderboy opens his four-year soap opera, we are told that fresh winds caress the land. What they might bring remains the *pons asinorum* of the moment, and a hush has befallen the Republic. The pundits are giving the Wonderboy his honeymoon, and he, after squawking dizzily about impending catastrophe and promising nothing less than his Populist-Christian cure, now must divine something approximating a policy.

Well fair enough, and until he auspices his foolishness we at *The Alternative* will be good sports and refrain from noting his promises to scotch inflation, smite unemployment, bring in "newcomers," revamp the bureaucracy, never employ the likes of Cyrus Vance, and always tell the truth. As the Carter Administration tries on the moth-eaten robes of Camelot there will be no hoo-hahs heard from this quarter. Rather, this month I shall merely lay before you some of the random reflections that make me doubt we can soon shake the moonshine of the sixties. As I see it, we are steadily approaching the political and cultural greatness of Argentina, but that is another story.

Mayor Daley...apparently his life was a political tragedy of unparalleled dimensions. For twenty-two years he had governed the most prosperous and comfortable major city in America. I had thought his achievements in keeping Chicago civilized were even more impressive than his malapropisms, and he seemed to be one of the least noxious pols afflicting us. But oh, how I had misperceived the rogue. According to a documentary aired on the Public Broadcasting Service, life in Daley's Chicago was grimly suggestive of life in Schicklgruber's Germany. Furthermore, the *New York Times* obit forcefully implied that Daley exited for celestial parts but one step ahead of an army of government prosecutors, bill collectors, angry husbands, and enraged voters. The *Times* devoted fully 4 7/8 inches of column space to his accom-

plishments and 19 9/16 inches to his abominations. How he managed to get elected by 70% of the vote in 1971 and by 77% in 1975 staggers my speculative powers. Possibly the South Koreans were at work.

Justice...the sempiternal mirage of history's mischief makers. Always proclaimed as an urgent objective and an ultimate good, it has never been seen by the mortal eye, never been experienced save in legends or in good-government fantasies, and its zealous pursuit has cost mankind horrible suffering and loss. The world's greatest thinkers have proven it to be an absurdity, though fanatics like Dr. John Rawls keep popping up to hypothesize a new formula for it every few decades. Yet, notwithstanding the dubiety that surrounds it, there is no celebrated "Justice is Dead" movement, not even in the universities. Nor are any of our professional sophists very eager to champion such a movement. I know. I have suggested it to several at the Harvard Divinity School. The whole thing grows eerier the more one thinks about it. On the other hand pornography seems to be thriving in our supposedly rational era, and so long as there are gulls around to believe in the possibilities of endless couplings and volcanic ejaculations there is no reason to think people will perceive justice for the fraud it demonstrably is.

Liberalism...or at least that curious epidemic of vacuous rituals that so successfully made off with the term. Is it any wonder that the conscientious liberal so often prescribes coercion of his neighbor as the tool for social improvement? After all, he has often spent a lifetime coercing himself into accepting every contradictory new nostrum of liberal enlightenment, why not coerce others? The episodic political enthusiasts that violently take hold of the liberal's energies demand from him great personal discipline, for they are suggested by neither principle nor logic. Surely the liberal who once remonstrated against racial discrimination and who now hollers for busing and hiring quotas has had mercilessly to flog himself into subscribing to such contradictions. Once he viewed the black's "social disorganization" as a consequence of his origins in slavery, now his sages tell him it is racist to suggest that slavery hurt the black in any way. Yesterday liberals urged the rehabilitation of

criminals, today such rehabilitation is viewed as arrant imperialism. Once the world's oppressed peoples were all to be liberated, now only Chileans. The discordant goals of liberalism change with the season. Those who can coerce themselves into such a thicket of preposterousities will not scruple over coercing others.

This hollow zealotry which calls itself liberalism is really a denatured religion. Its influence within our government flies in the face of all our platitudes about the division of church and state. This ritualistic liberalism is a menace to liberty, made all the more dangerous because it lays claim to being the party of liberty. What friend of liberty would ever countenance the social experiments that our children are constantly forced to undergo in our school systems? First they are bused; then they are propagandized; always they are the guinea pigs of one or another of liberalism's utopian experiments. Yet all these high-minded tyrannies the so-called liberal piously accepts, for he is a dutiful member of the church. He is a votary who ceaselessly flails at his mortal flesh that he might discipline himself into submitting to each divinely revealed program for the New Age; let the heathen be boiled in oil if he too does not bow to the Holy Word of Liberal Humbug.

Women's Liberation...these women are angry! They have been denied the right to thrive as coal miners, steeplejacks, nuisance lawyers, and so forth. In America they are without status or influence. Of course a large grain of truth resides here, but the women of the fevered brow go too far when they blame "the forces of conservatism" for their lowly condition. It was not the conservatives or the establishmentarians who deauthorized American womanhood, but rather the liberators of this century's early years: the cosmopolitans, the champions of modernity, the forces of liberality and enlightened ways; and—truth to tell—they would have had my vote were I then up and about.

In 1921 Harold Stearns finished his preface to *Civilization in the United States* and vamoosed for Paris. The book was a compendium of essays characteristic of the dissenting intellectuals' grief-stricken diagnosis of bourgeois America. Philosophically disposed readers will be amused by it, for the progressive intellectuals of the twenties diagnosed America as suffering from about the same maladies that

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James Q. Wilson

## Zero-Based Budgeting Comes to Washington

*You remember ZBB—that government reform candidate Jimmy Carter promised. Here's how it will work.*

Charles Pettypoint, the newly-installed efficiency expert in the White House, was eager to see at firsthand how Zero-Based Budgeting was working. He decided to drop in on an agency getting ready to use it, and selected the National Park Service in the Department of the Interior.

He arrived to find the entire senior staff of the Park Service seated around a big table. The Director seemed pleased to have so distinguished a visitor, and asked Mr. Pettypoint to explain ZBB to his aides.

"Well, the idea is to get the most out of the taxpayer's dollar by making sure that every cent we spend is justified."

Everybody around the table nodded. "Hear, hear," one said.

"What we do," Pettypoint continued, "is to assume that the agency—in this case, the Park Service—has no money at all and then..."

Murmurs of outraged disbelief erupted, but the Director silenced the room with a firm glare.

"As I was saying," Pettypoint went on, somewhat stiffly, "we then ask the Park Service to justify each dollar of its budget and every activity it carries out. You will have to show us how much of your product or service you can produce for a given amount of money."

Only after a pin dropped noisily to the floor did everyone realize how quiet the room had become. Two older Park officials had turned pale, and the hands of another began to shake uncontrollably.

"Justify *everything*?" the Director asked.

"Everything," Pettypoint replied.

"This year?"

"This year. In fact, within the next three months."

A long pause.

"Men," the Director finally said, "I think we ought to cooperate 100 percent with this splendid idea."

"Sir, you can't be serious..." An aide started to rise, but was waved back to his seat by the Director.

"Of course I am serious. Mr. Pettypoint is serious. The President of the United States is serious. We will all be serious."

"Here is what we will do," the Director continued. "Smith, you tell Senator Henry Jackson, the chairman of the Interior Committee, that we are considering what would happen if we closed all the national parks."

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"Even those in the state of Washington?" Smith asked incredulously.

"Especially those in Washington," the Director replied. "But stress to the Senator that it is just a mental experiment, a planning exercise. We probably won't *really* close any of the parks in his state."

Suddenly, a beatific expression of sudden enlightenment spread across Smith's face. "Gotcha, chief."

"Gorstwinkle, I want you to get right to work on making up a list of national parks in the order of their importance, so we will know which ones to leave open if we can't reopen all of them," the Director said.

Gorstwinkle started to giggle uncontrollably. "Right away. Of course, I won't be able to keep the list secret, chief. You know, Freedom of Information and all that..." He broke up in laughter.

"I understand," the Director replied, allowing a thin smile to crease his stern features. "Nothing's ever secret any more. I suppose the Sierra Club is bound to find out that we are thinking of closing Yellowstone."

"The Audubon Society will suspect that we might be cutting back on bird sanctuaries," someone remarked.

"Wait until the Daughters of the American Revolution finds out that we are..." the speaker gasped for breath, as he shook convulsively with laughter, "that we are analyzing whether it makes sense to leave Independence Hall open!"

Howls rang through the room. One man staggered to the drinking fountain, and another had to loosen his tie to avoid choking.

Pettypoint bristled. "You are not looking at this constructively."

"Oh, but we are, Mr. Pettypoint," the Director replied. "I firmly believe that, as a result of this ZBB exercise, the public will realize that we need more money for more parks."

"But that isn't the purpose," Pettypoint rejoined.

"Isn't it?" the Director asked innocently.

Smith, wiping his eyes, shouted: "Hey, Pettypoint, did you know that some of those women in the Garden Club can hit a moving White House staffer at twenty paces with a potted geranium?" He collapsed back in his chair, overcome with hilarity.

Crestfallen, Pettypoint said plaintively, "Well, maybe the Park Service is not the place to begin. I suppose ZBB would work best if applied to a program that didn't have this kind of organized public support."

The Director stared at him for a long moment.

"Name one." □