

THE WAR AGAINST PROGRESS

IN the old days we used to start things and clean up afterwards. Now, for fear that there might be something unforeseen to clean up, we argue interminably. It is coming to take ten or more years to get "yes" on a project, and even then the possibilities of court action are not exhausted. Herbert E. Meyer calls it *The War Against Progress* in a book of that title (Storm Publishers, Inc., 4 East Main St., Box 252, Middletown, N.Y. 10940, 195 pp., \$11.95). He can't quite bring himself to recommend going back to the old ways, but he does think a happy medium could be struck.

The difficulty of reaching a happy medium is that the war against progress consists of hundreds of battles that seem unconnected. As Mr. Meyer says, no single battle is especially dangerous by itself. But when the battles are all added up, the wallop is significant. Mr. Meyer likens it to a bleeding that comes from

a thousand tiny cuts. It could kill a man.

Mr. Meyer describes some of the single battles. There is a fierce one now raging in Alaska. Since Alaska is relatively unpopulated, its citizens don't have much argumentative clout. The federal government owns most of the land, and the rules can be made by a distant landlord. Environmentalists in the lower forty-eight states who will never visit Alaska can set the tone in Washington, D.C. So we have a bill that would set aside 125 million acres of Alaska territory for parks, national forests, wildlife refuges, scenic rivers and plain "wilderness." This latter is a special category that would prohibit the building of roads of access, so not even the hardest outdoorsman would have much of a chance to taste a bit of wilderness life.

What the enthusiasts of caribou and grizzly bears do not see is the

connection between maintaining 100 percent environmental purity in Alaska and the future spread of urban slums in the lower forty-eight states. Geologists think there might be billions of barrels of oil under the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. There could be trillions of cubic feet of natural gas. Mining companies have already discovered a multi-billion-dollar deposit of copper, lead and zinc in wilderness territory in the western Brooks Range. The oil of Prudhoe Bay, which the environmentalists kept us from getting for ten years, could be a mere foretaste of what Alaska might contribute to the health and prosperity of the western world. Without new energy sources and industrial raw materials, wars and depressions loom. And urban slums grow in depression climates.

You could forget the need for Alaskan oil and gas if atomic plants were on the increase and coal technology had an unimpeded run. But the "separate battle" against the use of atomic energy has resulted in a temporary victory for the No More Nukes forces. As for coal, there is enough of it in the United States to run our power plants for hundreds of years and to provide a life-sustaining surplus for western Europe. Moreover, coal can be turned into gas and a methanol that could run automobiles. Everything on the coal front lags, however, as worries about

sulfur in the atmosphere and the possible warming effects of a "greenhouse" condition are debated. Wyoming and Montana cattlemen don't like the idea of a new Pittsburgh being built on the rich reserves of local coal that can be easily strip-mined. And in Colorado, skiers and forest rangers take a jaundiced view of a new molybdenum mine that will, if and when it gets going, solve many of the alloying problems of American industry.

A Suggested Strategy

Politicians who are kept in power by local interests find it safer to reflect local prejudices about the building of a new refinery or opening up a new strip mine in the neighborhood. The sum total of a lot of local "noes" make it difficult for a national "yes" ever to prevail. Mr. Meyer has no magic formula for changing this. He thinks the tide of the separate battles won't be reversed until there is a coalition of businessmen and labor leaders willing to volunteer as the natural leaders of a still unformed army. He sympathizes with executives and union officials who have been loath to stand up in the past—"no one," he says, relishes being "mowed down by the guns of an advancing army." We have been living through a time when reticence has been the better part of valor. But the time has arrived, he says, "to climb out of the

trenches and to lead a forward charge." It is now or never.

If nobody can say "yes" in the United States, what will happen to the rest of the world? The Cold War will swing toward a victory for the Russians. This will not help the Third World: Communism has nothing worthwhile to export. Other nations—France, Japan—may be saying "yes" to nuclear plants making use of breeder reactor fuel, but the Free World needs a strong United States to lead it.

For one thing, says Mr. Meyer, the U.S. is the linchpin of the world's communication system. The International Tele-communications Satellite Consortium, which has established communication links to parts of Asia, Africa and South America that could have been opened up in no other way, is a product of the U.S. space program. The domestic communications of Canada and Indonesia depend on hooking up with U.S. produced satellites.

A Call for Leadership

"There is not the slightest possibility," says Mr. Meyer, "that any of our country's allies could fill the various gaps—military, economic, communications, cultural—that would be created by the destruction of the U.S. All of our allies put together have less military firepower than we have. All of their

economies put together are weaker than our own. All of them combined lack the satellite-communications technology that we have. All of them combined do not equal a culture as dynamic, productive and creative as our own . . . We and we alone have the power. We have the broadest shoulders."

If the U.S. were to succumb in the "war against progress," it will trigger destruction everywhere. Brazil's newest industries would collapse without our computer technologies. Nigeria and Mexico need us as a market for their oil. A major part of Canadian industry would go bankrupt if there is a bad U.S. tailspin. Meanwhile, some of our allies are having troubles of their own with the anti-progress termites. It took the Japanese twelve years to open up their new international airport outside Tokyo at Narita.

Mr. Meyer's book deserves a wide reading. It makes a few mistakes: Samuel Slater did not build an engine factory, as Mr. Meyer says on page 27, he built textile mills from his memory of Arkwright models. But flyspecks are minor. The impact of the book could be devastating if it could only be circulated among those industrialists and labor leaders who have been elected by Mr. Meyer to change the no-growth climate that has afflicted us now for almost a generation. ⊗

Ideas on



A new public opinion must be created privately and unobtrusively. The existing one is maintained by the press, by propaganda, by organization, and by financial influences which are at its disposal. The unnatural way of spreading ideas must be opposed by the natural one, which goes from man to man and relies solely on the truth of the thoughts and the hearer's receptiveness for new truth. . . .

ALBERT SCHWEITZER

Where have you been? If you've just discovered THE FREEMAN and have found some helpful ideas, you may want to see our studies regularly. If so, just use the form below to reserve your place on our mailing list. (Any individual in the United States is added at his request. For foreign delivery, extra mailing costs require a charge of \$5.00 a year.)

Where are you now? If you're already on the mailing list, but have a new address, please use this form to let us know of the change and to minimize any delays in delivery.

Sorry, this is not a mailing card; please enclose in a stamped envelope.

THE FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC EDUCATION
IRVINGTON-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK 10533

Please add my name to receive THE FREEMAN, 64-page monthly study journal of free market, private property, limited government ideas and ideals; plus NOTES FROM FEE, a 4-pager devoted to libertarian methods, issued every other month.

I'm already on your mailing list, but have a new address, as below.

Name (Please print)

Street

City State

Zip Code

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OCTOBER 1980

The Case Against Protectionism	Lawrence W. Reed	579
Penalties on Employment	Ralph Bradford	586
The Enemies of Production ..	Roger Ream	591
Against All Enemies, Part II ..	Robert Bearce	599
Self-Improvement	Samuel Smiles	606
The Myth of the Stable Price Level	Joe Cobb	608
The Sphere of Government Nineteenth Century Theories: 3. Thomas H. Huxley	Henry Hazlitt	614
Time for America	Robert R. Hoyt	621
Thinking About Government	Rae C. Heiple	627
On Manipulating Others	Ingrid Rottinghuis	635
BOOKS:		
The War Against Progress ...	John Chamberlain	638

**THE FOUNDATION FOR
ECONOMIC EDUCATION, INC.**

30 South Broadway
Irvington-on-Hudson, New York
10533

Non-profit organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Foundation for
Economic Education, Inc.

RICHARD G. NEAL
3701 S. GEO. MASON DRIVE 1715 N
FALLS CHURCH
VIRGINIA 22041

D