

LETTERS

Maggie, Listen Up

In its recent zeal to shower Mrs. Margaret Thatcher with well-deserved accolades for resurrecting the British economy, the American press, including apparently REASON ("Maggie for President," Editorials, Oct.), has lost sight of the fact that there is another, much less appealing, side to Thatcherism: antipathy to the concept of a tolerant, open, and pluralist society.

In the last six months, the Thatcher government's record on civil liberties has been nothing short of appalling. In the spring, the government passed Clauses 28 and 29 of the Education Bill, which virtually prohibit discussion of homosexuality in British classrooms, even in an academic context. The prime minister recently reiterated her opposition to a British freedom-of-information act and in fact proposed a new, even more restrictive, Official Secrets Act.

October 1988 was a particularly alarming month for British civil libertarians. The government adopted no less than four measures that offended the principles of freedom. First, the government banned broadcast-journalism interviews with members of Sinn Fein, the political arm of the IRA, and of the Ulster Unionists, both of which are legal political organizations. Then, Mrs. Thatcher fired several civil servants (not, in itself, a bad thing) for the sole reason that they refused to quit their union (again, a legal organization). Next, the government decided to reverse the burden of proof in certain criminal trials (those of suspected terrorists), thus making the accused guilty until proven innocent. Finally, the government ended a criminal suspect's right to remain silent at a police interrogation without having negative inferences drawn in court. (See *The Economist*, Oct. 29, 1988, pp. 15-16.)

Without question, the Thatcher government's policies are infinitely preferable to the irrational, socialist alternative

offered by the opposition Labour Party. Also I, like REASON, would prefer Mrs. Thatcher to the nonentities advanced for the U.S. presidency by the two major American parties. But this does not mean very much—merely that competence is better than mediocrity. Being a good leader requires more than mere competence. It takes vision (the thing that Mr. George Bush could not seem to understand), and a fundamental understanding and respect for the rights of the people.

A government "will only achieve higher growth, only release enterprise, only spur people to greater effort, only obtain their full-hearted commitment to reform, when people have the dignity and enjoyment of personal and political liberty, when they have the freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the right to form free and independent trade unions." Or so said Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, in a November 3, 1988, speech to the Polish government at a state banquet in Warsaw. Someone should explain Mrs. Thatcher's words to her.

P. Michael Donlan
Boston, MA

Boo to the Cheering Theory

In his editorial "Why Vote?" (Nov.), Craig M. Collins implicitly accepts the cumulative value of votes as cheers for a party, but he discounts their cumulative value as a way of determining the winner of the election. He correctly points out the infinitesimal chance that one more vote for any candidate will influence the outcome but neglects the fact that in a close election even a modest number, following his advice, of votes for a third-party candidate (perhaps enough to make an audible cheer) may exceed the winner's margin of victory. If all these voters would have preferred the major-party loser to this winner, they would have obtained a more satisfactory outcome by voting for this candidate and thereby making him the winner.

It is in this sense that a vote for a

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third-party or independent candidate may be wasted. Though the perception of such wasted votes may be accurate, it indicates that the vote third parties receive must be less—perhaps far less—than the number of voters who would choose them if they could have them. It is inadequate as a representation of their potential support.

The trouble is not with the integrity of voters but with the election procedures in general use in this country, which are not well suited to a multiparty system. The presidential election, of course, is complicated by the electoral college, but in the more usual plurality system where the candidate wins who gets the most votes, one can win with a minority of the votes cast. It is quite possible that a majority is split between two others and would prefer either of them to the winner but cannot vote without choosing between them.

Faced with the necessity of voting for only one candidate if any, we who live in this country's western-most time zones still have the advantage sometimes of be-

ing able to find out the winner of a presidential election before we vote. We are then free to cheer for any candidate or party without regard to any cumulative effect on the outcome. I vote for a third party, as Collins suggests, but only if I can first learn who will win.

Herbert Rempel
Walla Walla, WA

Marcos Enhancing Liberty?

Michael McMenamin's review of *The Predator's Ball* ("Hero or Hustler?" Dec.) contained some choice comments on the character and morals of U.S. Attorney Rudolph Giuliani. However, I suspect that Mr. Giuliani's ambitions, if not his career, may come to an inglorious end. I refer to the racketeering indictment Giuliani has obtained against Ferdinand Marcos, Imelda Marcos, and several others. Many of them have just plea-bargained their way out of trouble. But Ferdinand Marcos himself is something else.

If you are going to tangle with Ferdinand E. directly, you not only have to be as good as Giuliani thinks he is, you had also better be the epitome of a Boy Scout. Any hidden agenda on your part, any pulling of punches to avoid embarrassment, any false posturing, or any other manifestation of base motives, and Marcos will chew you up and spit you out. He is the past master of manipulating statist desires into self-destruction. If this one comes to trial, I predict that we shall see a masticated and regurgitated prosecutor on the courtroom floor. I shall shed no tears over that. Marcos can no longer do us any harm. He may wind up doing us some good.

The Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) is nothing but a fancy conspiracy law. Almost anybody can be convicted for almost anything under its terms. It must go. Should Marcos happen to be the one who sends it on its way, he will have (quite inadvertently, mind you) done more to enhance liberty than to destroy it. His highly refined instinct for self-preservation will have led

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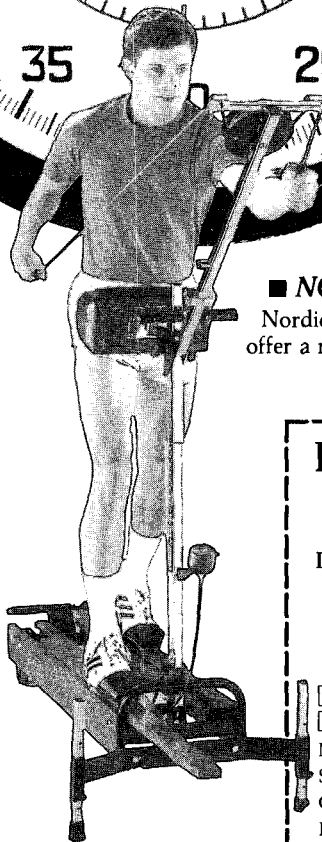
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him to negate his lifelong crusade to subjugate all who came within his sphere. This will cause him as much distress as he causes Giuliani. As Jackie Gleason would say: "How sweet it is!"

Dave Hanley
San Bruno, CA

Reclaiming Our Neighborhoods

Charles Murray's cogent examination of volunteerism and its connection to a freer society ("3-D Living," Nov.) poses a great challenge: Do we serve our neighbor, or do we turn away and allow the federal government to fill the void with costly, intrusive, and clumsy programs?

Our neighborhood platoons are alive. They hustle clothes and food to evicted mothers, they buy uniforms for inner-city Little Leaguers, and they replenish the blood supply when the alarm sounds.

Sometimes platoons inspire a nation. Do you remember "Baby Jessica"? She brought oilfield roughnecks to tears while the city of Midland, Texas, struggled for 58 hours to free her. How about the whales of October, three grays trapped beneath an encroaching blanket of Arctic ice while Eskimos and corporate oil men toiled to save them?

Platoons show us we matter. And Murray explains, by suggestion, why the work available to platoons is diminishing. Platoons form to fill "holes in the safety net," which, after all of us have gone back home, are almost always targeted for filling by our beneficent bureaucracy. Until we reassume the role of filling in the holes in our own communities, the gulf between the haves and have-nots will widen and disillusionment will deepen. Trading freedom, compassion, and self-worth for supervised isolation is a lousy deal.

Major E. Garret
Houston, TX

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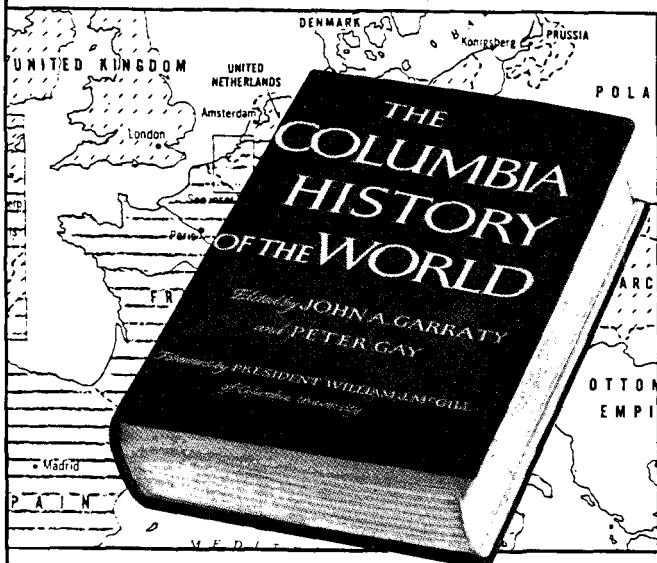
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A FREEZE IS NOT ENOUGH

ROBERT W. POOLE, JR.

As George Bush takes the oath of office to become this country's 41st president, a near-consensus is emerging that the budget deficit must be eliminated. Unfortunately, Congress, the president, and most of the media are covering up the true extent of the deficit, thereby masking the need for serious cuts in government programs.

Virtually every discussion of "the deficit" uses the number addressed by the Gramm-Rudman law. That number is actually the sum of two others: the federal government's operating deficit plus the surplus or deficit of the Social Security trust fund. The latter is beginning to run a huge surplus—courtesy of the higher FICA taxes that you and your employer have been paying in the '80s. And with that surplus, of course, the sum of the two numbers masks the real size of what ordinary citizens mean by the "federal budget deficit." For 1988, instead of the \$155-billion figure that we hear so frequently, the *real* deficit is \$252 billion, according to the General Accounting Office. And this real deficit is projected to continue growing, not shrinking, in the years ahead.

What is more, that projection is based on "other things being equal." It excludes two major, predictable contingencies for the next few years. One is the highly probable taxpayer bailout of the federal government's savings & loan insurance program—which could total between \$50 billion and \$100 billion. And the other is a recession (remember them?), which could easily add another \$50-100 billion to the deficit (since a slowdown in business activity means lower income-tax revenues and higher claims for welfare and unemployment benefits.)

Japanese bankers and other key players in the economy are well aware of these

facts. That's why they will continue to demand higher real interest rates to hold the government's bonds—unless and until the real deficit is brought under control.

Of course, what you hear from many members of Congress, and nearly every expert opining on the editorial pages of the nation's newspapers, is that the only alternatives we face are to raise taxes, raise taxes, or raise taxes. But even if George Bush had not pledged to avoid that route, it is simply not an effective way to cut the deficit.

Congress, of course, has powerful incentives to spend any new revenues. But also, because of the way the Gramm-Rudman law is worded, setting annual *deficit* targets, any increase in revenue simply boosts the amount Congress is "permitted" to spend that year. So raising taxes holds no hope of ending the deficit.

Nor does the "flexible freeze" proposed by Bush and advisor Michael Boskin. Merely holding down the rate of growth in spending, to keep it below the (assumed) continued growth in revenues, is unlikely to meet the Gramm-Rudman targets, let alone tackle the real deficit. To do that requires *real* cuts—and that means *eliminating bad programs*.

The consensus on the evil of the deficit offers us as a nation the best chance in several decades to force a hard look at where federal dollars are going—and to call a halt to indefensible programs. In eight years of Ronald Reagan, the only turkeys that were actually killed were General Revenue Sharing (\$5 billion a year) and Urban Development Action Grants (\$225 million). Now that the health of our economy is literally at stake, isn't it time to "just say no" to a host of boon-

doggles and plums for special interests? For example:

- farm subsidies that lead to higher food prices (about \$25 billion a year),
- the space station (a \$30-billion public works project for aerospace),
- the Superconducting Supercollider (another \$5 billion worth of science pork),
- transit grants to build subways in places like Los Angeles and to subsidize the operation of inefficient bus lines (\$3.8 billion a year).

There are tens of billions more of this sort of thing, larded throughout the federal budget—not even counting any of the so-called entitlement programs (lavish federal retirement benefits, Medicare, etc.), which could at least be frozen for a few years.

Then there are the commercial assets of the federal government. Last year's Privatization Task Force—a sort of "shadow group" that stepped in where the President's Commission on Privatization feared to tread—identified over \$300 billion worth of lands and business enterprises that could be sold off over a period of years if we are serious about eliminating the deficit. Among these are \$150 billion worth of government-owned commercial timberlands (*not* national parks or wilderness areas), the TVA, the Postal Service, the air traffic control system, and many others.

While the easiest thing would be to count the proceeds from such sales as revenue when received, the more sensible approach would be to use asset-sale revenues to retire federal debt, which would also help the deficit situation. If implemented, such asset sales would produce ongoing savings in interest costs of some \$28 billion, as well as reducing the burden on future generations.

Nor should defense spending be off-