

Tilting at Windmills



Since the attitude of liberal intellectuals toward *Time* magazine ranges from condescension to hostility, one fears that they will miss the useful items that do appear there. There was an excellent essay by Lance Morrow in the August 7 issue called "After Proposition 13, Volunteers Needed." If we are going to cut back on what government does, someone must fill the gap by doing the work that needs to be done. An example is care of the aging. The cost of this care, according to recent articles in *The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times*, is already threatening to overwhelm the national health systems of Sweden and Britain. And the situation will only get worse as the number of older people continues to grow. Volunteers could easily be trained to meet most of the needs of the elderly and could bring to their work the kind of concern and warmth that is increasingly lacking in our health professionals.

It is against this need for a massive rekindling of the volunteer spirit in America that the performance of Sam Brown and the leadership at ACTION has been so disappointing. As an old friend and admirer of Brown, I greeted his appointment with great enthusiasm and saw it as compelling evidence that I had been right in supporting the man who made it, Jimmy Carter. It has turned out, however, that the two are the wrong combination. (See the articles beginning on pages 12 and 28 of this issue.) If Carter had been a leader who could have told Brown what he wanted from the Peace Corps and VISTA, I'm confident Brown could have delivered. But Carter gets his programs from his subordinates, and Brown didn't have one. Instead he has

been swimming around in circles, using his intellectual sonar to make sure he avoided saying or doing anything to offend his left constituency.

This self-protective avoidance of risk is typical of agency heads serving under presidents who fail to lead. It is now going on, not just at ACTION, but all over Washington.

Another disappointment of the Carter administration is Max Cleland, the triple amputee Vietnam veteran who heads the Veterans Administration. He is rapidly gaining a reputation for caving in to the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, who care little about the Vietnam veteran who needs help the most. . . . The legal and financial professions are full of respectable cons—tricks that are legal ways of making free money. One example, as we pointed out a couple of months ago, is that Jack Kent Cooke and Edward Bennett Williams are enriching themselves at the expense of local sports fans by having the Redskins organization use its revenues to buy up the stock of other stockholders, thereby increasing the value of the Cooke and Williams shares as well as the price of tickets to Redskins' games. In other words, the fans who buy tickets are buying stock for Williams and Cooke, so that they won't have to buy it with their own money. "So what?" said our friends who are lawyers, when the story came out. "Perfectly legal." But our friends who aren't lawyers joined us in feeling robbed. Another example of the same respectable con appeared in the July 13 edition of *The Washington Post*:

"The Washington Post Company yesterday announced plans to buy back an additional 300,000 shares of its class B



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Illustration: Annette

common stock. . . . Since 1975 when a stock repurchase strategy was announced, the Post Company has purchased 1,977,000 shares of its class B stock. . . .

This move would appear to enhance the value of the Graham family's holdings in the Post. It would also appear to enhance the value of the shares held by Berkshire Hathaway Corporation, which is controlled by Katharine Graham's close friend, Warren Buffett. It's all perfectly legal and they are all fine people, but why should we buy stock for them—which seems to be exactly what those of us who buy the Post are doing.

In another follow-up to the Williams story, George Allen, the former coach of the Redskins, was fined \$3,000 by the National Football League because he had publicly criticized Williams. It seems that Article IV of the NFL's constitution provides: "No member nor any stockholder, officer, partner or employee shall publicly criticize any member of its management. . . ."

This I find further evidence to sup-

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port my insane but certain conviction that fascism will come to America, not in jackboots but in the smooth, suntan-lamp guise of the likes of Pete Rozelle.

Medical science has known for decades that salt consumption can lead to high blood pressure. But when the Center for Science in the Public Interest recently petitioned the Food and Drug Administration to limit the amount of salt added to processed foods and to require the amount of salt in a product to be listed on its label, the FDA said that since it is still collecting and studying the evidence on salt, it would be "premature" to make a decision on the petition. . . . If you've always questioned in your heart those defenses of the federal bureaucracy that cite how little it has grown since World War II, Spencer Rich of *The Washington Post* recently confirmed your doubts. While the federal bureaucracy has grown by only a third to 2.8 million since 1950, the number of people who work for universities, research organizations, and state and local governments who are paid by the federal government has grown to between three and four million. HEW, for example, in addition to paying its 144,000 regular employees, has 980,000 others whose salaries it pays through other organizations. So ask the real HEW to stand up and you'll see over a million people rise.

The vice chancellor of the New York State Board of Regents has proposed competency tests for New York teachers. Perhaps he should reconsider. He may not want to know the results, if the experience of Dallas, Texas, is any indication. The Dallas Independent School District recently tested 585 teachers. More than half failed. . . . An unhappy fact of national life in recent years has been skyrocketing real estate assessments—it seems to affect everyone except the influential, as we pointed out in a recent article by Joseph Nocera. The latest examples are Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter. As Martha Angle

and Robert Walters have revealed in their syndicated column, the Carters' assessment has increased only ten per cent since they bought their brick rambler in Plains ten years ago—and it has not increased at all since 1974. . . .

Another *Washington Monthly* theme is that government is run not for the governed but for the government employee. Here's our latest example: In Rhode Island, school closed for over two weeks last winter because of a series of snowstorms that shut down the state. However, summer vacation began on schedule for the kids. How come? The school departments and the teachers' unions in the state decided that the kids didn't need 180 days of school, only the teachers did. So they worked out a schedule whereby teachers—but not students—stayed an extra hour and a half at school until the time was made up. Wasn't the original idea of a 180-day school year that it would benefit students, not the teachers' union?

Now that the Supreme Court has managed to perceive—in the Guy Goodwin case—that prosecutors should not be immune from damage suits for their sins, I hope they will have enough sense of humor about themselves to reconsider their ruling that judges do have such immunity. . . . A recent Army study has recommended that the number of women soldiers be limited because they are absent from duty three times more often than men. But, on inspection, “three times” turns out to mean 9.5 hours per month instead of 3.3 hours. This slight difference is more than made up for by the fact that women tend to remain in the service longer than men. With a dwindling birth rate and a dwindling supply of male recruits we need women in the armed services. We are now turning away qualified female applicants, an absurdity in a time of an overall shortage of qualified people. A further absurdity is keeping women from the combat roles they can perform, on the grounds that there are

some combat tasks they cannot perform. As General Ira C. Eaker pointed out in the *Air Force Times*:

“In my infantry company 60 years ago the men selected to carry the machine guns, mortars, and ammunition were the six-foot, 200-pounders, not the lightweights.

“Some women and some men are physically unfit for some military tasks. Common sense will prevail. . . .”

But some people are immune to common sense. Take the Texas Department of Public Safety, which, according to the Associated Press, put a female cadet into the boxing ring to fight a male cadet who was three inches taller and 39 pounds heavier. The result was a brain concussion for the female cadet.

Nothing is being done about needed reforms in the intelligence agencies; so it seems likely that the only effect of the scandals will be a short-term pulling in of the horns that does not discriminate between what the agencies should and should not be doing. Take the CIA's refusal to help in the recent Moro kidnapping. What should it be doing if it is not fighting terrorism? . . . What are protesters protesting these days? Nuclear power plants. At Seabrook, New Hampshire this past June you would have found Dr. Spock, Dick Gregory, Pete Seeger, and the usual cast of thousands of young people. How do causes become suddenly chic? To the extent nuclear power plants are a threat, the danger has existed for years. Yet only recently has it become an issue in vogue.

If we are to move forward with the task of figuring out how to reform the federal government we need a lot more reporting like Neil Maxwell's recent story in *The Wall Street Journal*, “How U.S. Housing Aid Fails Many of the Poor in One Georgia Town.” Journalists must connect the programs, policies, and rhetoric of Washington with the realities out there where things

are supposed to be happening. Perhaps they will be motivated to do so—at least in the housing area—by the dreadful housing shortage that is driving up rents in places like Washington and New York to the point where journalists who are not employed by rich institutions like the *Post* and *Times* can no longer afford to live where they want to work. . . .

The rising cost of housing in Washington is also forcing us to reconsider one of our most consistent articles of editorial faith—that federal employees are massively overpaid. Today one would have to say that they are massively overpaid only if they already own their houses. If they are faced with the prospect of raising the down payments needed in the local real estate market, they must feel like Americans in Japan. Of course if they can scrounge up the down payment, they have the rosy prospect of seeing their assets double in a matter of months so that their self-interest will again be in the continuing inflation of higher salaries and higher prices, to which their own overpayment has made such an important contribution.

Carter had a marvelous opportunity to stop all of this when he came into office. With most of his staff already receiving twice as much money as they had ever been paid before, he could have refused to give them the May 1977 raise. This would have given him the moral standing to refuse the October 1977 raise for all government workers—which would have been a blow against the cost of federal government and against inflation too. He still could—and should—veto the raise scheduled for this October.

Even though the government is finally catching up with the danger of asbestos, the firms that produce it are not going out of business. They're simply closing their American plants, where requests for work safety are becoming burdensome, and opening new plants in foreign countries, where solicitude for employees' health is not intense. The Abex Corporation recently opened a plant in India—and got \$1 million in

political risk insurance from the same United States government that would have compelled it to observe safety regulations had it stayed in America. . . . One of the most depressing examples of the failure of the American system is the Teamsters Union. Think of all the newspaper exposes, congressional investigations, and federal prosecutions. Yet it still seems to be run by gangsters for gangsters and there still seems to be nothing we can do about it. . . . From time to time we have complained that the civil service is inbred and particularly hard for an outsider, no matter how qualified, to break into at its middle and upper levels, where the good, high-paying jobs are. There are, for example, 180,000 jobs at the GS-13 through GS-15 levels, paying between \$26,000 and \$47,200 a year. Last year only 500 outsiders were hired at those levels.

In the realm of vituperative invective, the Marxists are rivaled only by the academics. Our favorite recent example of the professors' skill in this area comes from Dr. Christine Rossell of Boston University. Dr. Rossell, who had published research indicating that desegregation did not cause white flight to the suburbs, was told of an article supporting the white flight theory by Dr. Diane Ravitch, who was quoted as saying:

"The main factor that I found in restudying the white flight controversy was denial—the power of denial among people who do not want to or cannot afford to believe what has happened."

Dr. Rossell replied:

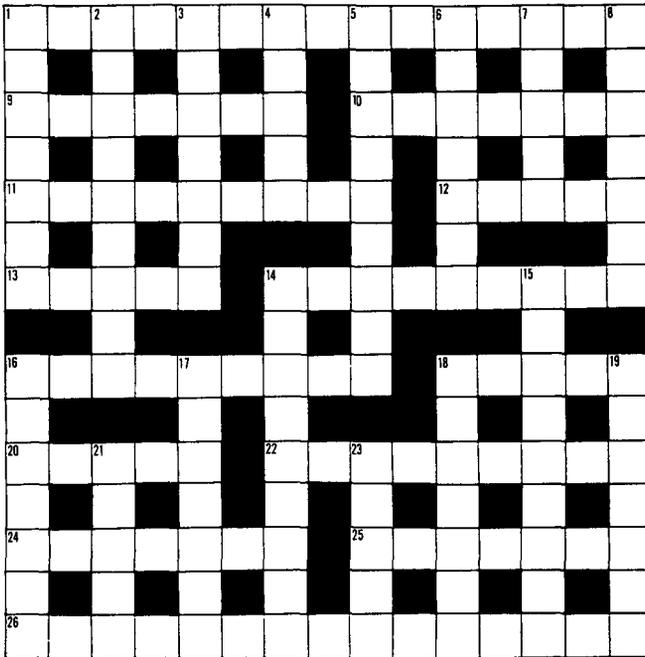
"Power of denial? What does power of denial mean? Ask her what a standard regression coefficient or an interrupted time series is! It's just crazy to debate statistical analyses with a journalist like Ravitch."

Calling Ravitch a journalist is, of course, in academic code roughly equivalent to the Marxist calling someone "a running dog of the capitalist imperialist exploiters."

—Charles Peters

the political puzzle

by John Barclay



ACROSS

1. Caesar's answer to high taxes? (11,4)
9. Likes to pass on in middle of after-thought. (7)
10. Veterans' Administration subsidy for tramp. (7)
11. Peter's are copiers, in a way. (9)
12. Fabric in funeral spray only once. (8)
13. Stick nothing in lewd reversal. (5)
14. Paper sold for damaged organ. (9)
16. Paraders the rest trust somehow. (9)
18. Dual nothing can be heard. (5)
20. Just the suit for Melvin Belli. (5)

22. Site of D.J.'s locker? (2,3,4)
24. Lady bit a hat strangely. (7)
25. Bizarre storied pressmen. (7)
26. Quiet domestic drayman in control in Washington. (9,6)

6. Country I regain in revolution . . . (7)
7. . . . and where laity is organized. (5)
8. Chanted for tin node discovery. (7)
14. Aide crept around foundation. (9)
15. Screw in broken V.O. bottles. (5,4)
16. Pulpits smashed asunder. (5,2)
17. Author found in list, too, somehow. (7)
18. Weird crime among former drinkers here. (7)
19. Witness to climbing procedure in reed. (7)
21. Bit of cloth the French used as text. (5)
23. A delight to consider. (5)

DOWN

1. Set up documentation for French priest in quarters. (7)
2. We prove or slyly suppress. (9)
3. Supreme general? (7)
4. This month's magazine bound in chamois suede. (5)
5. Angels sort vines entangled. (9)

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g., (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g., USA, are treated as one word. Answers to last month's puzzle are on page 22.