
Tilting at Windmills



Carter's gentle reaction to James Fallows' article in *The Atlantic* is another reminder of one of his best qualities, his freedom from the kind of hatred that twisted Nixon and Johnson. But his statement that Fallows "didn't say any of this to me while he worked here" was Carter at his worst. He was lying. Fallows had raised several of the points with him personally, including almost all of his criticism of Carter's speeches. But worse than the petty deceptions—which, while embarrassing, do not threaten the Republic—is the reason Carter didn't know of Fallows' other concerns about the administration. Carter has ignored one of the principal lessons of whatever success was enjoyed by FDR and JFK—he has failed to make use of his brightest employees outside of their assigned areas. Unlike Roosevelt with men like Hopkins, and later Kennedy with his brother and Ted Sorensen, he does not encourage comment from his staff on subjects not in their direct line of responsibility. He talked to Fallows about speeches, not about anything else. Never did he ask "what do you think about tax reform?" or "what do you think about energy?" Nor did he seek to find out indirectly what Fallows and the other thoughtful young people on the staff were thinking. Either Powell or Jordan or Eizenstat or Rafshoon could have told him about the complaints that Fallows later included in the article, for Fallows had told each of them about one or more of those complaints, and between them they had heard all the major points he raised in *The Atlantic*.

An example, one that would have saved the administration from a

mistake that all its senior members now acknowledge, was an article Fallows wrote in December 1976. The article warned Carter that cabinet government would not work and argued that, if Carter really wanted to run the government, he would have to make sure he had a grip on what was going on down below.

Fallows showed the article to Eizenstat and his deputy, David Rubenstein, before publication. They did not react except to urge that it not be published under Fallows' name, so it appeared in the January 1977 issue of *The Washington Monthly* under my by-line. Fallows also gave the article to Hamilton Jordan, but the administration ignored his advice—at least they ignored it through 1977. But gradually they began to discover they weren't in control of the government, and they then spent most of 1978 trying to undo the damage that could have been prevented, had they listened to Fallows.

Having seen that he was right, did Carter's aides go to the President and say, "Fallows was right and we were wrong. Let's pay attention to Fallows"? Or did Carter have any other way of finding out that Fallows, or others who urged the same course, had been right while he and his advisers had been wrong? The answer to both questions is, of course, "no," which explains a lot about why the President is wrong so often.

Another one of those puzzling minor lies from Carter: after only three months of jogging he says his pulse rate has dropped from 60 to 40. As experienced runners know, your pulse might decline ten points—but not more—after five years of steady jogging. . . . On the other hand, in our never-ending quest for balance, we want to rise in the President's behalf against Betty Beale of *The Washington Star*, who ominously reports that "President Carter's snub of foreign ambassadors is causing whispered grumbling throughout the diplomatic corps." Carter's outrageous sin, according to Beale, is that he is "the first President of the United States not to give a yearly reception, dinner, or whatever in peacetime for the ambassadors accredited to him. . . . During President Ford's administration the ambassadors were invited to two dancing parties in two years and they were beautiful affairs." . . . Is there a movement toward candor among business publications, a tendency to shed the kid gloves and say, "All right, men, here's what you really want to know." We can't say for sure, of course, but we can tell you that *Boardroom Reports* now promises inside tips on "How smart businessmen are winning tax deductions for money they spend on hobbies and the cost of getting to work each day" and "Legal ways to keep union organizers off your premises." My favorite, from *The Expatriate Investor*, is a special section of advice entitled "Extradition, Deportation, and Asylum."

My oft-stated suspicion that many Women's Libbers are imitating the worst in male culture has been fortified by a new organization, the National Association for Female Executives. It promises to tell its members "how to get prestige credit cards" and "the title you merit." . . . James Fallows' reference to Calvin Trillin (see page 11) reminded me of Trillin's article in the

first issue of this magazine. It looked 20 years into the future, and began:

"WASHINGTON, Feb. 1—There was, of course, vehement response here to the report of the National Orthopedics Institute that 17 to 20 years of steady marijuana smoking tends to cause the average adult to walk on all fours. Within minutes of the report's release, the Crop Research and Health Foundation—the public relations arm of the marijuana industry—had accused the N.O.I. of confusing the public by 'spreading evidence that is strictly statistical. . . —the fact that people who have smoked marijuana for 17 to 20 years tend to walk on all fours and people who have not smoked marijuana for 17 to 20 years do not.' (The orthopedists, defending their research techniques, have maintained that, in the investigation of this particular phenomenon, animal experiments are bound to remain inconclusive.) It was clear that the Senate committee would give no support to the orthopedists' suggestion that marijuana packs be required to bear the warning, 'Continued smoking of this product might cause the average adult to walk on all fours.' Speaking to reporters after his testimony, Mr. Hawkins hinted that the industry might someday be willing to accept a compromise: 'Continued smoking of this product might cause the average adult to *think* he's walking on all fours.'

" . . . The men who had enough leverage to establish Public Law 849 as an unchallenged fact of American political life—what has come to be called 'permanent pot parity'—are not likely to sit by idly if restrictive legislation is introduced. Even proponents of advertising restrictions and compulsory health warnings concede that any setback in the marijuana industry would cause enormous economic dislocation in all of the states of the Great Grasslands. Probably never before in the history of American agriculture has commitment to one crop been so passionate, despite such warnings as Senator Orville Owens'

'Cross of Grass' speech at the National Plowing Contest two years ago. Marijuana now accounts for approximately 94 per cent of Iowa's cultivated acreage—there is still some peyote left over from the filtered-peyote kingsize craze of three years ago. . . ."

There is a company in California that thinks the moment Trillin predicted is at hand: Applied Hydroponics of San Rafael is selling a product called the Hydropot, which, according to the company's owner, one Dave Berkman; makes it possible "for anyone to grow as much marijuana for their personal use as they want in a space the size of a closet." If you think Berkman may be partaking excessively of his own product, consider this recent bulletin from UPI in Sacramento: "Assemblyman Willie Brown, Jr.'s home cultivation bill . . . cleared the Criminal Justice Committee on a 5-4 vote March 12 and is awaiting a hearing date before the Ways and Means Committee."

I do not smoke marijuana, but I am a consumer of alcoholic beverages, and, as such, want to protest the conversion to the metric system. When the idea was first proposed, my world federalist sympathies had led me to conclude the switch was a harmless step toward world order. Now it is clear that the whole thing was engineered by the wine and liquor industry as part of its plot to give us ever less at ever higher prices. You now pay the same, or more, for a measly 1.5 litres as you used to pay for a half gallon. . . . The monthly hearing schedule of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee came too late for me to attend the April 30 hearing on "Adopt a Horse Program." . . .

A recent *Wall Street Journal* article by James M. Perry tells a story that is depressing in what it reveals about the White House, the Foreign Service, and journalism. It seems the White House, trying to curry favor with Jack Anderson, leaked a "secret" cable to him. The cable was from our ambassador to Rome, who, trying to curry favor with

the White House, had reported what a great hit Miss Lillian had been during her visit to Italy. Anderson, trying to curry favor with the White House, used the item. . . . I want to join *The Washington Star's* Philip Greer and Myron Kandel in a bit of shameless but deserved press-agentry on behalf of the moped, a bike with a motor. The thing about the moped is that it gets 130 miles to a gallon. One would think that the Department of Energy would be zealously promoting the prodigious energy-saver. Instead, the moped is mentioned by the DOE in only one piece of literature—and then only as part of one of 181 suggestions to improve the energy situation. . . . Leonel Castillo is the public official for whom we all should have the most sympathy. As the Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization, he is poised between pressures, on the one hand, from the right wing and the labor unions, who seem to want a steel fence along the border patrolled by killer dogs, and, on the other, from eccentrics like me who want to let all the aliens in because doing so is what made the country great. . . .

The Department of Energy has been requiring states to allow right turns on red lights, in order to save gas. The District of Columbia convinced the DOE that only a small percentage of its intersections were suitable for the "right turn on red" rule. But then came the tough decision. Would the District pay for 600 signs saying "Right Turn on Red Permitted," or 6,000 signs saying "No Right Turn on Red?" If you have followed our reports on the DOE and the D.C. government, you will already have guessed which choice was made, after several years of haggling between the two bodies: the District will buy the 6,000 signs, to be posted at 85 per cent of the city's intersections, at a cost of \$375,000.

I've long admired the skill of those who write the annual reports of our

great corporations. Here is the way Citicorp handled the accusations of an employee regarding the \$100 million in profits it earned from pushing the dollar down and other foreign exchange dealings:

“Early in 1978 Mr. David Edwards, a former Citibank employee, alleged that Citibank was conducting its foreign exchange operations in a manner inconsistent with the exchange control and tax laws of several European countries. The Citibank Board of Directors requested outside counsel, Shearman & Sterling, to review Mr. Edwards’ allegations and Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co., as well as local counsel in various European countries, were retained to assist in the review.

“After approximately eight months of investigation, Shearman & Sterling submitted an extensive report which found no pattern of violation of foreign exchange or tax laws in the various countries reviewed, but that certain transactions had been identified which could be viewed as being in possible violation of local foreign exchange regulations or tax laws.”

They really let it all hang out, don’t they? . . .

The system of military commissaries—at which military personnel and retirees can purchase food for a third less than the rest of us—is based on the vision of an underpaid military serving at remote posts. The military is no longer underpaid, except in some foreign posts that have been adversely affected by devaluation—and, as Sandra Boodman points out in *The Washington Post*, the average commissary is within ten minutes’ drive of a civilian supermarket. . . . How little writers understand about themselves was illustrated by a recent interview with Mario Puzo, in which he described *The Godfather* as an attack on the American capitalist system. He should read *Khrushchev Remembers* for evidence that *The Godfather* was equally true of the Russian communist court under Joseph Stalin—or that, to the extent it was untrue, it was only because Vito Corleone had a benign

and loyal side that Stalin did not possess. In any event, Puzo wrote a fine novel that was made into two movies that are even better than the book at depicting the paranoia that rules the world today. . . .

When you read about the San Diego collision between a private plane and a commercial airliner, you may not have realized that what was unusual about the event was not that the private plane was in contact with a different air traffic controller than the airliner, but that it was in contact with *any* controller at all. When you look out the window of your commercial jet and see a private plane, the chances are that the plane is not required to be under a controller’s supervision. That requirement exists only if it is flying above 18,000 feet, or if it is flying below 7,000 feet *and* is in the vicinity of one of the 21 major airports. The government is trying to do something about this, but, as usual, its effort, even if successful, will make only a small dent in the outrage: 44 more airports would be added to the below-7,000-foot group. The private pilot’s magazine calls even this reform “The Government’s Major Airspace Grab.” . . .

There is one simple reform that I think would restore some candor to American government: put under oath all congressional testimony by executive branch witnesses. Ninety per cent of such testimony is not under oath today and 90 per cent of it is removed from the precise truth in degrees varying from the subtlest unconscious nuance to the grossest and most deliberate distortion. . . . Last month we told you about Amtrak’s troubles. One reason for those troubles is the excessive manning of trains that is required by labor contracts. What an escape from those requirements could mean is illustrated by the experience of the Virginia and Maryland Railroad, which was formed to serve the Delmarva peninsula when the Penn

Central went bankrupt. The new line was not stuck with the Pennsy's old labor contracts. One result is that the two tugboats that haul the train barges across Chesapeake Bay now have 12 workers instead of the 28 men used by the Penn Central. Overall, the line's deficit has been cut in half. . . . If you read Joseph Nocera's article last month about the dismal state of the District of Columbia schools you will be interested to know that, next to Alaska, the District has the highest per pupil costs in the country. . . . After the teachers' strike ended, there were supposed to be extra classes to help students catch up. But, according to *The Washington Post's* Juan Williams, the classes are poorly organized and ill-attended. "The program of extra classes," Williams concluded, "appears to be principally helping teachers recover wages they lost while on strike instead of helping students to learn lessons they missed while their teachers were walking the picket lines."

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is the highest paid agency in Washington, with about 30 per cent of its employees GS-15s or higher, averaging better than \$40,000 in annual income. Another indication of the declining relationship between pay and performance. . . . If you've begun to worry a bit about the cost of public employees' retirement you will not find comfort in this report by Joseph Young of *The Washington Star*: "The top government official on federal and postal employee retirement benefits says the government has 'a contractual obligation to maintain government workers' present level of benefits.'" . . . Another cheering item of the "nothing can be done" variety comes from Larry Kramer of *The Washington Post*, who had this to say in the course of an article on the decline of the dollar:

"Some economists charged that although the dollar should have dropped during the 1976-78 period—perhaps because it was overvalued—the drop that did occur was sharply

accentuated by speculators gambling that just such a drop would happen, and positioning themselves to profit from that drop.

"So as the dollar began to recover last fall, a new question popped up: What could be done to prevent the dollar from being victimized in such a manner again?

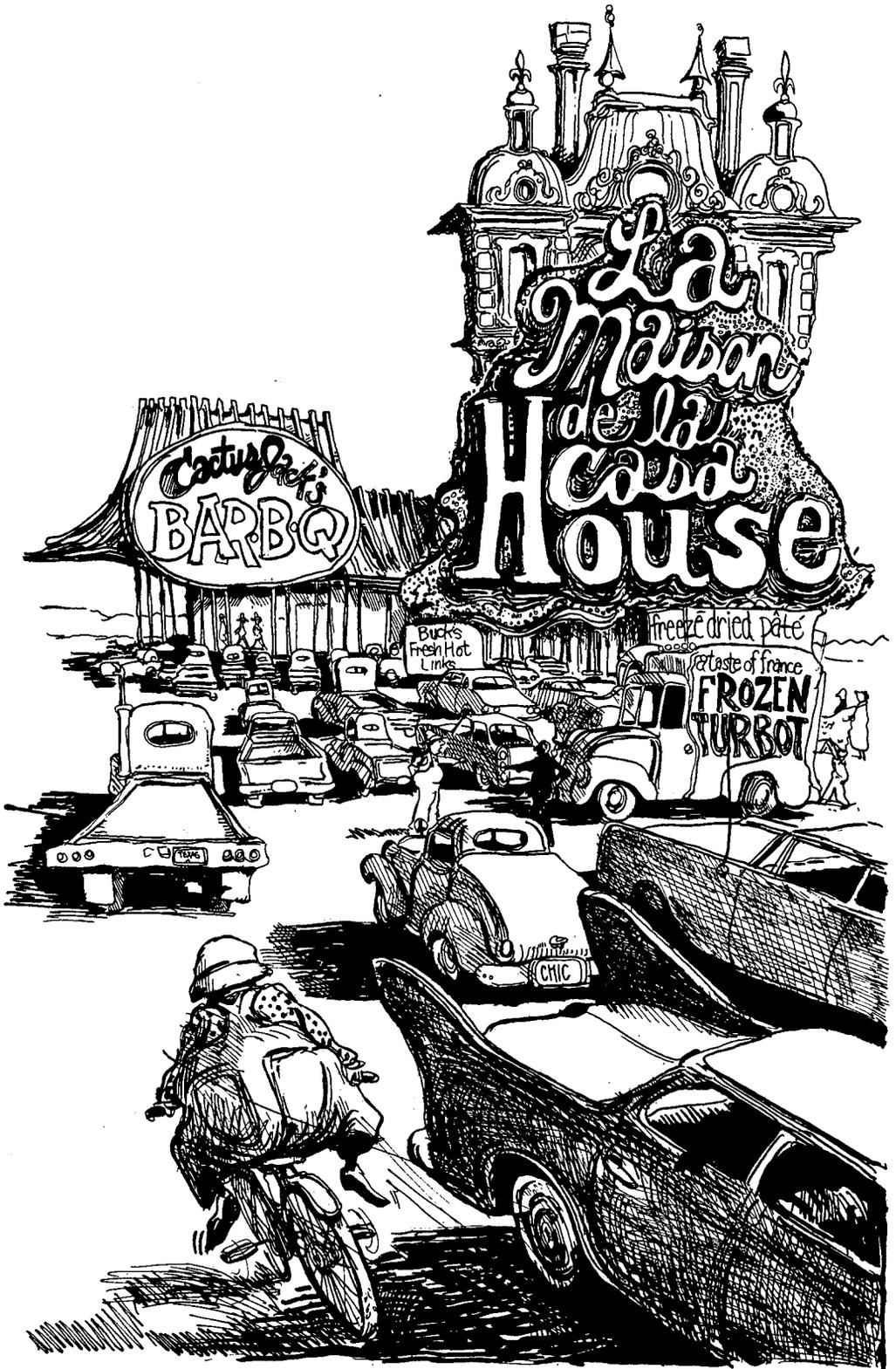
"The answer was frighteningly simple: nothing."

All of this once again made me wish we had some people thinking about world government. There was a burst of interest in the mid-forties, but the "one-world" movement quickly died—and its goals seemed so remote that members like Cord Meyer joined organizations like the CIA, I suppose in the hope of creating a secret world government under the benign guidance of Allen Dulles. Still, however inept the present international organizations may be, we have problems, like those surrounding world trade, that are only going to be solved by international organizations of some kind. Indeed, in another part of Kramer's article on the dollar, he asks Professor Charles Kindleberger of MIT about the tax havens set up by international banks in places like Nassau and Singapore, and gets this response: "Tax avoidance or evasion is a big problem. In the long run maybe we will have to internationalize taxes."

—Charles Peters

Answers to last month's puzzle:

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