

Dear Stuart,

28th March 1993

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We enjoyed your, and
as matter of course Ursula's
company as well, company
at ours. I hope that you
were not bored by the discus-
sions on today's world pro-
blems. Enclosed a couple
of copies of articles which under-
score the idea that we live
in a society similar to the
latter day's of the Roman
Empire. They didn't also
get enough. Boy for their
Denarius sestertius or whatever!
last week ⁱⁿ a government report
was published that we,
the Dutch, were increasing our
usage for energy (I do not know
what the criteria are) instead
remaining level. We are hooked

Thinking the Jobless Unthinkable

By Richard Reeves

LOS ANGELES — "Thinking the unthinkable" was a phrase that came out of the old world order. It was related to fear that the Cold War would become a hot war and someone would have to think about actually using nuclear and thermonuclear weapons — why? where? when? how? how many? how big?

And in this new world order what is it that we cannot bear to think about now?

The unthinkable now is that there will not be enough work to go around.

There seems to be only pain in thinking that the undereducated, often alienated young people, some of them terrorizing such cities as Los Angeles, will never have a real job, never be accepted enough to have a stake in the larger society.

There is a looking away from the fact that many of the men and women losing jobs in their 50s or 40s now are, for all practical purposes, forever unemployable.

There is temptation to ignore the fact that immigrants are doing a lot of our heavy lifting because they are so cheap.

There is quiet desperation in thinking that most Americans will be overpaid, overexpecting and underachieving in a truly open world workplace.

"A decade ago, Americans earned higher wages than anyone else in the world," said Bill Clinton as he campaigned for president. "Now we're 10th and falling." Then he promised, or intimated, that he could make America No. 1 again. We would be "the best educated, best trained work force in the world."

Leaving aside the fact that he left out "best paid," does "best educated" and "best trained" really get us anywhere? Some of us — sure! But not all of us by any means. It is obvious that work in a free-market, free-trade world after revo-

lutions in communication and transportation will not be going to the most polished but to the most productive. And productivity can be measured as simply as military efficiency could under the old order: **More bang for the buck!**

Hardware jobs will go to China. Software programming jobs will go to India. And if an American calls an 800 number because of a glitch in the wares, the person who finally picks up the telephone after you have pressed every

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number known to tape-recorded man, the person who tells you how to fix it will not be in California but in Ireland.

We Americans are getting an introduction to all that these days in the debate over a free trade agreement with Mexico, where wages are a fraction of what they are in the United States. It is hard for any student of capitalism to explain why a manufacturer of, say, refrigerators would make them in Texas rather than on the other side of the Rio Grande if "Made in Mexico" costs significantly less than "Made in the U.S.A." In fact, if the capitalist's company has shareholders, it is more or less against the law not to maximize profits and the value of their shares.

And, to think the unthinkable, Mexico is not the future. It is more like the United States than it is like China. The work our fathers and grandfathers did to get us to college, the actual manufacture of things that can be put in boxes or on railroad flatcars, is going to pass right

through Mexico to cheaper labor in Vietnam and China. There are a lot of smart people in those countries willing to work for almost nothing.

We are not going to be No. 1, at least not in manufacturing. Our politicians, including the president, say we are the best workers in the world. But that is nonsense in the new world order where the work produced will always be divided by the cost — and the number that pops out determines who is the best. And that final number is rarely going to be produced after dividing by \$10 or \$20 or \$30 an hour.

I have no doubt that President Clinton understands that, and so do most of the rest of us. He is already worrying around at the edges of the unthinkable when he talks about providing last-resort government jobs to replace long-term welfare, or about National Service, or endless education and retraining, or extended unemployment benefits and national health care. All of those are replacements for the lost wages and benefits and security that were once provided by capitalism when the United States and other rich countries were able to produce and consume at levels barely known in most of the world.

But the president does not want to think about that on any level, including the spiritual. If we are not here to work and to produce, why are we? What do we do? Who are we?

I don't want to think about it, either, although I know that those questions of work and the meaning of work will dominate not only Bill Clinton's presidency but the rest of my life and the lives of my children and theirs, too.

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on "Energy." more goods, more gadgets,
more material wealth and it doesn't make
us happier according to your article, which
you sent us. What we need is recognition
from our community where we live in. But
all the electronic devices to distract ourselves,
make a community superfluous. At
the same time morality and ethics become
less important. Morality is a function of
interdependence between people and morality
has only a bearing when respect and affection
exists. This is the view of an amateur
philosopher.

I noticed in the Rijk Museum in Amster-
dam a glaring lack of knowledge on
the topic: "the Bulbs." just your luck,
I found also in the DHT (fountain of my
knowledge) an article on bulbs.

Have a good time in Madeira.

Love to Ursula. Also from Vera
and once more, in writing this time,
thank you for the beautiful
ill bear + vase, which will ornate
our rooms wherever we ultimately
shall reside

Alfredo