

cost of installing the system would be covered by the new “paperless” system of traffic tickets. What was that? Paperless system of traffic tickets? Oh, I’m so sorry, didn’t I tell you yet? Now hear this! This is your traffic cop speaking. As you know, at present traffic violators are pulled over (if they are unlucky enough to be nailed) by the traffic cop, who gives them a ticket which will sit in the computer with tens of thousands of others for “an unspecified time,” sometimes for years. Obviously, this makes traffic tickets into a lottery losing whatever deterrent value it might have. I’m proposing a much simpler “paperless” system doing away with traffic tickets as we know them. It would work something like this. The traffic cop pulled over the victim and spoke thus: “May I have your car key please? Thank you. You can repossess your car tomorrow at the impound lot after paying the towing company’s fees in cash.” (Fifty percent of the towing fees will be forked over to the city, which will use it for installing the system described above. The impound lot will be organized into bays according to alphabetical order of the owners of the cars. If a little hassle can be incorporated into the routine, so much the better. We want this whole system to be a deterrent, right? Right.)

As I keep saying, most of our problems can be solved with a bit of imagination and common sense, but what we have to keep in mind is that the key to success lies in changing the whole basic approach, the basic philosophy, the entire *zeitgeist*. We have to stop giving the benefit of the doubt to the scofflaws, miscreants, and criminals and let the victims benefit from the doubt—when there is a doubt. We have to put a stop to the era when “The United States has the most elaborate, indeed overblown procedural protections for criminal suspects in the world” (TNR/TRB May 11, 1987). We have to end “A legal system perhaps a bit too exquisitely attuned to the rights of the criminals” (TNR July 13-30, 1987). And we have to stop the cycle in the history of our nation when it was rightfully said that “No other modern nation, whether capitalist or socialist, or Christian or Muslim, shares the American tolerance for crime” (Lewis Lapham, March 1991).

Incidentally, I would very much appreciate it if somebody could explain to me why the minimum age for obtaining a driver's license in the United States is sixteen years when in all of Europe (except England) the minimum age is eighteen? Is somebody seriously going to tell me that our youngsters are more mature or responsible than those in Europe?

"A jury are twelve people of average ignorance."
(English barrister quoted by Vincent Bugliosi,
America's most famous District Attorney.)

2.7 JURY TRIALS

To make it short and sweet, jury trials should be abolished. Why? Because they became a farce and an anachronism, bearing only vestigial resemblance to what they were intended to be and what they should be. This is not only my opinion—which would be of no value—but the opinion of knowledgeable people "in the trade."

The most recent and obvious degradation, discreditation, and devaluation of this system are the so-called consultants. These people are trained in psychology and/or sociology. They are the courtroom versions of market researchers, testing various arguments and evidence before mock juries, then helping the lawyers to "package the case." Needless to say, these highly trained people don't work for peanuts, adding to the already skewed system in favor of the affluent, who can hire the best lawyers money can buy. But this is not the biggest or worst problem. In the days of Jefferson, juries were considered more important than free elections as the bulwarks of Democracy. Today its prestige is in decline and its powers clipped.

But, as usual, the worst problem is that common sense is again persona non grata. Whenever a new employee is hired by an outfit s/he is expected to furnish a résumé to the Personnel Manager to enable him to judge the past performance of the applicant. Likewise, every army keeps a record of every soldier to enable the officers to decide who should be promoted. In the Foreign Legion, as soon as a new guy is signing on the dotted line for the standard five years stipulated by the

Management, his first C.O. opens a file on him, called the *Cahier des Chansons* (Book of Songs) in which is scrupulously entered everything the guy did—or did not do—and this was continued by every new C.O. if the guy was transferred to a new unit. This gave very new C.O. a pretty good idea of what he was getting—or not getting. Some of the inscriptions were, of course, pretty hilarious. One C.O. made a note in the Book of Songs “characterizing” a guy who was drinking a lot more above and beyond the already liberal limits of the Legion: “*Il boit comme un chameau mais ne rends pas la même service.*” (Drinks like a camel without rendering the same service.)

The basic reason for all this record-keeping both by employers and armies is the accepted fact that human beings have the tendency to develop a certain pattern of behavior by the time they become adults. I think it can be said that this is based on plain common sense. And it is exactly for this reason that the members of a jury are not allowed to have access to this vital information. In virtually every court in the country, a defendant’s criminal record is inadmissible as evidence. I’m quoting from the article of the *Washington Monthly*, September 1994, by Newton N. Minow and Fred H. Gate: What the Jury Doesn’t Know...Could Hurt You. “In 1948, Justice Jackson wrote for the Supreme Court that evidence about a defendant’s character is ‘not rejected because character is irrelevant; to the contrary, it is said to weigh too much with the jury....’ But what is wrong with that? It’s time to let the juries know exactly who they are dealing with, and that means taking the common sense step of putting defendants’ past brushes with the law on the table. According to a 1991 Justice Department study, over 60% of criminals released from prison will be rearrested...and those are only the ones who get caught.... We must stop denying jurors the facts necessary to make informed decisions. Courts should eliminate the rules that keep such information from the jury. Either we have faith in the system of jury or we don’t.”

As matters stand now, the requirement of presenting a past record of achievements—if that is the word in this context—to the interested parties is voided and nullified only for one class of people

in America: the criminal class! These lucky people are the only ones who are allowed to come in a court of justice and present themselves to the jury every time they commit a new crime, with a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate, an archetype of the innocent in whose mouth butter would not melt—a perfect choirboy.

I keep asking myself how did we arrive to this grotesquely demented lunacy becoming part of our jurisprudence, but the answer keeps eluding me. It reminds me of a saying arguably attributed to Einstein: “Sometimes a thought which makes me hazy, am I, or are the others crazy?”

The latest, but surely not the last, caper of this lunacy is the result of the headline in the local paper of Seattle: “U.S. Judge throws out Jeffries death sentence.” Jeffries, 59, was convicted and sentenced to death in 1983 for the killing of Phil and Inez Shiff who befriended him while he was serving time for armed robbery in British Columbia. After his release the Shiffs allowed him to live in their home near Port Angeles, Washington. Now comes the funny part. Twelve years later, my favorite Bleeding Heart Club *par excellence* a.k.a. the Ninth Circuit Court—you remember the same august crew which costs Washington taxpayers half a million bucks for the upkeep by sitting on the case of our death row star for four years, Mr. Campbell, who wasn’t able to make up his mind whether he wants to be hanged or lethally injected because that would be suicide, which is against the law—ordered the U.S. District Court Judge Carolyn Dimmick to release Jeffries because two jurors testified that during the trial they heard another juror mention Jeffries’s criminal record, which included armed robbery, which information was not admissible in court. Here is ladies and gennulmen another example of the obscenity of the American Criminal Justice System in all its splendor and grandeur for all to admire and savor, not so blind who don’t want to see. Chris Callahan, County Chief Deputy Prosecutor, said, “A new trial, if necessary, would be a challenge. It certainly makes it harder 12 years down the pike, trying to find out who is still around and who can recall what.” I’m sure all these difficulties are not lost on the members of the Ninth Circuit Court.

Au contraire. They devoutly hope—like all good bleeding hearts—that they can save another life—worth saving. Their next hero waiting in the wing is Mr. David Rice, who was sentenced to death for killing attorney Charles Goldman, his wife Annie and their two sons Derek, 12, and Eslin, 10, in their Madrona home in Seattle. The death sentence was overturned by U.S. District Judge Jack Tanner because Rice was not in court when the sentence was announced. Mr. Rice was not in court because with great foresight and wisdom, he swallowed several packets of cigarettes before sentencing and had to be taken to Harborview Medical Center.

Said King County Prosecutor Norm Maleng, calling the Ninth Circuit Court's decision mind-boggling: "this is the type of ruling that breeds disrespect for the Criminal Justice System." Number One Son, you said mouthful.

If I could be "King for a Day, I'd first of all put a lien on all the financial holdings of all the members of the Ninth Circuit Court until they reimbursed every cent the taxpayers of Washington had to shell out for the upkeep of Campbell during the four years they were sitting on his case. Once that was taken care of, I'd bring charges against them on conspiracy for obstructing justice, give them the max allowed by the book, plus a little more, according to the system of Imperial China, which gave harsher sentences to the Mandarinate *à la noblesse oblige* principle, make them serve every day without parole and without time off for good behavior to send The Signal stupid, to the other wannabe bleeding hearts, inclined to follow the gallant example of the Ninth Circuit Court.

There is one more thing we have to put in place if we want to turn around our culture of crime, and that is a National Police Academy to train all our police forces from rookies to chief and replace our mixture of Keystone Kops and Ton-Ton-Macoutes. If you know another modern nation which needs a first-class police force more than America does, name it! This should also be a four-year curriculum and, beside the standard law enforcement stuff, they should teach two foreign languages to fluency: Spanish and an Asian language. In a nation of immigrants like this, the ability

to communicate might make the difference between life or death for the cop or citizen. The Honor Graduate should be rewarded with a car of his choice up to \$50,000, the second best with a motorbike of his choice up to \$25,000, and the third best with a handgun of his choice up to \$5,000.

As a final word (and wish) I'd like to say concerning what is masquerading here in the last thirty-forty years as a Criminal Justice System, what I said about our healthcare, but with even more validity. No Jurisprudence can be better than its Judges administering it. The fact that we have the largest number of our population behind bars or on probation, parole, etc., of any nation is the result that "we the people" lost our respect for the Judiciary. The reason for this is that a large number of our judges are a disgrace to their profession and the majority of the judges know this since years. The "sentencing guidelines" many of the judges are bitching and harrumphing about now are the direct results of the *unrealistic* sentences (on both extremes) some of the judges were handing down.

The remedy is obvious. The Judiciary should appoint an "Oversight Committee" to police their ranks in a realistic, effective, and timely manner. Nobody knows who is who better than the peers of the profession. Self-policing is a chimera. ("I scratch your back—you scratch mine.") This Oversight Committee should be made up of five Judges, five Law professors, and five Police Officers, and their findings should be *final*. As "nobody is perfect" the same "three strikes and you are out" should apply as to the felons. What is sauce for the felons should be sauce for judges. They should be given a warning first, a suspension for six months second, and the third time—"gone with the wind."

This same system should apply to *all* judges at *all* levels. *No* judge of *any* level should be a "lifetime appointment." Only kings were appointed for their lifetime—and as history has shown even *their* lifetime was sometimes shortened by a head.

3. IMMIGRATION

No better proof or example is needed to prove my thesis that our infrastructure is nothing but a gargantuan Potemkin Village than the pathetic mishandling of our immigration processes.

I could never fathom why during all these years since I came here in 1950, a country of immigrants *par excellence* never grasped the significance and importance of establishing a Minister of Immigration and Absorption to deal with the zillions of problems all newcomers face in an enormous country like this. Even a minuscule country like Israel, another nation of immigrants, realized this shortly after their Independence.

What we have here instead of a competent umbrella organization dealing, under one roof, with all the problems of newcomers from the four corners of the world, is the INS, this sad-sack, hybrid, hermaphrodite conglomeration, by consensus the worst, most understaffed, incompetent, inept, inefficient hodgepodge giving a bad name to bureaucracy. They could never make up their brilliant minds to this very day about what their goal and purpose is. Bring immigrants *in* or keep immigrants *out*. Nor could they decide in all these years of wrangling and gumbeating whether we want the wetbacks or not. If affirmative, let's work out some sort of ID, provide them with decent wages and living conditions, etc. If not, we should tell them we'll mine the borders and unless they want to lose their *cojones*, they had better stay out. What we have instead is this dumb hide-and-seek "system" of catching and releasing the same *pendejo* over and over again. This is an immigration

policy? All this imbroglio could have been avoided long ago if we would have had an organized, structured, realistic, and most important, fair Ministry of Immigration and Absorption able and willing to realize and take into consideration that when you bring in immigrants from all over the world, helter skelter, you not only bring in people but you also bring in the customs, habits, cultures, in short, their whole way of life. You just can't let them in and dump them on the street "sink or swim," or as the French say *Système D* (for *débrouillez vous*) – fend for yourself.

What we should have had long ago was a sort of ongoing G.I. Bill modified for immigrants on a larger scale keeping very well in mind what Teddy White said about the Marshall Plan in his book *In Search of History*, page 302 *inter alia*: "Speed and simplicity in large affairs are most essential...good will without competence, or competence without good will, are both equivalent formulas for political disaster...The Plan could move most swiftly, for it enlisted minimum personnel and that only the best...the next quality could only be called benevolent ruthlessness." Amen.

Optimally we should have had something, on a larger scale of course, like the KGB used in the good old days for their spies. Realistic mockups of American cities where they could familiarize themselves with all the customs and gadgets making up "Life in these United States" from how to use a Coke machine to how to fill out labels for a parcel at the P.O. without standing too close in line to the person in front because that is a no-no in the West and on and on. In short, how to fit in without rubbing the "natives" the wrong way, especially those who don't exactly love immigrants anyway. Now in the era of VCRs, this orientation could have been much simpler with well-made tapes and voice-overs by a native speaker. Unfortunately, this was of course a Catch-22 situation because to give birth to something like this we would have needed an infrastructure which is exactly what we don't have to this very day.

There is another important aspect of bringing in immigrants helter-skelter without giving them a chance to "fit in" and I don't think any social scientist (pardon the expression) ever wrote

anything about this. We have millions of people who are completely “out of the loop” as far as social life and participation in community life is concerned except with their own kind. This is a “Floating World” no other country has to deal with—and, come to think of it, we are not dealing with it either. New immigrants are completely engulfed with survival for the first five years. I still remember very vividly when I worked sixteen-hour days for weeks and months on end and all I wanted to have was a few hours’ sleep and the hell with “participating in community life” or “politics.” If we would have an umbrella organization for newcomers which would follow up their progress, lots of their major problems could become minor problems leaving them a little “breathing” time besides just surviving.

At this late stage it is almost impossible to visualize and grasp all the different aspects and effects this lack of infrastructure had on the lives of all these millions of newcomers downstream, legal or otherwise. Nor is it possible to overlook the ways all this boomeranged on literally every aspect of the nation’s life.

The floating world we ended up with I mentioned previously resulted in millions of “quasi-citizens” out of the loop as far as participating citizenry is understood and meant, starting with their non-voting—which is what a democratic country is all about—going on to the non-English speaking pupils flooding the schools, and the newcomers bringing with them their exotic and other diseases we thought we eliminated almost completely long ago as is the case with the resurgent TB epidemic, diphtheria, and others, all the way to the deteriorating quality of the service industry aided and abetted by people coming from primitive countries where good service is unknown. And even if they would know good service they wouldn’t dare to insist on it and complain as the last thing they want to do is “rock the boat,” the result of which would be promptly told “if you don’t like it here go back where you came from. Nobody called you.” Needless to say that according to time-honored custom for all these problems and difficulties we blame the victims, when the plain fact is that most

of these problems could have been avoided by establishing an immigration authority and policy decades ago.

We made a grievous and tragic mistake by not insisting that all the newcomers acquire a working knowledge of English in boarding-school-like institutions similar to the Israeli ULPAN, enabling them to communicate with the "natives" which is the *sine qua non* of being "absorbed" with the minimum of difficulties in a new country. The tragic result of the newcomers being unable to communicate was that the newcomers became strangers in a strange land, more or less permanently, or at least in the first few years which are the most influential ones for their future absorption in their new country. It was the experience of Israel that if the new immigrants didn't pick up the language in the first three years, most probably they would never do so. And the concept of a stranger here in America is drastically different from that in Europe, Japan, et al, where a stranger is somebody we don't have personal contact with but at least we speak the same language and we're able to communicate with each other if necessary. This is a very different kind of stranger from a Hmong, Vietnamese, Haitian, et al, who could be just as well an extraterrestrial as far as the ability to communicate is concerned. The result of this kind of stranger-ness was the tragic phenomenon the writer George Garrett recently observed: "We have become accustomed to, inured to, atrocity.... The pain of strangers is meaningless to us. We...lack the essential common and communal sense of shame without which there can be no community of secular justice." We became inured and insensitive to the pain of strangers even if they are our own neighbors. Once you are able to talk to a "stranger" you might become, if not exactly friends, at least somebody we "know." The result of the inability to communicate was the tragic death of a young Japanese man who was shot to death at Halloween. "Unless man makes a conscious act of will they invariably resent what is different in their midst, and what is different they suspect, and what they suspect they fear, and what they fear, they hate, and what they hate they put outside the law."

A lot of the old-timers insinuate, openly or otherwise, that the immigrants are responsible, at least partly, for the enormous increase in crime. The fact is that the newcomers were generally speaking more law abiding when they arrived from their country of origin than the “natives.” This is especially true of those who came from the Far East where family structure is very strong and the Confucian ethic of honoring the parents and elders is still very much practiced and observed. A perfect example of how we contributed to the transformation of the young newcomers from law-abiding citizens into gangbangers is the typical case that happened in my own town with the Samoan youngsters. By general consensus the Samoans were nice, law-abiding people when they arrived, including the youngsters. The problem was that the youngsters liked to play their Samoan-style soccer, which required a lot of yelling and hollering. Sooner or later the neighbors got tired of it and called the police, who chased the kids away. This same scenario was repeated over and over again in different places and parks with the result that the kids realized that they can't have a place to play soccer. They solved the problem by organizing their own gangs as the next best recreation – and now the Samoan youngsters are considered hoodlums and gangbangers. It is ridiculous to assume that in a big town with all the parks and wide-open places the authorities couldn't have found a place for these kids to play soccer a couple of times a week with all the hollering they wanted to do, without bothering anybody.

In the few cases where the new immigrants added to the resident criminals, we can blame only our own stupidity and naïveté. To wit: of the 250,000 Cubans who sailed in with the Mariel flotilla, some 25,000 were jailbirds and lunatics Fidelito wanted to get rid of – and did. Nobody forced us to accept this sorry bunch, some of which turned out to be the most vicious scum this country ever saw. My town was “awarded” its quota of some thirty and they promptly turned a certain part of downtown into something of a free-fire zone. As one of the detectives put it: “These bastards will kill you for a belt buckle!” How did Fidelito manage to open all his jails and funny

farms and march 25,000 people to the ships and embark them without anybody being the wiser here? Did he metamorphose them into 25,000 Ninjas?

Scapegoating and fingerpointing will get us nowhere. This country was never as homogenous as Europe, Japan, et al, with their thousand years of culture and traditions. But until WWII, it had at least a modicum of cohesion which is the *sine qua non* of a functioning nation. The reason for this was that the greatest majority of the inhabitants were able to speak English even if only as their second language and thus able to communicate with each other. They were the same kind of strangers in Europe.

That this cohesion is gone is the result of the lack of an infrastructure worthy of the name, able and willing to metamorphose the new immigrants in a systematic, organized, realistic manner into functioning and participating citizens. Eric Hoffer said in *The Temper of Our Times*: "The efficiency of a society should be gauged not only by how efficiently it utilizes its natural resources but by what it does with its human resources." Hoffer was right once again and our first task should be to find a way to make the best use of our millions of immigrants, legal and illegal. The obvious question is how are we going to accomplish this?

We're going to accomplish this monumental task by going about it in an organized and systematic manner, for a change. Whenever one is dealing with "resources," whether human or otherwise, we have to do a complete inventory by cataloguing these resources. In this case, when we're dealing with human resources concerning immigrants, legal and/or illegal, the first thing we have to establish is: how many are there? What can they do? What is their educational background? Do they speak English? If "negatory," what languages do they speak/write/read fluently? What kind of skills do they have, etc. Once we have all this information we'll have a fairly good idea about where and how do they best fit in. The next, obvious step has to be to computerize all this information for instant retrieval and use. This will form the basis for a National Employment

Agency for all these immigrants.

Unless and until we're willing and able to do this cataloging, we will never get on top of this problem and we will keep generating generations of gangbangers between the youngsters – and as we are all aware of it, we already made a good start. And as usual, we'll keep blaming the victims. To accomplish this inventory, the first thing we will have to do is to put a moratorium on all legal immigration with the few and very rare exceptions of family reunion for medical reasons. And needless to say, we'll have to close hermetically all our borders by any means required to illegal immigrations, otherwise the cataloging will be a never-ending job and a monumental chimera and waste of money.

The only realistic and efficient way to inventory and catalogue millions of immigrants is to issue them some kind of ID cards, whether they are legal or illegal, making it perfectly clear that this per se does not entitle them to anything unless they are willing to participate in the follow-up steps of job training, vocational training, language courses, etc. On the other hand, if they don't have an ID card, they are not going to be entitled any longer to any, repeat any, help or benefits whatsoever, either state, federal, or private. They are going to be for all practical purposes *persona non grata* in America.

I fully realize of course that the idea of having an ID card is the proverbial red cape in the eyes of the ACLU and their ilk, but this is another big crock of horse manure which I'll dispose of with effortless ease, by again using another example of my somewhat eventful life. I've worked as a so-called foreign expert from 1970-1981 in Israel. Anybody who was in Israel for no more than a couple of weeks even as a tourist, must be aware that there is no more free-wheeling democracy in the world. Truth be told, and I'm "tolding" it, for us who were actually living here, it very often looked – and sounded – more like anarchy than democracy. The unofficial national slogan is: *Kol mamzer Melech!* (every bastard a King!) And yet, believe it or not, every Israeli is carrying an ID card

all the time (more exactly it is a little booklet called Teudat Zeud). To say that having to carry an ID card is going to turn this country into a totalitarian state is surely the apogee of idiocy, the more so as we're all carrying some sort of ID card or another already in the form of a driver's license, a credit card, etc. As one of my favorite cartoonists said, "Everybody wants progress, but nobody wants change" (Brickman, *The Small Society*).

This sounds like—dare I say it?—a whole new bureaucracy, right? Absolutely right. And this whole new bureaucracy will become a part and parcel of the whole new ministry of immigration and absorption I talked about before, which we should have had since decades if not since generations. And where are we going to get all the people for this whole new bureaucracy? Glad you asked. There is a whole army of people (pardon the pun) in the Pentagon still planning and designing weapons and systems which will never be used because their *raison d'être*—the big/bad monolithic Kommanizum—is gone bye-bye. As everybody who has enough brain for a turkey knows, their only saving grace is that all these fancy toys are keeping them from becoming unemployed and a very influential bunch of unemployed they would become, too, with big clout. Fortunately, they are all bright people with good brains and skills. Nor is the Pentagon the only man/woman labor pool with very bright people. We have something called the National Space Administration, NASA for short. These bright people are planning space colonies and sundry other fascinating stuff which will never see space in the foreseeable future. Now believe it or not, in spite of the fact that I'm an old geezer, I'm not against all progress. *Au contraire*. As this whole story proves, I'm very much for progress. But I'm even more for common sense. And common sense dictates that first things first. Which in turn requires establishing our priorities. Let's make America first fit for human consumption for all its citizens, and only then start planning space colonies and other toys. As I mentioned previously, all these people are very bright. They all know a thing or two about system engineering and the very least they are all computer literate. They should be turned

loose to tackle the new Ministry of Immigration and absorption as a project of system engineering, tackling all the problems of immigrants, those who are already here and those who will follow, under one roof instead of this sad-sack "organization" known as the INS

Another project I mentioned previously which could be handled as another system engineering job is the National Police Academy, also long overdue. Come to think of it, my engineer friend at Boeing says there is hardly any project which could not be best handled with the principles of system engineering. Is there anything in this country which does not need fixing? Name one. All these talented engineers wasting their time with useless toys "to be kept busy" could be turned loose on all our non-existent infrastructure to make them work at long last.

Will all this cost money? Affirmative, but first of all "there is no free lunch." Second, it won't cost more than Star Wars, the Stealth Bomber, and all the other fancy toys, with the difference that it will be money well spent on something useful. And it would be high time too that all these highly skilled people are used for something that makes sense for the nation's future.

The choice is ours. Are we going to solve our problems in a realistic manner or are we going to keep talking them to death with one hare-brained "feel-good" project after another as we did for decades? Is this a great country or what?

4. EDUCATION

"Erwin, where you from?"

"I am from Hungary."

"Oh, is Hungary in Vienna?"

Good try, but no cigar. Vienna is the capital of Austria and Budapest is the capital of Hungary. But luckily for you, Hungary and Austria have a common border, so you're not 100% wrong.

I am sure all of you have heard dozens of similar stories and even worse ones. I recall reading a survey which said that some of the high school graduates can't even find their own states on a map.

Obviously this state of affairs in the only superpower extant is not only a national disgrace, but a catastrophe. According to current headlines, 50% of our population is illiterate. Illiterate means that they cannot intelligently participate in our current and relevant domestic problems and affairs, to say nothing of the "outside world," which for all practical purposes is *terra incognita* to them. Walter Laqueur, Chairman of the International Research Council and a well-known author, called this in another context "The Parochialism of Bigness." This is such a vast, immense country and continent that the majority of Americans never go abroad and don't have the slightest clue how the rest of the world lives and functions. The result is that they are convinced that the American way

is not only the best way, but the only way. I'd like a "C" note for every time I was told that crime is the price we pay for living in a democracy, as if we would be the only democratic country in the world. Sometimes I wonder about the Viennese saw: Shall I try to educate him or let him die stupid? Usually I opted for the latter, being a case of too little too late.

As one bumper sticker has it: If you think education is too expensive, try ignorance. We had better do something about this *status quo* before we really become a Third World country. Having spent almost twenty years of my life in Third World countries, I can recognize the signs when I see them and, believe me, we have already made a good start.

5. HEALTHCARE

Apart from crime, this is the other reason why the rest of the modern world lost respect for this country. Whenever I'm talking with someone from abroad, the question I hear sooner or later is, "how can a rich country like this not be able or willing to provide one of the most basic and important necessities like adequate healthcare for all its citizens?" Good question, and there is a good answer. Politics. When a reporter asked Hillary Clinton why can't we have a Single Payer Plan like Canada, the answer was, "It's not politically feasible." I might be more naïve than I have the right to be at my age, but I think politics should stay the hell out of the nation's healthcare. How to do this?

One of the first things we should do is abolish free and better healthcare for politicians than for the rest of us peons. This is not a subject where the old motto of *quod licet jovi, non licet bovi* should play a role. If the aristocracy has the money to check into the Mayo Clinic to get their hangnails taken care of in designer rooms by designer nurses and gourmet meals – no problem. But, when they can check into Walter Reed and get first-class state-of-the-art care while us peons get discharged "sicker and quicker" after major surgery because the hospitals have to watch every cent to stay in business, that's another story that I am sure would change in a hurry if everybody would get the same but adequate model.

As a final word (and wish) perhaps I'll be permitted to quote myself from a My Turn column

submitted to *Newsweek*, January 28, 1984 (rejected as "not right for us," natch): "I'm convinced that some of the outrageously punitive sums awarded by juries are the result of the doctors' own making. What I mean is that if the doctors would realistically and effectively police their own rank getting rid of the (small) number of quacks, incompetents, drug addicts, winos, sex fiends, et al, as soon as they are becoming aware of them instead of waiting until it becomes a public scandal, "we the people" would be more inclined to forgive an occasional honest mistake, being well aware of it that "nobody is perfect." The problem is that the doctors are protecting all these "misfits" under the label of "loyalty." In my humble opinion this doesn't wash. There is a very definite line between being "loyal" and being an "accessory to a crime."

Unless and until the great majority of competent doctors realize this, they don't have the right to holler about the sky-high malpractice insurances they have to pay.

6. WELFARE AND HOMELESS

Truth be told, and I'm telling it, I think this is the tarbaby of the lot. If a brilliant and savvy politician like Senator Pat Moynihan was struggling with it for years without much success, it must be a very bleak and forbidding picture indeed. I believe that the reason for the intractability of this problem is that it is multifaceted, most emotionally distressing and easiest to target for sheer demagoguery. Also, and very unfortunately, it is one where the old saw that there is no free lunch is probably the most obvious. As if this wouldn't already be bad enough, it looks like a very expensive lunch to boot with the obvious question of who is going to pick up the check? Nobody wants to even breathe the dreaded "T" word, needless to say.

It is incidentally the perfect example that since the previously mentioned metamorphosis after WWII and the Vietnam War, we never tackled any problem while it was manageable because no infrastructure was *in situ* for doing so. We didn't just wake up one morning seeing all those panhandlers, rummies, loonies, and junkies sitting, lying, and perambulating in our cities; we didn't just wake up one morning to realize that our high school graduates can't spell, can't add, can't read, etc. It took years and decades, but nothing was done about it because nobody was there to do what needed to be done. Now when we have all this to a degree no longer possible to overlook, and we have families on welfare for generations, we throw up our collective hands in a gesture of helpless despair—and keep talking it to death.

I'm convinced that the big difference in the difficulty between the problem of crime and the problem of welfare and the homeless is the difference between the complexity involved in the two problems. While I'm convinced that the problem of crime could be solved, and in a relatively short timeframe, if we have the will and the *cojones* to do what is needed to be done, I'm also convinced that in the case of welfare and the homeless this is not the case.

The basic reason for this not being the case is that while the much-talked-about "root causes" concerning crime are minimal as far as their impact on the solution is concerned, root causes are indeed at the very foundation of the "welfare mess" as we know it. These two root causes are two givens: 1. the paucity of simple jobs people on welfare could handle (even if they wanted to), and 2. the difficulty of upgrading the skills of people on welfare (even if they would be willing to try). I'll mention later three possibilities for employing people with limited skills which might "make a dent" – perhaps even a fairly big one – but I also make it perfectly clear that by no stretch of the imagination could/would solve the problem.

Regarding the two given root causes, as we are all well aware, the jobs which required only a "strong back and/or two willing hands" are gone forever. Some of the few remaining ones were exported and relocating them homeward is not a possibility because if we don't buy from them, they won't buy from us.

The second given of upgrading the education of people, the sad fact is that a lot of people are simply not educable to the degree required for the available jobs.

The simple but unavoidable fact is that, whether we like it or not, we're faced with millions of people who are probably neither employable nor educable. What to do with them?

Sooner or later we'll have to get used to the difficult-to-swallow idea that we'll have not one but two classes of *dolce far niente* – the rich and the poor. As Professor Galbraith pointed out in *A Journey Through Economic Times*, with his usual dry wit, we never had any problems with the idle

rich, only the idle poor were regarded with scorn. However, before we'll be willing and able to accept the fact of this new strata of "idle poor" permanently living in our midst, if not exactly cherished, at least tolerated, the Establishment will have to get it through its collective head that this is a very big country with very big problems and at long last and *horribile dictu*, requires unique approaches and unique solutions and that nibbling at them from the peripheries won't cut the wasabi anymore. Which brings me back again to my initial thesis that it is past time to establish an infrastructure worthy of its task, which we should have done decades if not generations ago.

To manage this new class of idle poor in an organized, realistic, structured way and manner, instead of our usual *modus operandi* of no-system system/catch-as-catch-can/let's muddle through, we should again fall back on system engineering I suggested for the solution for our Criminal Justice System and law enforcement.

As this class of idle poor is going to be for years to come a case of womb-to-tomb project, we will have our work cut out. And if it will be "only" for years and not *ad infinitum*, the *sine qua non* will be a draconian birth control, of course. Nobody is going to tell them not to have sex – which would be obviously unenforceable and useless – but the part about "Go forth and multiply" is not going to be part of the deal. We have to realize that we're not going to deal with the best and the brightest. The chances that any of these idle poor will have gone through a class of home economics is remote, to say the least, therefore it will be up to the Management to provide guidance from A to Z. The way I visualize this project, the Management not only will have to provide a roof over their head, but all the necessities of life to a degree of modest comfort. Most certainly not luxuries, but not barest subsistence level, either. (As we all know, our one and a half million felons are not living at barest subsistence level either – far from it.)

This strata of "unemployables" will consist of two different groups: 1. the "grown-ups" (or un-educables) already discussed, and 2. the "existing offsprings" of school age including

kindergarten. (We don't have to worry about daycare as the parents—mostly probably women—who are qualifying for this *dolce far niente* group because they are unemployable—will do their own daycare).

As the very last thing we want is to bring up kids to be the next group of unemployables the only thing we can do is to educate the kids. Pretty obvious. Needless to say that they'll have to be educated on the taxpayers' expense. Also pretty obvious. If you find this solution "onerous," to put it mildly, remember that if their parents would have been educated we wouldn't have to deal now with their kiddies. This also is pretty obvious.

How are the kids going to be educated in a systematic way resulting in the best possible solution and result for the largest number of kids? Elementary. We're going to have the best experts in vocational guidance money can buy, to test the kids starting from kindergarten for their I.Q.s and all other skills.

Once that is done they will be educated to their highest levels they can absorb, keeping in mind long-range projections and forecasts for required skills and professions for the foreseeable future. Yes, this is not a very solid science, no, but with a certain degree of I.Q. (and skills) competent people can always be re-educated as necessary according to the latest needs and requirements.

Needless to say, I hope, that care should be taken not to educate any of these people for professions, skills, etc., which are already overcrowded or notorious for only on-again, off-again opportunities for "making a good buck," like acting and music. As Charlie Peters, Editor-in-Chief of *Washington Monthly*, keeps harping on it (correctly), let's have more teachers instead of more lawyers. Nor should they be allowed to study medicine to become one of the specialists of whom we already have too many, like cosmetic/plastic surgery, neurosurgery, or, dare I mention, "shrink." We need more G.P.s and specialists in geriatrics to take care of all the growing numbers of old geezers and old

biddies.

As all these people will be educated on the taxpayers' expense they will be not only "expected" but required to accept jobs and positions anywhere at the discretion of the Government in the continental U.S. for the equal number of years as educated (unless they are volunteering for jobs overseas à la Peace Corps). Those who are willing to accept "hardship" postings (like doctor in the Appalachians or teachers in schools of "notorious" reputations located in neighborhoods best approached by people with black belts in karate, etc.) should have the cost of their education considered to be a grant and allowed to keep whatever salary they can earn. The others will have to start repaying the cost of their education in realistic sums of monthly installments. To discourage deadbeats the Government will be not only authorized but required to garnish their earnings until the cost of their education is reimbursed (without interests) in full.

Knowing about human nature (easy come, easy go), I'm adamant not to provide these people with cash payments besides a very modest allowance of pocket money, say \$40 per month, doled out with their other monthly supplies. I'm in favor of the \$40 cash, not only because it is a bit of a morale builder, but because it can be used as part of the true and tried system of the carrot and the stick. It's safe to assume that some of the people being part of this program are not exactly model housekeepers. If at the last (unannounced) "visit" by the Management the place was not up to scratch, the cash payment will be suspended until there is improvement in the housekeeping standards. To avoid Mrs. Sloppy smooching on her neighbors there could be a notice on the bulletin board of the building something like: Please don't lend money to Mrs. Sloppy – we had to suspend her cash allowance because her home was not up to the standards of her neighbors.

Nor am I in favor of continuing the food-stamp system in any form whatsoever, having found out about all the combinations, permutations, and variations of skullduggeries and abuses/misuses they are leading to. What I prefer is providing them with all the necessities of life,

meaning, food, clothes, shelter, and, dare I say, healthcare. The kind and amount of food to be provided will be decided by trained dieticians. For instance, nothing in the junk food category should be provided. Fruit juices, yes; soft drinks, no.

I know of course what you want to ask me: Where is the money to come from? A big part of it should come from the savings by eliminating prisons *q.v.* Another big chunk would come from the abolishing of all – repeat all – other bureaucracies dealing with the subject of “welfare as we know it” which will be superseded/obsoleted by the above-outlined approach. I assume it is also needless to emphasize that this system would have to be uniform from coast to coast to forestall and avoid migrating caravans from the lowest to the highest “benefit-paying” states with the exception of adjusting the calorie intakes of food and required clothing according to climates.

To sum it all up, having read dozens of articles, columns, and essays about this subject, I became firmly convinced that the above-outlined approach and solution is the only realistic one and the least likely to be abused or misused because there will be the very minimum of cash disbursed to people who are likely to spend it “not only well but wisely.” Needless to say, but I’ll say it anyway to avoid being accused later of having promised perfection, that I’m not saying, implying, or otherwise indicating that this system is airtight or 100% foolproof. To the best of my knowledge, no such system was ever invented for any purpose by much brighter people than I can ever hope to be. The best we can hope for is “being on the ball,” use all the commonsense we can scrape together and plug all the leaks we become aware of right from the start and keep plugging them as they develop.

To repeat, this system will consist of three parts:

1. To create the maximum number of real jobs paying a decent salary adequate for a modest standard of living.
2. To get the maximum number of people filling these jobs.
3. For those unable to become part of the above group, to provide and assure a modest

standard of living if necessary from womb to tomb. To ascertain that this group will diminish through the years by natural attrition and thus not become a "political liability" and a heaven-sent target for the "right" to beat up on, there must be a strictly enforced and strictly supervised draconian birth control. Nobody said this is a perfect world and no society can be reasonably expected to deliberately breed a class of unemployable citizens.

There was an article not long ago by Mickey Kaus of TNR bearing the title *Only Work Works*. I think he is right, at least in principle as far as the able-bodied are concerned. Unless and until we find a way to put to work those who are able to work, we will never make a dent in this problem. There are two major obstacles to overcome. How and where can we find work for people in this era where a "strong back and willing hands" are not enough to make a living anymore? I can think of three possibilities, and, although they surely won't solve the entire problem, they will make a dent in it as it could be organized from coast to coast.

It is a well-known fact that our highways, roads, and bridges are sorely in need of repair and upkeep. I know from my army experience that one doesn't have to be a civil engineer to fill in potholes, clean out runoffs, or even resurface secondary roads under expert supervision. We could organize crews in every state to be moved by trailers to do this work. It would supply work for years or even indefinitely as this kind of work would "never be done" as there would always be new potholes to be repaired. I see many young women working on road building/repairing crews all over the place now so it could be unisex. I realize, of course, that the reason for it is the good pay, but at least nobody could object that "this is not Russia" (whatever that might be now).

Another possibility which would have a fair chance of success and also be feasible from coast to coast is to reincarnate the late and lamented Chinese laundries. ("Don't let shoities luined by machines! We do it by hand.") When Mr. Pong closed the last one here in Seattle a few years ago,

there was “crying and gnashing of teeth” between the “dress for success” crowd of both sexes. This project would cost a minimum of money to get underway. The washing would be done by commercial-type machines in the Central. The washed shirts and blouses would be farmed out to single mothers, etc., furnished with ironing board and pressing iron and they could do the work while watching their children. Pickup and delivery would be done by the Central. The success of the project would stand or fall on meticulous quality control, what else is new? This would be done by the person who picks up the finished product from the women to be transported back to the Central. These quality control people would be promoted from the ranks of the Pressers who have done consistently outstanding work. An occasional torn shirt would of course be unavoidable—to be reimbursed without hassle—but if the word gets around that the shirts and blouses have suspicious brown spots smelling of baby kaka or pee-pee, forget about the project. Nothing, but nothing, ruins an outfit faster than bad word-of-mouth publicity.

As a decent shirt today costs about \$30-\$40, and women’s stuff even more, there should be millions of “dress for success” people willing to pay \$2-\$3 for a well-pressed shirt or blouse which would take it out of the price range of mass-produced commercial outfits charging \$.85-\$1 avoiding hassles with the unions.

Payment for the pressers could be a basic sum for a minimum number of “products” — well over the welfare check, of course—augmented with additional pay on a “piece work” basis. The old and time-honored “carrot and stick” again.

Another possibility occurs to me by recalling a recent cover story in *Parade Magazine* about “Why Paris Works.” The entire city is hand-swept and washed every day. Every single mile of it and kept spotless. We could do this using the Welfare Crew and street people. You don’t have to be a rocket scientist to push a broom handle or a hose from a water tank. Give them a spiffy uniform with a baseball cap with a slogan on the back: *I keep your city clean.* Pay them a decent wage and

train them right and there is no valid reason why it wouldn't work. As for training them, we should be smart enough not to try and reinvent the wheel. We should send a crew to Paris for a week accompanied by a VCR crew to learn the nuts and bolts of it, how it is done, and be able to show the Doubting Thomases at home. And we should not be dumb enough to start this project in a big madhouse like New York. Let's start it in a small madhouse like Seattle—a city which was spotless when I came here in 1981. Where is the money to come from? The dreaded "T" word, of course. If the citizens are reluctant to cough up the money for having a clean city they can stop bitching about the dirty streets because they proved they don't deserve it.

It just occurred to me that perhaps there would be a possibility to use the recycling activities/modes to interface with the unskilled labor pool of welfare recipients. I'm not sufficiently familiar with the nuts and bolts activities of recycling to outline this "op" in any significant detail—as the previously mentioned three activities—but it's pretty obvious that exactly these "givens" which are available from coast to coast are the ones which should be scrutinized as viable possibilities for making a significant dent in this hard-to-manage problem. I've read somewhere that certain aspects of recycling are no-starters from a financial point of view because they are so labor-intensive that they cost more than what the end result is worth. However, if the labor could be available for free—or almost free—once the setting up phase of the "op" is taken care of, cost-effectiveness of the "op" would be solved.

What recommends this "op" is that the skill necessary for sorting/cleaning, etc., of the recyclables is minimal and available even by people who don't speak the lingo. What the Management would have to be careful about is to pull a preemptive strike by designing the nuts and bolts aspect of the "op" in such a way that the whole mode of operation should be acceptable from a point of view of hygiene/safety aspect otherwise the "left" is going to visualize and paint the whole thing as "an ant-like army of unfortunates crawling over a mountain of garbage picking up scraps of

this and that like in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro and other South American slums.”

As we all know, there is no project that could not be aborted *in utero* by a bunch of skilled demagogues trying hard enough and long enough.

I am confident that smarter people than I could come up with other feasible projects and solutions.

The second obstacle we would face in solving the problem of “welfare as we know it” has to do with human nature. How to change a way of life and habit practiced for years or perhaps generations.

Living on welfare as a career is a bit like being a hooker. Once you get the hang of it (pardon the pun), it takes a very strong character and motivation to get used to working for a living. Also, how the most obvious doesn’t occur to people on welfare – I noticed when a young guy asked me why he should take a lousy job for lousy pay, which doesn’t really pay much more than welfare? My answer was that if he would show up regularly and on time for the lousy job, the boss might give him a raise, noticing that he is a cut above the rest; but, even if he doesn’t, he will give him a good reference for a better job. No boss will be impressed by the fact that he has shown up regularly at the welfare office.

One thing I am certain of is that we absolutely must find a way to motivate people to get off welfare. Forcing people off and Shanghaing them into some kind of “make-do project” will never work. As I said, I have served in three different armies and soldiers are as closely supervised as anybody and yet we always had our share of goldbrickers who managed to load/unload only one box of ammo while the rest of us did two or three.

First of all we must dig up credible role models who were on welfare and managed to get off by their own efforts. We should put these role models on TV from coast to coast and the local ones on the local TV stations also as they will have most of their credibility locally of course. And we have

to ding into their heads the old saw: If you are looking for a helping hand, you will find it at the end of your arm. We also have a pretty good saw in my native Hungary: If you are waiting for the roast chicken to fly into your mouth, you will starve to death!

As I mentioned before, I want to discuss the plight of the homeless, as they are either on welfare already or are serious candidates for being so sooner or later.

“The homeless” is as much a catch-phrase as “the sick” and is just as meaningless unless we make a more specific differential diagnosis of their plight.

By now it must be obvious to anybody even moderately knowledgeable regarding this problem that being roofless in the sense of not having a permanent home to call their own is only a small percentage of the homeless. The others covered by this catch-phrase could and should be divided by differential diagnosis into the following five categories—even if some of them overlap:

1. The alcoholic
2. The drug addict
3. The mentally disabled
4. The physically handicapped
5. The senile (Alzheimer’s and others)

What all these five categories have in common, to a greater or lesser degree, is the fact that they are unable to take care of their daily needs. To solve their problems only requires money, but how to get it is beyond my pay-scale. However, the first “lump” of it should be allocated to the category whose only problem is not having a roof over their head; in other words, a permanent home they can call their own. Once they have that they will probably be able to earn a living. Until they do, we will have to pay the rent. As these are the people who did honest work for years and are on the street because they lost their jobs through no fault of their own, we can trust them to make an honest effort to find employment.

The winos will have to be dried out cold turkey in a place of their own and, if possible, find work. If this is not possible, they must be kept dry and off the streets by fair means or foul.

Ditto drug addicts.

Ditto the mentally disabled, only more so.

Ditto the physically handicapped unless they can be depended on to ambulate by themselves or be provided with some means of transportation.

Same for the senile, of course.

What we have to realize is that all these people are "out of the loop" as far as earning a living is concerned; but, they are still human beings entitled to "four squares" plus their daily medication, if necessary, and a clean roof over their heads. Yes, even if they don't want it and the ACLU be damned.

May I digress for a minute? Thank you. The ACLU is a perfect example of one of those things I learned during my perambulations, which is this: almost every movement, political, pseudo-religious or otherwise, will be taken over sooner or later by its lunatic fringe which will turn it into a laughing-stock from a previously perfectly valid and respectable outfit. The reason for this is that the lunatic fringe are the fanatics who are willing to fight both tooth and nail for "not one inch." The others either give in or leave.

In a modern society "the good of the many" comes before the good of the individual given that the individual is unable to understand what is good for him/her. Nobody said this is a perfect world. The time has long past when this country had wide open spaces everybody could use according to their needs and inclinations. Times change and accepted behavior has to change accordingly – keeping in mind the old saw that your right to swing your arm stops where my nose begins.

“A thousand times in modern Society your life is made easier or harder depending on the care with which someone else has done his job. Are the newspapers delivered on time? Are the vending machines fixed when they break? Are the technocrats competent? In general, can you count on others to do their best? In Japan you can.”
(James Fallows: *The Japanese are Different from You and Me.*)

7. THE QUALITY OF LIFE

Although I don't think James Fallows had the intention to define what is meant by the Quality of Life, he succeeded pretty well to put the whole ball of wax in a nutshell, within the parameters of Do-able by the individual and the local authorities. (Global problems like air pollution, etc., are not included here.)

I'm convinced that the Quality of Life of a country (as I defined it above) is to a large extent influenced, if not defined, by the same kind of daily activities and happenings as in the “average marriage” (if there is such a thing). The top of the toothpaste not put back, the toilet seat not put down, the papers not put in order after one finished reading it— and on and on.

These little daily aggravations ruined more marriages than the proverbial mother-in-laws, and “translated” into the kind of activities enumerated by James Fallows, ruined the quality of lives of more countries than the much-despised bureaucrats. (Not that they are not doing their share and more.)

To demonstrate what I mean I'll use as example the case of Israel, where I've worked as so-called foreign expert from 1970-1980, Singapore which I didn't have the chance to visit but did a little reading on it, and America where I've lived and worked from 1950 (and counting) with the ten years interruption in Israel mentioned above.

By the time I went to Israel in 1970 they had a very decent standard of living, albeit not quite as high as now which is very close to Europe's. If you had the money you could buy all the luxury

items you wanted, in clothes, imported cosmetics, imported booze, foreign magazines, cars, etc. And yet, the quality of life was atrocious. Philip Roth visited the country for a couple of weeks and summed up his impression very elegantly and succinctly in his book *The Counterlife* (p. 64) as follows: "In Israel it is enough to live—you don't have to do anything else and you go to bed exhausted." Amen. Not being Philip Roth I had the following (less elegant) entry in my diary after an especially "interesting" day: "To live in this country is like being married to a *klaft* (shrew) who will think up a thousand and one aggravations during the day from giving you lukewarm coffee for breakfast with burned toast to initiating coitus interruptus in bed without warning and screaming at you for having made pecker tracks on the bed sheet."

What is the reason for this atrocious quality of life in Israel? A detailed explanation would fill a book, and I myself dedicated a chapter to it in my memoir, but at this time I'll restrict myself to the barest essentials.

The Founding Fathers (and Mothers) decided in their great wisdom that they want the future Jewish Homeland to be an *Eastern Socialistic Nation/country*. To achieve this their (unofficial) motto became: "We want jews *without* money (from the East) and money *without* jews (from the West)."

As we all know the people who have no money are very seldom the most educated, most competent, most able, most sophisticated strata of the population. To put it in another way they are not likely to be the "shakers and the movers" of society.

Right there and then they as much as decided for the foreseeable future the paradigm of the future Jewish Homeland.

They got what they wanted, and, as the saying goes, the rest is history. Israel's population today is only ±5% Westerners and 95% Easterners. The Easterners are from Poland (literally all the Founding Fathers and Mothers) and from Rumania (especially lately). These are the Ashkenazim. The Sephardim are from North Africa (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia) who came after the French lost

their colonies there, and the Yemenites from Southeast Asia (Operation Magic Carpet). Some others are from India (where they were considered "low caste"), South America, and the latest group from Ethiopia (called Falashas).

To add insult to injury there was something else involved, politely called "negative selection" especially concerning the Sephardim from North Africa. Those who could hack it anywhere else managed to go to France, the U.S., and other countries. The "leftovers" went to Israel.

It's no great secret that if you open a "greasy spoon" restaurant, you'll attract only two kinds of customers: those who are used to eating only in these kinds of emporiums, and those who eat there because that's the only place they can afford. In either case it is very unlikely that they will have the kind of table (and other) manners Miss Manners would approve of.

There is perhaps one more question to answer: How did this crew manage to survive financially. Very good question. They pulled off a *tour de force* no other nation was ever able to match. This Eastern Socialistic country managed to get itself sponsored (to put it delicately) by a Western Capitalistic country and counting (guess which).

As Lonesome George Gobel used to say when I was still watching the tube, "...and theeeeere you aaaaaare! And heeeeere is the show!"

Nobody will ever persuade me that under different management Israel couldn't have become the Singapore of the Middle East. According to persistent rumor and generally speaking, we Jews are not exactly idiots, and as for natural resources compared to Singapore, which has to import even water, Israel is still the land of milk and honey. Regarding the case of Singapore, whether we agree with the system of Singapore's Government or not is irrelevant for the subject I'm discussing, which is the Quality of Life. What we should not ignore or overlook are two aspects of Senior Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's genius as nation builder: 1. being constantly aware of the fact that the *signal* the Leader of the Government sends is of paramount importance for the nation's Quality of

Life, and 2. to be bloody-minded enough to *immediately* stomp on the miscreants who ignored the signals, unlike we did here in the last quarter century or so, waiting till things got out of hand and then throwing up our collective hands in a gesture of helpless despair wondering: where did we go wrong?

Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew did something else we never managed to achieve to this very day, to decide on a realistic immigration policy for his future nation/state. "He set his face resolutely against soft-headedness in the matter of Indo-Chinese refugees: we either grow calluses or we will die of bleeding heart" (*No Man is an Island*, James Minchin, p. 164).

Very importantly, he also realized that as his small nation cannot provide all the skills and expertise needed, he was not too proud or reluctant to hire the best experts from all over the world on a "name your price" basis. This was a big difference compared to the Israeli *modus operandi* where outside experts who offered their skills *pro bono* were politely but firmly brushed off. I've a letter in my file addressed to the Editor of the *Jerusalem Post* from an American business consultant with impeccable credentials who offered his services *pro bono*. The Letter Editor gave it the catchy title: *Experts Needed But Not Heeded*. All this has a very big impact on the Quality of Life.

And this brings me to the problems of the America here and now, because it proves my point that there is more to the Quality of life in a country than the GNP/GDP/DOW etc.

The proverbial Average Citizen is not worried about these and other statistics. He is worried about being able to go to the supermarket without making the round of the apartment to check if all the windows and doors are locked, whether he/she will be mugged for the groceries on the way back. He/she is also wondering why are the skateboarding morons allowed to practice their "art" at the busiest streets at the busiest hours, why and how did the pedestrians become the pariahs of America having to share the sidewalks not only with the above-mentioned skateboarding morons but also with the inline skaters and bicycle messengers, ending up at the bottom of the totem pole of

'em all, not to mention the drivers who believe that Yellow means to stomp on the gas trying to beat the Red, which they don't "see."

He/she is also wondering why is the mailperson leaving the parcels in the lobby instead of delivering it to recipients as it is specified in their regs, especially when the elevator is right there in the lobby for their use. A parcel in the lobby comes under the rule of "finders keepers, losers weepers." I came very close recently to be becoming one of the weepers when the mailperson left my box of new checks on the shelf one whole foot from my mailbox. Do you have any idea what a box of blank checks can do in expert hands? Just thinking of it gave me the willy-nillies and the heebie-jeebies. I was also wondering why was my letter I mailed to Pagliacci arrived with that cute little stamp with the hand pointing to my return address label with ADDRESSEE UNKNOWN – Return to Sender, when Pagliacci is the most popular pizzeria in years, the address was perfect including the number of the building but the one digit of the ZIP code was wrong, and Pagliacci is visible from the P.O. where the letter was mailed – six days ago. In six days I get letters from my friends in Noo Joisey. But not to worry, the greatest Marvin Runyon of all times, a.k.a. the Postmaster of the U.S.A., keeps insisting that we have the best mail service in the world. I'm not inclined to argue with him but all this reminds me of the time when I was still bending over the hot drafting board and I saw a cartoon in one of the trade magazines. The cartoon shows a draftsman at his board with the supervisor standing next to him and the caption reads: "Bill would you please tell me again what a terrific draftsman you are because I'm getting a bit discouraged."

To change this delicate subject, I got my monthly phone bill from good ole' US WEST and guess what? They still didn't figure out after five months of nagging, bugging, begging, and pestering, how to change my mailing address from my home address (where the above-mentioned mailpersons distribute the mail according to the random theory) to my P.O. Box where there are special mailboxes installed in the lobby for the customers' convenience to drop all the mail which

was deposited – you guessed it – in the wrong mailboxes. (Do you remember what Jim Fallows said in my epigraph?)

A special Honorable Mention should go to the President of Broadway Merchants Association of Emerald City in charge of an intrepid crew of hydrocephalic troglodytes wearing goggles, dust masks, and ear protectors while walking up and down Broadway five days a week bravely carrying on their back those putrid, stinking portable banshees (a.k.a. leafblowers). No, there are NO leaves to blow. What they are blowing in the face of passers-by are cigarette butts and other assorted dreck discarded by the citizens. This op was cunningly timed to be taking place *exclusively* between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. to inconvenience the largest number of people. On the day when they are not blowing (it is a two-man crew) they are scrubbing the sidewalk with a high-pressure hose, this time not the blowers but the high-pressure hose driving all the dreck in the faces of the passers-by mixed with the dirty mist of water.

This whole op must be immune to intervention by the Constitution because there is a constant stream of letters to the Letter Editor of the local papers about this nuisance, to say nothing about my personal contribution of letters in five years (having included dozens of pictures in different positions, pard'n me) to everybody from the Mayor down – to no avail. However I heard it on the grapevine that there is relief in sight: the blowers keep breaking down and there is no money in the kitty for repairs. Going on 82 and counting, I hope I live that long.

All these “little aggravations” and all these “little dangers” puts one in a state of mind when one has to be constantly “on guard,” when one has to ask constantly “*qui vive?*” (Who goes there?), when one has to be constantly *en vedette* (on sentry duty) because one can never be safe (or so it feels, which is the same). I don't think anybody will deny that this has a negative impact on the Quality of Life.

The obvious question is how and why did we get into a situation when one has to be

constantly on Red Alert? And the answer is obvious. It is the trickle-down effect of our enormous amount of violent crime taking up the time and attention of the police who don't have either the time nor the resources to worry about "the small stuff" and the crooks who are causing "the small stuff" who are well aware of this and taking advantage of it. Another aspect of this problem is the legions of scam artists bedeviling this country lately, starting with the time-honored shell games in all their combinations, permutations, and variations, through the phony travelling handymen offering the unwary homeowners all kinds of repairs for which they collect hefty down payments but never show up for them, or if they do, it is a lousy job which will have to be redone in short order by a qualified tradesman. And let's not forget of course the latest plague, the telemarketers who would sell you not only the Brooklyn Bridge but a reserved seat on the next shuttle to Mars. The reason why all these scam artists can thrive and flourish like never before is the same trickle-down effect I mentioned previously from the violent crimes we all have to live with and worry about. When one has to swim in shark-infested waters, one is not likely to worry about some little fish making a nibble at your "little piggie."

By some strange free-association I'm not aware of, talking about sharks made me think of a privileged class in America who are a law unto themselves: banks.

And I'm not going to mention the name of my bank because I know from my own experience that they are what we described in Hungarian as "one is nineteen, the other twenty less one." In other words: you can't win. And they are also using the same *modus operandi*: *milk 'em till their teats fall off!* I realize of course that this is a case falling under the saying "fools walk in where angels fear to tread" so I'll make it a very short walk with just one *f* rinstance. In the recent past I was a bad boy and wrote four overdraft checks at the last week of the month. They were for \$13, \$11, \$10, and \$8. Obviously just plain carelessness, not because I went on a "shopping spree." At that time my bank charged "only" \$18 per OD checks which they shortly remedied by making it a nice round sum

of \$20/OD check. As Uncle Sam sends my Social Security benefit on the third of the month instead of on the first (there is a cute story in there too) the bank charged me $\$18 \times 4 = \72 for lending me \$42 for five days. "You gotta love these guys." Shylock would have been green with envy.

As the next story shows, which happened just while I'm writing this, their much-vaunted service is not so hot either.

I get a pension payment from Israel wired every month which arrives between the 5th-10th of the month. On the 7th I get one of their Account Information forms advising me that I got a wire transfer, but to my surprise the amount is twice what the usual amount is. Having worked in Israel for ten years I give them "the benefit of the doubt" assuming that they screwed up and write to my friend who is handling this to go to the bank and see what happened. However, before I get an answer a second Account Information form arrives showing the wire transfer with the usual (correct) amount. As Alice said "things are gettin' curiouiser and curiouiser." I go to my bank and relate them the story. One of the guys gets on his computer and tells me that the sum which was *credited* to me on the first Account Information form was *debited* on the same day. In other words "God giveth, God taketh away." In still other words they screwed up. As the porcupine said trying to copulate with a hairbrush: we all make mistakes. OK, but why didn't the bank let me in on this secret, I ask the guy. Embarrassed silence. The answer is of course that writing letters costs \$\$\$\$. Let the poor sucker find out when he gets monthly statement.

In all fairness, banks are not the only fair-haired boys of the Establishment who are a law unto themselves. The Pharmaceutical outfits are another. They can charge what the traffic (a.k.a. the customers, a.k.a. the suckers) will bear. There is *no* authority which is controlling drug prices. Period. Recently I needed some antibiotic which was "long off patent" as they say in the trade. When I needed a refill three months later, it was 30% more expensive. As I'm living on a very modest fixed income this was not a "question of principle" but of \$\$\$ so I asked the Troubleshooter

of the *Seattle Times* to investigate this problem. Here is the word-for-word answer of the employee of the Food and Drug Administration: “Frankly we’ve no idea why drug prices continue to rise – even for products long off patent. The Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, which we administer, contains no provision authorizing us to establish prices for drugs.” There you have it clear as distilled water. As we all know the explanation for the high prices of drugs is that the R&D is very high. OK, although I’m sure this too is exaggerated. But what is the explanation/excuse to raise the price of a drug 30% in three months which is “off patent” some twenty years? Could you please talk a little louder, I can’t hear you.

There is an ongoing debate whether we have too much or too little Government. The correct answer is: both. As Philip K. Howard’s bestseller *The Death of Common Sense* amply proves there are hundreds of examples of too much Government meddling and as the above two examples of banks and pharmaceuticals prove there are places where is not enough Government “meddling.”

I think by now even the few examples I discussed makes it obvious that our Quality of Life could be easily improved with a little more common sense and goodwill if the relevant authorities would only listen to the input from “we the people,” if they are not competent enough to do on their own initiatives what needs to be done.

According to persistent rumors America is a democracy and in democratic countries there used to be an old Yiddish proverb: *vox populi, vox dei*. Somewhere along the line when we didn’t look this was changed to *vox populi, vox dreck*.

8. CONCLUSION

To make a long story shorter, what we need is a completely and drastically new way of governing. Our Constitution became an anachronism unsuitable for the New America which is a microcosm of the world. It should be graciously deposited in the Smithsonian with a nice sign: R.I.P.

You think I've lost my mind? It's a possibility, of course, but although I might be prejudiced, I don't think so. What I do think is that my background spanning five continents gives me a better perspective and wider horizon enabling me to notice and register what the proverbial Average American cannot or will not see if he/she does, will not accept as valid or true because the truth is too painful.

In the last chapter of my autobiography I discussed the same dilemma. A system of checks and balances was fine while the system worked as it was meant to by the founding fathers. When the system of checks and balances became a system neutralizing each other to the point where the bottom line became zero, resulting in zero action, the system outlived its usefulness and should be traded in for a new system appropriate to the circumstances, in a word a system that works.

"Because history changes, human institutions must change accordingly" (*Law in Imperial China/The Legalists and Law*, Bodde and Morris, p. 24).

What we have been trying to do is like trying to run a Japanese or French high-speed train

with coal-fired engines and a crew which cannot communicate because they don't speak the same lingo. Sorry, folks, it can't be done. If we want to run high-speed trains, we have to get rid not only of the old train, but the old crew as well. Fiddling with its parts won't make the train fly. You remember what your friend Erwin said about the old engineering axiom? "If the basic concept of a project is wrong, no amount of fiddling with its parts will make it fly."

Barbara Tuchman in her brilliant historical survey from Troy to Vietnam, *The March of Folly*, came to the sad conclusion that the wisdom in government is almost a contradiction in terms. Although I have neither Ms. Tuchman's scholarship nor her phenomenal grasp of history, just my own experience of eighty years, I don't doubt her conclusion for one minute. What I still refuse to believe is that a nation which was able to provide statesmen and visionaries of the caliber of Jefferson, Washington, Lincoln, Madison, and others from a pool of two and a half million people and barely touched natural resources, couldn't do a better job of governing from a pool of two hundred fifty million people and the largest natural resources of any nation on earth. I cannot and do not believe that using all the resources—human and natural—and adding a modest amount of common sense judiciously mixed with a dash of imagination where required, and by picking and choosing the best from previous systems, we couldn't come up with a model resulting in a better quality of life than what we "enjoy" now.

To assume that we can use basically the same system of government as in the days of the founding fathers is absurd. It cannot be done. If you think I am wrong, all you have to do is look around you and marvel at the wall-to-wall chaos we try to deal with from day to day, whether it is law enforcement, healthcare, education, welfare, immigration, you name it. Unless you're one of those "none so blind as those who don't want to see," you cannot argue the fact that all these problems are the undeniable result of a system in gridlock.

To say that "once we're starting to fool around with the Constitution and Bill of Rights we're

heading for catastrophe” is utter nonsense. *Au contraire*. It is exactly this “not one inch” approach which doomed organized religion in general and made the Orthodoxia in particular the laughing stock and the butt of jokes in Israel—of all places—and all over the world.

To mention just one aspect of our, in my humble opinion, misplaced approach of “not one inch” is our sacred freedom of speech, and I’m not being sarcastic, either. But, you can boil me in imported olive oil and you’ll never convince me till I draw my last breath, that to call me a filthy Jew and my building manager a dirty nigger, is a *sine qua non* and the very cornerstone of our building of freedom, which would surely come tumbling down around our collective ears, if we would pull this specific piece of stone out of the building, which serves no necessary, much less valid purpose in holding up our building of freedom. *Au contraire*. It is an unmitigated disgrace to belittle a human being for being different in color, religion, nationality, or belief, and it is even a bigger disgrace to condone and approve of this by law. I’m convinced that this is one of the reasons why this country is still the racist, intolerant, narrow-minded, bigot country it is. Are we absolutely *sure* that the protection of the First Amendment is an honorable, valid, and most importantly, *intended* use for hate-mongering in any form or manner? Particularly and specially in the home of the Klooixie peepool with the white *jallabiya*? And the Birchie peepool? And the Arianized peepool? And all their ilk of similar ideologies using the word in its widest sense. I’m just asking. Let’s check this subject out with a person of impeccable credentials (unlike mine), Professor Emeritus Derek Bok of Harvard University who is writing in his book *The State of the Nation*, Chapter *Individual Freedom*, p. 303 *inter alia*: “Almost every country except the United States draws the line when it comes to ‘hate speech.’” Now this is pretty specific isn’t it? I’m neither quoting him out of context, nor do I put a “spin” on his own text. What he says in other words “is everybody out of step but Johnny?” Nope. I think Johnny is out of step and very much so. And I think it would be past time for Johnny to get *in* step with the other countries.

The more so as it seems to me this country has already its work cut out to get all its laundry list of social ills and other problems under control, without complicating its situation by adding a generous dash of hate-mongering to its witches brew.

This is especially important in a country like ours which is not a "nation." You remember my epigraph quoting Bucky Fuller? "The United States of America is not a nation...The United States of America is a crossbreeding integration of humans from all the nations of the planet Earth." And I've more bad news for you. It became something of a cliché that America is a melting pot. The cliché is wrong. America never was and never will be a melting pot in the sense of an alloy or amalgam, which is created by mixing different kinds of metals together, creating a new homogenous whole. America always was and always will be a mosaic. And there is nothing wrong with a mosaic if the pieces fit together creating a harmonious whole which works. And it is exactly here where our problem is. We seem to have lost the skill – perhaps the will? – to fit the pieces of the mosaic together into a harmonious whole which works. Or come to think of it, we might never have had it, but didn't notice until recently when we became "...a crossbreeding integration of humans from all the nations of planet Earth."

What is my supporting evidence to make this statement? As follows: While it is a truism that America always was, and is, a country of immigrants from day one, it is equally true that up to WWII, we were a nation of predominantly European immigrants with the exception of Chinese coolie and some Japanese farmers. (See: *Strangers from a Different Shore*, R. Takaki.) Therefore we had to deal only with our "own kinds," whose customs, habits, religions, etc., we've dealt with for generations in the Old Country. To use the vernacular, to deal with them again here was "no big deal."

The big deal started only after the Second World War in general and the Vietnamese War in particular. This generated the "new kind" of immigrants and in massive numbers, too, about whom

we knew absolutely nothing regarding their languages, their customs, or their religions. They were very different indeed from those America had to deal with previously and we were completely unprepared for them. My point is that we're still just as unprepared for them now. Basically, we just expect them to "sink or swim," what the French call System D, for *Débrouillez-vous!* (fend for yourself), and if some of them "sink" – as some inevitably will – we blame the victims for ending up on welfare or in jail.

My favorite cartoonist, Brickman, *The Small Society*, had a cartoon with the caption, "Everybody wants progress but nobody wants change." Amen.

The following are the changes I'm suggesting to achieve the progress we desperately need.

There is one thing about which I am adamant and about which I am absolutely certain and that is the *sine qua non* of success. It must be some kind of system (the name is irrelevant) where there is a Head Honcho even if it is only a *primus inter pares* who has the final word to decide and say: I listened to all your suggestions and remarks and this is my decision. Now, go and do it!

Fortunately I just came across Professor Emeritus Derek Bok's book *The State of the Nation* and I'm indebted to him to help me make this point. He writes in the chapter *Health Care* as follows (*inter alia*): "In 1994 the administration mounted an unprecedented campaign to reform America's health care system.... By the time the campaign ended innumerable plans had been trotted out, costed out, and talked out along the corridors of power in Washington. After all the reports were issued and all the speeches made, however, no legislation was passed, not even a compromise bill."

Here you have the whole ball of wax in a nutshell. The American system of checks and balances in action with the bottom line resulting in *zero*, culminating in *zero* action about one of the most important legislation impacting the population of the whole nation.

It might sound like a paradox, but the fact is that the bigger and more complex an organization is, the more imperative it becomes to have one person who has the last word and the

ultimate responsibility for making the organization work. And we will never find this person as long as he has a bunch of old fossils looking over his shoulder, second-guessing him and back-seat driving, but expecting him to be the fall guy if things go wrong. Nor do we want a younger generation aspiring to become old fossils with the only priority to worry about being reelected by sending home their share (or more) of the "pork."

The team we need to run this new system of government cannot be the old system of the best congress money can buy. We need *doers* and *shakers* with the old-fashioned zeal and integrity whose only ambition is to be part of the team working like demons for the common good of the nation and its people. Period.

And this is exactly why we get all the second- and third-raters lately. A first-class doer might be willing to consult and accept compromises, yes, but once he/she has heard everyone out, he/she wants to have the last word, expecting everyone to fall in line and work like mad to get the job done or get out of the way. I realize that this is only the outline, but if I had all the details I'd be the American Harry Lee Kuan Yew. You should be so lucky.

So what kind of a system do I have in mind? A system I would call *The Cabinet of the Ten Wise Persons*. These ten wise persons would be the strategists who would decide what has to be done. They would hold a secret vote to choose their *primus inter pares*, who would have the last word. Next question: how and from where would the ten wise persons be chosen or recruited? They would be a mixture of academics and CEOs from the business world. It is a fact of life that both the academics and the CEOs know each other. They know who are the shakers and movers and who are the phonies and what Montaigne called "the donkeys loaded down with books," with too much book learning but not enough common sense. Also, the movers and the shakers could be depended on to be familiar with the dictum of my landsman Leo Rosten: "first class people hire first class people, second class people hire third class people." Amen.

Now to the Phoenician aspect of the system of the ten wise persons, not exactly unimportant in a country where the slogan is: "By their income thou shalt know them." How much would they get? Name your price—within reason. The *primus inter pares* would get 50% more than the other nine wise persons. More responsibility deserves more moola.

So, by now we have the *primus inter pares* and nine wise persons culled from the *crème de la crème* of academia and the CEOs. Now we need the staff for the ten wise persons who, being first class people, will hire first class people to do the actual work. Where to find them? Ah, this is where it comes in handy to have an itsy-bitsy idea about past history. I have something in mind like the Mandarinate of Imperial China, but before going into that, perhaps I shall be permitted to give you an idea of what kind of people I would like to have as the ten wise persons? First and foremost, I would like people who saw a little of this green earth outside the USA. Nothing makes a person more "rounded" than to see with his/her own eyes how the rest of the world is doing things, not only differently but sometimes also better than we do here. Second, I would like to stay away from "specialists" and/or "experts." Somebody said a specialist is someone who knows more and more about less and less. Obviously this is not conducive to "vision" nor to wisdom. A couple of foreign lingoers would be nice. I would also want people to have hobbies they really enjoy. I would not want sourpusses regardless of how well-qualified they might otherwise be. One sourpuss can screw up the ambiance of a whole team and unhappy people do not work well together, and it is obvious that these people will have to spend a great deal of time together. In a word, I would like a "happy ship." One more thing: I would not want saints any more than fools. I don't have to paint pictures I assume—enough said. Somebody remarked that nothing revives a tired businessman more than a good roll in the sack—in moderation, of course.

Now, back to the Imperial Chinese Mandarinate. In case you are familiar with the system, relax, we won't have Imperial Eunuchs, thank you very much. The Mandarinate were chosen by

passing exams and that is exactly what I have in mind. The exams would be open to everybody with guts and brains. The only prerequisite would be a clean police record, without being a fanatic about this either. As we say in Hungary, a horse has four legs and it still stumbles. Of course, a horse that keeps stumbling is no good, as sooner or later the dummy is likely not only to break its own leg but probably your neck, too.

Just as in Imperial China, the final exams were reached only after passing preliminary exams first, to eliminate the obviously unqualified, the weirdoes, the Flat Earthers, and other adventurous “let’s give it a try, what can I lose” types. These exams would also automatically filter out the ones with skeletons in their closets rattling too loudly and too often, as they would be expected to have enough common sense not to call attention to their indiscretions, to put it delicately, knowing full well that somebody is going to give a good hard look at what they did with their life. This would automatically do away with the spectacles we’ve heard and read about lately, embarrassing the head honchos who selected them for some important jobs, only for some nosy media guy to come up with some pictures or what-not of the guy with a bimbo sitting on his lap topless in public while said naughty boy was palpating for silicon implants.

There was another aspect of Imperial China which definitely finds favor in my eyes and would likewise definitely plagiarize for this system. It was translated as The Censorate. The only job of these people was to keep a sharp eye on the Imperial Bureaucracy, of which there was a whole bunch as you can imagine in a big country like that, to make sure that they stay on the proverbial straight and narrow – or else. The “else” was nothing to sneer at, either, as the law in Imperial China practiced the principle of *noblesse oblige* long before the French invented this saw, but then again, as you know, the Chinese invented just about everything long before us round-eyes did. What they did was to inflict a much harsher sentence for the same crime on government officials than on the *hoi polloi*. I cannot prove this, unfortunately, but I’ll bet my front teeth that if we would have had

something like the Imperial Censorate, the S&L caper and the International Bank of Crooks would not have made all the front page news it did, to say nothing of a whole slew of smaller peccadilloes endemic between the membership of the best Congress money can buy.

What is not open to argument is that if we want to reinvent America and have the intention to play the role in the so-called post cold war, post communist era the way we did in the good old times after the Second World War, we'd better get off our collective butts in great haste and urgency because the present picture and sitcom reminds me of nothing as much as Casey Stengel's immortal *cri de coeur*: "Ain't anybody around here who can play this fuckin' game?" At this point in time: negatory.