

The Way We Were

by John R. Coyne, Jr.

When Bob Tyrrell rather casually asked me to do a short piece on the differences between the Beats of the fifties and the New Leftists of the sixties, I rather casually said I would. And now that it's time to produce, I wish I were in Mongolia, up the creek without a typewriter. For what I'm expected to do, I fear, is to sum up a couple of the most complex decades in American history, a task for which I may be even less suited—believe it or not—than someone like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

For one thing, I haven't really sorted things out for myself yet. The fifties were special for me, the memories still having more to do with emotion and nostalgia than with reason and analysis. And I think that most of us who came of age in the fifties feel much the same way. Occasionally some of us get together again, a little beefier now, the bellies beginning to push out, the hairlines retreating, the worry lines a little deeper. We stand at some obscure bar where no one remembers us, a bar where once we held court, and we gulp down draft beer and dago red and forget about those martinis most of us have—much against our better sense—graduated to, and we dust off our memories and dredge up forgotten names and adventures. "Remember the night Jack punched John the bartender just as he was coming over the bar to throw us out? John went flying into Kathleen's lap and knocked her into the steam table. Good old Jack." "Remember that night we got stranded outside Santa Rosa and finally hitched a ride with two escaped cons who'd stolen a Studebaker?" "Remember that night in Denver we sat up all night chewing that peyote Dick had brought back from Mexico? And the peyote turned out to be soft wood chips?" And we begin to stand a little straighter, one foot hooked up on the rail and we forget the wives and the kids and the cushy jobs we're all just a little bit ashamed of. Some boob at the bar asks Bill Moylan what he's up to now, and Bill, who spent four years in the fifties writing an immense novel about war and Christ and courage and patriotism and death, flushes and finally blurts out that he sells toys. But Mike comes to the rescue and tells the boob to bug off and we seal it up and forget it. And after we've drunk a few more gallons the years drop off and it's 1950 again and we see the faces as they were, lean and tough and cynical and mean and absolutely compassionate. And we dream again of cross country trips, sometimes

hitching, sometimes on Greyhounds, trips begun at about three in the morning when we'd had too much of New York and New Yorkers. And those magnificent places we fled to—Tucson, Santa Fe, Denver, Rapid City, Waco—are ours again for just awhile.

Like most important things, we didn't know we had it until we lost it. It all began I guess, in the late forties, when the first great wave of veterans hit the campuses, and universities became almost overnight the new centers of American society, a great chain of autonomous city-states stretching from coast to coast. And suddenly, the former inhabitants of the universities—the 4 Fers, the evaders, the young deferred instructors who had whiled away the war by ogling coeds and preaching received Marxian doctrine—all were washed away as the veterans remade the campuses in their own images. Years older than their classmates chronologically, and centuries older experientially, they were tenderly cynical, hard drinkers and womanizers, and they had learned in Europe, in the Pacific, in obscure Southern and Southwestern military bases pretty much all there was to know about the basics of manhood. They were men, real men, who'd tried everything at least once, and many of them had been through hell and come out the back door. And just when they began to thin out, the Korean veterans returned and the whole thing began again.

It was this suddenly imposed society, a man's society, that nurtured the first crop of Beat writers. The Beats, for the most part, were an integral part of the new society, and in one way or another they'd learned most of the same basic lessons. Unlike the New Leftists, they were absolutely unpolitical. As long as the machine ran they were willing to leave it alone, and they had seen enough (unlike the new radicals, who have seen little more than college campuses and the irrelevant life lived there) to realize that as bad as the system might be, it was still the best system yet devised. They were willing to leave politics to the politicians, for whom they felt no great love but whose antics amused them mightily (and this explains a great deal about how most of us felt about Joe McCarthy. We never loved him, but we all got a great kick out of the way he used to scare the liberals).

I was never a Beat. By the time I came back from Korea the movement had already pretty much fizzled. But many of them were still around and they were more

like us than any of our non-veteran classmates. We knew the same things, we drank the same things, we hated the same things, and we shared, despite our contempt for the pin-headed bureaucrats who too often ran things, a deep and profound love for America. Our experiences had taught us to eschew frills, to look for what was basic. Thus, we believed strongly in those emotions such as patriotism which we had seen bring out the best in our comrades, and although cynical (albeit our cynicism now seems pretty superficial), we believed that the important things could be reduced to a very few essentials—kindness, honesty, bravery. Courage was the big thing for us, and if we had any single idol (outside of Kerouac, of course) it was Hemingway. Probably naive, but it seemed to us that Hemingway was one of the very few big American guns who understood anything at all of what manhood meant. Our girls, most of whom we picked off from young instructors, seemed to agree, and until 1960, there was always at least one girl acting out the Lady Brett bit.

We weren't Beats, but we could talk to them and they could talk to us in a way we've never been able to communicate with the radicals. Our ideals can never be theirs, for our personalities, our style, our whole sense of humor is completely alien to them. Most of us understand the radicals, I think, for we were the last reading generation, and we know that each idea and goal which the New Left believes it has discovered was discovered by someone a few centuries ago. No, they'll never understand us.

Yet I'm flailing, and I fear that you still have no idea of what we were like. So let me try it this way. I wrote a story, sometime around '56, which was published in a small, obscure, now-defunct periodical. The story became, for a year or so, famous at Columbia, and whenever I bump into survivors from those years they talk about it. The story, I think, can tell you more about how we were—what our humor was like—than pages of exposition. It's called "A Manhattan Love Story," and it goes like this (please read to the end).

Artie Shaw's clarinet cut momentarily through the smoke and babble of the small downtown bar. An old waiter with tired eyes approached the couple in the dim back booth.

"Arv annuver?"

(Continued on Page 12)

How to Enlist the Free Market in Pollution Control

by John C. Meyer

The problem of air and water pollution, unlike many of the so-called problems incessantly urged upon our attention by the media, is a genuine cause for concern. Pollution is something all can agree is undesirable and it is not a condition of nature, physical or human, which is not susceptible to change. Furthermore, it is a legitimate sphere for governmental activity, because it is a physical impingement by some individuals on others which they cannot adequately cope with either individually or by voluntary association.

The crux of the problem is that the polluter makes other individuals pay part of the cost of his activity, a situation economists call an "external diseconomy." At this point in the discussion someone will surely say, "pollution is not a 'cost'; it is something we must abolish." However such a person does not actually believe this; his position is merely the product of inadequate analysis. It is palpably absurd, for example, to suggest that, if we had eliminated 99% of automobile exhaust pollution, we would pay \$25 billion to eliminate the final one percent. We definitely want to reduce pollution and we want to get the greatest reduction possible for the resources we put into this enterprise; we are, however, unwilling to allocate unlimited resources to the problem, and especially to the complete elimination of all pollution.

Once we have defined our objective as the reduction of air and water pollution at the least cost (both in terms of direct dollar costs and in terms of the indirect costs of social dislocation), the question of how it should be done can be more intelligently approached. The conventional approach through government regulation and government programs has been virtually the only way considered until now. Is it therefore necessary to resign ourselves to yet another massive, inefficient set of regulatory agencies and government programs? I believe there is a better way—a way to accomplish a great reduction in potential government spending in this area and an even larger reduction in the incipient pollution bureaucracy.

The key to this alternative is a system of pollution taxes, coupled with a "pollution tax credit" (similar to the investment tax credit) for those investing in pollution control. Such a tax system would harness the machinery of the free market by internalizing the diseconomies of pollution within the market. In simple terms the internalization of this external diseconomy would mean that the polluter pays through taxes for the damage he does. Thus the cost of pollution to all of us

is added to the cost of the activity which pollutes, be it driving a car, producing electricity or steel, or burning trash.

This alternative combines the virtues of (comparative) simplicity and great flexibility. Since pollution does not respect state lines, a basic Federal tax on each type of air and water pollutant would be necessary—probably to be levied only on pollution above a certain amount, for practical reasons. To this tax any state or locality would be free to add a further tax. Since the cost of a given additional amount of pollution is greater in some places (e.g. New York City) than in others, state and local pollution taxes can contribute to a rational distribution of such polluting enterprises as society chooses to pay for. The tax rates can be varied to meet the urgency of the problem, provided that they are never made so high as to be equivalent to an outright prohibition for the average polluter in an industry at any particular time. If the rates were made prohibitive, the advantages of a tax over a regulation would be lost. In particular it would no longer allow a gradual adjustment of each industry affected to the new conditions. Furthermore there is less incentive to evade a tax one can at least temporarily live with than a regulation which makes the continued operation of one's business impossible, or nearly so, if complied with.

The largest single cause of pollution today is the automobile. Since the problem is not centralized as is that of an industrial plant, it is somewhat more difficult to administer a pollution tax in this area. Since the car owner will ultimately pay for anti-pollution equipment (as he is already paying for safety equipment) and since the efficiency of such equipment depends on the car owner who must maintain it, he should pay the tax directly. This arrangement will promote competition to satisfy the demand for low-pollution vehicles which such a tax will create.

Since all states require automobile licenses and many require an annual automobile inspection, the tax could be collected with minimum of additional bureaucracy. The Federal Government would need to require an annual inspection in all states. This inspection would include a measurement of the rate of pollution caused by each car and the tax could be computed from that rate times the number of miles each car had been driven in the past year. (A pollution factor should also be added to the gasoline tax.) Of course there are a number of tax evasion possibilities here, but the same would apply to any system of regulation. Evasion of this tax would do very little to thwart its purpose, since its purpose is to affect an average, not any particular individual, and since such evasion would necessarily

be partial, at least until someone invented a perfect anti-pollution device. Furthermore, the tax would still function as an incentive to buy a cleaner automobile, since the tax evader may have a guilty conscience, often has to bribe an inspector, and is always in some danger of getting caught.

The advantages of taxation over regulation are clear in the field of automobile pollution. Regulation must simply prohibit pollution above a certain minimum and cannot touch pollution below that minimum. With a pollution tax there is no need for any minimum at all since each car must be tested anyway. Thus continuous market pressure on everyone to reduce pollution is substituted for a clumsy all-or-nothing approach. This pressure can be readily adjusted by a simple change in the tax rates, whereas a change in Federal emission standards often causes injustice and disruption, while usually not applying to cars already on the road. A tax can be introduced at a level tolerable to those affected and increased from year to year until it reaches a level sufficient to attain whatever objectives we may set in the field of automobile pollution control.

Each car's inspection sticker could have its pollution rate recorded on it so that localities could easily collect their own pollution taxes. For example, New York City could collect a special tax on each commuter's car according to its pollution rate. A pollution tax credit could be given both to the automobile companies and to any car owner who installed an anti-pollution device in his car. A tax could be imposed on each car produced in proportion to its rate of pollution, but it would merely be passed on to the consumer. It is, however, necessary that there be a direct tax on the car owner so that he has an incentive to keep his anti-pollution devices in good repair. Furthermore, a direct tax on the car owner, who is almost all of us, is a protection against an irrationally high tax, since the voters will know they are the ones paying the tax.

Except for automobiles, government and industry are the major polluters, and most of their pollution is concentrated in large units. The only cure for governmental pollution is a government program, and this is the area on which President Nixon has placed his major initial emphasis. For major industrial plants the tax solution is relatively easy to administer. Some industries will adjust with relative ease under the tax incentive. Others may be unable to accomplish a substantial reduction in pollution at a reasonable cost. As a result of this their products will become more expensive and their sales will decline; this is exactly the result we should want. To the extent that their products are unimportant, or that substitutes for them are readily available, these industries will tend to disappear in the long term, and this is also as it should be. Importance and substitutability are indefinite concepts whose meaning will vary with the pollution tax rate structure which is in turn determined by how urgent we find the pollution problem at any time. At all times there will be a continuing

(Continued on Page 14)