

THE ALTERNATIVE: TO BARE THE WITNESS AND THE TRUTH

Published remarkably without regard to race, color, creed, or (most redundantly of all) national origin — the question of sex is still in committee.

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The Continuing Crisis

• It was a thrilling month for the peacemakers. After a three week prelude of noble sentiments from the enlightened orators of Albania, Egypt, Tanzania and the like, the distinguished United Nations admitted yet another peaceful nation, Communist China, and bounced the treacherous militarists of Taiwan. All America shivers.

• In another show of good will West German Chancellor Willy Brandt refused to press charges against the twenty-four-year-old student who slapped him in the face, and on 20 October he was awarded the Noble Peace Prize. Stanford University received a grant to study human aggression; the program will be directed by the eminent Dr. J. V. Lawick-Goodall, an expert on chimpanzee behavior. Manhattan College, the Harvard of Catholic education, became the first institution of higher learning in America to offer a "peace major." And lo, the fruits of Western Civilization have arrived in Thailand where Mr. Pan bunnag, a renowned Bangkok hairdresser, divulged to a press conference that "there are hundreds of homosexuals in Bangkok who would like to live together as man and wife." But perhaps the month's cheeriest peace of news came when Mr. Raguhir Singh passed

through Passion, Nebraska on his "around-the-world bicycle ride for peace" and-or brotherhood. His vehicle sports thoughtful banners reading "One God, One Humanity — Peace" and "This Earth Belongs to All of Us." Finally, congratulations to Mr. Yoshinori Yazaki who became the first man to commit suicide from Japan's tallest building, the forty-seven story Keio Plaza Hotel.

• Earlier in the month Premier Nguyen Van Thieu won his second term in an election about which even his detractors had to admit that the best candidate had won. Meanwhile back in Washington the Senate voted to declare a six-month withdrawal deadline for American forces in South Vietnam. The Longshoremen's strike spread. *The New York Times* reported that the incidence of panhandling in New York was increasing, and, while Mayor Lindsay went west pursuing the winds of political prosperity, a team of scientists from the Gulf South Research Institute of Louisiana infected an armadillo with leprosy.

• Lloyd's of London no longer will insure executives against environmental suits, and VD in Britain nearly doubled in the 1960s. In Mexico a rare

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Editorial I

Bad Ideas in Blossom

Richard Weaver's proposition that ideas have consequences is the kind of insidious commonplace that is treated suspiciously by the bovine of every community. Yet, if repeated to them often and booming enough, it will eventually thud into the goo of their cerebra and leave them entranced — stammering and shuffling about with tiny sparkles of light popping before their eyes. This is called Enlightenment, and it never quite measures up to expectations. Ninty-five per cent of the people it afflicts are rendered yammering idiots in search of a cause, and when the cause pops up the idiots stampede.

Now I have always held as a certitude that any cause — whether it be just or malign — is a nuisance to free men, especially during its time of stampede. Eventually it is even an embarrassment to the lofty fellow who, in the security of his bath, dreamt it up. What is more, any cause fired by Mr. Weaver's sunny apothegm is apt to sputter and backfire, for his assertion that ideas have consequences is only half the truth. There is a less rosy corollary to it, that is *bad* ideas have *bad* consequences, and as *bad* consequences always come more numerous, more furiously and more swiftly than good consequences it is usually better for the author of ideas to open a hot dog stand or chase lewd women than to dredge from his noodle bright ideas.

I know there are some who will dismiss this statement as shameful or un-serious. Such persons generally are honeyfogging their incomes from one form or another of the education swindle, and they reach for a lynching rope every time someone questions the value of "good books," the benefit of "higher education for all," the need for "continuing education," "humanized institutions," "broad horizons," "new eras" or any of the other poppycock platitudes that these rascals marshal to defend their swindles. They cannot be expected to have grasped the sad lessons of the 1960s which is unfortunate. That they are ages from understanding the profound political turbulence roiling the early years of the 1970s is more serious.

Though the lessons of the 1960s are unpalatable, they are not impenetrable. By 1971 the Federal government had grown over 200 per cent larger than it had been in 1960. More than half of that growth issued from government's attempted to "promote the general welfare and secure the Blessings of Liberty..." as interpreted by American liberals. Billions were spent to implement abstractions at home (more billions were spent to defend abstractions abroad). Yet by 1970: a) the popularity of government and government officials had plummeted, b) the incidence of crimes against authority had skyrocketed to heights exceeded only during the Civil War and c) agreement on the very defi-

nition of welfare or liberty had shattered. More ominously, America's consensus on what constitutes the good life (what is society's goal) was, at the end of the 1960s, more fragmented than at any time since the 1780s.

From the 1960s thoughtful persons learnt that generally speaking — all improvement is for the worse, and any man who is out to do good is certain to do bad. Assuredly, ideas have consequences. But upon implementation, ideas, more often than not, reveal themselves as bad ideas — hence the parents of unpleasant consequences. A cursory review of a few of those great ideas of the late 1960s still attracting oohs and ahhs today will document my point.

Consider the salient anti-pollution ideas. Pollution is a wildly complicated, basically economic problem (involving what economists call externalities or the neighborhood effect). Unfortunately those persons leading this campaign rarely discuss economics. Generally they are upper-class persons whose solutions involve an invidious campaign against producers, the acquittal of inconsiderate consumers, the demand for limiting production, a highnosed disregard for the basic theories of economic distribution and a reprehensible inattention to the situation of the poor. To limit production is to deny to the poor jobs and inexpensive products. These are but the most obvious consequences flowing from popular anti-pollution ideas.

Consider the idea of the quota system. To enhance opportunities for the underprivileged, quotas based on one defining characteristic or another are established for employment or admission to universities. At the universities the typical result of this bad idea is, that a number of unqualified Negroes are accepted because of their race and a number of Jews are rejected because — according to society's proctors — a disproportionate number of Jews attend universities, and this is not healthy. Individual achievement is denied. Progress is hobbled. Individual freedom and personal dignity lose their priority. Community breaks into competing factions based on race, religion, geography or whatever the defining characteristics of a quota happen to be at the time. In point of fact some of the consequences of the quota system have been the recrudescence of implicit anti-semitism, tainted degrees for every Negro regardless of his achievement and an increase in factionalism. Ultimately the bad idea of the quota system is opposed to individual achievement, dignity, personal freedom and progress.

Consider the ideas emerging from that glob of embellished discontent marketed by Mr. Ralph Nader as consumerism. As with so many of these social problems, it is always stated without any regard for economics but with dramatic solicitude for the rights of all of mankind. Un-

fortunately when the solutions are advanced it becomes obvious that the freedom of all mankind was part of the problem. The consequence of consumerism's basic ideas are that the enlightened few will decide for the benighted many, eventuating in a loss of freedom, a loss of efficiency, higher prices and the periodical loss of order — the worst of both worlds.

Finally there is the idea that the United States should deny its interest in foreign affairs and attend to problems at home. George Will dealt exhaustively with this particular bad idea in our November symposium, clearly elucidating the idea's baleful consequences. I would only add that when the carriers of this bad idea urge Washington to solve its problems at home what they have in mind are certain conditions which *they* perceive as problems and for which only their solutions are considered feasible.

Obviously these are all bad ideas; when implemented their consequences will be adominable. However the abominable consequences of these bad ideas are merely unpleasant legacies of the 1960s. A more serious condition troubles the early years of the 1970s, for it is the consumption of decades of bad ideas, and its consequences will be devastating. The American consensus on America's ultimate goal has dissolved of common purpose or an ultimate goal. In a constitutional democracy when citizens disagree about the means for realizing the society's ultimate goal, it is a sign of political vitality. But when citizens cannot even agree on what that society's ultimate goal is, the life of the constitutional democracy is imperiled, and this is a sign of sickness. Whether they realize it or not many politicians and figures prominent in public life today disagree on the "promise of America."

Originally the ultimate goal of the American democracy was what the founders called "Republican Virtue." It was fraught with contradictions, finally evolving into the national goal that served us for some 170 years. Outlined as the "right to a useful and remunerative job...the right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing...the right of every businessman, large and small, to trade in an atmosphere of freedom from unfair competition and domination by monopolies at home or abroad," President Franklin Roosevelt gave a synoptic rendering of our national goal in his famous "Economic Bill of Rights," and whether one was a Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal, the great consensus of Americans held that the American Dream was one of expanding prosperity and individual liberty.

Obviously when voices demand that, in pursuit of pure air, we diminish industrial output or that, for the sake of some egalitarian paradigm, Harvard deny admission to a young man because he is Jewish and from the East or that, for the approved benefit of the majority, a minority will select what Americans are to consume or that in the name of "new priorities" at home, we trust our future to the good will of foreign powers rather than our own military strength, they are not merely lugging about bad

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