

Commentary

The Pitfalls of "Pragmatism"

DURING THE past 30 years, the tax burden on a median-income American family has risen from 14 to about 25 percent. Now Gov. Pete Wilson proposes increasing taxes even further. This, we are told, is "pragmatism," "budget leadership," "realistic." Actually, it is cowardice. As politically difficult as higher taxes may prove down the road, Wilson apparently prefers to take his chances with that fallout rather than go to war against the admittedly powerful forces responsible for the reprehensible looting of ordinary Americans' wallets through taxation.

The issue is far less one of cash and government financing or even of the state of the economy than it is the issue of freedom. Wilson's famous "pragmatism" is little more than a studied refusal to recognize that more is going on in front of his eyes than gentlemen disagreeing about governmental procedure. America's retreat down the road to serfdom through taxes is but one part of a general flight from freedom, which consists of people governing themselves and their money, toward socialism, which is a headlong retreat from individual and every other kind of responsibility.

THE TRANSFER of one-fourth of ordinary families' wealth from their own control to that of a rapacious bureaucracy is only part of the story. Consider, for instance, this description of how the current budget crisis came about:

"The fact is, it took years . . . the same Democrats who control the Legislature wrote the laws, created the formulas and assembled piece by piece the powertrain that is driving the budget machine.

"When it came time to make hard decisions, marathon negotiating sessions all too often ended with important financial decisions being delayed or put off entirely. At such times, experts say, state officeholders planted fiscal time bombs by using accounting gimmicks, borrowing from pension plans, selling bonds in record numbers, and adopting various 'smoke and mirrors' tricks that made it seem like the state had balanced budgets when, in fact, the budgets were balanced only on paper."

The analysis of some conservative think tank or GOP

caucus staffer? No, this account appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*. Our purpose is not to make partisan points — Republicans can be found who joined in these activities — but to emphasize that now, as always, the problem is government or, rather, the escapist mentality that turns to government as a "solution," as though freedom were a problem. Once abandon the proposition that responsibility for the disposal of wealth should remain with those who create it and one needn't hope to find responsibility popping back up again somewhere down the line. Look at the array of devices those in government — with, at times, the connivance of the voters — employ to escape responsibility for running things:

ROUGHLY 92 PERCENT of the state budget is running on autopilot — the money is disposed of according to pre-set requirements without the Legislature or governor having to get into the messy business of governing. What on Earth do these folks *do* with all the time on their hands? Run for office? No — the gerrymander and all sorts of built-in incumbent advantages were painstakingly constructed to relieve them of that responsibility.

So what do they do? About all that can be confidently predicted is that powerful special interests will be protected (Wilson's parental choice in education proposal, for instance, and Assemblyman Tom McClintock's plans to rein in the state's Public Employee Retirement System will go nowhere), tax cuts of the past (though they rarely did more than slow rates of increase) will be blamed for the budget crisis, and, as certain as the turning of the Earth, Assemblyman John Vasconcellos will be heard whining at every opportunity for more money for starved programs of every size, shape, and variety imaginable.

"A PASSIONATE, tumultuous age will overthrow everything, pull everything down," wrote Søren Kierkegaard, "but a revolutionary age that is at the same time reflective and passionless leaves everything standing but cunningly empties it of significance."

The accumulating rape of the taxpayers is our current age's revolution: a revolt against freedom and self-government. But it is a passionless, reflective revolution, not characterized by radical exuberance so much as by recourse, as justification, to empty notions like "pragmatism." It is a revolution that drains the significance from both voting and holding office as incumbencies that can't be lost and autopilot government re-

Sacramento Spectator

Gov. Harold Hill

OH WE'VE got trouble, right here in River City. It starts with "T" and that means TAXES. Gov. Pete Wilson's proposal to raise taxes by \$6.5 billion has done severe damage to his ability to work with GOP conservatives over the long haul.

Republicans in the Legislature complain most that 1) the plan was announced without any input or consultation with legislative GOP leaders and 2) the \$6.5

billion figure was Wilson's *opening* offer to the Democrats — i.e. sure to be ratcheted upward in budget negotiations.

Your *Spectator* was among those conservatives last fall urging my brethren on the right to hold our noses and vote for Wilson. Because of reapportionment, I still stick by that move.



However, Wilson is playing a dangerous game with the future of the party.

One of the few campaign issues that *always* works for Republicans against Democrats is the tax and spend issue. Voters have known instinctively that the Democrats were the High Tax party and that the GOP was the Control Spending party. George Bush caved in last fall to the congressional tax-raisers — a move that cost the GOP substantial gains in November.

WILSON'S MOVE — coming on top of Bush's — serves to blur further the line on one of the few effective campaign issues that Republicans have enjoyed for almost 30 years. This *Spectator* has heard from authoritative sources (I have virtually no other kind) that the method behind this madness for the governor is the long term plan to become president. The media — always eager for more taxes — will praise Wil-

son's "moderation" and "leadership." The GOP in California will likely be punished by the voters in return. But after all, when your ultimate goal is 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., some sacrifices have to be made.

As you can imagine, this scenario infuriates both conservatives and long-time party activists of many stripes. If the budget negotiations do not go *absolutely* smoothly, major problems could develop for the governor inside the GOP. He's playing a high risk game. Unfortunately, the real losers if he fails are the Republican Party, its activists, and candidates.

CONSERVATIVE COMMENTATOR (and staunch friend of *California Political Review*) Bruce Herschensohn is off to a fast start in his quest for Alan Cranston's Senate seat. Unlike six years ago, Herschensohn realizes the need for early money — and lots of it — as well as statewide exposure beyond his Southern California base. If other conservatives don't enter the race and split the vote, Herschensohn will trounce liberal Rep. Tom Campbell in the primary. Then — dare we dream it — a general election against Jerry Brown? Naw, probably too good to be true. And besides, the Doomocrats would never be that nice to us, would they?

IN THE additional good news department, conservative, pro-life candidates absolutely trounced liberal, pro-abortion opponents in two recent special elections for the state Senate. You didn't see this reported and "analyzed" in the media? The *Spectator* is entirely too young to be sooo cynical.

These elections elevated Assemblyman John Lewis, R-Anaheim, and Assemblyman Tim Leslie, R-Sacramento, to the Senate. Their arrival, when added to Bill Leonard, Ed Royce, and Frank Hill, means that after a long absence the Senate GOP caucus may actually start exhibiting some backbone. Long considered a "push over" by the liberals in town, the Senate Republicans finally may become key players. It's long overdue.

AND LASTLY — making the rounds of Sacramento watering holes: finally, a public safety "waiting period" bill conservatives can support: a proposal to require a seven-day delay before Ted Kennedy can buy a bottle of scotch . . .

—A.P.C.