



American GNP grew by about 3 percent or less in 1986 according to current estimates. Almost everyone would like to see figures slightly higher—say 4 percent or 5 percent. But many analysts feel reasonably comfortable with 1986's lackluster yet apparently solid growth. Unfortunately, much of the growth in our GNP in recent years has been illusory—as artificial as walnut veneer on pasteboard. Honest GNP figures would show a far bleaker economic picture.

The problem is that we are now measuring as GNP "growth" the one-time effect of the movement of women into the workplace. Services—cooking, child care, sewing, cleaning—that women used to provide "free" for their families are now bought and paid for. As a result, they are counted for the first time in our GNP. In 1986, the GNP included approximately \$5 billion paid to the nation's 1.6 million child-care workers. Just a decade ago, the amount spent on child care was almost negligible, though there were actually more children being cared for in American homes. Similarly, the 1984 GNP included \$124 billion in restaurant meals, up dramatically from just \$44 billion in 1974, with fast-food sales making up most of the increase. But are we really a wealthier nation because we now eat at McDonald's instead of at home and pay to have our children cared for?

Analysts admit that America's "smokestack" industries have declined steeply in recent years. In 1982, for the first time, more Americans were employed in service industries than in manufacturing. In its 1986 survey of U.S. industry, *Business Week* worried about "the decline in overall manufacturing activity." "Are we going to retain a manufacturing base?" wondered

one business executive interviewed by *BW* editors. Nearly two million American manufacturing jobs have disappeared since 1979, and in many formerly prosperous steel-mill towns, hundreds line up to get jobs delivering mail or selling groceries.

But some economists argue that the rapid growth of America's "service industries" has more than made up for the slide in heavy industry. After all, the GNP is still going up, isn't it? Syndicated columnist Donald Lambro particularly hails the movement of women entrepreneurs into the "fastest-growing sector" of our economy. But the replacement of blue-collar jobs with pink-collar positions is changing our economy in troubling ways. For one thing, the female-headed entrepreneurial firms described by Lambro typically provide services or consumer luxuries—nanny services, for instance, or "home-style" pies and cookies or clever toys—that we would probably do without during an economic downturn.

And the most recent figures from the U.S. Department of Commerce suggest that most women are not up-and-coming entrepreneurs. Instead, the occupations dominated by women—secretarial, nursing, child care, sales, and elementary education—are mostly service-oriented and usually poorly paid. As the female fraction of the nation's workforce climbed from 35 percent in 1960 to 44 percent in 1985, the services component of our GNP made a remarkably parallel jump of 38 percent to 49 percent.

Some observers are also beginning to worry about the long-term economic effects of a birthrate that has fallen well below the Zero Population Growth (ZPG) level as more and more women have left the home. A GNP

that rises off the chart may provide no staying power for a nation that must import not only its steel but also its babies.

Writing recently in the *Washington Post*, the University of Maryland economist Frank Levy argued that "for the past decade and longer, Americans have been living an illusion of increasing prosperity." Levy believes that we have maintained that illusion through unprecedented social realignments: "more women working; postponement of marriage among the young; low birthrates; and a great willingness . . . to take on debt." Now, says Levy, "most of the choices are exhausted," and we have created a debt-laden service economy in which "normal productivity growth is difficult."

American women can only make one massive movement out of the home into the workplace. Within the next few years, that movement will be virtually complete. After that, the at-home meal and the at-home preschooler will be rarities, and it will be impossible to pump up our GNP any more by building more fast-food restaurants and day-care centers. The traditional functions of the home will largely have been replaced by service industries. When the structural weaknesses in our economy start poking through, we will no longer be able to hide the problem by putting more housewives to work.

—Bryce Christensen

At-large representation has become a major civil rights issue in recent years, one that is not likely to go away. Only days after a U.S. District Court ruled Springfield, Illinois, in violation of the Federal Voting Rights Act, civil rights activists in Danville (IL) filed suit. At

issue in Illinois and many other states is the method of electing local government officials. In a classic ward system, members of a city council are elected from the neighborhood districts they represent. The smaller the district, the more susceptible the councilman is to pressure from constituents. In an at-large system, however, all the voters vote for all the councilmen (or commissioners). In a city like Springfield, where blacks make up just a little more than 10 percent of the population, the white majority maintains an effective monopoly on public office.

Defenders of at-large representation argue that it was never designed to exclude minority representation. This is not entirely true. In fact, at-large elections became popular early in this century precisely because they reduced the power of ethnic leaders and neigh-

borhood politicians. Upper- and middle-class civic leaders were alarmed by the flood of immigrants who did not take even a generation to learn how to muscle their way into urban politics. Cities like Chicago and Milwaukee, which had small districts and large councils, soon found Irish, Italian, and even black aldermen bargaining for a bigger piece of the pie. The result was a complex system of patronage and pull that drew each new wave of immigrants into the political process.

In the name of good government and municipal reform, liberals and progressives took steps to reduce the influence of ward heelers and ethnic voting blocks. More cautious cities simply increased the size of an alderman's district and drew the lines carefully to make sure the district did not coincide with ethnic neighborhoods.

The more radical solution was at-large elections, which were going to eliminate all the problems of crooked government and usher in a period of uninterrupted honesty and prosperity for all.

Not exactly. So long as men are men, politicians will be politicians. A councilman at large is no more honest or intelligent than an alderman elected from a ward. The only difference is that while the alderman typically lives in his district and has to face, every day, constituents who want to know what he's doing about the garbage pickup or the potholes in Elm Street, the at-large councilman or commissioner only has to please himself and a handful of colleagues. Given the reality of urban politics, which type of dishonest councilman would most of us prefer: one who is only out for himself and his cronies or one who has

REVISIONS

The Decline of a Radical

Michael Katz is among the most interesting and fair-minded radical historians at work today. His studies of public education and welfare policies have gone far in debunking the progressive myths of American social history. In *The Irony of Early School Reform*, Katz demonstrated that, for Massachusetts at least, public schooling was not a response to working class demands or even a vehicle for social advancement. School reform, in particular, was a powerful tool for assimilating immigrants and controlling the lower orders.

While Katz approaches his subjects from a position so far out in left field he has to sit in the bleachers, his books—stripped of the rhetorical excesses—are a critical and lucid introduction to the history of social policy. It was with high hopes, therefore, that we took up his most recent book, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, \$22.95). The early chapters, in large measure, live up to expectations. Katz painfully traces the attack on outdoor relief,

which left the poor in possession of freedom and dignity, and the corresponding rise of the poorhouse, the orphanage, and scientific charity. The very same issues being debated in the 1980's were already being disputed in the 1880's: how to distinguish the deserving poor from the simply lazy, how to liberate children from the culture of poverty, how to be charitable without creating a dependent class. By and large, the arguments of progressives and reformers are now being echoed by conservatives.

Even the family was a hot topic 100 years ago. Outdoor relief served to keep families together, but many reformers preferred a system of poorhouse and orphanage that separated children from the bad influence of poor parents. Eventually, even the progressives realized that most children were even worse off in institutions, but that recognition did not retard the intrusion of child-savers into family life.

Katz goes over some ground already traveled by Christopher Lasch, among others: the professionalization of nurture and the rise of centralized urban governments as dispensers of social services. It is

here that the radical vision begins to falter. Katz, of all people, ought to deplore the bureaucratic welfare state as an elitist monopoly. Instead, near the end, he seems to go soft and sentimental in order to defend the practice of welfare against what he imagines are "conservative" critics (e.g., Charles Murray). In his conclusion, Katz is as entrenched a New Dealer as, say, George Will.

There is, quite frankly, no excuse for a welfare system that creates a bureaucracy of overpaid busybodies who skim off as much as 75¢ from every welfare dollar. If people need our help, by all means let us give them the money. We can afford it. In the long run, a negative income tax would be far cheaper than the nightmare of housing projects, AFDC, and food stamps which gives so much tyrannical power to a middle-class professional elite. If Prof. Katz will reread his own books, perhaps he will rekindle the fire in his belly. But the trouble with American radicals has always been this tendency to the middle-aged fatty degeneration known as liberalism. (TF)

to answer to his neighbors?

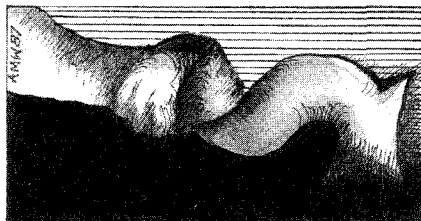
There is little justification for at-large elections. They are antidemocratic, bigoted, and stupid. I say stupid because in a town like Springfield, where blacks comprise the lowest socioeconomic class, a minority that is excluded from the political process naturally develops resentments—an explosive situation, especially in a period of underemployment. Since the problem is so obvious and the remedy so simple, why do so many cities persist in maintaining such an antiquated system?

There are several reasons. Old habits die hard, especially in small towns, and no entrenched elite enjoys sharing power with its subjects. But there is, perhaps, another reason. At-large elections were sold as a progressive, enlightened, and liberal measure, because they held out the promise of utopia: cities free of pettiness and bickering, urban governments liberated from ethnic animosities, and the selfish “what’s in it for me?” that characterizes ward politics in the Chicago style. During the same period of “good government,” school districts were consolidated in a similar effort to keep parents and politicians from interfering. Ironically, all this was done in the name of democracy. Teachers and administrators needed a free hand if they were going to instill democratic values, and city government had to wrestle power out of the hands of neighborhood politicians and put it in the hands of decent people and trained professionals. The progress of democracy depended on it.

We used to call this sort of idea by its proper name: enlightened despotism. Since people are too stupid or too selfish to govern themselves, they need wise and benevolent leaders to govern in their name. We need government of the people and for the people, but never government by the people. Black voters are only the most recent victims of a progressive political establishment that has repeatedly attempted to save democracy from itself. At the national level, it has taken about 100 years for the republic of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson to turn into a debt-ridden bureaucracy. In local government, the old uproarious style of ethnic ward heelers and neighborhood government was slowly but surely

transformed into miniature replicas of the Pentagon: powerful, centralized, wasteful, and unresponsive. When Americans contemplate the careers of old-style political bosses like Chicago’s Richard Daly, I hope they will remember him, for all his faults, as one of the last democrats in America.

The New Yorker is undergoing a painful and much-publicized transition. In January the new owners decided it was time for William Shawn to retire and Robert Gottlieb to take over. Magazine staffers responded by signing a declaration that more or less demanded that Shawn’s successor be promoted up from the ranks. At first sight, the response was surprising, since Gottlieb



does not represent much of a change: as president and editor in chief of Alfred Knopf Publishers, Gottlieb has been part of the New York literary scene for years—a New Yorker to the core.

On a deeper level, the panic is easy to understand. For years *The New Yorker* has been provided a hothouse haven for a small group of writers who soothe each other’s vanities and lullaby their readers to sleep with reassuring platitudes. Any outsider, no matter how sympathetic, is bound to let in some fresh air. While Gottlieb will step on no spiders, he may sweep away a few cobwebs.

The New Yorker, we are told by those who write for it, is an institution. That much is certain, but what kind of institution? In my view, it most nearly resembles a geriatric hospital. It represents conservatism at its worst—a changeless and elegant package for withered and desiccated ideologies, a handsome political bible pressing the faded roses of the gracious intellectual left.

Of course, it was not always so. Under its founding editor, Harold Ross, the magazine was the New York (not American!) *Punch*, full of the bitter-sweet confections of James

Thurber, Alexander Wolcott, E.B. White. In its pages, expatriate Midwesterners created the grand illusion of New York as a bastion of wit and talent. Much of it was a sham, and the ghosts that haunt the Algonquin round table are a set of nasty and embittered alcoholics. And yet, how much of life is illusion? Literary children growing up after World War II will always think kindly of *The New Yorker*: its funny (if unintelligible to an eight-year-old boy) cartoons; the bright splashy covers, as delightful as a spring rain on Park Avenue after a few drinks; the mysterious aloofness of the “Talk of the Town”; the dreams it nourished of a literary life.

By the mid-60’s, all that was changed. There were “serious” discussions of the Vietnam War, civil rights, and wheat crops in a dull style that made you long for the *Guardian* or the *Evergreen Review*. People still buy *The New Yorker*, but it is for the cartoons, the short reviews of films, plays, and restaurants, and—above all—for the ads: I don’t know anybody who actually reads it. Who is responsible for turning the sprightliest American magazine into the house organ of grim conformism? One can only point out that retiring editor William Shawn, the most admired man in the business, presided over the decline into senility. It is not at all clear what Mr. Gottlieb will be able to do, but the situation calls for heroic exertions. It is as if a small boy had to spring a beloved grandfather from the state asylum. Good luck.

The line between illusion and reality—always faint in Washington—continues to blur as Hollywood personalities testify on Capitol Hill. Last year it was Sissy, Jane, and Jessica posing as farm wives. More recently, Valerie (“Rhoda”) Harper told the Senate Housing and Urban Affairs Subcommittee that something had to be done about homelessness, a situation she described as “heart-breaking.” Rumor has it that Edward (“The Equalizer”) Woodward will soon be asked to tell what he knows about CIA involvement in Iranian arms shipments, and if the “Golden Girls” haven’t yet given their views on aging, it is only a matter of time.

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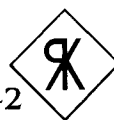
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LITERACY BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

by Thomas Fleming

Publishers Weekly must be the most depressing magazine published in the United States. Oh, there are others like *Esquire* that make us despair for the affluent numskulls who swap life-styles as if they were wives, or *The New Yorker* that makes us remember how really boring New York can be. But for the sick feeling in the stomach that threatens paralysis, the feeling Augustine must have had as he began the *Civitas Dei*, you must try the premier magazine of the book publishing industry. From the full-page ads promoting "A New Self-Help Profit Maker" by best-selling author L. Ron Hubbard, to news stories on Anna Porter's acquisition of 51 percent of Doubleday Canada or the copublishing

plan of Basic Books and *The New Republic*, to interviews with industry leaders ("retailers and publishers are moving more toward making nonbook products available for consumers"), all the way to the back where we find names like Stephen King, Pat Conroy, Jackie Collins, Danielle Steel, Bill Cosby, Andy Rooney, Jim McMahon, Carol Burnett, and Robert Schuller. What do they all have in common—apart from fame, fortune, and bad prose? They all have top-15 hardcover best-sellers in the first week of 1987.

Please do not misunderstand. *Publishers Weekly* is a solid trade magazine. It can hardly be held responsible for what goes on in the literary marketplace, but many a writer and reader glancing through its pages must have asked themselves, "What is the point to universal literacy, if the novel of the week is *It* and the nonfiction best-seller is 'Dr.' Bill Cosby's ruminations on fatherhood?" (By the way, ask Dr. Bill, next time you run into him, how he earned his degree.)

If we turn from humble best-sellers to "PW's Choice: The Year's Best Books," there is some improvement but not much. Reynolds Price, Peter Taylor, and Mary Lee Settle are all mentioned, but so is Margaret Atwood. The nonfiction category, oddly enough, displays a high degree of professional courtesy, with books on Ed Murrow, Emily Dickinson, and Hollywood screenwriters, to say nothing of George Plimpton's anthology of *Paris Review* interviews, *Writers at Work*. It's a tough choice between the lowbrow Andy Rooney and the middlebrow Ed Murrow, but on balance, the best-seller is less offensive.

There is, to be sure, a place for popular fiction and popular history. Chesterton was not the only writer who has enjoyed "penny dreadfuls," but ours cost something like \$22.95; and dreadful doesn't begin to describe the moral, intellectual, and artistic qualities of Ms. Steel or Rev. Schuller. America is the land of opportunity where citizens are free to choose, but increasingly readers of new books are free to choose between the sentimental garbage of soft-core sex gothics and the more pretentious garbage of Frederick Barthelme (not to be confused with Freddy Bartholomew) and Philip Roth. Why?

Those who delight in conspiracy theories will point to the interlocking directorates of American mass media. How easily executives and journalists shuttle back and forth between highbrow magazines (*The Atlantic*), middlebrow papers (the *New York Times*), and browless advertising

