

will truly care about the families they deal with. Our government in general has failed to prove itself capable of doing the work of charities, much less the work of preserving families.

In conclusion, Wexler is an expert at uncovering the abuses in our child protective system, although flawed in some of his arguments on causes and cures. The child-abuse issue is one that deserves examination by everyone concerned with preserving individual rights, and *Wounded Innocents* is among the most thorough and readable works on the subject—the kind of book that leaves a lasting impression on its reader. □

*Hannah Lapp is a dairy farmer and writer in Cassadaga, New York.*

### PARLIAMENT OF WHORES: A LONE HUMORIST ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN THE ENTIRE U. S. GOVERNMENT

by P. J. O'Rourke

The Atlantic Monthly Press, 19 Union Square West, New York, NY 10003 • 1991 • 255 pages • \$19.95 cloth

*Reviewed by William H. Peterson*

*I never lack material for my humor column when Congress is in session. . . . [For] every time Congress makes a joke, it's a law. And every time they make a law, it's a joke.*

—WILL ROGERS

Meet P. J. O'Rourke, the White House correspondent for *Rolling Stone* magazine and a reincarnated if earthier Will Rogers.

O'Rourke holds that giving money and power to government is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys, that a little government and a little luck are necessary in life but only a fool trusts either of them, that the mystery of government is not how Washington works but how to make it stop, that every government is a parliament of whores, but—and what a *but* this is—that in a democracy such as ours the whores are us.

Or take the author's contention that he is first, last, and always a conservative. How so? Well, he says, conservatism relies on personal responsibility and private liberty. It is an ideology of, by, and for the individual. A conservative, you see, takes his fellows one by one. The modern-day liberal, on the other hand, plays to the crowd. But crowds, says

O'Rourke echoing Mackay, Le Bon, and Ortega y Gasset, "are noisy, unreasonable, and impatient. They can trample you easier than a single person can."

Or how about this iconoclast's theory that God is a Republican and Santa Claus is a Democrat? God, explains O'Rourke, is a stern fellow, patriarchal rather than paternal. God holds men strictly accountable for their actions. God is difficult. He is demanding. He is unsentimental, and so it is "very hard to get into God's heavenly country club."

Santa Claus is different. He's cute. Huggable. Always jolly. Ho-ho-ho! Loves children, animals, and the environment. Sure, he may know who's been naughty and who's been nice, but he never does anything about it. He's famously generous to the poor and indeed to everyone else without giving a fig about the cost or any quid pro quo. Generous to a fault. Hence, maintains O'Rourke, keenly aware of the law of no free lunch, Santa Claus is preferable to God in every way but one: "There is no such thing as Santa Claus."

Our White House correspondent has fun with high school civics texts, which are about as close to reality as Santa Claus. He chooses the current Harcourt Brace Jovanovich book, *American Civics*, one of America's most widely used texts. The book includes standard chapter headings such as "Our Federal Court System" and "How a Bill Becomes a Law."

But *American Civics*, short on politics' naked jungle law of seizure, short on Machiavellian manipulation *à la* the Keating Five, i.e., short on what makes the real Washington tick, is a droner, mechanistic, bland, a yawn, despite its pictures in color instead of black and white and despite its insertion of boxed items such as:

"CAN YOU GUESS?

"One of our Presidents had a serious physical handicap. Who was he? *Answer is on page 578.*"

O'Rourke also has fun with the 1991 Federal budget. According to the budget proposal originally submitted to the Congress in February 1990 by President Bush's Budget Director Richard Darman, it contains some 190,000 accounts. Mr. Darman explained that if a concerned Congressman spent but one minute perusing each one of these accounts, at eight hours a day, it would take more than a year to study the budget.

That's bad enough. But by the time the budget

emerged from interminable hearings and "Budget Summits" and was billed as the "final budget compromise," it contained a whopper of a tax increase notwithstanding the pledge of President Bush ("read my lips") of no new taxes. Further, it landed on the House floor at 6:58 A.M. on Saturday, October 27, 1990, during what was called "a Congressional sleep-over."

By then the revised and revised budget had grown fatter by more than 1,000 pages of legislation—a pile of paper 10 inches thick, weighing 24 pounds, entailing outlays of \$1.23 trillion, and, according to O'Rourke: "Nobody knew what it contained. No one, not one single person in the entire United States had read this document." Nor was anybody able to, there being but a single copy for the entire House, or inclined to, with the Congressional election little more than a week away.

Other targets of the O'Rourke cannon include the National Conventions (with equal fire on Bush and Dukakis), the State Department, Defense, Agriculture, Health and Human Services, Social Security, Environmental Protection Agency, and the Office of National Drug Control Policy (headquarters of the Drug Czar whose War on Drugs, according to the author, is a lost cause). In any event, whores all over the place.

O'Rourke winds up his work on scoundrelism by switching to the story of democracy in the little town where he lives in New Hampshire. There he relates how the townspeople found themselves

obligated to spend \$6.2 million inasmuch as Congress had passed the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1982 mandating that all water drawn from surface sources must be filtered and chlorinated whether necessary or not.

But he also finds his fellow townspeople playing the same coercive game by attempting to deny a local property owner the right to develop his property into a golf course and condo complex. The townspeople's attempt was, in O'Rourke's opinion, "wanton, cheap, and greedy—a sluttish thing."

Look, says the author, no longer so amused, "We were going to use our suffrage to steal a fellow citizen's property rights. We weren't even going to take the manly risk of holding him up at gunpoint." He then comes up with the blockbuster idea that *government is morally wrong*. He argues that authority has always attracted the lowest elements in the human race, that all through history mankind has been "bullied by scum."

(Here he seems to go beyond thinkers from Aristotle to Mises who held that government, while very much subject to abuse, is still an institution requisite to civilization.)

A perhaps unfunny ending to a funny book, but is it any unfunnier—or funnier—than government in America today? □

---

*Dr. Peterson, Heritage Foundation adjunct scholar, holds the Lundy Chair of Business Philosophy at Campbell University, Buies Creek, North Carolina.*

## Get Organized!

Attractive blue binders for twelve issues of *The Freeman* will keep your 1991 issues in order. Price: \$12.00 postpaid.

Order from: The Foundation for Economic Education  
30 South Broadway  
Irvington-on-Hudson, New York 10533

VISA and MasterCard orders accepted. Please give us your name, address, card number, expiration date and signature.

# Join us in the pursuit of an ideal.

**T**he ideal of freedom is to let anyone do anything he pleases, as long as his behavior is peaceful, with government empowered to keep the peace—and nothing more. An ideal objective, true, but one that must be pursued if we would halt the continuing descent of our society from bad to worse. Nothing short of this will suffice. And unless we fully understand the ideal—and what makes for its attainment—we'll tend to settle for powerless, futile little pushes and shoves that yield no more than a false sense of something done.

—Leonard E. Read

**Where have you been?** If you've just discovered THE FREEMAN and have found some helpful ideas, you may want to see our studies regularly. If so, just use the form below to reserve your place on our mailing list. (Any individual in the United States is added at his request. For foreign delivery, extra mailing costs require a charge of \$15.00 a year.)

**Where are you now?** If you're already on the mailing list, but have a new address, please let us know of the change to minimize any delays in delivery.

---

*Sorry, this is not a mailing card: please enclose in a stamped envelope.*

**The Foundation for Economic Education**  
**Irvington-on-Hudson, New York 10533**  
**Telephone: (914) 591-7230**

**THE FREEMAN**  
IDEAS ON LIBERTY

- ☐ Please add my name to receive THE FREEMAN, a monthly study journal of free market, private property, limited government ideas and ideals; and the newsletter, NOTES FROM FEE.
- ☐ Enclosed is a donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to help in The Foundation's work.
- ☐ Please change my address, as follows.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (Please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Street

\_\_\_\_\_  
City State

\_\_\_\_\_  
Zip Code

*“No nation was ever ruined by trade.”*

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN  
(1706–1790)

---

THE FOUNDATION FOR  
ECONOMIC EDUCATION, INC.  
30 South Broadway  
Irvington-on-Hudson, NY 10533  
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

---

Non-profit organization  
U. S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Foundation for  
Economic Education, Inc.

---