

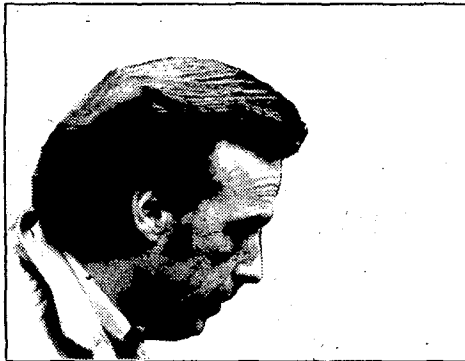
HANS KONING

## Another Third World: Homeless in the land of the free (press)

A NUMBER OF THIRD WORLD countries are complaining about the world press; it is dominated if not run, they say, by the few Western news agencies. UNESCO has taken up the argument, but what goes on in that body is rarely considered newsworthy by the American media. However, as the issue of press freedom seems to be involved, a number of commentators in this country have considered the complaint.

The complaining countries are all much too poor to sustain competitive free enterprise newspapers and if they would set up a parallel news service, it would, without a doubt, be governmental or semi-governmental. Thus it comes easy to American journalists to see this whole issue as a third world—if not Marxist—attack on the freedom of the press in the West.

Actually, considered this way, whether from the point of view of a Zambian weekly or from *Newsweek*, both premises and conclusions are all false and irrelevant. The issue is not that readers in



the West are only told about the third world when there's a natural or manmade disaster to report. No agency or UNESCO resolution can make our broadcasters and editors give space to items which just do not interest our public.

The real issue is that the western media are free—and I am not minimizing that blessing—but their freedom means (only): free to do what they want. And what they want, wittingly or unwittingly, is to look at the world from a highly limited, narrow base, the base of the tiny minority in this world of secure, well-fed upperdogs who consider our brand of corporation-run

democracy, with property sacred, and "free enterprise" as the opium of the people, the natural order of things.

Everyone of us who had participated in a protest action of the '60s and read the following morning what our serious newspaper said or didn't say about it, knows that there is an uncovered third world right here. It isn't a question of subject matter, it is a question of point of view. And no writer or broadcaster who does not really and basically believe in our Establishment, can dream of being allowed by our Establishment-owned media regularly to air his or her point of view in their service.

I am hardly even talking politics here. When I write "third world," I am not thinking of Sorbonne or London School of Economics-educated politicians with, or perchance without, Swiss bank accounts. I am thinking of all those men and women to whom the world is an inimical place, who know how it feels to be an underdog. That, to me, is the basic test and schism.

It so happens that I, through my World War II youth adventures, am one of the not so many white Westerners who have experienced that particular feeling. I'm not trying to romanticize myself; I want to establish that I know whereof I'm talking.

For this feeling has little to do with being poor, or being in danger. It's different from what happened to our GI's even in Vietnam; it's different from what our Irish or Jewish immigrants experienced on Ellis Island or New York's Eastside. On the other hand, it is precisely what black people, even rich and successful ones, experience; it's doled out at our welfare offices together with those rather fat checks.

It is a feeling that the world around you, your fellow human beings, would

just as lief do without you. And on our present-day earth where for the first time all communicate with all, all are seen by all, whole tribes and whole nations are faced with this feeling.

AP and UPI and the *New York Times* haven't got a clue about this. The *Times* may devote pages to the "hundred neediest cases" and it's nice to do so; but it obviously has nothing to do with what I'm concerned with. I recognize that the institution of the Op-Ed page in this and some other papers arose from a vague uneasiness that "the others" did not have their say; but those pages are now filled mostly by the papers' own columnists and when they publish an outsider he or she is rarely one of "the others." Unavoidably almost, for the very fact that they're published already singles them out and puts them apart.

Our own third world neither writes to newspapers nor votes in elections. They're written about only by sociologists and criminologists in the main, and they may get their picture in the paper if they loot a TV store—a precise equivalent of our news coverage of third world Africa, Latin America and Asia. We turned our backs on them, they have turned their backs on us. When our papers and broadcasters report on world events and the world's hopes and fears, they do not manifest one atom's awareness of the fact that our hopes may not be everyone's hopes, that they may be the very fears of millions and millions; and their hopes our fears.

There seems to be no touching of them and us, except in violence.

Or, in socialism.

Hans Koning is a novelist and former reporter-at-large for the *New Yorker*. His latest novel is *The Petersburg-Cannes Express*; his latest book of nonfiction, *A New Yorker in Egypt*, came out last winter.

NEIL KOTLER

## The exhaustion of American politics and how to revive it

AS ELECTION DAY 1978 APPROACHES, POLITICS PRESENTS two very different faces. One is the appearance of spiritedness and involvement that surrounds single-issue crusades against abortion and gay rights, the determined drive of the women's movement to win ERA ratification, and the singular purpose behind the tax revolt. Yet a different political reality lies beneath the surface, a reality of massive public apathy toward, withdrawal from, and rejection of political life. The secular trend in voter turnout is one of steady and significant decline.

The 1976 presidential election, like the several preceding it, drew barely a majority of voting-age population. Only one-fifth to one-third of those eligible vote in state and local elections. In the most celebrated in recent years—the California tax referendum known as Proposition 13—fewer than half the eligible voters in the state participated.

While it can be said that virtually every segment of society is involved in special-interest, or single-issue politics (if only as the organized clients of advocacy organizations or bureaucracies), few are involved in the general politics that overarches special concerns (e.g., the politics of the environment that affects all of us; of full employment and price stability; of civil liberty and good government).

The accelerating disintegration of institutions that bound groups together in the past—parties, local machines, social programs, community ties—has led to an acute fragmentation of political life. While the mass public is withdrawn from public life, a relatively small number are intensely involved, though much of their emotion as well is increasingly hostile to the objects of public life. As the citizen body shrinks, the vested interests steal the thunder.

More than ever, citizens are cut off from the vital sources of political life, which at various times in the past served to induce participation. These consisted of one or a combination of party tradition and loyalty, community ties, familiarity with, and trust in, the character of candidates, and ideology. In the absence of such attachments, the public is left with little else than the personalities and egos of opposing candidates.

Though American parties have always been consensual rather than ideological, even their traditional bargaining and coalitional role has greatly diminished, as have their fund-raising function and programmatic responsibility. In the relatively small-scale governments of the past, citizens had far better means to judge the temper and character of candidates. Nowadays, politicians are essentially strangers to the electorate, whose origins and purposes are unknown, except for their merchandizing and media appeal, which seeks to transform their strangeness into trust and their rank ambition into civic aspiration.

Without attachment to party or traditional principles, those who take office have little basis for accomplishing significant outcomes which, after all, require

some measure of coalition and public support. This disintegration of institutional life leads irresistibly to a politics that is no longer anchored in higher purpose, edifying goals, or shared commitment, and that is plainly lacking in relevance to the felt needs of the majority.

This basic irrelevance is illustrated also by the composition of Congress. Sixteen black members and one Senator—3 percent of Congress—represent 22 million people, one-tenth of the population. There are only a handful of Latino and Mexican-American members, none in the Senate. The 96th Congress that convenes in January once again will have no women in the Senate; fewer than 4 percent of the House are women. An analysis of social class composition would, of course, yield an even more outrageous distortion of the general population.

An objection might be raised that American politics is doing what it has always done, and this is to have politicians broker and aggregate the numerous conflicting particularistic interests. The problem with this view is that those who happen to be organized in interest groups and for electoral activity represent only a tiny fraction of the citizen body, special-interest politics cannot create the necessary consensus and support upon which the system depends, and the outcomes of government will continue to alienate greater and greater numbers of citizens.

At the very least, a democratic system requires a supply of innovative social and economic ideas, citizen support, and organized energies. The fragmentation of parties and coalitions, and the nearly total shutting out of those social forces that normally would create a climate for social change and reform has exhausted the supply of creative social ideas.

The gross unrepresentativeness of governmental institutions and the growing amount of financial resources devoted to special-interest issues have weakened to a great extent the moral basis of citizen support. The organization of those diverse energies so necessary to a democracy has been critically impaired by the narrowness of the electorate. Without a significant expansion of the citizen base, the system will become ever more rigid and those seeking social change, even more exhausted of resources than they are now.

The dispiritedness of the left cannot be overcome simply by the ever-increasing number of leadership meetings that bring together left constituencies for the purpose of determining the prospects of unified action. A citizen force outside of the existing institutional structure of parties and local and state coalitions has to be developed. The women's movement and the neighborhood movement are the most impressive candidates for forming the bases of that new force. The one has already amply demonstrated its political effectiveness; the other, its ability to mobilize hitherto excluded citizens into the political process.

They and the other constituent groups have to extend their organization at local and state levels to counteract party and machine structures. They have to raise the resources to assist new groups. The articulation of a common program might follow, and produce a national citizens and communities congress in 1980, perhaps the beginnings of a new political force.

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# PERSPECTIVES

## Liberals must choose: Serve the corporations or serve the people

**THIS COLUMN IS ADDRESSED TO MINNESOTA LIBERALS,** but applies to liberals throughout the U.S. I write as a radical activist, one of your illegitimate sons and daughters of the 1960s. We have been as unwelcome at family gatherings as our grandparents, the Farmer-Laborites, whom you banished from the homestead in 1948. A family reunion of the democratic left in Minnesota is long overdue. But this reconciliation will proceed only if we move beyond liberalism. ¶Don Fraser's defeat exposed serious flaws in the Minnesota liberalism of

Humphrey, McCarthy and Mondale. Neo-conservatives like Bob Short are manipulating these weaknesses, and voters' authentic resentments, to spread a right wing populism. Only by developing an anti-corporate populism can progressives counter this, and create an agenda for a new majority in the 1980s.

Economic growth and prosperity had shrouded liberalism's tragic contradictions for nearly a quarter century. But the economic crunch of the '70s has pushed liberals to the wall: corporate liberalism can no longer attempt to serve two masters. While posturing as champions of reform and social justice, liberals have become the handmaidens of corporate priorities and private greed; while posing as advocates of participation and democracy, liberals have become pawns of corporate planning and private power. The day of reckoning is at hand.

The Fraser defeat and Proposition 13 represent the "politics of resentment." What are the implications of this trend? It does *not* mean that voters are becoming right wingers, mean-spirited and selfish, ready to dismantle government, racist and anti-poor, rescinding public programs.

It does mean that the average citizen's sense of fairness is deeply offended. Liberalism, at the expense of the vast majority, has extended rights and benefits to the corporate rich and crumbs for the poor. People are outraged by the paternalistic and self-righteous manner in which liberals set and carry out public policy.

A new majority is expressing its resentment by joining the only alternative game in town—neo-conservative politics and know-nothing economics.

For five weeks liberals have exhibited the "4R&4D" Syndrome. Some are filled with Rage and Resentment, seeking Revenge and planning Retaliation. Others are suffering from Depression and Disillusionment, open to Defeatism and Dropping out.

Yes, Bob Short ran a vicious and dirty campaign. Yes, Republicans shamefully crossed over and voted Democratic. Yes, single issue fanatics distorted the political process. Yes, the Wendell Anderson crowd helped get Fraser. Yes, Bob Short bought a lot of votes.

Rather than pausing by the stream of politics and reflecting on the character defects of the New Deal, liberals are muddying the waters by blaming everybody else for polluting the pond. Rather than extracting the beam in liberalism's eye, they are pointing out the speck in their neighbor's. Rather than acknowledging that they live in the glass house of welfare statism, liberals continue throwing stones at passersby.

The people may be voting for the wrong programs, candidates and parties—but for many of the right reasons. To call Minnesota voters greedy hayseeds, dumb bumpkins and selfish hicks, is moral blindness and elitist arrogance. The real reasons

for the Fraser defeat, and a possible Republican sweep in November are painfully obvious: "disgraceful" taxation, runaway inflation and the white elephant of government bureaucracy, waste and corruption.

Don Fraser rightly claims that neo-conservative politicians "play the middle class, hard hit by inflation, against the poor, and turn back the clock on social legislation." Bob Short and the new right politicians, in exploiting the legitimate grievances of working and middle income people, are proposing programs that will make the rich richer, and the poor poorer. This was true in California with Proposition 13.

But who caused this situation? Since liberals took over the Democratic Farmer Labor Party 30 years ago, they have led the charge to create the welfare state. New Deal capitalism has expected the middle third of society to pay not only for the poor that the corporate economy excludes, but to provide government subsidies for

oil corporations, real estate developers, the health care industry, agribusiness and other corporate interests.

From 1950 to 1974 corporate taxes fell from 23 percent of total federal revenues to 14 percent. During the same period the portion collected from personal income taxes rose from 31 to 40 percent.

The basic necessities—food, energy, medical care and housing—are increasing in cost at a 12.6 percent annual rate. Liberals have been too timid to take on the corporate giants in these industries. While they are out raping and pillaging the pocketbooks of the American public, lobbies for energy corporations, agribusiness, real estate interests and the American Medical Association still have a cozy relationship with a liberal Democratic Congress.

Even though liberals have created social programs to insure citizens' social welfare, they allow the private sector to administer many of the programs with poor service and self-profit. The small amounts of charity that liberals are willing to dole out to the weak, sick and lame are provided in a way that breeds dependency and fosters self-contempt.

The rash of scandals and exposures of theft, waste and inefficiency in governmental operations have appalled the average person. It is time to stop explaining away these horrors, and time to rethink and retool our public administration of the people's business.

A recent Gallup Poll shows that those of us definitely "left of center" account for 17 percent of the electorate, while the solidly "right of center" is 23 percent. The broad "middle of the road" make up 36 percent, while 17 percent have "no opinion." This means a pool of 53 percent, a majority of citizens, are open to persuasion about the major public policy questions of the 1980s.

To create an alternative agenda for the 1980s liberals must end their commitment to corporate-government. An important test for Minnesota liberals is whether they can participate in citizen movements for economic democracy, and return government to the people by following this grassroots democratic leadership. In Min-

nesota there are numerous struggles from which liberals are conspicuously absent: control of utility rates, public ownership of power, anti-nuclear battles, rent control, cooperative housing, ending real estate speculation, neighborhood autonomy, progressive tax reform, food co-ops, saving the family farm, alternative health care, anti-powerline struggles, runaway shops, community-owned and controlled enterprises and increasing worker participation in management.

Redistributive economic reforms are meaningless without redistribution of other forms of power. If reforms are carried out in an individualistic, elitist and centralized manner, they will become part of the problem they are meant to solve. The core of an anti-corporate populism is democratic control of social, economic and political institutions; common people can be empowered in new cooperative, participatory and decentralized organizations. An unresponsive governmental bureaucracy is as undemocratic as private domination of the economy.

Within or without the DFL, the democratic left must forge a new majority that includes the poor, working and middle classes; a political movement of farmers, laborers, taxpayers and consumers. To carry out this task, we can learn a lot from the old Farmer Labor Party of the '20s and '30s.

The FLP created a political movement by listening and responding to the needs of common people. This movement helped citizens translate their personal troubles into public issues. Not above or separate from the daily struggles of Minnesotans, the FLP was a vehicle for the people's participation in solving their common problems.

Minnesota liberals cannot serve two masters: they must choose between the corporate elite and the vast majority of citizens. By learning from the people, corporate liberals can become anti corporate populists.

**Monte Bute** is active with the Farmer Labor Association (FLA). He works as an organizer with the Minnesota Tenants Union in Minneapolis.

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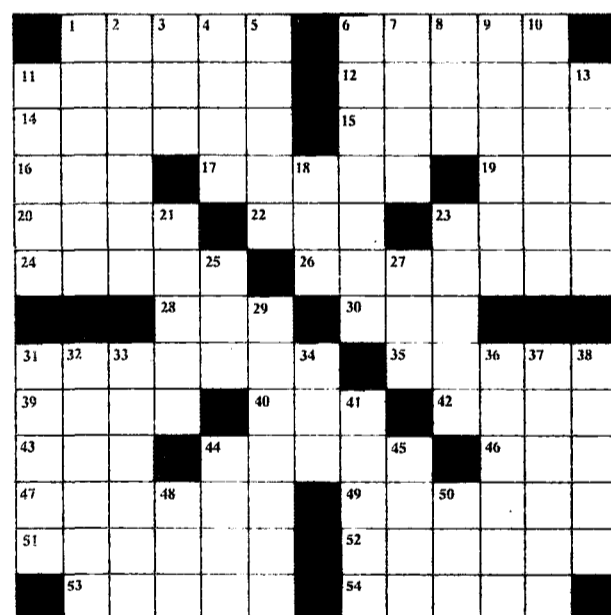
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by Jay Shepherd

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- 6 Degree
- 11 Football player's protection
- 12 Inmate
- 14 Idle
- 15 Record again
- 16 RR stop
- 17 Sidedish
- 19 Legal matter
- 20 Camper's equipment
- 22 52, to Tacitus
- 23 Word with hot
- 24 Mother of note
- 26 Designate
- 28 Dolt
- 30 Help!
- 31 Dappled
- 35 Relating to John Paul II
- 39 Units of land
- 40 Scarlet
- 42 Etna's output
- 43 SST concern
- 44 Beliefs
- 46 Butterfly catcher's gear
- 47 Designer Cardin
- 49 Protracted speech

#### DOWN

- 1 Sofa
- 2 Flexible
- 3 I love, to Virgil
- 4 Hardy girl
- 5 Tiptoe
- 6 Airs
- 7 Played golf
- 8 Monet's forte
- 9 Turkish inn
- 10 Annual
- 11 Welcoming people
- 13 Remainder (Fr.)
- 18 Pincocchio's nemesis
- 21 Short blasts
- 23 Rope material
- 25 Singer King Cole
- 27 Spinning item
- 29 Polecats
- 31 Punishes
- 32 Like Pollyana
- 33 Weasel relatives
- 34 Sandre or Ruby
- 36 Type of hat
- 37 Photographer Richard
- 38 Afterwards
- 41 Inhibit
- 44 Ontario tribe
- 45 Singer Martin, to friends
- 48 Soak, as flax
- 50 Zodiac symbol

#### Answer to last week's puzzle:

