

information and useful advice. Instead, he directed his queries about immigration to, of all places, the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

A constituent of Rep. Colombo's had noticed that the public housing in his hometown of Rancho Cordova, California was filling up with former Soviets and asked the Congressman about the U.S. refugee program. Rep. Pombo promptly sent a letter to the INS asking about the program and got back an answer from the acting Director of Congressional Relations who writes:

When refugees are admitted to this country there is a resettlement fund which is issued per individual by our government, through the offices of refugee resettlement, a part of the Department of Health and Human Services. The amount that is issued ranges from \$5,000 to \$7,000 that may be obtained by the refugee within the first 18 months of their entry. Once the refugee has received this assistance and permanent residence has been acquired, they must work to sustain themselves as any other person in this country. Our government does not grant special treatment to any specific group of immigrants.

Is it possible that the INS Director of Congressional Relations thinks that each refugee uses \$5,000 to \$7,000 in services and that no special treatment is afforded them? Is it true that summing the annual budget of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) with those parts of the INS and

State Department budget dedicated to refugee resettlement and then dividing that sum by the number of refugee arrivals for a given year yields a result of approximately \$7,000 per refugee? This mythical \$7,000 figure floats around in the media and in Congressional testimony, but it is surprising to see the INS promoting it, especially implying that it is a fixed cash amount that is doled out over the first year and a half of residency.

Absent from this number is the cost of welfare dependency beyond the first months. (An ORR official told me that \$7,000 is not even one tenth of the true average per refugee cost.) According to an ORR study over half of those refugees who arrived in a recent 5-year period are dependent on cash assistance, two-thirds receive food stamps, etc. Elderly usage of welfare/Medicaid runs nearly 100 percent and is a lifetime entitlement, unlike some welfare programs which are subject to time limits.

All of this is made possible because our government does indeed grant "special treatment" to specific groups of immigrants. Unlike other immigrants, refugees receive interest-free and apparently uncollectible loans for airfare and are allowed access, upon arrival, to all welfare programs on the same basis as citizens.

Perhaps the sociologists and organization theorists will give us a name for the state of affairs that exists when the people using a system know so much more about it than the people who are running it. TSC

Do Declinists Have a Point?

by Patrick Buchanan

*Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
is one with Nineveh and Tyre.*

So wrote Rudyard Kipling in "Recessional," his 1897 poem penned at the peak

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of the British Empire for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

Two decades later, in 1918, a fateful year for Germany, the great historical pessimist Oswald Spengler produced *The Decline of the West*. On the eve of Hitler's accession to power in 1932, Spengler wrote, "Optimism is cowardice."

About the continent that had been the cockpit of history for centuries, these "declinists" were right. The era of Britain and Europe was about to end and the American century about to begin.

Britain, France, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Spain and Portugal had empires in 1897. Now, they are virtually disarmed,

defended by Americans, unable even to police the Balkans. Though rich, they are no longer great, and with each decade their numbers decline. "This is the way the world ends," wrote the poet T.S. Eliot, "not with a bang but a whimper."

What brings this to mind is a review in which this writer was related to a new declinist school. And with America the last superpower and our economy the marvel of the age, this is rankest heresy, even in a conservative household where pessimism always had a room. Yet, as the millennium approaches, there is evidence to contradict the current mood of American triumphalism. Consider:

While the United States dominates air, sea and space, the U.S. defense budget has fallen to the smallest share of gross domestic product since the 1930s, just must than three percent. Our strife-ridden armed forces are down to pre-Pearl Harbor strength.

What was the greatest creditor nation in history, running trade surpluses yearly from 1900 to 1970, has run trade deficits almost every year since. We are now the world's great debtor.

Once we borrowed to build. Now we borrow to consume.

Our history is being reverse engineered. It took a century to achieve American autonomy. But dependence on foreign markets and our vulnerability to foreign financial crises is now as great as in Colonial days. The awesome industrial plant that won World War II is being sold off, broken up and carted away as the United

States runs annual merchandise trade deficits that could hit \$300 billion by 2000.

History teaches that when a nation shifts from production and manufacturing to a reliance on trade and finance, it is in decline. But perhaps we are, as the optimists reassure us, at the end of history.

U.S. foreign policy was once made by statesmen acting on what was best for America. It now appears to be a stapling together of the agendas of ethnic minorities. The Israeli lobby dictates Mideast policy. The Greek lobby blocks closer

ties to Turkey. Cuba policy must pass a veto by Cuban-Americans. Americans of East European descent demand war guarantees for old homelands and get them. Our policy toward Azerbaijan is set by Armenian-Americans. We pledge American blood and hand out foreign aid to mollify voting blocs. Who speaks today for the national interest?

In our capital city a hiring hall has been established for the ex-senators, congressmen and cabinet officers who sign on and get rich doing the bidding of their new foreign masters.

Immigrants from Latin America and Asia demand we maintain open borders, and both parties, fearful of being branded nativist, go along — although 75 to 80 percent of Americans beg for a moratorium.

Mexico City urges Mexican-Americans to vote its interests in U.S. elections. A Mexican consul

says we should stop playing our national anthem at U.S.-Mexico soccer games if we wish to stop the kind of outrages visited on our flag and team last February in the L.A. Coliseum. Not a peep of protest comes from U.S. officialdom.

American culture dominates, but even liberals are revolted at the crudity of our films and TV sitcoms and at a media where

"U.S. foreign policy ... now appears to be a stapling together of the agendas of ethnic minorities."

Jerry Springer tops the charts and Howard Stern reaches for radio gold.

In a quarter-century, 37 million unborn have been done to death, homosexuality has become a valid lifestyle, and drugs and sex are routine in junior high. From Rome to Weimar, these were signs of a dying civilization. But in America, none dare call it decadence.

Panem et circenses, bread and circuses, marked the end of Rome. Our version is the Clinton scandals. We cannot get enough of them. Public affairs shows have been given up to endless babble about Monica and Bill — and been rewarded with record ratings.

This nation has enormous reserves of strength and vitality, but we are also exhibiting unmistakable symptoms of national cancer. 

Graft in Latin America

Corruption threatens nascent democracies

by **Bart Jones**

CARACAS, VENEZUELA
During a strip-search of a Venezuelan judge suspected of taking a bribe, police find the money stuffed in her panties.

In Mexico, the head of a state anti-kidnapping squad is arrested for running a kidnapping ring himself. The brother of the country's former president reportedly amasses \$100 million while holding a \$39,000-a-year government job. His "com-missions" earn him the nickname of "Mr. Ten Percent."

A decade after the region's last dictatorships fell everywhere except Cuba, corruption has become one of the main threats to democracy in Latin America. It undermines the credibility of public officials, thwarts economic development, scares off foreign investors and diverts badly needed funds from schools, hospitals and highways.

Latin American countries consistently show up as among the world's most corrupt, says Transparency International, a private Berlin-based group that studies corruption worldwide. In last year's survey of 52 nations, five of the 11 worst were in Latin America: Venezuela, Argentina, Mexico, Colombia and Bolivia.

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For decades, corruption was tacitly accepted in Latin America. Military regimes gave citizens little leeway to address the problem. But now that democracy has swept the region, the press is freer to root out illegal practices and voters are holding officials more accountable.

Angry citizens in Venezuela, Ecuador and Brazil have helped oust unpopular presidents accused of corruption. Raul Salinas de Gortari, the brother of former Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, is under arrest for reportedly amassing a fortune through graft.

Still, those high-profile cases are exceptions.

In Venezuela, many people think someone who passes up the chance to steal is a "fool," said Gustavo Coronel, head of Quality of Life, a private group that conducts anti-corruption workshops.

Venezuelan police say they discovered about \$900 of bribe money in the panties of the judge who minutes earlier had demanded a payoff from the lawyer handling a real estate dispute.

Payoffs help Venezuelans cut through mind-boggling bureaucracy to obtain driver's licenses, passports, telephone hookups, business permits, even operations at crowded hospitals.

Free-market economic reforms implemented across the region as democracy took hold

were supposed to reduce corruption by making business and government more open.

But the selloff of state airlines, banks, steel mills, telephone companies and other businesses was itself mired in corruption, says Eduardo Gamarra, director of the Latin America-Caribbean Studies Program at Florida International University.

Venezuelan corruption spiraled out of control during oil booms in the 1970s and early '80s when tens of billion of dollars flowed into the oil-rich country. Politicians, government workers and businessmen all grabbed their shares.

Former President Jaime Lusinchi once commented on national television that "only fools pay taxes." By official estimate, 60 percent of workers, executives and businesses are tax evaders.

At least on paper, Latin American governments are taking the problem seriously.

President Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico recently announced that fighting corruption will be a top priority.

Ecuadorian President Fabian Alarcon is investigating allegations of graft by his ousted predecessor, Abdala Bucaram — but Mr. Alarcon's administration is itself accused of wrong-doing, including the reported theft of international donations meant for El Nino flood victims.

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