

# Tidbits

## Joseph K at the Baltimore Unemployment Office

Daniel Franko Goldman of the *Baltimore Sun* wrote about this experience with bureaucracy in *The Sun Magazine*:

"A friend of mine is a lawyer, who in recent years has been teaching law rather than practicing it. In midsummer, he lost his job in a faculty shake-up, and applied for unemployment benefits. After a time he began to receive them.

"He has always been generous with minor legal advice, and though I know that cadging professional services from friends is an imposition, I have sometimes sought his advice, and he has always been helpful.

"After he became unemployed, I asked him to look over a legal document, but considering his changed circumstances, I insisted on paying him for his services, and he reluctantly accepted \$20.

"Some time passed. Then he called me, asking if I had heard from the state unemployment compensation people. It seems he had reported my \$20 as earned income, as the law requires. You can clip coupons to the tune of thousands of dollars a week and still be eligible for unemployment, but if you *earn* a penny, it can affect your benefits. The same thing applies to Social Security payments. Two men can be receiving identical benefits, and one might have income from investments yielding many thousands of dollars. He still collects; but if the second man has no such investments, finds he can't make ends meet on his benefits and goes back to work, not only does he lose part or all of his benefits, but he must begin paying more Social Security taxes.

"In any event, the lawyer reported the \$20 on the proper form, making it clear he'd been employed for less than one hour in the relevant week, and giving my name as his employer. He evidently neglected, however, to supply my address.

"Whatever the reason, his checks immediately stopped, and he was deluged with forms and questionnaires, all of which he duly filled out and returned, but to no avail. . . .

"Finally, he received notice that a hearing had been scheduled. He could produce witnesses or be represented by legal counsel, but the hearing could result in his being declared ineligible for benefits. He asked me to go along and explain the \$20 I'd paid him as his 'employer' . . . .

"His 'hearing' had been scheduled for 8 o'clock, but one social worker had told him that everybody is told to come at 8, even if there is no prospect of getting to their cases until late in the afternoon. . . .

"The room we had been told to report to was already full, so we waited in a hallway outside. A guard came along and told us we couldn't wait in the hall, so we went into the room and stood. Another guard told us we couldn't stand, but there were no seats available. . . .

"We finally did obtain seats, but a short while later, my friend thought he heard his name called, and we got up to go to the window. It turned out to be a mistake, but our seats had been taken at once, so we stood around some more. . . .

"By this time the place was packed, and people filled the halls simply because there was no place else to go. A guard kept ordering people to 'lean against the wall,' presumably to keep the center of the hall free for wall'ng space, but it had an unpleasant ring to it all the same. . . .

"In the hope of getting us out of there before sundown, I went up to the window and spoke to the man we'd checked in with earlier. The parade of expressions that flitted across his face in a few seconds was something to see. The moment he saw me coming, knowing I'd been there for a while and wasn't a newcomer wanting to check

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# and Outrages

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in, he was obviously prepared to tell me to sit down, wait my turn, and not make trouble.

"I began by saying I was not there as a claimant, but as a witness for a claimant, who had been given an appointment for a hearing, to which he could bring witnesses or legal counsel, that I had to get back to my own job, and could he please look into the matter and find out when we would be seeing a case worker.

"At the precise instant I established myself as a wage-earning, tax-paying, member-in-good-standing of the middle class, and not one of the hapless people waiting in that hot room for him to call out a name, the condescending expression that had been forming on his lips disappeared. At the words 'witness' and 'legal counsel,' something like respect actually came into his eyes, combined with a certain wariness, for those are not words normally used by people on unemployment lines.

"He did check, and we were told, almost at once, to proceed to desk number such-and-such. . . .

"While we had been waiting, I noticed I was developing a slight tremor in my hands, as though I were suffering from a severe hangover, which I was not. I was surprised to see that the same thing was true for the lawyer, an easy-going man not given to nervousness, even in uncomfortable situations. . . .

"The young woman at desk number such-and-such proved fairly reasonable. My friend told her his name, unnecessarily, since it was on all the documents she had in front of her. She did not offer to tell us hers, nor was there a name plate on her desk. . . .

"He patiently explained that he had not *found* work after losing his job, that he had been 'employed' for only 30 minutes, and had duly reported it. 'And who was the employer?' she persisted.

"At this point I spoke up and explained that I had consulted my friend one Sunday afternoon nearly two months before, regarding a business matter, had paid him \$20 for his advice, and that was the long and the short of it.

"She accepted this readily enough, and after crossing to a computer terminal where she punched up some data, she returned to the desk and began filling in more computer cards.

"We asked about the system for seeing people, why the first-come-first-served rule seemed not to apply. 'Oh, it doesn't,' she said, 'not at all. You see, when you give the man your card, he sends for your records, which might have to come from a variety of different places, depending on why you've been summoned here. He calls out names in the order that people's records arrive. But in your case,' she said to my friend, 'we already had your records pulled, of course.'

"In other words,' he said, 'the man at the counter calls people as he receives their records, but you already had mine, so they would never have been handed to him. Does that mean we could have sat there all day and never been called?' 'It sure does,' she said. 'You could have sat in that snake pit forever' . . . .

"She shuffled some papers, took down my friend's previous employment history (which had, of course, been done before, and which was, for what it's worth, quite impressive—she even had the grace to smile when he got to the part about having taught law and government at the college level), and announced that as far as she was concerned he was back on the rolls, but it would take a week or two at least for the computer to catch up. The lawyer managed to smile weakly. 'I guess I'll just have to make that \$20 stretch a little bit farther,' he said."

# Tidbits and Outrages

## President Survives Shaving Accident

On Saturday, November 15, 1975, readers of *The Washington Post* were confronted with this headline:

### Ford Eyes Sen. Brooke for '76 Ticket

The facts behind the story were that Ford, while visiting a black college in North Carolina, had been asked if he would consider a black running mate. What was he to say? He answered yes and named the only prominent black Republican as a possibility. Anyone who knows anything about Jerry Ford and the Republican Party knows that Senator Brooke will not be the vice-presidential nominee in 1976. What happened to the *Post* is what happens to a lot of papers covering the President: they send out their best talent, and a story has to be found and published to justify the expenditure. All the space devoted to the non-events of the China trip is a classic example. Half of the evening television news was given over to Walter Cronkite, John Chancellor, and company trying desperately in their fur-collared coats to make something out of nothing.

Another example is this story by James Deakin, an excellent reporter assigned by the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* to cover the White House:

"President Gerald R. Ford was reported today to be suffering from a cold and a sinus infection that gave him a temperature of slightly more than 100 degrees and forced him to cancel his appointments.

"Press Secretary Ronald H. Nessen said Mr. Ford was spending the day in the residential part of the White House, most of the time in bed. He said it was 'not possible to tell right now' how long it would take the President to recover.

"Nessen said in response to a question that Mr. Ford was not suffering from anything more serious than the cold and sinus infection. Except for the fever, the President's physician reported that 'all other signs are normal,' the press officer said.

"He said Mr. Ford had been suffering from the cold for about a week. The President first complained about it Oct. 9, after a press conference. He said at that time that it was the first cold he had had in two years, but later he told reporters that he had had a small cold last October."

The story appeared on page one of the *Post Dispatch*. It continued in the same vein for five more paragraphs. But you get the general idea. The President had a cold.

## The Case for Limited War

We have commented at length on the excessive salaries paid many civil servants. Now comes John Finney of *The New York Times* with the news that those poor fellows are pikers compared to the military. A major general in the Army gets \$54,713 a year in pay and benefits. That's \$13,465 more than is received by the top civil service employees. From the rank of sergeant through the rank of major general, army personnel receive from \$3,610 to \$13,465 more in overall compensation and benefits than civilian employees in comparable grades of the civil service.

And, according to Stephen J. Lynton of *The Washington Post*, our military men are taking us to the cleaners twice. Of those stationed in the Washington, D.C., area, 51.9 per cent do not file local tax returns, which of course means that the same federal taxpayers who pay their salaries have to pay the slackers' taxes as well.

### The Trashmen Loafeth

Last month, in an article called "We Could Have Saved New York," we mentioned a GAO study showing that private health insurers handled claims for about a third less than government processors. Now comes a study sponsored by the National Science Foundation showing that private firms collect garbage at a lower cost than municipal agencies. The study, as reported by the Associated Press, covered 2,060 cities. It said the governmental inefficiency was caused by "high employee absentee rates, employment of larger crews, a smaller number of households served per shift, and less labor-incentive systems."

### Pals

A reporter for the *Washington Star* seeking to probe the motivation for public service of the 22,702 members of federal advisory commissions recently asked Albert V. Casey, chairman of the board of American Airlines, why Casey participated in something called Travel Program for Foreign Diplomats, which sponsors visits by foreign diplomats to the American hinterlands. He gave what has to be the most honest answer of the year: "Oh that State Department thing, it gives me a chance to sit with Bill Coleman [Secretary of Transportation] on one side and Frank Zarb [Federal Energy Administration] on the other."

### The More Is Less Award

A headline in *The New York Times* of Nov. 26, 1975, has received *The Washington Monthly* Award as The 1975 Headline Most Likely to Produce Disbelief:

## A Navy Staff Study Calls Big Carriers Less Costly

### Why Nothing Works in New York

A glimpse at the inner workings of the bureaucracy of New York City was provided by this story from *The New York Times* about the office of the district attorney:

"The office's budget provides for a librarian; the position was approved in October 1974, and the office has been trying unsuccessfully to fill it since. When the administration of Robert M. Morgenthau took office in January, they took up the banner.

"According to Mr. Morgenthau's aides, this is what happened:

"With dust piling up on briefs and crucial court records in disarray, they first approached the Bureau of the Budget. After much paperwork they got a classification and salary rate of about \$11,000 for the job. They then went to the Department of Personnel, where, by law, they were required to select a librarian from a list of applicants who had passed a Civil Service examination in the field. The Department of Personnel told them there was no current legal librarian 'list.'

"The district attorney's office then had to apply for permission to provisionally hire a librarian of its own choice (it had one waiting in the wings). After several weeks, permission was granted, the woman was told she would be hired, and then suddenly the Personnel Department said there had been a mistake; there was, indeed, a 'list' of people who had passed the Civil Service test.

"So the district attorney's people contacted all of the applicants on the list, which was two and a half years old. No one was available. Again they asked permission to hire their own person. But the Department of Personnel had discovered a second list—one that was only a year old. Again, everyone on the list had already found other jobs.

"So at last, the Department of Personnel gave them the green light to hire the librarian who had been waiting for months. Their troubles were not over, however; the Bureau of the Budget had to give its final approval.

"There were a number of delays, but finally the bureau gave its approval and then submitted the request to yet another agency whose blessings were required—the Vacancy Control Board.

"By the time that board considered the request, it was after July 1. The fiscal year had ended June 30. The district attorney's office was notified that it must resubmit the request with a new number—to begin the process all over again."

# Maximizing Profits at The Washington Post

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by Ben H. Bagdikian

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"You may feel responsible for freedom of the press, and I'm committed to that, too. But I have a responsibility that you don't. I have to worry about stock in a \$193-million corporation."

That statement, made to me four years ago by Frederick Beebe, late chairman of *The Washington Post*, during the debate on whether to publish the Pentagon Papers, helps explain the management anxiety that produced the current strike at the *Post* and is transforming American journalism.

The aspect of the *Post* strike that caught most attention was the trashing of the paper's pressroom at the start of the strike on October 1. Writers spoke of modern "Luddites," workers faced with automation and striking back, like lunatics, smashing inevitable mechanical progress. But the Luddite reference means something deeper. It illuminates the bitter

*Post* strike as an example of a crucial change in American newspapering: the transformation of the daily newspaper in the United States from a family enterprise to a corporation with an obligation to its stockholders to "maximize" profits.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the paternalism of English textile manufacture, something like the family control of Katharine Graham, her late husband Philip, and her father, Eugene Meyer, over their newspaper, was swept away by the forces of economic competition.

English manufacturers, 165 years ago, met competition by eliminating careful hand weaving and finishing of cloth in favor of coarser production by machines. It was cheaper to pay children to run machines than skilled adults to make quality products. Confronted with organized protest by the unemployed craftsmen, employers hardened their resolve. In 1802 the Earl Fitzwilliam, Lord-Lieutenant of Sheffield County, wrote of the organized workers:

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