

TIDBITS AND OUTRAGE

**Act Now and We'll Throw in
One of Georgia O'Keeffe's Gold Fillings**

**'Takes A Nuclear Licking
and Still Keeps on
Ticking...'**

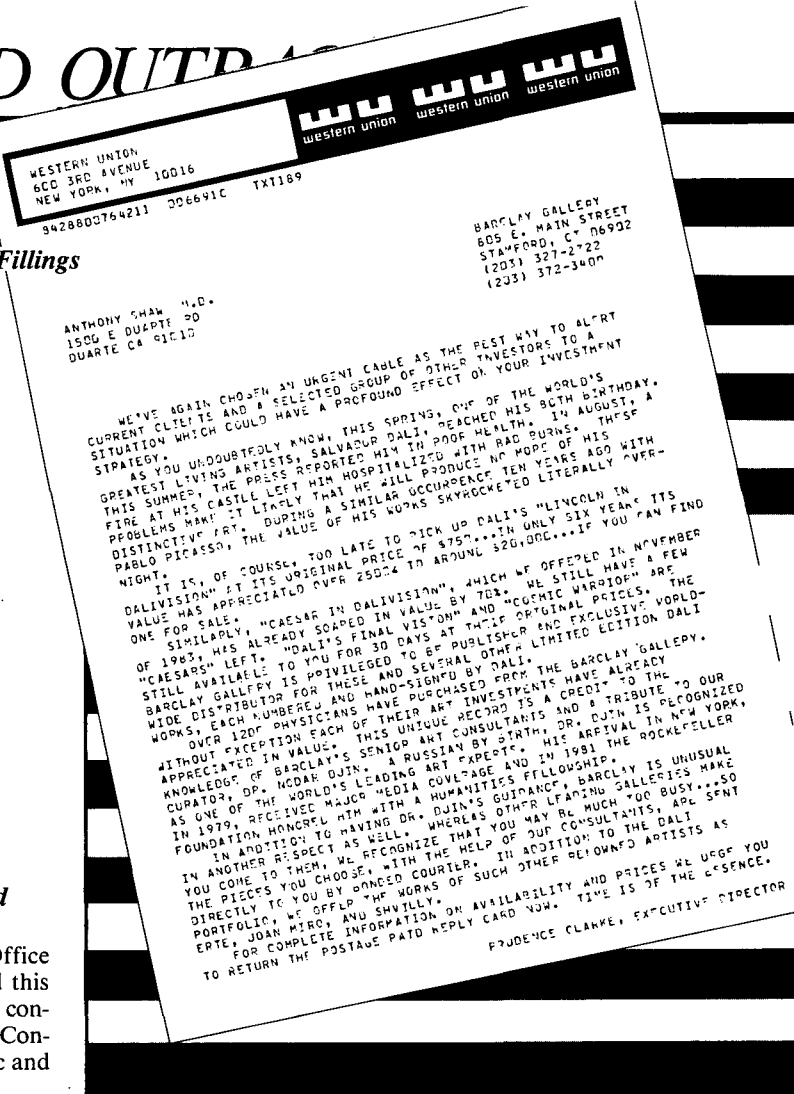
The Rado Watch Company is running a TV ad based on the last scene of "The Day After," in which a wristwatch was pulled from the rubble that was Lawrence, Kansas. Rado's commercials picture its new \$700 Rado DiStar being unearthed from the remains of the Statue of Liberty.

**Be Sure to Remind Him or
Her to Have the House Vacuumed
When You Return**

An article in *USA Today*, "How Office Parties Can Work for You," contained this advice from Terry Petra, head of a career consulting firm called Professional Services Consultants: "If your spouse is antagonistic and vocal, leave him or her home."

**'Hi, I'm Not in Right Now,
But If You'd Like
to Leave a Message
I'll Be Back in About 20
Light Years...'**

Teleplanet Services of Sudbury, Massachusetts, offers radio transmissions to any of the other eight planets in the solar system "as well as to other destinations in the universe." Teleplanet will send messages of 25 words or less for \$9.98 to fill what it calls "a hole in the sky."



'Hello Sweetheart, Get Me W.J. Sloane'

According to a four-color brochure for the newly refurbished National Press Club in Washington, "our formal dining room will impress even the most discriminating tastes" and "some rooms are designer originals with furniture groupings to lend an air of casual importance."

**All We are Saying is Give
Permanent Pre-Hostility a Chance**

The State Department was awarded the National Council of Teachers of English annual Doublespeak Award for its substitution of "unlawful or arbitrary deprivation of life" for the word "killing" in reports of human rights violations. Runners-up included the FAA's "controlled flight into terrain" for airplane crash and the Pentagon's "permanent pre-hostility" for peace.

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The Case Against Reform

by Thomas B. Edsall

Self-declared political reform movements are among the most ambiguous forces in America. Proclaimed as drives to eliminate corruption, bossism, and secrecy, many reform efforts in this country have been stalking horses for groups pushing their own covert agendas. The goal of the Progressive movement to prevent machine control of the political system produced restrictive voter registration laws that in practice became vehicles for a Protestant middle- and upper-class to restrict the growing political clout of Irish and Italian immigrants. In 1908, California Governor Hiram Johnson pushed through legislation gutting the power of political parties in the state and produced a system glorifying political irresponsibility. Party fundraisers have been replaced with lobbyist-fundraisers; single-issue initiatives, with governance by elected officials; and the campaign functions of party officials have been taken over by paid political consultants with no allegiance to substantive policy, and no public responsibility.

"Overall, the Progressives' reforms of government procedures were not an impressive contribution to the American heritage of democracy," Andrew McFarland pointedly notes in his new book.* For Common Cause, the mixed achievements and failings of the Progressive movement pose the central question: Is the self-proclaimed citizens' lobby a representative of the general interest or of an upper-middle class elite? McFarland has written an intelligent, thoughtful book that comes down in favor of Common Cause. For any student of reform movements, it

is a significant contribution. Unfortunately, the book is written from the inside of Common Cause looking out, a sympathetic portrayal of the techniques, aims, and internal structure of a lobby run by intelligent, articulate, likable men and women.

In the most interesting section of the book, McFarland carefully outlines the demography of the membership of Common Cause, showing that it is an organization made up of an affluent, well-educated, liberal elite. The median family income of members is about twice the national average, and fully 75.8 percent of the members have completed college, including 42.6 percent who have an advanced graduate or professional degree. Some 53.2 percent of the members describe themselves as liberal or very liberal, while only 7.3 percent call themselves conservative or very conservative. An estimated 99 percent of the members are white, but, unlike the white population at large, 67 percent of the contributors to Common Cause describe themselves as Democrats and only 19 percent as Republicans. The core of the membership grows out of a very special universe of Americans: "There seem to be 100,000 households in the country that contribute a total of \$75 a year to three or more of the following: Common Cause, Nader's Public Citizen, the League of Women Voters, the ACLU, public radio/television, and environmental lobbies."

By any statistical standard, then, Common Cause is made up of affluent, white Democrats. McFarland argues, however, that the leadership and staff of Common Cause have effectively avoided the danger of falling into the trap of the Progressives—serving the needs of its privileged members at the expense of the working class. Instead, Common Cause has succeeded in winning approval of legislation and rules "opening up the system." These included the elimination of many closed congressional hearings, the required public disclosure of politicians' holdings and sources of income, and campaign finance measures providing public financing of presidential general elections and full disclosure of all contributors to federal elections.

These are all legitimate and important victories, but they are not as clear-cut as McFarland suggests. The campaign finance reforms have in many ways encouraged and legitimized special-interest campaign financing through political action committees. Open congressional hearings