

States of the Union

WAITING FOR THE BLOODLESS REVOLUTION

BY RICHARD J. MARGOLIS

Thoughts while waiting on a station platform for friends from New York:

The train is late again. If Mussolini had had the Penn Central to contend with, there would have been nothing good to say about him, not even that he made the trains run on time. Is it possible to maintain schedules and sustain order without inadvertently opening the door to Fascism?

Well, the airlines are on time more often than not, but then they are younger and richer, and therefore less sclerotic and cranky. Besides they seem more carefully regulated by the Feds, a circumstance that keeps them hopping if not happy.

You'd think, to listen to President Ford these days, that "regulation" was a synonym for Fascism. Apparently, he wants to deregulate everything—industry, government, the stars in heaven. He pronounces the term "private sector" with a profound reverence, as if it were a line from a hymnal or part of the Lord's Prayer. *Abide with Me in the private sector. . . . Give us this day our*

daily bread from the private sector, and deliver us from regulation.

"All's laissez faire in love and war," the President seems to be saying. New Dealers retort, "The only thing we have to fear is laissez faire itself." I am getting carried away. Where's that damn train?

The White House sings the praises of privatism. Nowadays who doesn't? One way or another, everybody appears to be cultivating his garden, and liberals and radicals are not excluded from the general retreat. Many have effected an astonishingly swift, post-Vietnam withdrawal, deserting the political arena in favor of a chatty and modish narcissism. Without missing a beat they have glided from the polity to the psyche.

Look at those two posters over there on the station wall. One advertises "Transcendental Meditation" under the tutelage of Maharishi Marash Yogi. "TM," it says, "expands consciousness, develops clear thinking and perception, provides deep rest . . . inspires creative intelligence and more dynamic activity. . . ." The other poster offers "Inner Peace" and "The Joy of

Meditation," blessings bestowed by Spiritual Master Sri Chontana. It also promises an all-vegetable dinner in Westport, Connecticut, the town next-door to mine.

Ordinarily, Westport is meat-eating country—always plenty of fillet and tenderloin there. But if for the nonce it is deemed chic to be vegetarian, then a predictable percentage of its residents will eagerly eat greens.

Westport is worth meditating on, with or without the aid of a spiritual master. Its citizenry tends to be rich and restive. They are forever in pursuit of new themes and fresh obsessions, of plausible ways to account for the general unhappiness.

The other night Viveca Lindfors came to Westport to do her one-person show, *I Am a Woman*. The theater was packed. After the performance Ms. Lindfors sat on the edge of the stage and fielded questions from the audience. Most of the questions, and most of her answers, pertained to her struggles—her acting career, her marriages, her gradual enlistment in the Women's Movement.

Near the close of the evening a young woman in the front row stood up and made a declaration. She said she too had suffered, and was cheered to learn (from Ms. Lindfors' recitation) that she was not alone. It was very hard, she explained, to grow up in Westport, to be rich, to go to an Ivy League school, and afterward to come back, get married and continue to live in Westport. But now that she had heard Ms. Lindfors she felt much better about her life, and would like to thank the actress by giving her a hug.

The two women hugged while the crowd, in perfect understanding of what it means to be a sufferer, applauded enthusiastically. The rich are different from you and me. Yes, they have a lower threshold of pain.

Why all this soggy solipsism, this fascination with the juice of one's own glands? How is it that so many of us inveterate outgoers have suddenly become pious indwellers? "Be thou thine own home, and in thyself dwell," John Donne advised a friend. Of course, with James I on the throne, who had the heart to venture forth? Better to lock the door and put another log on the fire. Meditate. Expand your consciousness.

It was a time, I suspect, when the stagecoaches were always late. And only a few years later the Puritan Revolution started.

Some people keep talking about another kind of revolution, one that is bloodless and boneless, and can be neither perceived nor appraised. It will be purely a phenomenon of the heart, they say, and will occur inside millions of individuals. They see this revolution turning the U.S. into a huge and perpetual revival meeting, a place where each citizen concentrates on working toward personal salvation. "We're tenting tonight on the old campground, Give us a song to cheer/Our weary hearts . . ."

Even the *Wall Street Journal* has been thumping for this (cardiac?) revolution. "The job for America, in the end," declared a recent *Journal* editorial, "may be to replace the idea of success with the idea of the soul." The moneychangers may start throwing themselves out of the temple.

THE MAN WHO has given us a song to cheer our weary hearts is Richard Cornuelle, a former, and reformed, executive vice-president of the National Association of Manufacturers. He has written a book called *De-Managing America: The Final Revolution*, in which he envisions a nation cut loose from corporate regimentation and governmental authority, a nation of individuals rather than of bureaucrats.

It is an appealing thought, though hardly a new one. The trouble is

that in his zeal to enthrone the individual, the ex-NAM achiever would actually dismantle some of the very institutions that have made individualism in the United States possible.

Along with Gerald Ford, Cornuelle wants the government to recede from view, letting people and private business do the job. He has no faith in politics, and quotes with approval a newspaper account of a "disillusioned liberal activist" who has "passionately repudiated all the familiar liberal engines for creating a just society—legislation, politics, programs." The sole hope for revolutionizing society, says this disillusioned liberal, "does not lie in its institutions but in revolutionizing . . . the hearts of men."

We heard similar pleas in the '50s, from persons opposing anti-lynch laws. You couldn't legislate morality, they said; the only way to bring about social change was to transform the hearts of citizens—one at a time.

So—while passenger trains limp eastward from Grand Central, and impatient friends pace empty platforms—a vast and mysterious confluence appears to have taken place: between transcendentalists and vegetarians, outgoers and indwellers, disillusioned liberals and die-hard conservatives, John Donne and the *Wall Street Journal*, the public sector and the private sector, hymn-singers and speechifiers, Gerald Ford and Richard Cornuelle, the people of Westport, Connecticut, and Sri Chontana, sufferers and entertainers, Viveca Lindfors and everybody.

And there, at the far end of the platform, against a darkening sky, I can see them all. They are grouped in triumphant tableau, meditating, suffering, hugging, de-regulating, de-managing, swilling carrot juice. I watch them, with a touch of unexpected fondness, as the day's last train finally arrives. "O my America! my new-found land." All aboard.

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