

VILLAGE VIEW

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While driving to work, one day last week, I noticed the car ahead of me bore two rear bumper stickers. That on the left read STOP 2½, VOTE NO ON QUES. 2. The one on the right stated DON'T BLAME ME. I VOTED NO ON 2½.

If you're one of the thousands of voters who cast an affirmative ballot on question 2, and you're beginning to have second thoughts, are wondering if you did the right thing after all, and are starting to think that if you had it to do over again, you'd vote NO, consider a conversation that took place over the weekend at a social gathering.

The young lady I talked with works in a town office on Cape Cod. I asked her how she likes her position. "Well," she said hesitantly, "it's a job." At my look of surprise, she said, "There's not really enough to do. The first week I was there, they kept telling me to slow down."

"You mean the other employees feel your willing approach to your work threatens them?" I asked.

"I guess so. But I thought I'd already slowed down a lot compared to the way I've always worked in other offices, private business offices," she said. "It's hard to put in eight hours a day and only appear to be busy. Time drags."

"Isn't there enough work for everyone?"

"Not really. There are several of us: a supervisor, an assistant supervisor, a head clerk, a senior clerk, and recently a CETA worker who isn't doing a thing, isn't learning anything, and is about going crazy just sitting around all day thinking about going to the beach or having fun with friends."

"Isn't there a good chance for advancement? Will you be promoted to a more responsible position, one that is more interesting, as time goes on?"

"If I can stick it out a few more years, maybe. Some of the others in the office are within a few years of retirement. It's been hinted that I'll probably move up when they get through."

"You've got it made if you just sit tight, then."

"I suppose so. But half of us could easily do the work. It's not very stimulating, and I'm bored. I know I could stay there for the next thirty years, collect a paycheck every week, and be covered for all the benefits that go with the job. We get one vacation day and one sick day, each month, and if we don't take them, we can accumulate up to 120 days and take the time or the money,

instead. All our health insurance is paid, of course. It's security."

She didn't sound very happy about it though. "What do you actually do?" I wondered.

"Type, mostly; bills. File, set up new accounts, and enter receipts as invoices are paid. I have a beautiful new IBM electric typewriter to use, the kind with correction ribbon. It's a lovely machine, and I enjoy working on it."

"How much did that cost, do you suppose?"

"Around \$1200," she told me.

"Hang in there, honey, you're set for life. And you'll get a nice fat pension when you retire thirty years from now."

She sighed, "I know..."

I'll bet she quits in less than a year. She's a bright, intelligent person. I doubt she can stand the suffocation of a job like this one; if she does stick with it for the security it offers, she'll become another unproductive drone, putting in her hours, week after week, month after month, year after year.

That's the situation in one office of one town on Cape Cod. How many times, in how many towns, in how many offices is the scenario repeated? In each and every one? Probably not. But it is possible. In half of them? Probably.

She and I continued to talk, and she volunteered that before she found this job she had filed for unemployment benefits. "That was an eye-opener!"

"What do you mean? Were they unpleasant?"

"Oh, no; not at all. I had thought I wasn't eligible because I got fired from my previous job, and I thought unemployment was only for those who got laid off. But they didn't care what the reason was, only that I was out of work. I brought home over \$100 a week, free and clear, from unemployment. I don't even have to pay income taxes on that."

"That's a break, isn't it?"

"Sure, but I can't help thinking how much lower our taxes might be if everyone in our office, and all the other offices running at half-speed, were operating at efficient levels. I feel I'm being paid to generate enough in taxes to help pay people who aren't doing what they could do. Just like me. And if only there weren't so many people on the payroll being told 'Slow down,' and 'Don't work so fast,' and 'Take it easy,' our taxes would be lower."

I told you she isn't stupid.

Remember how you felt about Proposition 2½ back at election time? Remember the reasons you voted for, instead of against? In the meantime, you've been brainwashed. In the meantime, you've been assailed on all sides as a destroyer of the very fabric of state and local government.

You've been threatened with the collapse of the school systems, the light of your friendly street lamp has been doused, you've heard that police and fire departments are forced to cut personnel, and whenever town responsibilities aren't carried out properly, the explanation is that "Proposition 2½ has decimated our ranks; we no longer have the man-power to do the job right."

I do not believe it. I believe every possible step has been taken to obstruct the intent of 2½. I believe many town officials and their employees are conducting a campaign to make it appear to the voters that a terrible mistake has been made, and that Mr. and Mrs. John Q. Public must now suffer the consequences of their error in judgment. I believe we're being conned.

Furthermore, I believe if we give 2½ time to work to our advantage that the drones now on the payrolls will no longer be advised to "Take it easy. Slow down." Instead, as the pinch of 2½ begins to be felt (as it will, more and more, with the passage of time and continuing inflation) more productivity will be demanded of those on public payrolls.

Officials who are now excusing failures to produce effectively will find themselves losing elections to newcomers who promise efficiency in performing functions of town management. Employees in town offices will replace present attitudes of disinterest and boredom with a spirit of helpful cooperation and pleasant concern for problems of the people who come to them for assistance or service. Those are the people who pay their salaries; good paying jobs will be more difficult to find; busy hands are happy hands; attitudes will reflect these facts.

Lastly, I believe if 2½ doesn't achieve this metamorphosis, Mr. and Mrs. John Q. Public will soon find another proposition on their ballots that will bring about the desired changes.

Go ahead and blame ME. I voted YES on 2½; I'm glad I did; I'd do it again, given a second chance; and I promise to vote YES on the next such proposition when I get that opportunity.