

village view

by Andrea Leonard

It was a good many years ago that a splinter group led by one Roger Williams parted company with folks of Massachusetts Bay Colony and set off through the bushes to establish another settlement at a place to become Rhode Island.

Their reasons for hauling stakes were just as good then as they would be today. Massachusetts has a penchant for rules and regulations that's inconsistent with the ideas some of us have about how "free" we're entitled to be.

If the opportunity arose today for striking out and establishing another colony where rules were less oppressive, and it was necessary to travel no further from home than Providence, there might be quite a gang of us, splitting away.

As things stand, on November 2, 1976, you've an opportunity to enhance your own personal freedoms without going through the agony of a major household move.

Give a moment's thought to question 3 on the ballot. It's natural to vote against anything which doesn't affect you directly, and just maintain the status quo. After all, unless you happen to hold a religious belief that prohibits your participation in an election on a particular day, or time of day, why should you care?

It occurs to me that you and I would be freer if we were to assure for someone else a freedom we'd like for ourselves if we did happen to be the ones holding the inhibiting religious beliefs.

Denying this additional freedom benefits you and me not at all; approving it could, conceivably, someday, mean the difference between being able to vote or disenfranchisement. How could that be? I don't know; I have no powers of foresight.

But I'm in favor of any freedom which does nothing to inhibit the freedom of others. This is one area, it seems to me, where the freedoms should be as broad as we can make them.

The power to vote is a privilege no qualified citizen should be denied for any reason. If you or I are to be out of state on election day, we may have an absentee ballot mailed to us at some distant location; we may then take that ballot to a Notary Public and, in his presence, mark it, have the notary affix his seal and attest to our having voted, and mail the ballot home, to be counted.

If you or I are physically handicapped, we may similarly vote by absentee ballot. If we are prohibited by religious conviction from using mechanical transportation on a day that happens to be an election day, should we be forced to violate our religious convictions in order to exercise our duty and privilege as citizens?

You think about that before you vote on question 3. My own religion does not in any way interfere with my civic duties but, if it did, and this method provided a way to perform both duties in a satisfactory way, it would be a greater freedom. That's why I support it.

Skipping over more important questions, and today looking at those which seem hardly worth the trouble, consider question 8. It's not binding; it's on the ballot to give the legislature some indication of how voters feel about having an oil refinery and deep water port in Massachusetts.

Even before the Interior Department announced recently there's a 64 percent chance of at least one major oil spill coming ashore in New England if drilling proceeds on the North Atlantic Out Continental Shelf in the Georges Banks Basis, I was opposed.

I've been opposed to the construction of an oil refinery in New England ever since I spent a week visiting friends in Philadelphia where there were eight oil refineries within a ten mile radius of us and the air pollution was so severe I was acutely uncomfortable and experienced difficulty breathing.

My friends assured me they've become accustomed to it. I fully expect both of them to develop serious respiratory disease before they are middle-aged.

Again, more oil is not the solution to our energy problems; more oil now means the supply will be exhausted that much more quickly. Development of workable solar energy systems is ultimately our one best and safest solution; meanwhile, conservation of present supplies and use of renewable sources of energy to supplement oil and coal for heat and power is feasible.

Industry argues there are insufficient coal supplies in New England; Studies indicate there are large coal deposits, now untapped, in the Narragansett Basin. It is not necessary, yet, to develop off-shore oil resources to keep warm or to supply New England's electric power needs.

Regarding the Blue Laws, question 9 is another of the non-binding questions voters may express opinions about. Once more, consider this: the more restrictive our laws, the fewer freedoms we enjoy.

There's no need for anyone to patronize any shop or store that opts to remain open on Sundays. There's no law and there can be no law requiring anyone to do business at a store, Sunday or any other day.

To prohibit a business from offering goods for sale on one day rather than another is a restriction of freedom. I, personally, I am opposed to restrictions of freedom.

Any restrictions of this sort come under the heading of a limitation of liberty. For that reason, I'm "agin it". If it can be unlawful for a retailer to offer his wares on a Sunday, then it's possible it can become a law a retailer **must** offer his wares on a Sunday, and also possible it become law that you and I **must buy goods** on a Sunday.

Ridiculous? Not at all.

In this year of the Bicentennial, it is important to reaffirm the vital principles of freedom.

As an individual with some ideas that spring from independent thought and from consideration of many sides of issues, and as a woman who approves of equal rights for all persons, but who also beleives many "libbers" are over-reacting, I do support every question that enhances the causes of freedom, and I do oppose restrictions of freedoms.

Freedoms should be assured to those who exercise their options in ways that don't infringe upon the freedoms of others. Freedoms must be denied to those who impose upon others a denial of the rights and privileges to which all are otherwise entitled.

The person who wishes to vote and also wishes to conform to particular religious beliefs should be permitted to do both, inasmuch as this costs not one iota of freedom to anyone else.

Whatever you decide to do about these questions, please go to the polls and VOTE. Please. Please. Please.