

village view

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by Andrea Leonard

When your congressman sends you one of those multiple choice questionnaires and asks you to return it to him so he'll know which, of all the important problems facing the nation you feel need his attention, maybe you fill it out and return it. Or maybe you throw it in the wastebasket.

I must like answering questions because I always fill it out and send it back along with a few cogent comments I hope he'll give some attention.

It's not that I think the man doesn't already know what's important. I'm sure he does. But if he goes to the expense (his own expense, thank goodness!) and trouble to ask, the least I can do is respond. And it's a chance to let off steam.

He knows, just as we do, inflation is our biggest headache. And he knows, just as we do, unemployment runs a close second. Also he knows, as we do, that solving the energy crisis comes in third. In the running, too, are protecting our environment from pollution and cutting waste in every possible way.

We're all victims of inflation. If some solution isn't forthcoming, we're in big trouble not too far down the road. The energy crisis is closely connected to inflation; as power costs rise, dollars erode. Unemployment is also related to inflation; the disastrous effects of constantly rising costs are making us all poorer and poorer, but the unemployed really are pinched.

Pollution and waste are inflation-related too.

There's nothing simple about any of these problems. They touch each one of us since everything that happens, on a small scale or a large one, influences prices.

Whether the politicians ever will succeed in lowering the rate of unemployment and controlling inflation depends on their courage, their determination, and their willingness to serve but one term in office. The methods that must be employed to accomplish it won't be popular. But they could preserve the nation.

Unemployment is less a matter of too few jobs than of getting the most work done for the least expense. Labor costs have risen sharply; minimum wage now approaches \$3 an hour. Because no business can run for long without making a profit, employers hire only as many people as are absolutely necessary to get a job done. If a corporation can buy or rent a machine to do the work at lower cost than a person, the person will be laid off.

Someone else, somewhere else, will be hired to build, sell, install and service the machine. The person who got laid off is seldom skilled enough to fit in at that part of the cycle. Unless he can find a job similar to the one he lost, he stays unemployed. Even if he finds another job... if a machine can replace him once, it can again. And again.

It takes energy to build complicated machinery to replace people. As energy costs go up, machinery costs rise, too. Eventually people may again become less expensive than machines. Of course, if people would work for lower wages, they wouldn't be replaced by machines in the first place.

On the other hand, with inflation eroding the purchasing power of the dollar, working for lower wages doesn't permit people to maintain present living standards.

These are the problems facing all of us today. No one can afford to be unaware of the difficulties we have as a nation. None of us can blame any one thing, person or group for the vicious cycle of inflation-unemployment-energy crisis. Sooner or later it affects each of us.

As individuals we haven't much influence, but we can do something about environmental pollution and wastefulness. If enough of us take responsible action to preserve our environment and conserve energy, we could save ourselves, help retard the inflationary spiral, and a lot of people, now unemployed, could go back to work.

Maintaining the standard of living to which many of us have become accustomed is certainly desirable; it's not possible at all for the millions of unemployed. Working at anything, for a wage even smaller than one is worth, beats going hungry.

Eliminating waste in everything we do, everything we eat, wear, use, buy, drink, consume in any way, can help take up the slack between a lower income and one we'd like to earn.

Eliminating waste can prevent further despoilation of our environment. There would still be many jobs that need doing, jobs that, once done, would make the world a better place.

We waste tons and tons of paper, gallons and gallons of gas and oil, million of kilowatts of electricity. We throw away metal, glass, plastics, fabrics, food, rubber, wood - and more paper.

We generate more trash, garbage and litter, per capita, in this country than ever before in the history of the world, and more than all of the rest of the world's population combined.

We buy gas-guzzling cars when smaller ones do as well. And we buy them. And we drive them needlessly.

We're still dumping tons of recyclable glass and reusable metals in our disposal areas. We're burying and/or burning tons of paper products which could economically be used again.

Laws, not outmoded, still must be obeyed until changed; there are laws in force that increase transportation costs and make recycling all sorts of materials more expensive than

transporting or using virgin materials.

Our congressman are influenced by powerful lobbyists who wish to maintain these laws for their own advantage rather than see them changed to effect the savings our country so desperately needs to make. Unless we, the constituency, make ourselves heard, legislators respond to the voices they do hear.

Aside from the element of waste, if we continue to bury and burn materials that could be reused, we will eventually destroy our water supplies and further degrade the quality of the air we breathe. Living without water and air is not only uncomfortable and inconvenient; it's impossible.

The responsibility for controlling inflation, unemployment, energy shortages, and for protecting our environment and stopping the needless heedless waste, lies with us as individuals. We're the ones who hold the real power to control what happens. We vote, and we are listened to if we speak up and tell our representatives what we want.

The next time you get a chance to answer such a questionnaire, take the time to do it. And if the chance isn't offered again soon, pick up your pen and address an envelope to your congressman and send him a note giving your thoughts on these matters.

He'll be glad you did. And you'll be glad you did, too.