



The year is turning again, like the page of a great book, and we're reading the last paragraph of Chapter 1975. Coming up is 1976, the Bicentennial Year.

For twelve months our nation has been conducting preliminary celebrations to commemorate the country's 200th Birthday. During the coming year, attempts will be made to whip patriotic fervor to even greater pitch. The public will be urged to participate in rejoicing for Democracy's survival. We'll be assured, in speeches across the land, we're going forward, renewed in hope and dedication, to a better future.

Yup.

I can't work up much enthusiasm for all the hoopla.

It's not that I don't value the principles and precepts of our founding fathers. They had the right idea. Nor is it any lack of response to the many great things America's accomplished in the period since United States history began to be written.

What bothers me is the present state of affairs and the directions in which the nation is moving, step by faltering step. If we close our eyes to the present while we laud the past, there will be no cause to acclaim the tercentennial when another century rolls around. Past achievements must be weighed against some of the perfectly asinine things that are being perpetrated in the present.

Billions of dollars are being spent for foolishness like studying what makes people unhappy, and concluding that illness, poverty and old age make people unhappy. How about that? So, what else is new?

Billions are spent annually in Health, Education and Welfare programs to help the underprivileged, though little improvement in their lot is perceptible. All we find is that more people are joining the ranks of the poor.

While growing numbers of citizens are reduced to welfare-recipient-status, billions of dollars are sent to developing countries, to improve the standard of living of the people there.

Medical care at no cost to the recipient is available to those on welfare, yet many who are eligible don't receive it since no transportation is available to its point of distribution. Further, many are unaware of their needs, and they have not been and are not being educated to recognize these needs.

And still further, the poor who can and do take advantage of these benefits often receive care that so-called middle-class families can't afford. One reason they can't is, they're being taxed to pay for the care of others who contribute nothing toward the costs.

It seems there's little we can do to control this run-away system. Those who run for office, no matter what they promise — and they promise everything to everybody — become tools of special interests once they join their brothers in Congress.

The country is divided into two main factions. Those dependent on the federal pork barrel because social welfare programs provide them with some sort of employment and/or income, and those who are dependent on the federal pork barrel because military programs provide them with employment and/or income.

From welfare recipients, through social workers, program administrators, Congress, up to the Presidency, and extending web-like to doctors, dentists, nursing homes and hospitals — and extending to food suppliers, builders of public housing, and taxi fleets,

federal money moves out of one pocket and into the other — of the same pair of pants.

And from manufacturers of aircraft, ships, automotives, weapons, and energy components, through the millions of both military and civilian government employees, and extending into every industry through government contracts of various kinds, federal money moves out of one pocket and into the other — of the same pair of pants.

And along the way, there's the slippage; wherever there's slippage, somebody gets in on it, and comes away richer, at your expense.

At the local level, it's a similar story. The day of the courageous politician seems dead. What's happened to the kind of person Harry Truman was? He didn't hesitate to call a spade a spade, sometimes crudely, often colorfully. His answer to most accusations was apt to be, "Sure I did. So what?" We could do with more of that.

The Town of Barnstable will again elect, this coming March, representatives to Town Meeting.

To persuade enough people to run so there's any contest is no easy task. Most people, unless they have something to gain from the position, can't be bothered. The majority of the representatives comprise special interest groups on a town level similar to those outlined above on a federal level.

If you want a jolt, go through the list of more than 200 Town Meeting Members and count those who probably won't be influenced by their work, either as town employees, school employees, or as people with a special concern for building and real estate. It won't be a long list, believe me.

What's the answer? Unless a better cross-section of the citizenry comes forward to serve, and is elected, there seems to be no satisfactory answer.

In making this observation, I'm not implying all teachers or town employees, or all real estate agents or builders, carpenters, plumbers, painters, and architects, are influenced solely by self-interest.

Many take seriously their pledges to support what's best for Barnstable. They all live here and they all pay taxes here. And they, like all of us, feel the pinch of present economic conditions.

They face tough decisions. It's not easy to judge what's best. The hours are long, the pay is poor, and little thanks do they get.

The alternatives, locally, are: return to Open Town Meeting or go to a small elected Board of Selectmen comprised of a dozen or so people to make major decisions and hire a Town Manager or Executive Secretary to administer the town's operation.

The first alternative: no space available can accommodate the voters. Too many voters don't participate leaving the town vulnerable to the same kinds of special interests.

The second alternative: it's easier to buy off a dozen men than to buy off a couple of hundred. It's easier to influence a dozen people than a much larger group. The job carries powers that ought to remain in the hands of a representative group.

And so the pages turn, the years slip away, and coming up is our Bicentennial. Do we really have anything to celebrate?

Not as long as Americans continue to become more and more dependent on the largess of federal funds. Not as long as we move closer and closer to abdication of individual rights, to achieve through our own efforts, to get ahead because we're willing to work harder than the next guy. Not as long as it no longer pays to economize, save, plan ahead, and reap a harvest of our own sowing.

Celebrate the Bicentennial? No, not I.