

How did we get here? A letters column sheds some light.

I recently sat down to read the New York Times Magazine. Just as I always do, I started with the letters column. They all share something in common. Here is a sampling:

Marc E. Broid, a graduate student from Northwestern, writes in response to an article by John J. Snyder, Jr., on modern threats and promise in the workplace:

The crux of the outsourcing threat, is the fact that outsourcing does displace men from jobs. He writes: "If it did not, it would make no economic sense."

Yet his own "complete solution" to our unemployment problem is through "the creation of new markets ... with a view to creating more jobs."

The creation of new jobs is not going to bring full employment to a nation which is losing thousands of jobs weekly to outsourcing and is increasing its population at a rapid pace. The type of solution required is some sort of plan for the gradual shift from a production-oriented economy to a knowledge-oriented economy, paralleled by a corresponding shift in school emphasis.

How quickly Mr. Snyder forgets the nature of the economic disease which he himself characterizes so well. Why will new industries and markets be impervious to outsourcing? If full employment is the only kind of solution imaginable, then outsourcing, by its very nature as a job-displacer, must necessarily be our permanent headache.

H. Fields, of Cambridge, MA, wrote regarding a recent piece about Rwanda:

Horror and outrage must have been the reaction of all sensitive men, in reading the account of the massacre of the Tutsi tribe by the Hutu, in Rwanda. Yet no government saw fit to speak up forcefully on this matter, nor was the subject brought up in the U. N. for urgent consideration.

Perhaps it would be too much to expect such action from the "Christian" temporal and religious powers of the West, or the "Socialist" powers of the East, in view of their dismal record of years ago regarding German genocide of the Jews. It is, however, incredible that the independent African nations, who rightfully took every occasion to denounce apartheid in South Africa, should put the immoral mantle of non-interference on, when the grossest of crimes was being committed by an African Commonwealth.

Will this generation, witness to one genocide, remain inhumanly silent and inactive again?

Robert Primack addresses modern thinking on reform of social programs:

I have but one serious criticism of Prof. Andrew Hacker's excellent article... He appears to assume that opponents of the social programs are open to persuasion by a method of intelligent argument; that they will reconsider their position if presented with an appeal on the basis of the probable consequences to the innocent children now being harmed by our lack of national concern.

Unfortunately, most of those who oppose a reasonable form of distributive justice with respect to the needy are themselves frequently mentally and emotionally immobilized by their prejudices, traditions, and their greed. Only the most graphic demonstrations — or more commonly, only the alteration of their own circumstances for the worse — provide them with a measure of sympathy and understanding for the victims of our society.

Walter Benjamin laments a modern day scourge:

Theodore Irwin... did not mention one terrible aspect of the buying and selling of personal information.

Some years ago my wife became pregnant and was registered by her physician at a local hospital. In the fourth month she suffered a miscarriage and was taken to the same hospital for treatment. As I sat by her bedside, trying to console her, a woman came into the room and tried to sell us diaper service.

For the next several months we continued to receive "baby" mail. Almost every morning brought us some fresh reminder of the baby that would have been born. When the ninth month passed, the diaper services let up, but were replaced by baby photographers and food

companies.

There ought to be a law.

Joel E. Kahan of New York writes about Sen. Russell's defense against elimination of the filibuster:

As a conservative it is difficult for me to reconcile with the views of Senator Richard Russell, but as an interested citizen I find much value in the democratic principles of government which he espouses.

Although unprogressive and undemocratic in certain key areas, Senator Russell and his colleagues do play a vital role in fostering American liberty. In practice, a Senate filibuster is staged to hinder democratic progress; nevertheless, the theory of unlimited debate serves as a safeguard for the democratic process. The right of every Senator to express his views on any issue protects us against the enactment of legislation which might encroach upon our basic constitutional liberties.

Today, the filibuster may be used for temporarily blocking judicial nominees; but tomorrow it may be the means of thwarting totalitarian power. That the stalling of judicial nominees for a short while will destroy our democracy is doubtful; that a limitation on the freedom of speech and expression will end our much cherished system is certain.

What do these letters, all addressing topics very much in the news and on our minds, share in common? Have you guessed? I will admit that I did alter each letter a little bit. In addition to some minor adjustments to phrasing:

I replaced "automation" with "outsourcing," in the letter about jobs,

In the second letter I replaced "Watusi" with "Tutsi" and "Banhutu" with "Hutu,"

"Social programs" replaced "welfare state" in the broadside against opponents thereof,

Letter four was written about "unwanted mail," not "buying and selling of personal information,"

In letter number five? "Judicial nominees" replaced "civil rights legislation" and the writer was a liberal, not a conservative.

You see, the issue of the New York Times Magazine I was reading was dated April 5, 1964.