
Let Them Eat Cake!

"Why Pay for the Best and the Brightest?" by Terry W. Culler, in *Cato Policy Report* (May-June 1989), 224 Second St. S.E., Washington, D.C. 20077-0872.

In Washington, it is called the "quiet crisis." Low pay is demoralizing the federal work force and draining it of talent, warn such "inside-the-Beltway" luminaries as Paul Volcker, the former chairman of the Federal Reserve Board. Volcker now stumps for a big federal pay raise as head of a group called the National Commission on the Public Service.

Culler, a former official of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, finds it all a little hard to believe. If the three million civilian federal workers are so miserable, why do only 5.2 percent of them quit their jobs annually, as opposed to 10.9 percent of their private sector counterparts?

Culler suspects that Volcker and his allies (including former President Gerald Ford) are really most concerned about the upper-echelon bureaucrats who earn salaries of \$50,000 or more. But even among technical specialists who could easily find more lucrative work in the private sector

[a recent study put the overall public-private pay gap at 28.6 percent], "quit rates" are low. Only 2.3 percent of chemists and 3.3 percent of engineers leave the federal payroll annually. "There must be something about federal employment that makes it attractive to them," Culler observes.

It may well be that the government service fails to attract the "best and the brightest," he concedes. So much the better. After all, they serve the national interest more in the private sector, where they help create wealth. And why raise salaries, say \$15,000, to attract a few Wharton MBAs when it will also mean increasing the pay of thousands of employees who were content to work at the old rate?

We need competent government, Culler concludes, "but we should not be railroaded into paying higher wages—and higher taxes—than are necessary to achieve it."

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Swords Unsheathed

"The Middle East in the Missile Age" by Gerald M. Steinberg, in *Issues in Science and Technology* (Summer 1989), 2101 Constitution Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20077-5576.

Even as the world cheers the progress of Soviet-American arms control, dangerous new weapons of mass destruction are spreading to the volatile Middle East.

Iraq used chemical weapons during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, and the two sides fired conventionally-armed ballistic missiles at each other. Iraq is also working on an atomic bomb and is stockpiling biological weapons (bacteria, toxins, viruses). Libya is building a chemical weapons plant, and Syria has obtained Soviet-made SS-21 missiles. Israel almost certainly possesses nuclear weapons.

More alarming than the quantity of

arms, writes Steinberg, a researcher at Israel's Hebrew University, is the ignorance of Middle Eastern leaders about their dangers. Over the years, the two superpowers have reduced the threat of war through deterrence—by, among other things, placing weapons in submarines and hardened silos to ensure that any surprise attack would be met by a deadly second strike. But few deterrents exist in the Middle East.

Geography and the new missiles heighten the temptation to strike first. Syria's capital, Damascus, is a mere 100 kilometers from Israel's Golan Heights.

It is too late to put the genie back in the