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**POLITICS & GOVERNMENT**


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### *Food Stamps: Not a Bargain*

"The Case Against In-Kind Transfers: The Food Stamp Program" by Judith A. Barmack, in *Policy Analysis* (Fall 1977), University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif. 94720.

Basic changes in the American welfare system over the past decade have led some analysts to conclude that widespread, de facto welfare reform is underway. The food stamp program and Medicaid, for example, which provide help "in kind" rather than in cash, have delivered more benefits to more people than ever before. (In-kind expenditures now greatly exceed cash outlays in the federal welfare budget.) But if "reform" also means a more equitable and efficient system, then "in-kind transfers" have not advanced the cause and may have retarded it.

The \$5-billion-a-year food stamp program is unfair and wasteful, contends Barmack, an urban affairs specialist at Portland State University. Its complex rules and varying levels of aid have produced unintended anomalies. Households on public assistance are automatically eligible for food stamps; equally needy families who are not on welfare may not be. Regulations governing food stamp benefits tend to provide eligible, higher-income households with disproportionately large allotments, while many poorer families receive few or no benefits.

The program exacts high costs (the result of error, fraud, and labor expenses) from government agencies and private businesses serving intermediate functions, such as selling food and processing the used stamps. Food stamps have also proved incapable of increasing food consumption among the poor.

Although a well-intentioned response, Barmack concludes, the food stamp program may hamper real welfare reform by the political and bureaucratic inertia it encourages.

### *Individuals and the State*

"A Question of Elbow Room" by John Dos Passos, in *The St. Croix Review* (Dec. 1977), P.O. Box 244, Stillwater, Minn. 55082.

Few founding fathers felt that an experiment in full-fledged democracy would work. Washington, John Adams, and the Federalists, for example, believed that universal suffrage would probably end in demagoguery and despotism. Yet all these men considered the self-interest and political apathy of the average citizen and sought to grant him enough "elbow room" to pursue the goals and pleasures of his life. A politics—which Gouverneur Morris called the "sublime Science"—based on happiness and personal freedom was the *raison d'être* of the American state.

What distinguished 18th- and early 19th-century Americans from their successors and their European contemporaries, according to the late novelist John Dos Passos in this reprint from his *Essays on In-*

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*dividuality*, was that they thoroughly understood the world they lived in. For the New England fisherman, the Midwestern merchant, and the Southern planter, the family was his fiefdom—his vocation as well as avocation. But with the growth of industrial society, Americans became subject to so many rigid “sovereignties”—corporations, unions, and above all, tiers of government bureaucracy—that conformity took precedence over individuality, and the family was relegated to “leisure time.”

The irony of American history, Dos Passos contends, is that in our recent haste to solve problems through government action, Americans have lost the conviction that the best government is self-government. Americans need to reaffirm an individual commitment to work for the public good—to disprove the 19th-century historian Macaulay’s contention that “institutions purely democratic must, sooner or later, destroy liberty or civilization or both.”

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**FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE**

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*Taiwan’s Future*

“Thinking Through the China Problem”  
by Richard H. Solomon, in *Foreign Affairs*  
(Jan. 1978), 428 E. Preston St., Baltimore,  
Md. 21202.

U.S. concern for the security of Taiwan is the chief obstacle to normalization of diplomatic relations between the United States and the People’s Republic of China. The Chinese demand the cutting of U.S. ties with Taiwan, abrogation of the 1954 U.S.–Taiwan mutual defense pact, and withdrawal of all U.S. forces from the island. Solomon, director of the Rand Corporation’s research program in International Security Policy, thinks it unlikely that normalization would expose Taiwan to an invasion from the mainland for at least a decade.

The 100-mile-wide Taiwan Strait, he writes, presents a major barrier to direct amphibious assault. By all indications, the People’s Republic neither possesses nor is constructing landing craft suitable for such an attack. Nor is Peking training enough pilots to provide the air cover such an invasion would require. Despite Peking’s 15-to-1 advantage in aircraft, Taiwan’s modern air defenses would take a heavy toll.

Mainland China could try to isolate Taiwan through military and diplomatic pressure. But that would lead to conflicts with the United States and Japan, Taiwan’s major trading partners. As long as the Soviet border threat preoccupies the Chinese military, Peking will seek good relations with Tokyo and Washington.

The future status of Taiwan is an emotional issue in both China and the United States. However, Solomon argues, further delay on normalization could spark a return to Sino-American hostility or outright confrontation. With the U.S. military presence on Taiwan already fading