

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

*Managing the
Welfare State*

"Thoughts on the 'Governability Crisis' in the West" by Walter Dean Burnham, in *The Washington Review of Strategic and International Studies* (July 1978), Transaction Periodicals Consortium, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

The specter of "ungovernability" has come to haunt Western politicians and intellectuals in the 1970s.

Today's predicament in the United States, Britain, Italy, and other Western countries is ultimately the by-product of severe strains in advanced capitalist societies, says Burnham, an M.I.T. political scientist. These strains stem from the depression of the 1930s, the convulsions of World War II, and the growth of expensive, new, and complex welfare state systems financed by the affluence that came with rapid, post-1945 economic growth.

Disappointment with governmental performance has now produced a spontaneous revolt by ordinary people against unresponsive power. In the United States, citizens are rejecting the authority of the central government at the very time the country needs a "new American ideology" to reconcile competing interest groups and find rational, comprehensive solutions to major problems like energy.

The American political system has confounded its critics in the past by its capacity to adapt, says Burnham. It could do so again, perhaps through development of mass support for an aggressive foreign policy initiative in response to a serious threat to Israel or Western Europe.

There are three possible lines of evolution, he concludes: the creation of a new political formula to regain popular consensus; a subversion of the political system to concentrate power in the executive branch (e.g., President Nixon's projected "administrative presidency"); or a continuation of the present unhealthy fragmentation.

*Deadly Gases
and Weak Seats*

"Airline Passenger Safety: Two Studies in FAA Dalliance" by Charles E. Hill and Mark A. Borenstein, in *Trial* (Aug. 1978), P.O. Box 3717, Washington, D.C. 20007.

The Federal Aviation Administration has been charged by Congress with the responsibility to promote the safety of air travel "by prescribing and revising . . . such minimum standards . . . as may be required in the interest of safety." Safety standards are to be promulgated as soon as possible after the need for them has been established, say Hill and Borenstein, associate director and staff attorney, respectively, at the Institute for Public Interest Representation in Washington, D.C. Yet, in at least two key areas, the FAA has been slow to act.

Since 1970, when federal investigators began measuring the hydrogen cyanide level in blood from victims of fiery air crashes, nearly 275 deaths have been directly or indirectly blamed on deadly gases or

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smoke released by burning interior cabin materials, such as decorative draperies and polyvinyl fluoride ceiling panels.

The danger related to the burning of interior cabin materials, say Hill and Borenstein, has been recognized as a safety hazard by airplane manufacturers and airlines at least since 1966; yet no rules setting safe toxic gas and smoke emission levels for these materials have been developed, much less adopted.

The failure of seats and the tiedown mechanism by which they are attached to the aircraft has also been cited in more than a half-dozen reports of commercial air crashes. When seats tear loose, passengers are trapped in their chairs, others are injured when hit by unattached seats, and exit ways are frequently blocked by seat wreckage. Yet with one minor exception, current seat strength requirements have not been changed since 1952, before the advent of jet aircraft brought marked increases in landing speeds and other impact factors.

New technology has produced aircraft better able to withstand impacts and enabled manufacturers to use safer interior designs and new materials. Yet the FAA has still not responded to petitions filed in October 1977 by organizations representing consumers, flight attendants, flight engineers, and airline pilots asking that the existing regulations be amended. As a consumer protection agency, Hill and Borenstein conclude, the FAA leaves something to be desired.

The Bottom Line: Audit or Analysis

"The GAO: An Evolving Role" by John T. Rourke, in *Public Administration Review* (Sept.-Oct. 1978), 1225 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

The role of the U.S. General Accounting Office has changed substantially since its creation as a watchdog agency for Congress in 1921. For 30 years, the GAO concentrated on straightforward voucher audits—checking the books of federal agencies and departments. Then, in the late 1940s, it shifted its emphasis to "comprehensive" auditing that covered managerial efficiency as well as the legality of expenditures. During the past decade, says Rourke, a political scientist at the University of Connecticut, the GAO has moved into more controversial territory—examining not just how a program works, but whether it achieves its intended purpose. This larger role has aroused alarm, both within the GAO and in Congress.

The GAO's evolution, says Rourke, has been pushed by its current director, Comptroller General Elmer B. Staats, as well as by members of Congress concerned with the spiraling costs of government. The first congressional directive to enter the program evaluation field came in 1967 when Sen. Winston Prouty (R-Vt.) ordered the GAO to find out whether the new Office of Economic Opportunity was achieving its assigned goals in the "war on poverty."

Traditionalists in the GAO worry that the organization will lose its