

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

gency or inspiration that crowds can impart.

Today's orators also lack a rich lode of common literary allusions and images. Even references to the Bible—to Job or to Balaam's ass, for example—are no longer universally understood. "What do our politicians now quote?" asks Fairlie, "A television commercial: 'Where's the beef?'"

But neither TV nor politicians are solely to blame for the decline of oratory. After all, Fairlie observes, the purpose of public speaking is to persuade the public to support a certain course of action. "But a nation with its ears in a Sony Walkman does not wish to act." It is not that our public officials cannot lead, but that we do not want them to. Oratory will return, he predicts, when Americans once again look to their politicians for leadership.

Social Security's Cloudy Future

"Budget Cutters Think the Unthinkable—Social Security Cuts Would Stem Red Ink" by Linda E. Demkovich, in *National Journal* (June 23, 1984), 1730 M St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Nobody in Washington wants to admit it before the November elections, but public officials of both political parties who are looking for ways to reduce federal budget deficits are contemplating cuts next year in that most sacred of federal programs, Social Security.

The retirement program itself seems assured of solvency for the foreseeable future, thanks to the \$165-billion rescue package signed into law last year. And while the system is self-contained (it is financed by a designated payroll tax), reports *National Journal* correspondent Demkovich, its outlays and revenues are counted in federal budget totals. (In 1992, Social Security will be separated out of the budget.) Trimming its expenditures—\$180 billion, or 20 percent of Washington's spending in 1984—would thus reduce federal red ink during the present crisis.

A look at the options illustrates why the system is such a juicy target. A one-year freeze on its annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), for example, would save \$15 billion in 1985 alone. By reducing the base from which future COLAs are calculated, it would also save some \$20 billion annually thereafter.

Tinkering with the COLA, however, would hurt the poorest recipients most: Elderly individuals who live alone and are in the bottom fifth of the U.S. income scale will have an average income of only \$3,600 this year, \$2,600 of it from Social Security. That makes another plan attractive: If half of every recipient's benefits were subject to the federal income tax, the poor would pay virtually nothing. Such a tax would reap \$6.5 billion in general revenues in 1985. (Well-to-do retirees will pay such a tax this year as a result of the 1983 rescue package.)

Taxation and COLAs offer the quickest savings, Demkovich says, and are thus most apt to get serious attention after the November elections. But more far-reaching "reforms" are also possible. Treasury Secretary

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Donald T. Regan has wondered aloud whether Social Security might be converted to a "means tested" program, with benefits available only to the needy. The Brookings Institution backs a five-percent cut in the benefits paid new retirees, which would reduce later COLA costs as well.

Social Security's 36 million beneficiaries (not to mention younger folk) may not like such medicine, Demkovich concludes, but making a serious dent in a federal budget deficit edging up to \$200 billion a year may require it.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

*Democratic
Vistas*

"Will More Countries Become Democracies?" by Samuel P. Huntington, in *Political Science Quarterly* (Summer 1984), 2852 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-0148.

Democracy has planted new flags in recent years, notably in Spain, Argentina, and Greece. But Huntington, a Harvard political scientist, is not optimistic about the overall prospects for the spread of representative government.

For more than a century after the American Revolution, democracy was on the rise around the world. Its momentum faltered around 1920, only to revive between 1942 and 1953, in part because the victorious World War II allies imposed it on the defeated powers. Ever since, however, there has been no clear trend. In January 1984, 36 percent of the world's population lived in "free" states, from Denmark to Trinidad and Tobago—no more, no less than 10 years before.

Some political scientists link the rise of democracy to increasing national wealth: As developing states reach a certain level of affluence, they seem simply to outgrow their (usually authoritarian) political institutions. Members of the political elite are thus forced to choose new institutions. In 1981, 21 countries stood within this "transition zone" of economic development. (Among them: Chile, Yugoslavia, Iran.) But democracy is not the inevitable result: In most cases, transition nations face a choice between democracy and communism. In 1981, every country that had passed through the "transition zone" and achieved a per capita gross national product of at least \$4,220 (with the exception of the small Arab oil exporting nations and Singapore) fell into one camp or the other.

Ironically, democracy must, in Huntington's view, be established from the top down, by political leaders, businessmen, and the middle class. "The passionate dissidents from authoritarian rule and the crusaders for democratic principles, the Tom Paines of this world, do not create democratic institutions; that requires James Madisons." Revolutionaries may *call* for democracy, but once in power "almost all turn out to be authoritarian themselves."