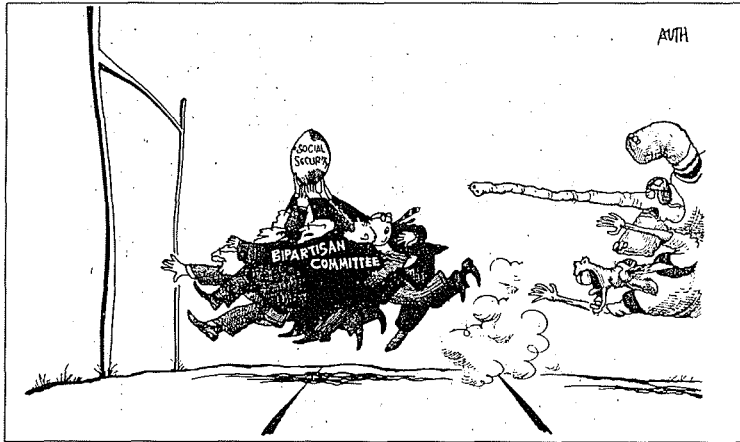


## POLITICS &amp; GOVERNMENT



In a January 1983 cartoon, a bipartisan panel rushes a Social Security rescue package past congressional Republican and Democrat resistance.

fragmented. Even freshman legislators expect to have their say.

Now that Congress holds most of its committee meetings in public (only 19 percent are closed today, compared with 34 percent in 1953), legislators faced with demands from competing single-issue interest groups are relieved to let someone else make the hard decisions.

Government-by-commission, say the authors, may work for a time. But voters faced with the spectacle of a president and Congress unable to act on their own will soon lose all confidence in their government.

### *Back to the Grassroots?*

"From Progress to Modernization: The Conservative Turn" by Sheldon S. Wolin, in *democracy* (Fall 1983), 43 West 61st St., New York, N.Y. 10023.

"I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past," wrote Thomas Jefferson, voicing the optimism that would fuel liberalism in America for most of this nation's history. The banner of "progress," however, has been seized by conservatives, writes Wolin, a Princeton political scientist.

While Ronald Reagan cheers up his countrymen with visions of a booming economy and an America growing "more healthy and beautiful each year," liberals see "limits to growth" and look backwards to the New Deal for inspiration. President Carter's Commission for a National Agenda for the Eighties, whose membership, says Wolin, was "an inventory of the liberal consensus," warned of a grim future for the cities of the Northeast and foresaw a "nearly permanent urban underclass."

The Founding Fathers' idea of "progress"—the vision of ever-increasing

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**POLITICS & GOVERNMENT**


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gains in human liberty and prosperity—was borrowed from the French Philosophes and other intellectuals of the 18th-century Enlightenment. These thinkers had a two-pronged notion of progress: the establishment of political rights and the growth of science and the economy. By the end of the 19th century, Wolin says, political “liberation” had been achieved in the West (with the exception of blacks and a few other “anomalies”) and enshrined in new constitutions, legislatures, and civil liberties. Progress gradually came to mean just scientific and economic advance; demands for more political rights (e.g., “participatory democracy”) were viewed as threats to material progress.

Thus, the idea of “progress” embraced by present-day conservatives, says Wolin, is “antidemocratic.” Though it grew out of the Enlightenment ideal of realizing all the powers of the human mind, its aim is to apply science and technology in a constant effort to “rationalize,” “modernize,” and improve the efficiency of society. Political, corporate, and scientific “experts” must be allowed to function free from meddling by the “ignorant” masses. According to Wolin, that is why conservatives habitually disparage popular protests (e.g., the antinuclear movement) as too uninformed to be taken seriously.

America’s liberals lost their way, Wolin believes, because they once shared this faulty notion of progress with conservatives and have now recognized its limitations. He argues that the Left must re-emphasize the idea of *political* progress and articulate a vision of a society where citizens have direct control over the nation’s political and economic institutions and “where taking care of people and things, rather than using them up, is the basic stance toward the world.”

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**FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE**


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### *Sink or Swim*

“What’s Wrong with NATO?” by Irving Kristol, in *The New York Times Magazine* (Sept. 25, 1983), 229 West 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) seems to be in perpetual crisis. For good reason, writes Kristol, a New York University professor of social thought. Now that the Soviet Union has achieved nuclear parity, NATO’s strategies no longer make sense. Almost the only thing that can save the Alliance, he argues, is for the United States to pull out.

An air of unreality pervades the Alliance today. Neither the NATO battlefield doctrine of “graduated deterrence”—escalating from conventional arms, to tactical nuclear weapons, then to intermediate and strategic missiles to halt a Soviet advance—nor the U.S. threat to “engage in nuclear holocaust” with the Soviet Union for the sake of Western Europe is much more than a bluff, Kristol contends. A defense that guarantees the annihilation of all the NATO nations is unworkable.