

democracy didn't seem to stir much enthusiasm. On average, the ballot initiatives attracted votes from only 36 percent of those who voted for president. (However, 73 percent voted on a prohibitionist initiative, which went down to defeat.)

And even in 1912, long before television and campaign consultants, "special interests"—including public utility corporations, railroad companies, mining and smelting operators, and newspaper publishers—were busily manipulating the process for their own benefit. There were two initiatives to create a new body to regulate public utilities, one put forward by the progressive Direct

Legislation League, the other sponsored surreptitiously by the utility companies and designed to create a commission beholden to them. Perhaps confused, voters defeated both measures. (The state legislature subsequently created a progressive-backed regulatory commission.)

"Besides sponsoring ballot initiatives," write Smith and Lubinski, "vested economic interests also successfully placed on the ballot six popular referendums that expressly challenged reforms passed in 1911 by the progressive-leaning legislature." Voters endorsed five of the antiprogressive measures.

## FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

### *Too Much of a Good Thing?*

"The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action" by Alexander Cooley and James Ron, *International Security* (Summer 2002), 5 Cambridge Center, 4th Fl., Cambridge, Mass. 02142-1493.

Everyone's cheering the rise of international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). These groups, ranging from familiar brand names such as CARE-USA to the newer Doctors without Borders, can fight poverty, government corruption, and other global ills, say enthusiasts. Ultimately, power will shift from dysfunctional states to liberal private organizations. It's the dawn of a new global civil society!

Alas, there can be too much of a good thing, caution Cooley, a Columbia University political scientist, and Ron, a McGill University sociologist. As the number of international NGOs rises—it went from 1,000 to 5,500 between 1960 and 1996—competition for donor dollars drives them to act much like for-profits. They may aim to improve the world, but the focus on increasing market share, landing big contracts, and remaining solvent often leads to perverse results.

"Low barriers to entry," traditionally a virtue, may start the inefficiency ball rolling. In 1980, a total of 37 foreign relief agencies operated within one Cambodian refugee camp; in 1995, by contrast, 200 agencies flooded the refugee camps in Goma, the vortex of Hutu-Tutsi devasta-

tion in Rwanda. As a *Guardian* journalist put it, since aid had become "big, big money," any NGO "worth its salt recognized that it had to be in Rwanda."

Competition can lead to the squandering of aid: Money better spent abroad instead goes to grant-writers hoping for the same U.S. Agency for International Development (or United Nations, or World Bank) contracts. Duplicated efforts, endless rounds of meetings, and a growing tail-to-teeth ratio are other results. Worst of all, while competition may eliminate the inefficient, it can also eliminate some of the worthiest aid groups.

It's having to compete every six or 12 months to win a new contract that causes the worst problems, Cooley and Ron believe. The need to keep the money coming can encourage NGOs to hurt the very people they're supposed to help. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, NGOs brought in to help liberalize the economy encountered constant backsliding by local politicians. But because "donors often ask recipients whether the contractor's project should be renewed," the NGOs were reluctant to tattle. In Goma, "the refugee camps became de facto safe havens for Hutu fighters." In the

past, the aid givers likely would have put their foot down, but when one NGO contemplated a boycott of the camps in protest of the fighters' presence, another aid group quickly signaled its willingness to take over the contract.

"More is not always better and competition does not solely reduce waste," Cooley

and Ron warn. Market forces can homogenize groups and inhibit cooperation. The two scholars recommend that Western governments and other international-aid givers grant longer-term or nonrevocable contracts to NGOs. The groups themselves should search out funding from church groups and other alternative sources.

## *The Return of Tyranny*

"The New Age of Tyranny" by Mark Lilla, in *The New York Review of Books* (Oct. 24, 2002), 1755 Broadway, 5th fl., New York, N.Y. 10019-3780.

President George W. Bush, the United States, and the democratic West now face not an "axis of evil," but rather the uncharted expanse of "a new age of tyranny," argues Lilla, a professor in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. The "hollowness" of Bush's phrase reflects the West's conceptual unpreparedness to deal with this new challenge.

The totalitarian threat posed by Hitler's Germany and then the Soviet Union is past, Lilla notes, yet the West's long confrontation with that menace "still sets our intellectual compass," rendering us "less sensitive to tyranny in its more moderate forms." Thus, in the recent war in the Balkans, most

Europeans found it difficult to grasp that though Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic was not Adolf Hitler, he "still was a dangerous tyrant who had to be combated." A similar reluctance is evident today among Europeans and many Americans with regard to Iraq's Saddam Hussein.

"From Zimbabwe to Libya, from Algeria to Iraq, from the Central Asian republics to Burma, from Pakistan to Venezuela," says Lilla, "we discover nations that are neither totalitarian nor democratic, nations where the prospects of building durable democracies in the near future are limited or nil."

"Sooner or later," he writes, "the language of anti-totalitarianism will have to be



*The wave of the future? America may be forced to grapple with more leaders like Libya's Muammar al-Qaddafi.*