

BUSH'S PROGRAM: ARMIES OF COMPASSION

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Introduction

President Roosevelt introduced the welfare system in America. Prior to his Presidency, poor Americans essentially depended on charity. However, the depression taught Americans it was not possible to rely on the charity of individuals to effectively deal with poverty. Besides, charity was precarious and depended on the "whim and fancy" of the rich. It was also selective and discriminatory. Minorities were discriminated against by many charities during the depression, particularly in the South. Federal governments since the 1940's institutionalized the welfare system. It was understood that since taxpayers finance the system poor people do not have to be at the mercy of the rich and to suffer indignities from any quarter. The key idea was that when one is healthy and employed one contributes financially to the welfare system, so that when one is sick, unemployed and aged, the government would assist one until one recovers, is working again, or has passed on. However, since the 1980's and in the 1990's, there have been reversals in the mindset of policymakers and policies as a whole. Under the present neo-liberal economic model, the market and not the government decide on the allocation of resources. In this model, the principle that guides the allocation of resources is profits and/or super-profits. The poor, unemployed and aged are not the responsibility of the market. That according to neo-liberals is the job of compassionate individuals and charity.

It is in that background at the dawn of the 21st century, that George W. Bush who promoted during the elections a policy paper entitled "Duty of Hope: Armies of Compassion", intends to implement a policy based on faith-based charities which may compete and/or undermine the welfare system. Now that he is President, it is important to study the policy and to monitor how it will play out over the next four years. Who will manage the faith-based charities?

How much money will be allocated? What would be the criteria for disbursing allocations? To whom would the faith-based charities be responsible? How will the "Jim Bakkers" and the "Henry Lyons" be excluded to avert corruption? Who will benefit? Will the faith-based charities be Republicans? Is this the real beginning of the end of the welfare system?

Bush's Program

The policy paper stated that President Bush will "commit himself and the nation to mobilizing the armies of compassion—charities and churches, communities and corporations, ministers and mentors—to save and change lives, as he has done in Texas. These groups are proving that real change comes bottom-up, and not top-down." In order to translate that statement into action, the Bush program proposes: 1) To expand "charitable choice" and remove barriers to the participation of faith-based groups in government programs; 2) establish an "Office of Faith-Based Action" in the Executive Office Of the President; 3) Expand the charitable deduction to people who do not itemize; 4) promote a new charitable state tax credit; 5) provide new incentives for corporate giving."

Among the initiatives he intends to take is the creation of a "Compassion Capital Fund" to invest in charitable "best practices."

- **Expand the Charitable Deduction:** Under current law, only people who itemize deductions are allowed to claim a tax deduction for their charitable donations. About 80 million people—70% of all filers—do not itemize. The new law would give every taxpayer the ability to deduct his or her charitable donations. The change it is anticipated would generate billions of dollars annually in additional charitable funds.
- **Promote Charitable State Tax Credit:** new legislation would provide a credit (of up to 50% of the first \$500 for individuals and \$1,000 for married couples). States will also be permitted—at their option—to offset the cost of this credit by using money from the Temporary Assistance To

Needy Families (TANF) program. It is anticipated that the optional tax credit would give states additional flexibility in addressing human needs.

- **Permit Charitable Contributions From IRAS Without Penalty:** Under current law, withdrawals from Individual Retirement Accounts are subject to income tax. This creates a disincentive for retirees to contribute some or all of their IRA funds to charities without having to pay income tax on their gifts.

- **Extend The New Charitable State Tax Credit To Corporations:** Corporations will be allowed to participate in the new Charitable State Tax Credit. Corporations will be eligible for tax credit of 50% of the first \$1000 donated to charities dedicated to fighting poverty. The country has about 5,000,000 corporations, and so it is anticipated that the tax credit would stimulate new partnerships between corporate and social entrepreneurs.

- **Raise Cap On Corporate Charitable Deductions:** Under current law, a corporation can deduct charitable donations until their value exceeds 10% of the company's taxable income. New legislation will raise the cap to 15%. It is anticipated that firms would be encouraged to give more to charities.

- **Provide Liability Protection For Corporate In-Kind Donations:** The 1996 Good Samaritan Food Donation Act protects donors of foodstuffs to charities from liability, except in cases of gross negligence. The 1997 Volunteer Protection Act provided similar protection to individual volunteers. To encourage in-kind gifts, new legislation will limit civil liability of businesses that donate equipment, facilities, and vehicles to charitable organizations, except in gross negligence."

Serious Concerns

There are a number of concerns that have been raised from various sectors of the society. Some ask whether the main goal of the policy is to provide business with another tax loophole. Should Mr. Bush seek an across the board tax cut which will benefit the rich and also give

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own Executive Orders. He expressed the view that the FBI could become a Gestapo. The year before the 1952 elections, he appointed a nine-member citizens commission to examine the thorny issue of subversion and loyalty in a free society. He was quoted to have said: "We must be sure that our laws and procedures at home are adequate...to preserve our National Security against treason, espionage, sabotage and other subversive acts.... At the same time, we are concerned lest measures taken to protect us from these dangers infringe the liberties guaranteed by our Constitution and stifle the atmosphere of freedom...." Clearly, Truman excelled in "double speak." The appointment of a commission at the end of his term of office was insufficient to *rewrite history* or to excuse him for having promoted and condoned the violation of the Constitution, human rights and the persecution of American citizens. As for J. Edgar Hoover, he seemed to have been "reborn" in the person of Montesinos of Peru!

EISENHOWER'S EXECUTIVE ORDER

One might have thought that the election of a new President, particularly a man who led the world's military might against Nazism and Fascism, would have brought relief to the victims of fascistic forces which had gained prominence in America. That was not to be. Richard Nixon, a former member of HUAC was Vice President. Senator Joseph McCarthy and other prominent anti-communists were Republicans. Consistent with his party, Eisenhower on April 27, 1953 issued Executive Order 10450, better known as the Employee and Security Program. The new Order went a step further in tightening the "rope" around the "necks" of federal employees by abolishing all recourse to appeals. The Heads of Agencies and Departments were given final powers. The Civil Service Commission was instructed to develop a Security Investigation Index to cover all employees. George M. Moore, US Civil Service Commissioner, in defense of the Order "barefacedly" argued that it would free the government from disloyal employees and from security risks. Under Executive Order 10450, four thousand three hundred and fifteen (4,315) employees resigned, there were 6,926 separations and 1,743 dismissals attributed to subversive activities.

In the latter half of the 1950s, McCarthy began to be exposed. He treaded on the feet of the Army. The Army Intelligence disseminated information on him regarding allegations of alcoholism and perversion. He also made a fool of himself in the Hearings of a Congressional Committee. It was aired on television. McCarthy lies were exposed to such an extent that he was marginalized in the Senate. One Head of an important American Corporation told President Eisenhower to do something about McCarthy. Finally, the President asked Vice President Nixon to attack McCarthy publicly. Nixon, the only "risen star" of the HUAC did just that in a public statement, but insisted that communism had to be fought, learning from the mistakes of McCarthyism!

PATHOLOGICAL GOVERNANCE

The political phenomenon of McCarthyism, which was the extensive practice in the abuse of power by the US Government, clearly qualifies as an example of pathological governance in a developed northern nation-state. The policies adopted in the 1940s and 1950s to fight communism and protect democracy were considered alien to America's political culture. They were similar to those used in communist dictatorships. Why did both Presidents issue Executive Orders that provided the framework for opportunistic, fanatical and "sick" politicians to legitimize a massive assault on the constitutional rights of American citizens? They did it because they were politicians who pursued their objectives regardless of the cost to citizens or institutions. The two Presidents did not swim against the tide in defense of the American Constitution even though they took a solemn oath to do just that.

Why did the Executive Branch allow the Head of the FBI to amass so much power in violation of administrative and constitutional rules and precepts? Was it because of fear of blackmail based on information collected by the FBI on politicians themselves? Perhaps, the politicians used J. Edgar Hoover to do their "dirty" work in the beginning, and later, he and the FBI got out of control and clearly did their own thing.

The Congress of the USA, instead of restraining the Presidents in issuing Executive Orders in violation of the

Constitution, pressured the Presidents to escalate the violations. The Congress then went further than the Presidents and conducted open "witch-hunts" and persecution of citizens in private and public at their workplaces and in their communities. Well, the Presidents were two men, but what happened to the hundreds of men and women who made up the Congress? How can so many men and women in such a short span of time surrender to the McCarthys, Mundts, Nixons, and others? What about their oaths? It was evident that they were afraid that they would lose elections, so they collaborated.

In such a situation, when a nation's political and administrative leadership and government degenerate, the hope lies in civil society. But even there, America faced grave problems. Civil society was divided. The anti-communist network that evolved during three decades blossomed from within civil society in the 1940s and 1950s as a minority. They wielded influence because they were able to effectively lobby the Congress and the Head of the FBI. But more importantly, because the majority of the citizens were silent, inactive and misinformed by the media on public policy issues. The media played a "Goebbels" role during the McCarthy era. The mainstream media "hanged" citizens in public. The Catholic Church also fell down. Many trade unions abandoned their leaders and members. Communities ostracized their neighbors and their children. For many, it was hell on earth. But perhaps, the collaboration of the private sector in dismissing workers and denying employment to victims of the purge was the policy that made citizens feel real fear. To lose one's means of livelihood is to lose all. The weapon of unemployment was effectively used by the Executive, the Congress and the FBI.

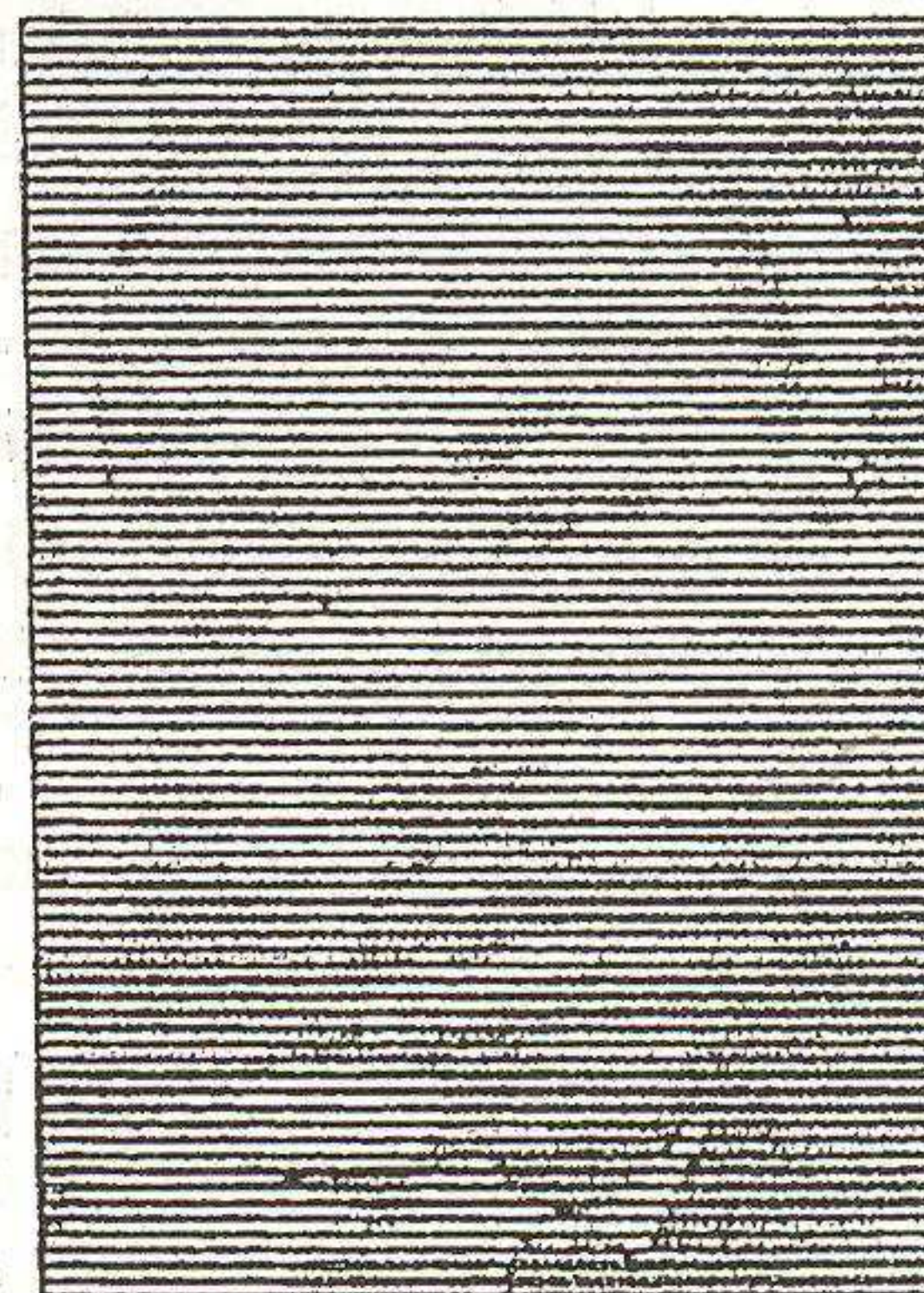
However, America did emerge from nearly two decades of that "nightmare" and entered the turbulent 1960s, when citizens were awakened as never seen before, East and West, North and South, to fight for their rights and demand that their government be accountable and transparent. The seeds were planted in the previous decades when many organizations and individuals heroically stood up to McCarthyism. One such organization was the National Alliance of Postal Employees (NAPE). But that is a story to be told.

them generous tax loopholes in the name of "good samaritanism"? Then there are issues surrounding the controversial Christian Coalition. Mr. Bush relied on this non-profit to win his battles both against Mr. McCain and Mr. Gore. Was this program devised as a carrot for support during the elections? Will the leadership of the Christian Coalition "commandeer" the Office of Faith-Based Action in the Executive Office Of The President? Will other Christian denominations and religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and others benefit equally?

African Americans and other minorities have raised other issues. President Bush had a meeting with a number of religious representatives in Houston when he reiterated his commitment to a "faith-based" policy. Considering that African Americans were deliberately disenfranchised in Florida and other parts of the country, many eyebrows were raised when African American pastors attended the meeting and expressed great hopes for the policy. On television, some of the African American pastors made it clear that the NAACP, BLACK CAUCUS and Jessie Jackson do not speak for them. Could this policy be part of a Bush/Republican strategy to divide the solid support of African Americans for the Democratic Party? Is this an admission of the influence African American churches in the electoral process? Will the policy provide the Republican Party with its own African American base? Would some African American pastors trade civil and human rights for community programs to strengthen their own pastoral bases? Will the Republican Party succeed in putting the African American church to sleep as in the past? It took a century to re-awaken the church in the South. Martin Luther King's letter from the jail in Birmingham is very instructive on this. Hispanics who are predominantly Catholic are also wondering how they will fit in the new policy.

Be Vigilant

Evidently, at this stage there are more questions than answers since Mr. Bush has only been inaugurated in January. It is important in the communities that all concerned monitor the implementation of this policy when it would be translated into programs. In principle, it is a good idea that religious organizations do more than preach the word and hold Sunday services when folks are in pain and hurting both physically and in their souls. However, if the overriding objective is not the recovery of one's humanity, but essentially, to obtain sectarian, religious and conservative political advantages, then the spiritual and social problems of America will deepen to the detriment of all. It is therefore important that citizens be vigilant in order to ensure that our taxes are used for the benefit of all regardless of color, race, class, religion or nationality and that the welfare system is not further undermined. □



Martin Luther King Jr. Day
is January 15

Let Freedom Reign

I Have a Dream