

The American Day-dreamers

Goals for Americans: the Report of the President's Commission on National Goals. Englewood Cliffs, N. J: Prentice-Hall, 1960.

Goals for Americans is the report of President Eisenhower's Commission on National Goals. I can only deduce that Prentice-Hall had an excellent year and was looking for a tax loss, because I can't figure out who would want to buy this volume. Indeed, I am prepared to offer 8 to 5 that Ike himself never finished it—and it was *his* Commission.

I know the danger of arguing *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. Nevertheless it is my duty to report that after reading the first 23 pages—which constitutes the Report proper—I was laid low by what the medicos at first thought was intestinal flu, but which turned out to be a severe case of cliché poisoning.

For it is a sad but true fact that when even the wisest of men—and some members of the Commission are as wise as many are foolish—sit down to make an analysis of anything as nebulous as American goals, Gresham's law takes over com-

pletely and the resulting synthesis is even nebulosier than the subject.

Each member is suddenly seized with the fallacious notion that he is preparing a farewell address for posterity and begins behaving like a high-school valedictorian. All common sense deserts him: and, one and all, they strike poses reminiscent of Jacob Javits and Wayne Morse defying "the interests"; they beat their breasts passionately while firing broadsides composed of some of the dullest pieties ever conceived by mortal man.

The deadliest of these are collected by an expert who rearranges—finalizes, if you prefer—them into a format of sorts that is now known as the Report and sends it on to the President. The President formally thanks the Commission, and files the report in some secret archives and that, customarily, is that. There is some external evidence in the case, however, that Ike graciously sent a copy to the Democratic National Committee, which adopted the report bodily as the Democratic platform of 1960.

I find it difficult, in this space, to choose from among the many noble homilies presented by the Report. But here, not necessarily in order of unimportance, are some of the goodies offered:

1. The Connally Amendment must go. (Otherwise, obviously, our goals might remain American, which is un-American, indeed.)

2. Teachers' salaries at all levels must be improved. Therefore, government expenditures for education must be expanded to the tune of \$33 billion annually by 1970—or else.

3. The arts are a fine thing. Artists require rigorous discipline (the boys never heard of John Barrymore, obviously) and provision must be made for the long years of training. (Translation: subsidize 'em.)

4. The Commission, having looked into juvenile delinquency, is opposed to it and thinks it needs more looking into.

5. We must encourage (*i. e.*, subsidize) a far larger number of Americans to live and work abroad. (Well, there's the Peace Corps. And we did send Italy Lucky Luciano; and we did our best to return Harry Bridges to Australia, but that reactionary Supreme Court wouldn't back us up.)

6. We must contribute more to the underdeveloped nations. Instead of the measly \$3.4 billion we shelved out annually in 1956-59, we should raise the ante to \$5.5 billion yearly by '65.

7. We must stand firm, at all costs, against Communist aggression and subversion. But, on the other hand, we should try continually to find a basis for mutual tolerance and, by all means, enlarge our personal and cultural contacts.

8. In nations subject to Communist domination, our hope must be that the right of self-determination will ultimately be achieved. (And, I take it, we defy our opponents to hope otherwise.)

9. All Americans must demonstrate in every aspect of their lives that man does not live by bread alone. They should be active (I give you my word I am quoting) in organizing boys' clubs or serving on school boards.

10. And—natch—man has never been an island unto himself.

In the chapters accompanying the report, there are signs in some of the statements and essays that a couple of the boys realize that they have been had. One or two want to know where the money is coming from, and a few dissenters seem to think you can't get it by raising taxes that are already too high. But these dissenting opinions are toward the back of the book, and nobody but the authors will ever read that far.

Reviewed by MORRIE RYSKIND