

# A Revolutionary Idea for '76: Blow

By Art Buchwald

Capitol P

The United States is having a very difficult time trying to figure out how to celebrate its 200th anniversary. Many ideas have been suggested for the Bicentennial, but few have grabbed the American people. The President's commission on the anniversary is bogged down in red tape and no one is certain we will have a celebration at all.

The other day a man walked into my office and said he had a revolutionary plan for Americans to celebrate their country's 200th birthday.

I tried to be polite, but it was difficult because I have people like this coming in to see me all the time.

"Make it brief," I said.

"Well," he said hesitatingly, "I have this idea to celebrate 200 years of independence and it won't cost the country a cent."

"Get to it," I said impatiently.

"Why don't we, in 1976, hold the first honest presidential election in the history of the country?"

"You're out of your mind," I said.

"I've got it worked out here on paper. There would be only one fund-raising committee in each party and no one would be allowed to contribute more than \$25 to a presidential candidate."

"Impossible," I said. "What would happen to your \$1,000-a-plate dinners? What about people who want to buy ambassadorships and jobs in the government? How about the oil companies, the airline companies, the labor unions and milk producers? Are you going to be able to keep them from giving more than \$25 to a presidential campaign?"

"I know it's a wild idea," the man said, "but it could work. No one would be permitted to give any donations in cash. Every gift would have to be by check or money order. All monies would have to be accounted for and if there is any hanky panky committed by the finance committee of either party, the presidential candidate of that party would automatically forfeit the election."

## ng Out the Parties' Birthday Stakes

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"Have you lost your senses?" I said, trying to hold my temper. "Do you know what it costs to run a presidential campaign? Do you have any idea of the payroll, printing bills, television fees, and national security costs that it takes to elect a President of the United States?"

"Well, if it costs so much," the man said, "then let's eliminate a lot of it. Why should money be the decisive factor in electing a President of the United States?"

"Because money is the mother's milk of politics!" I shouted. "Do you think Nixon would be President of the United States today if people were allowed to contribute only \$25 to his election?"

"I'm not talking about Nixon," the man said. "I'm talking about 1976. Look, I'm not saying we would have to continue with my plan. But I thought for

just one presidential election we could do it. It's not just a ceiling on money that I'm advocating. When I talk about an honest election, I mean the candidates would have to stick to the issues. There would be no name-calling or dirty advertisements or double agents, no bugging or wiretapping or reading other people's mail."

"You've got to be kidding. This country is not ready for an honest presidential election and you know it. We've been brought up on the principle that in politics anything goes. Everyone knows the only reason one party resorts to dirty tricks is that if they don't the other party will. Do you expect us to change our lifestyle just because we're celebrating our 200th anniversary?"

"That's what everyone tells me," he said sadly and he got up to leave.

After his departure my secretary asked me what it was all about.

"He's some crackpot who wants to hold an honest presidential election. They shouldn't allow guys like that to wander around loose."

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