



Ford's Message Not Coming Through

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PRESIDENT FORD has something truly important to say to the country. He's telling us that the national lifestyle has to change. But his idiom is so square, his concept of the world so Boy Scoutish, that the message is not coming through.

The basic Ford message is announced in a key passage from the President's speech to the Future Farmers of America in Kansas City last week. Mr. Ford said:

"Americans have an international reputation as the world's worst wasters. We waste food, gasoline, paper, electricity, natural resources — in fact we waste almost everything."

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THE MEANING of that comment is very plain. Mr. Ford is telling us that the country has to come off the spree of self-indulgence which has marked our national life during the past decade and more. No one can seriously doubt the validity of that criticism.

But once the trouble is diagnosed, what should we do about it? And who should do it?

Mr. Ford systematically exempts from censure, or even attention, the major institutions which dominate national life. He has yet to say a hard word about the banks and other financial institutions. Neither has he pointed a finger at the big car companies for producing the big gas-guzzlers. Nor has he said anything about the oil companies and their windfall profits. Or the unions and the wage push.

Instead, Mr. Ford has directed his attention to ordinary people and the one institution which serves ordinary people — the federal government. Government

spending is the big villain in Mr. Ford's rhetoric. The one serious sacrifice he has asked of anybody was his request to postpone the pay raise due government workers.

In the same vein are the individual examples he cited in his Kansas City speech. Take the case of Robert Stewart of Waverly, Tenn.

He has, according to the President's speech, "a heart condition and draws a pension of only \$251.28 a month. This allows him only two meals a day. 'But thank God we aren't on welfare,' says Mr. Stewart."

Now the real moral of that story is that Stewart ought to have more money. But President Ford acts as though his situation is just dandy. He gives the impression that it's good for Stewart to take only two meals a day and that what's truly bad is welfare.

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IN KEEPING with this diagnosis, Mr. Ford recommends action individuals can take. He tells children to clean their plates. He asks mothers to buy warm clothes. He counsels fathers to budget their expenses. Not surprisingly, that simplistic preaching is not getting across.

The point of all this is not that President Ford should stop talking to the country as some people suggest. But the country is ready for analysis that goes beyond the folk wisdom of the past century. Mr. Ford needs to move quickly from homiletical generalities to a selective program that addresses the flesh and blood institutions which dominate the real world of 20th Century America.