

# That Indispensable Bum

By RUSSELL BAKER

WASHINGTON, Sept. 18—This is Phil Chivy, America, and as a public service to the nation in this vital Presidential election campaign, this noisecaster will periodically present interviews with the indispensable men who make government and politics in America the great farce we have all learned to love and sneer at.

Today's guest: A man without whom scarcely a politician in America would be able to inflame and embitter us all. How do you do, Sir. It's a pleasure to have you with us today. Would you identify yourself for the millions who have to work hard and pay taxes so they can enjoy the pleasure of having you, Sir, to hate?

Answer: Yes, of course. Delighted to, Phil. I am the bum on welfare.

Q. It's good of you to come by today.

A. Not at all. I happened to be in town for a few days with nothing to do, and since you've got plenty of free parking space for my Cadillac here behind the studio, it seemed like it would be a painless way to spend a little idle time.

Q. You've been out of town then?

A. Just up to Maine for the summer months. It's a little early yet for Jamaica.

Q. Being on welfare must be just one long vacation. Don't you ever get tired of it?

A. Frankly, it's exhausting. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. If you're not down at the new-car dealer paying top dollar for this year's Cadillac, you're fighting the airline reservations people for first-class tickets to Jamaica. And what do you have to show for it but the hate of the hard-working taxpayer?

Q. True, but it must be extremely gratifying to you to realize that hate is helping thousands of hard-campaigning politicians rise to the top of their profession.

A. Well, without being immodest about it, I would have to say that I sometimes feel mighty proud of the service I perform for the men who labor so hard to bring out the worst in our country.

Q. How did you become the bum on welfare, Sir? Did you major in it at college?

A. It just came naturally, Phil. You see, I was one of Them.

Q. Really? One Them? That's disgusting.

A. Exactly. And we all know who They are.

Q. I'm sure we all know who They are, but for the benefit of any newcomers in America who may be listening, why don't you just tell us who They are?

A. Well, frankly, Phil, now that you ask me, I really don't know who They are, but whoever They are, They are the reason for the trouble.

Q. Do you believe They are related to Those Who?

OBSERVER



Tomi Ungerer

A. I rather doubt it. Those Who, you see, are the crowd that is always saying America is no good, thus forcing President Nixon to defend America, even at the risk of his political career.

Q. As the bum on welfare you must sometimes have moments when your conscience bothers you. How do you feel right now, for example, when you have to face somebody like me?

A. A good person, you mean?

Q. Right! A great human being. A hard-working American. The truly splendid sort of person whom America is all about. How can you sit there and look me straight in the eye?

A. I had special training for it, Phil.

Q. Fascinating! Then you did have some special vocational instruction?

A. Yes, I attended the Academy of Political Quackdoodle and Small Fraud. There they taught me to look really marvelous human beings like yourself right in the eye, so that you would want to kill me.

Q. And a good job they did too! I want to kill you right now.

A. You see, Phil, that's because I am making you feel more and more wonderful for being the kind of person who works hard to support a bum like me. You should now be eager to vote for the first politician who promises to starve me to death.

Q. You're right, you welfare bum! I want to see you suffer. How do you feel, knowing what a good person like me thinks of scum like yourself?

A. Really great, Phil! Really great! I think I've got you all ready to vote for the program everybody's running on this year—twice as much meanness-of-spirit! You can go ahead and shoot me if you like.

Q. I don't think I could do that.

A. O, go ahead, it's all right. I'm not real, you see.

Q. Terrific, ladies and gentlemen! The bum on welfare! The man you love yourself for hating! Only in America!