

Our Government Has No Problems



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THE ADMIRABLE THEME of Mr. Nixon's administration was to get the federal government "off the backs of the people," as he put it, and let them solve their own problems.

Exactly how he hoped to achieve this noble goal did not become clear until February of 1973. With meat prices soaring and housewives up in arms, it was Federal Reserve Board Chairman Arthur Burns who pointed the way.

If people had a problem buying meat (even on a lay-away plan), he said, they could solve their problem themselves by simply not eating the stuff — at least one day a week.

"The American public," he said, "would be just as well off if it spent less on meat and more on cheese."

The wisdom of Mr. Burns' modest proposal was immediately apparent. Millions of patriotic Americans jubilantly gave up eating meat one day a week. In fact, some of the poor were so patriotic they hadn't eaten any in years.

Naturally, solving their own problem in this fashion quickly instilled in Americans a new sense of self-reliance and a capacity for sacrifice — qualities Mr. Nixon held dear. He was so pleased, he appointed Mr. Burns Director of the Federal Bureau of Problem Solving.

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THE FIRST PROBLEM Director Burns turned his attention to was the high cost of medical care. "This certainly isn't the government's problem," he said. "It's the problem of those who get sick.

"The answer, then, is simple: don't get sick."

"By golly!" cried millions of Americans worried about the \$105-a-day cost of a hospital bed. "Why didn't we think of that?"

Overnight, Americans were not only more self-reliant, but healthier, too. And once the pattern had been established, solutions tumbled daily from the Federal Bureau of Problem Solving.

On Director Burns' advice, the President impounded not merely half the funds to clean up the nation's lakes and rivers, but all the funds. "Don't," said Director Burns, smiling confidently. "go near the water."

Poverty, that age-old scourge of mankind, proved equally soluble. "We will have no more poverty the moment people stop being poor," Director Burns pointed out. "Personally, I would advise them to buy five per cent tax-free municipal bonds."

Now that the concept of curing a problem by giving up its cause had been established, people found they could solve their own troubles even without Director Burns' advice.

Those with sexual hangups renounced sex. Those who feared crime in the streets stayed home. Those who disliked busing, airplane hijacking and fouled-up Amtrak schedules walked. And the postal service ran smoothly the very day that people stopped mailing letters.

All might have gone well if food prices, led by cheese, hadn't continued to skyrocket. "If you can solve your problem of the high cost of meat by giving up eating meat," Director Burns said sternly in a nationwide address, "you can solve your problem of the high cost of food the same way."

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IN A WEEK, Americans were self-reliant, healthy, hangup free, safe from crime and starving to death.

The country was fortunately delivered from the throes of starvation by a sudden sharp increase in the smog level. "That's your problem," Director Burns told an angry, coughing delegation of environmentalists. But once again, he showed the way.

First he tied a gag securely across his mouth. Then he carefully placed a clothespin over his nose . . .