

Voluntarism: The Best Is Yet to Come

by Joyce Lewis

Winds of social change are sweeping across this country and will pick up in intensity this year . . . and next . . . and the following.

Within three to five years, predicts C. William Verity, Jr., the country can be on course—a course of compassionate capitalism—“toward a more caring society.”

It has to go that course, he asserts, because “this country is in trouble.” Verity isn’t saying this pessimistically or with any gloom, but analytically, a man surveying the scene, who sees the ‘80s as a period of changes and challenges. He bases his observation on an enormous amount of faith in the innovativeness of the American people.

Verity, with a national and international reputation in the business and political fields, recently served as chairman of the President’s Task Force on Private Sector Initiatives.

To redirect the course toward more individualism and away from big Federalism, he sees the President leading the way. Verity believes this is “something the country wanted.”

He also sees corporations as helping lead the way though not to the extent that there would be a transfer of social programs from the federal government’s back to the shoulders of those in the corporate world. “No way is it possible.”

Also leading the way will be volunteers.

“We’re going to have to have volunteers if we’re going to get the job done. The demands are great.”

They’re so great, says Verity, that former Secretary of the Army Frank Pace and his committee on volunteers, one of 10 Task Force committees, will continue its work this year. The committee will persevere despite the fact that the Task Force, mandated for one year, disbanded in December.

“Pace will run the committee from New York. He doesn’t think the job got done” in one year.

Pace, one of 44 influential Task Force members, is also chief executive officer of the National Executive Service Corps. Although the Corps is specifically designed to recruit retired executives to serve as volunteers, Pace’s interest in volunteers encompasses all who get involved: from youngsters who volunteer through school-connected programs, to adults, both working or retired, who want or should be involved somehow.

Seemingly, there’s an army of volunteers out there not yet enlisted. In line with that, and just off the press, according to Verity, is a pamphlet from Pace’s committee—a how-to for recruiting volunteers. Other materials on voluntarism are rolling off presses elsewhere.

Out of the Hammocks

The so-called “hammock generation” is just about over, believes Verity. The hammock generation is how Verity characterizes those who’ve acquired and are simply enjoying their acquisitions, swinging in their hammocks, letting others be concerned with the nation’s problems and its future. Verity dismisses that lifestyle. He sees a new wave of voluntarism, a sense of commitment, volunteers with professional staff support.

He also rejects economist Milton Friedman’s theory which says the bottom line is profits.

“That’s not so,” Verity says emphatically, in discussing Friedman’s outlook. This is not that Verity disregards profits and success. He chairs the executive committee of the board of directors of Armco, Inc., one of the nation’s largest steel companies, located in Middletown, Ohio.

He is also a director of: Chase Manhattan Bank; First National Bank of Southwestern Ohio; the Mead Corp.; Business International; Eli Lilly and Co.; and Taft Broadcasting Co.; a trustee of Colgate Darden Graduate School of Business at the University of Virginia; and chairman of the US-USSR Trade and Economic Council, recently spending a week in Russia. Formerly, Verity was chairman of the



PHOTOS: DAN BEIGEL

continued



United States Chamber of Commerce.

When he says "No" to Friedman's thinking, he talks about a new breed of capitalism. Verity, a Yale graduate who majored in history, is concerned with an overall view of the nation's business and its future.

He believes a compassionate capitalism is not shortsighted about profits but is caring and smart enough to know an investment in a strong, happy workplace *and community* increases profits.

"Employees perform better. There's a climate of hope rather than despair. It's more rewarding for everyone. This (kind of thinking and activity) is happening in spades all over the country."

The relationship between Verity's hometown of Middletown, Ohio and Armco has been cited as a model for other towns and cities, an example of partnership.

"Building partnerships"—working together—has been the theme of the Task Force. For the partnership idea to grow, however, corporations, unions, hospitals, schools, civic organizations, women's groups, and churches all must get involved with one another—to generate a cross-pollination of ideas and projects. The result will be new hybrids of solutions which will ultimately and successfully help solve society's problems.

Since many more people need to be involved, from individuals to corporations, how do you get their involvement?

"Prick their conscience," Verity says quietly.

In those three words is the way, the strategy, the compass direction for this year

and after. It is a psychological approach which causes a change in course by stirring up thinking and prompting people to take action.

Americans are acutely aware of the problems we now face, according to pollsters, and are in agreement that the country has strayed off course. The bigness of the federal government and its' debt frighten many people.

But what can be done? Especially with more federal cuts coming in social programs. Private giving in 1981 (latest figures available) of \$53.62 billion—a record increase of 12 percent according to *Giving USA*—won't close the gap, even if the increases continue.

Repeatedly, during their speeches, Verity and Jerry Guth, executive director of the Task Force, have said that initiatives, ideas, and action leading to solutions must be initiated on a local level.

Verity, among others, sees a new role for the volunteer: creative thinking combined with giving (not just money but time as well); caring; and a sense of social responsibility—*particularly, a sense of social responsibility*. The new volunteer just doesn't donate his or her time for free, to wile away the hours.

The volunteer is going to be courted and praised as never before, according to those in the advertising and public relations fields. "Voluntarism—put it in caps," says one professional. "It's going to be big, and underline 'big'."

The Advertising Council has selected voluntarism as its theme for 1983. The Council, which created Smokey Bear, has committed talent to design a nationwide public service campaign on

voluntarism which will appear on TV, radio, posters, billboards, and in the print media.

The production costs, estimated at \$200,000, will be underwritten by the Task Force and the private sector, according to Don Underwood of the Communications Division of the Task Force.

In addition, the 210-member firms of the American Advertising Federation already have launched their own public service program of voluntarism, he says. It was Underwood who interested both the Council and the Federation.

As a personal contribution to the Task Force, Pat Boone has recorded, for satellite transmission, a dozen or more public service announcements (PSAs). The PSAs are based on examples of creative initiatives from the Task Force's Project Data Bank. Boone has also written words and music about lending a hand. His music provides a background for the PSAs.

To "prick the conscience" of 232 million Americans is a tall order. It can be done ever so subtly and with ever so gentle persuasion. Or it can be done on a competitive basis or with an appeal to the ego that becomes a matter of pride.

For instance, says Verity, the Task Force's committee on contributions strategies recommended corporations make a tax-deductible contribution of 2 percent of their pretax income. The committee, headed by Arthur Levitt, chairman of the American Stock Exchange, hopes to achieve the goal within four years.

Verity said he was told:

"This Task Force will kill itself if it adopts guidelines." But, he says he and Levitt, "have found people respond to guidelines—goals. There are 2 percent clubs springing up all over the country." He mentions Richmond, Norfolk, Kansas City, Wichita, Seattle and Portland. He also cites 5 percent clubs in Minneapolis and St. Paul. "We (corporations) don't want to be delinquent."

Recruited by President

Asked by President Reagan to be chairman of the Task Force, Verity went to corporations and others asking them to fund the Task Force for a year.

Verity regarded the Task Force itself as a challenge, a catalyst. "We couldn't solve any issue in a year," he said.

He cites Bill Norris of Control Data Corp., chairman of the Task Force incentives committee, as extremely innovative. Norris came up with a 24-minute film, among other projects, on how one goes about creating jobs.

"Very practical... the nuts and bolts."

Verity also cites Gordon Cooper, on loan from Armco, who gave shape to President Reagan's idea of forming a project data bank. The President wanted a central source to store information about successful private sector initiatives. The bank became a clearinghouse of 2,500 projects, big and little, from across the country. As Verity recalls it, he was told, "You can't do it. It won't work. Don't be dumb enough to try it."

Neil Hepp, on loan from Mobil and the Task Force's director of information services, developed the pro-

cesses to get the bank going. James H. Erickson, Jr. assembled the interns who fed the information about projects into the computerized data bank. Interns, who earned a semester's credits, were selected from among college students throughout the country.

The future of the idea bank?

A new organization, Partnerships Data Line USA, will run the bank. Two groups make up the organization. The first is Citizens Forum and Self-Government (formerly the National Municipal League), a non-partisan civic organization which sponsors the All American Cities Awards. The other group is the 450-member Partners for Livable Places. In addition, Volunteer/the National Center for Citizens Involvement, the Local Initiative Support Corp., and the Association of Neighborhood Enterprises have agreed to participate.

A committee headed by Alexander Trowbridge, president of the National Association of Manufacturers and a former Task Force member, will oversee the bank's systems design and development. Committee members will be: James L. Hetland, president of Citizens Forum; Robert McNulty, president of Partners; and Verity.

To cover operating costs of \$600,000 yearly for the first three years, both Citizens Forum and Partners will each contribute \$100,000 a year. The remainder will come from corporations, foundations, and government sources.

It's anticipated the bank, which will be located in

Washington, D.C., will increase by several thousand entries that can serve as models for groups to emulate.

Verity's Task Force also placed a great deal of emphasis on Governors' Committees on private sector initiatives. Forty-two states now have such committees, says Verity, with Wendell Butler of the Task Force showing the initiative in helping set up those state-level committees.

The Task Force has promoted private initiatives in other ways as well. For example, the Task Force has encouraged television stations to highlight private initiatives that could help solve local problems. The idea came from Wichita TV station KAKE which led the way in such programming. KAKE's programs sparked the imagination of Wichita viewers, says Verity. "They were stumbling over each other to solve problems. Now, 74 TV stations in communities across the nation are emulating KAKE."

"There are lots of good ideas" in the reports, submitted by each of the Task Force committees, says Verity, and he believes there'll be follow through.

Was it a successful Task Force? "We did a lot," says Verity. "We could have done more, but, we stirred the pigeons."

Some say it's too early to tell whether the Task Force is really a success. But some seeds have been planted, some are growing, some are yet to grow; it isn't harvest time yet. □

Ms. Lewis is former staff member of the President's Task Force on Private Sector Initiatives.

