

EDITORIAL

Consumers Beware

Bureau of Consumer Protection offices throughout the Commonwealth have been the pride of Gov. Milton Shapp, and most of them have gone far toward recognizing the needs of the consumer during the Shapp Administration.

It is unfortunate, indeed, when one bad apple upsets the consumer protection barrel. But that seems to be the case since the Pennsylvania Justice Department opened the second consumer protection office in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Following the 1972 flood, Harrisburg was beset with complaints from Wyoming Valley flood victims because of shoddy and incomplete work by many building contractors, plumbers, electricians and retail firms. But rather than draw from its team of crack investigators and lawyers from other offices, the bureau opened a Wilkes-Barre office staffed mostly with Luzerne County political hacks. The results obtained by the Wilkes-Barre office, which hopefully will expire from lack of funds in June, is partially documented in a page one story in this issue. It leaves one to ask, would consumers have been better served had there been no Consumer Protection office at all?

Despite inadequate laws, huge multi-county districts, and rules designed to keep consumers in the dark rather than informed, other consumer protection offices have maintained a high standard of results and consumer satisfaction. Court injunctions have become common place, and fraudulent operators have often found themselves barred from doing business in the state.

In Wyoming Valley, however, where a vigorous consumer protection office was needed, consumers by the score have found little or no help.

Rules under which the bureau operates seem inadequate, at best. Office personnel are not permitted to inform a consumer, for example, of a shoddy contractor, or business firm, even though formal complaints are pending. Rather, the bureau takes the position of saying nothing until legislation becomes a matter of record.

It appears to us that the Wilkes-Barre Consumer Protection Bureau has served out its usefulness. Gov. Shapp should insist that the bureau office is staffed with competent, aggressive full-time investigators and lawyers who will not only inform consumers every time a complaint is filed, but who will call a press conference to state publicly when a business or individual is operating under questionable practices. Anything less will continue to be no more than a bad consumer joke.

World Hunger

A world food conference will get underway Nov. 5 in Rome, spearheaded by Gov. Milton Shapp and Sen. Charles Percy, R-Ill. It will be attended by officials from 130 nations, under auspices of the United Nations.

Last December, a two-day food policy conference in Hershey set the stage for six regional conferences across the Commonwealth. From those the governor and his delegation have been given a storehouse of information regarding the role Pennsylvania might play toward feeding the world's hungry.

As state Agriculture Secretary Jim McHale told conference delegates recently at Marywood College, "When you're talking about food, you're talking about peace. There are 12 or 13 nations that now have the bomb, and when starving nations are going down, what the hell have they got to lose?"

The Rome conference will center on the fact that four to eight million people will starve to death this year, with indications that number might double during 1975.

That's a sobering thought, indeed. But U.S. Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz has said that Americans will not stand for eating one hamburger less a week so that more food is available to starving nations. And perhaps he's right.

But the Shapp delegation to the conference isn't going to propose Americans do that, anyway. Rather, they will ask for a sound national food policy that will enable the hungry, both at home and abroad, to eat meat from steers that are now being slaughtered and buried to demonstrate the inequity of current farm prices. They will ask for wheat stockpiling that might make an occasional difference between a nation surviving or falling, rather than billion-dollar deals with the Russians that mostly pad the pockets of a few rich Wall Streeters.

We hope the governor's world food conference bears fruit.

—J.R. Freeman

Conservative View

by James J. Kilpatrick

Plain Speech and Dr. Greenspan

Something will have to be done about Alan Greenspan. If the President's chief economic adviser is to appear in public, the White House may have to provide a translator to stand at his side. Sad to say, the gentleman speaks no English, and most of the rest of us speak no Greenspan.

These observations are prompted by a transcript that came in the mail the other day. This is a report of the proceedings of the Financial Conference on Inflation, held here Sept. 20. Mr. Greenspan made the opening address. He remarked that our system cannot indefinitely withstand the effects of double-digit inflation. Then he said:

"If you extrapolate the strains that we now already see as a consequence of what we have for an extended period of time, the institutions—economical, financial, structural—begin to break down because they are essentially constructed or have been developed over the decades in the context of low, single-digit inflation, and it's by no means clear or had not been clear, I should say, how significant this element was until we actually have tested it, and having tested it, we found that it does not respond terribly well.

"Clearly, we see—I don't have to go through examples, I'm sure that all of you are most familiar with all of the various problems that each and every institution is having, but that clearly the savings and loans are under extraordinary pressure; insurance companies, banks, business—especially smaller business—were having difficulty getting financing.

"The system clearly does not work well under these conditions."

Some years ago, Rudolf Flesch propounded a formula for determining ease in reading. The formula provides a fog index: 85 is easy, 65 is standard, 40 is difficult, and 15 is impenetrable. To judge from this passage from Greenspan, the gentleman scores 13.6. If you don't count that short third sentence, he comes in at minus 8.4. Better he should speak Swahili.

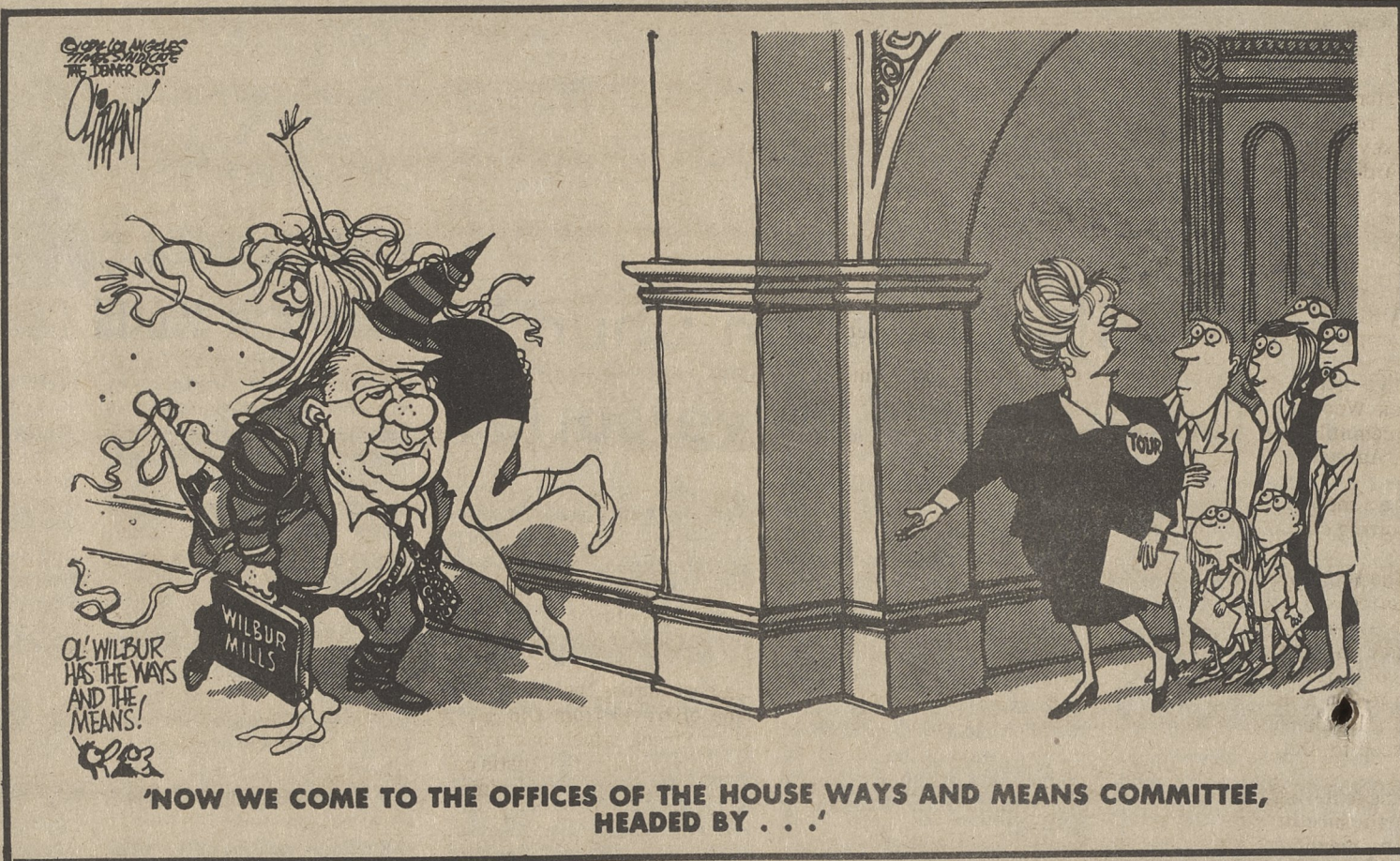
Glancing through the transcript, one perceives that other economists also speak in

at this stage—of exceptional concern."

The fog index for that sentence is 12.04. Now, granted, the subject does not lend itself to baby talk: "I see inflation. Inflation sees me." Mr. Flesch's famous fog index has limited application. All the same, the people have a right to expect some reasonable level of clarity in public discussion of the fix we are in.

Before long, we will be hearing proposals to impose higher taxes on industries and individuals. Wisconsin's Sen. William Proxmire

already is homing in on steel. It would be pleasant to hear such proposals defended in language we can understand. Why is it socially better, or economically better, for the government to spend an additional \$5,000 taken from a wealthy taxpayer, than it is for the taxpayer to spend the \$5,000 himself? How is the steel industry to build new plants if steel companies are denied high profits? These giddy notions ought to be discussed in English. Heaven help this republic if our leaders explain them only in Greenspan.



TRB

from Washington

by Richard Strout

When the Watergate trial recommenced last week I went back and looked up the 245-page opening statement of John Dean which he delivered with a choir-boy's smile in a level voice in the glittering Senate marble Caucus Room, June 25, 1973, while his second wife with the honey-colored hair (the one with whom he honeymooned of \$4,850 "borrowed" from the Nixon re-election fund) sat behind him. And I had long, long thoughts. And I thought I heard somebody murmur Mene, Mene, Tikal Upharsin.

The 1968 presidential election, you remember was very close. Hubert Humphrey got 42.7 percent of the popular vote and Richard Nixon got 43.4 percent, a majority of only 500,000 out of 73 million votes cast, and if California had gone to Hubert (he lost it by 233,000) the election would have gone to the House. And if Hubert had won he would probably have been re-elected in 1972 and would be finishing his second term now and we wouldn't have had Watergate.

Yet a Watergate would have come, I think, sooner or later. As Peter Kump points out Watergate needs three things and they all came together in 1972—the growing and excessive power of the executive (which hasn't been checked); a time of division and turbulence like that which followed the poisonous Vietnam war (which is still wreaking its "future revenge" on us by the worst inflation in history); and an amoral president, a reclusive, paranoid figure whom we had thoroughly trained in the anything-goes school of American politics.

So lights blazed, TV cameras showed their red "on" signal, the Ervin committee hitched

forward and John Dean, began in an easy natural monotone that he kept up for five days:

"To one who was in the White House and became somewhat familiar with its inner workings, the Watergate matter was an inevitable outgrowth of a climate of excessive concern over the political impact of the demonstrators, excessive concern over leaks, an insatiable appetite for political intelligence, all coupled with a do-it-yourself White House staff, regardless of the law."

That's how he began, and five members of the do-it-yourself crew, stony-faced John Mitchell, advertising man Bob Haldeman, jaw-jutting John Ehrlichman and the lesser figures, Mardian and Parkinson, sat in the court, and 70-year old Judge Sirica, son of an immigrant, looked over the heads of the men who had once run a government and who had thought so little of the Priest-President that in their private talks they had had no hesitation in interrupting him, contradicting him, and plotting out with him their "scenarios" to gull the public whom he regarded, after all, only as children. Looking down behind Judge Sirica were the statues of Moses, Justinian, Hammurabi and Solon.

It was agile John Dean, that flexible young man so eager to please, with an inner toughness none of his superiors suspected, who decided that perjury is dangerous if you get caught at it and who concluded that the best way to avoid being made the scapegoat is to get to the prosecutor first. Senators couldn't believe what he said and every time they asked questions he came through with some further damning detail. There was more there than he knew himself. "Keep a good list of the press people giving us trouble," the president

told him, "we will make life difficult for them after the election. But what was this about tapes? He said that before he decided to turn state's evidence he had learned that the President had informed the government "that he had taped a conversation with me." What conversation—what tape? About his alleged conversation in the Oval office? "I do not in fact know if such a tape exists but if it does and has not been tampered with and is a complete transcript, I think that this committee should have that tape, because I believe that it would corroborate many of the things that this committee has asked me to testify about."

Weeks later Alexander Butterfield unexpectedly revealed that everything said in the President's private office was secretly recorded; a year later the Supreme Court, 8-0, required the President to reveal 64 disputed tapes, and 17 days after that the President was out. He had lied to everybody.

But now comes a part of the drama really stranger in its way than what has gone before. While Judge Sirica tries to impanel a jury, with Hammurabi watching over his shoulder, Gerald Ford, the first President since Washington, hand-picked for the job—a nice man, an open man, an honorable man—is voluntarily going before the House Judiciary subcommittee to tell why he pardoned Richard Nixon, without seeming to understand at all why it caused such stunning consternation. The popularity of no other new president has fallen so precipitously (and perhaps temporarily): 20 points on the Gallup poll. We needed that popularity to get us over the hand-wringing sacrifices of the anti-inflation fight. The

popularity of the President, the lift he gave us after the sick-bed of Watergate, were national assets. A lot of that has gone.

Mr. Ford has been here, there, and everywhere. He was at the vast hotel ballroom of the Economic Summit where Sen. Chastan delivered a memorable quip: Recession isn't completely bad; it has allowed every American to live in a more expensive neighborhood, without moving. He has been at his wife's bedside; he has met with leaders of other big oil importing powers (inconclusively); he opened the World Bank session. The Administration's anti-inflation program and energy conservation program will come at once. But I can only report that the atmosphere of this city is disturbed and finicky; the bounce has gone out. Why?

Mr. Ford looked at Mr. Nixon's CIA-intervention in Chile and thought it was all right. Undermining foreign governments is legitimate. The Russians do it. On the economic front the feeling grows that the Administration hasn't really got control: it used up a month in summits and the recession still deepens; the stock market casts a gloomy verdict. Then there is the pardon. Even Mr. Nixon never used executive privilege to cut prematurely across the legal process—not only for crimes known but for any "they may have committed." Every day of the Sirica proceeding recalls that the chief indicted co-conspirator goes free. Then there is the give-away of the Nixon tapes, which Congress is trying to redress. And the Administration's uncertain signals to the Arab oil countries. Let's hope it pulls itself together soon. We need to get some bounce back.

Capitol Notes

by William Eckenberger
Philadelphia Inquirer

Pennsylvania Republicans have been claiming for nearly two years that the state Justice Department has become "politicized" under the Shapp Administration the same way the U.S. Justice Department was "politicized" under the Nixon Administration.

Considering the fact that the state Justice Department is headed by Atty. Gen. Israel Packel—a man with intimate political and personal ties to Gov. Shapp and who was appointed to the job by Gov. Shapp, the department is no more political than you might expect.

Which is to say that the department is very political.

But certainly no more political than it was under the two Republican governors who

preceded the present Democratic chief executive.

Although Mr. Packel and Mr. Shapp will deny it, there just is no way under the current system that Pennsylvanians are going to get a legal opinion from the Justice Department that is not heavily weighted by the thinking and politics of the governor. The manifestations are numerous.

Alleged investigations by Justice into misdeeds among bureaucrats that are potentially damaging to the Shapp Administration have faded quietly into the sunset without public denouement.

In this respect, it's interesting to hear the Governor's Office proclaim (quite correctly) that the current legislative investigation of venality in state government is politically motivated. The other half of that equation is that the committee is probing matters that have been glossed over by the Justice Department for political reasons.

On all controversial bills that have cleared the Legislature—abortion, pornography, capital punishment, state income tax, and others—the attorney general's official opinion has neatly dovetailed with the personal and political opinions of the governor.

In the early days of the Shapp Administration, the Justice Department's man assigned to the state Liquor Control Board was Alexander Jaffurs, who tried to call them as

he saw them without political considerations. For his efforts, Mr. Jaffurs was sacked ignominiously by Mr. Packel and labeled an incompetent by Gov. Shapp.

None of this is new to the Capitol. The state Justice Department has always been the handmaiden of the governor, and it will continue to be so as long as the governor appoints the attorney general.

A proposed constitutional amendment has been before the legislature that would change the system by having the attorney general elected directly by the people—as is done in 43 other states.

It's probably too late for the lawmakers to do anything about the proposal this year, but it doubtless will be back next year.

The state attorney general is no ordinary

cabinet officer carrying out the governor's policies. He can give an opinion on the constitutionality of a new law or policy that has the weight of law unless countermanded by another law or court decision. He is also responsible for investigating wrongdoing in the administration.

The chief argument against an elected attorney general is that it would make the governor's job more difficult, which it surely would. It would be more convenient for the governor if the attorney general did not have to run for election—indeed, it would be more convenient for the governor if he didn't have to run for election.

Convenience to rulers isn't one of democracy's virtues.

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