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routes (a more difficult feat which would require transferring the contents of postal route books into the computer's memory bank), an even bigger discount would be forthcoming. The principle is simple: he who saves the Post Office money gets to keep some of it for himself.

Unfortunately, the second major problem facing the Post Office cannot be solved by incentives or machines. There is no way within the present system to regulate the volume of mail so that a letter carrier would need the same amount of time to deliver mail on a warm Saturday in August and on a snowy Wednesday before Christmas. The five and a half hours assigned for delivery makes no sense except in winter; in summer, three to four hours is a better estimate.

Of course, no letter carrier will ever admit that it takes less than five and a half hours to walk his route. Unannounced inspections only embitter employees and waste the valuable time of highly paid officials. The only viable solution to this problem is to pay carriers by the job rather than by the hour. An additional way to save money would be to allow mail delivery to take place all day, instead of from 8:30 to 2, as at present. Ordinary mail carriers could then be invited to undertake second jobs, perhaps within

the Post Office itself. College students could be recruited to carry mail, deliveries scheduled around their classes. Mothers could arrange to deliver mail while children were at school. Even the elderly might be usefully employed, since the full-day schedule would make the daily route into little more than a leisurely walk. To be sure, there would be inconveniences in a later mail delivery; recruitment of part-time help would also make postal management somewhat more complicated. Still, when one considers the reduced costs and the great social benefits which could ensue from a revised schedule of deliveries, the drawbacks seem slight.

The few schemes outlined here for improving the postal system could go a long way to speed mail delivery and decrease costs. None of the ideas requires futuristic technology or massive reorganization of postal facilities. None would cause widespread layoffs of current employees. The substitution of incentives and job contracting for subsidies and institutional inefficiency should go some way to solve the problems which have plagued the Postal Service for years. It would certainly be appropriate if in this Bicentennial year, Benjamin Franklin Bailar could return the Post Office to the place of glory it held after it was reorganized by his namesake 200 years ago. □

RADICALISM AS COMMON SENSE

THE OFFICE-HOLDING ACTIVISTS

JAMES ROWEN

Madison, Wis.

From June 13th through 15th, a gathering of local and state government officials, who came to be called the "programmatically Left," held a national meeting in Madison that was sponsored by the Washington, D.C. Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), with Madison's 30-year-old second-term Mayor, Paul R. Soglin, acting as host. Called the "National Conference on Alternative State and Local Public Policies," this historic meeting marked the first time that elected and appointed activists "who share a Populist or radical outlook," as described in the IPS letter of invitation, had convened to organize themselves into an action-oriented body. The more than 150 officials, among them mayors, judges, state legislators, City Council members, state and city department heads, school board members, consultants and many local commission, committee and board members, drawing on their proven abilities to win elections and hold public office, will probably influence the substance and direction of public policy for years to come.

The conference brought together "those who are working for the reconstruction of American society from below," according to IPS Co-Director Marcus Raskin, who attended the three-day meeting. In addition to such well-

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known figures as Colorado State Treasurer Sam Brown, D.C. School Board President Marion Berry, and U.S. Senate candidate Tom Hayden of California, workshop panelists arrived from twelve states, some traveling more than 2,000 miles at their own expense. The workshops were the heart of the conference. They were short on rhetoric, long on the nuts-and-bolts work of assembling and promoting specific, alternative public programs. The workshops followed a widely accepted determination among conference panelists and participants, best expressed by Sam Brown in the opening plenary session, to stay away from "code words" which have positive meaning only for those on the Left, and to concentrate instead on program.

The more than twenty workshops, held at the University of Wisconsin, covered the spectrum of basic social and economic issues that currently cry out for alternative solutions. Sessions on land-use planning, nutrition, comprehensive tax reform, public ownership of utilities and natural resources, police policy and the courts, employment and job creation, housing and cooperatives were among the topics discussed by panelists and other persons attending the conference.

The common theme tying these workshops together was the need to create forms of public ownership, control and management of vital resources, such as capital, fossil fuels, timber acreage and land. Jim Lorenz, director of California's Department of Employment Development, a cabinet-level agency in the Jerry Brown administration, put

it succinctly to the conference's opening session: "Control of capital is the issue. It is the right of every American to have a job with reasonable wages, and the right to organize."

The workshop panelists invited to the conference by IPS, and most of the persons attending the meeting, are committed to political change at the state and local level. This grass-roots emphasis represents a major shift for many persons who had previously been most concerned with national and international affairs during the anti-war movement. The conference sought to tap, organize and publicize the trend developing among activists toward involvement in local politics.

Concomitantly, a goal of the conference was to break down the feeling of isolation that afflicts progressives who have moved into positions of power at the state and local level. In Madison, for instance, we often wondered how like-minded people were handling issues in other cities, and sometimes whether there were any like-minded people "out there" at all. The conference helped answer questions of this kind by bringing together people from California, the District of Columbia, Maine, Vermont, Texas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Nebraska, Massachusetts, West Virginia, Wisconsin—and the Province of British Columbia, in the person of Robert Williams, Minister of Natural Resources. Energy activists heard about public Utility Power Ownership in Nebraska, and a proposed Model State Energy Act in Maine; tax specialists discussed specific reform proposals being debated in Vermont; Sam Brown and others discussed the possibility of state-run banks and other publicly owned financial institutions, and two elected judges, Justin Ravitz from Detroit, and José Angel Gutierrez from Zavala County, Texas, related their experiences in attempting to humanize and reform the criminal justice system from the courtroom bench. Judge Gutierrez also best dealt with pragmatic strategies, and some of the conference participants' lingering doubts about the correctness of participating in electoral politics, when he stated that he and his supporters in La Raza Unida Party "utilize the electoral process as a means available to us."

A related goal of the conference was to exchange information, and this clearing-house activity was conducted on a massive scale. In addition to the communication at the workshops and plenary sessions, a conference reader, assembled by Derek Shearer, a journalist and consultant to the California State Department of Employment Development, was sold at cost to all conference participants. The reader, 2 inches thick and still available for \$5 from IPS, contains interesting and innovative bills, ordinances, programs and articles, all written by members of this new generation of government activists. One of the conference's ongoing functions will be to compile and distribute an annual reader, as well as an IPS-inspired newsletter that will carry an index of progressive legislation, proposals and articles as they are published nationwide.

This exchange of information was designed to familiarize conferees with the technicalities of a variety of programs being proposed or implemented across the country. The emphasis therefore was on how to use power, not how to acquire it, since nearly all the conferees hold some kind of public office. Loni Hancock, a member of the Berkeley

City Council, said her goal was "to turn the unthinkable into the inevitable," and "to shift the whole political spectrum of what is possible in Berkeley." Tom Hayden, who is trying to unseat U.S. Sen. John Tunney, remarked that his program was based on the belief that "the radicalism of the 1960s has become the common sense of the 1970s," summing up the widespread feeling at the conference and elsewhere that the Left's general analysis during the war in Vietnam had been proven right, and that proponents of that analysis could now shift their energies toward electoral politics.

Following the three days of workshops, several concrete steps were taken, based upon a series of recommendations by the conference organizer, Lee Webb, an economics professor at Goddard College, Plainview, Vt. The conference will continue with its primary orientation toward program development, also stressing the exchange of information. Four regional conferences are already being planned for the Midwest, Southwest, West and New England, and a 1976 conference may be held in Austin, Texas, at the invitation of that city's new independent Mayor Jeff Friedman, elected last April. The workshop areas will include: comprehensive tax reform; state and municipal bonding; women's issues; job creation and a re-definition of work, and public banks and finance. The continuing workshops will provide the substance for the regional conferences, the newsletter, the annual reader and next year's conference. Again, program is the major focus of the work of the conference.

And for those of us who have attended innumerable conferences and meetings, so many of them shattered by bickering or factional infighting, the Madison conference itself was a pleasurable alternative. An unmistakable air of confidence, and a feeling of *élan* permeated the formal sessions, the workshops, the hallway caucuses, and the gatherings late at night in Madison's student beer bars. Ling Yee Kelley, a member of the Berkeley City Council, told the conference that she had not experienced such a positive feeling among a group of people since her work in the California McGovern delegation in 1972. Many panelists, including Madison's Mayor Soglin, said they left the conference with a strange experience not common to national conventions—they felt they had actually learned something. The only complaint I heard during the three days of meetings was that the two hours given to each workshop were not enough; many sessions were continued into a second day. One reconvened at 8 on Sunday morning.

The short-term benefits of the Madison conference were obvious. Whether or not the National Conference on Alternative State and Local Public Policies evolves into something more formal, such as a lobby or a third party, is unknown. Professor Webb told the conference in his concluding remarks that he considered the conference "not a movement, but a social phenomenon"—a gathering of activists finding themselves at the same place in government at the same historical point. And when a questioner asked who would control the conference, Webb gave the same kind of programmatic answer that typified the entire Madison meeting: "the future of the conference will be determined by the people who work the hardest." □