

Greetings:

Is there a Santa Claus? Would you believe I received a phone call from the North Pole? Santa liked the bit I wrote about him on Dec 26th. He appreciated this recognition after Christmas Day. Usually, interest in him drops off to nothing, as tho he were expected to go into deep freeze until the next Yuletide.

"Was 1977 different from other years?" I asked the old boy. "Mainly that my elves are becoming restive about toys, jimjogs and unessentials. They want more of useful, lasting stuff on the sled. There is so much need on Earth - desperate need. With Jimmy Carter stressing wise use of energy, the elves believe we are not expending our energy for its highest and best use."

"Do you agree with the elves?" I queried. "Yes", he replied. "Surveys show most of our stuff is discarded in a short while, hardly worth the hustle and bustle."

Santa continued. "Our surveys indicated that all nations have something in common. All of them - large and small, developed, developing and underdeveloped, and democratic, socialist, totalitarian etc etc."

"And what was that?" I asked. "Too much government" chuckled Santa. "Too much government despite thinkers like Voltaire and Jefferson who warned that the best governed people are those governed least. That has never been heeded. Governments become multiplying bureaucracies. Rulers are inadequate to the tasks they assume. Budgets are dreadfully burdensome and insupportable. Too much government and it frowns on criticism in the name of patriotism and party loyalty. Governments insist on the support of citizen, voter, taxpayer. They swell like elephantiasis."

"Harsh words" I cautioned him. "Indeed they are" he replied. "But it is an error to soft-pedal government shortcomings. In the private sector, if private effort is inefficient, wasteful, corrupt it will fail and drop from the economic scene. In public, governments persist in control, taking ever heavier taxes to pay for inadequate, inefficient, inept and corrupt programs."

"Are you pursuing an unproven premise?" I asked. "No" was Santa's response, "everywhere on the globe there is too much government. It brings unemployment and inflation - twin perils like Scylla and Charibdis - on which so many nations foundered in the past. Governments refuse to recognize economic laws, but these cannot be ignored for they are as immutable as the law of gravity."

Santa went on. "I am distressed by the ego of rulers, in fact of most people who attain office. They think the voters are interested in their careers. The voters couldn't care less. They want prudence, fair play, efficiency. Instead they get little minds posturing as tho a mantle of instant wisdom descended on them when they assumed office. They are delighted by the adulation and attention and media coverage. They forget this evaporates when they leave office. Who gives a hoot for yesterday's ruler, governor, mayor, alderman? Yesterday they were front page. Today, they can't squeeze past the want ad section."

I shook my head. "Thanks for the call, Santa. Nobody will believe that you called and what you had to say. But I will note it down. Who knows? People who will believe in Santa Claus, will believe anything."

--- Joseph Zashin