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Quadrennial Hunt for the 'Great Man'

By James Bovard

The Great American Quadrennial Whine is beginning. From editorial pages to talk shows to soup kitchens, Americans are complaining about the caliber of the 1988 crop of would-be presidents. There is sadness across the land because no one worthy enough has yet stepped forward to control our lives.

Every four years or so, the absurdity of our current system becomes vivid. We have created a huge engine of government, even though there is no one even vaguely capable of intelligently driving it. We have a paternalistic system where almost everyone has contempt for the paternalists.

Is there any prominent politician from either party who could run your life better than you yourself? Is there any politician who is so superior to you in character and intellect that you should effectively sign your life over to his hands?

WHICH POLITICIAN would you like to vest with the power to condemn entire neighborhoods to benefit big corporations, as happened in Poletown and General Motors? Which politician can best oversee the Agriculture Department's decrees on what size of nectarines Americans may eat, or how many acres of land Americans may farm? Which politician should determine how many young workers to sacrifice so Social Security can allow more old people to enjoy winter in Florida?

Which politician can best administer the laws that prohibit private

citizens from sending letters to each other outside the U.S. mail? Which politician would you choose to set the price you pay for gasoline, rent, loans and your pension? Which politician's coercion would you like to rely on in lieu of your own voluntary agreements?

Because government allows people a token voice every four years in choosing who will seize their property and violate their rights, they are supposedly still free men and women. This is like saying the prisoner who gets to choose his own executioner doesn't really die.

Whom shall we choose to direct our Leviathan — with Congress considering 5,000 bills a year, with almost 50,000 pages of new regulations and decrees in the Federal Register each year, with government's share of the national wealth growing by \$50-100 billion a year? Almost weekly, new boondoggles occur, yet congressmen continue to create new programs even faster than the old programs become national disgraces.

REFORM IS the opiate of the welfare state. Government programs are a litany of contradictions. Farm programs pay farmers both to increase and to decrease production. Rent control rots neighborhoods, while housing subsidies hide the rot. Job training programs don't help the poor, while minimum wages are set that destroy the creation of jobs.

Government is the only business in which failure guarantees future

growth. Yet the media and the public focus their hopes on finding the Great Man who will somehow make two plus two equal five, who will say the magic words that will make government serve the people.

People trust their savings accounts and jobs to men whom they would never buy a used car from. People sneer at Big Government — and then surrender more of their freedom and paychecks to politicians and pray for favors from Washington.

Our society is already divided between those who work for a living and those who vote for a living. We are heading for a situation where it is a question of steal or be stolen from via government.

What does the race consist of?

SO WHAT does the presidential race consist of? Endless speeches on caring, compassion, leadership, character and patriotism. Some candidates play on our greed, some on our xenophobia and some on our guilt. But nowhere is there close attention to the real issue: Are politicians competent to exercise ever greater power over the lives of private citizens?

"I'm from the government, and I'm here to help you" could become the epithet of American democracy. The longer we spend searching for a Great Man to save us from our weaknesses and fear of the dark, the more contemptible we will be.

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