

# America's middle class makes a plea for sanity

They're different now — those people in the streets with petitions and banners.

Unlike 20 years ago, the students are in the minority. Sure, the weirdos show up — you know the ones who show up at just about any demonstration with painted faces and screwy costumes.

But they, too, are in the minority.

The majority are older. Some are very old. Many are business persons and physicians with a lot of money to boot. Others are clergymen from Christian sects which traditionally have avoided the political arena — Lutherans and Methodists.

These are the people who make up the new anti-war movement. This is the middle class — what Richard Nixon dubbed the "silent majority" — who have gone verbal to demand the nuclear weapons instantly come to an end before it puts an end to us.

City councils from conservative Midwest communities, at the urging of their constituents, are indeed sending a message to world leaders. Enough,

they are telling them. Enough of this mad rush to doomsday.

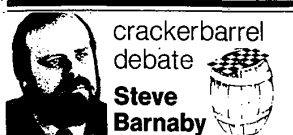
On Signature Sunday, thousands from around our suburban area signed petitions calling others to join the movement.

### THEIR PLEA IS SIMPLE.

"We call upon you, our neighbors and friends, to seek with us an immediate worldwide freeze on the production, development and deployment of nuclear weapons, a systematic reduction of present nuclear arsenals and the eventual abolition of all nuclear arms," says one petition.

Recently Ground Zero Week saw hundreds of seminars at colleges, churches, temples and community centers proclaim the insanity thrust upon us by our world leaders.

Some would compare the recent interest in nuclear disarmament to the hysteria of the '50s with bomb shelters, students diving under desks at the sound of a siren and debates over whether to shoot



your neighbor if he attempts to invade your bomb shelter.

But today the middle class is different. It knows better. It just doesn't take the government's word that hiding in the basement will save a family from a nuclear blast.

America really was that naive, you know.

But today's middle class is more sophisticated and is fighting back. It is taking to the streets in unprecedented numbers. No longer is it just the in-

tellectuals and what has been mistakenly considered by many to be the far-out element protesting the danger of nuclear obliteration.

**SURVIVING A NUCLEAR** blast is nearly impossible and the middle class doesn't believe Ronald Reagan when he says otherwise. We know those who do survive will live in a world more akin to the 17th rather than the 21st century.

But winning the peace is a tough job. Just ask the folks who have been stumping for nuclear weapons disarmament. Some of them have been doing this for decades. They do feel relieved that the rest of us are finally getting the message.

But the rest of us need more help. We need to speak out in evergrowing numbers to dissolve this nuclear suicide compact.

We can win the peace. Nuclear weapons can be wiped from the face of the earth. We have to win before civilization suffers that fate.

With the middle class, it can be done.



Tim Richard

## The law's delay, delay, delay, delay

We news gatherers often complain about closed court proceedings and closed meetings of government bodies. Whenever we take our complaints to court, we almost always win.

And yet we always lose because the appellate courts delay so long in deciding that we're correct that the proceedings are all over by the time the dawdling court can rule.

America's legal system seems unusually pokey. It took the Italian legal system only two months and nine days to catch, try, convict and sentence the man who wounded Pope John Paul II. It took the Egyptians six months to capture, try, convict and execute the assassins of Anwar Sadat. But 13 months after John Hinckley was caught with a smoking gun in his hand after wounding President Reagan and James Brady, the trial hasn't even begun.

**MISERY LOVES** company, and my companions in this lament are Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Michigan.

The Blues complain they are losing money hand over fist on small group and other-than-group health insurance subscribers. But let us ignore the numbers and the merits of the case and concentrate instead on the legal proceedings.

The phenomenon of rate increase proceedings is going on all over the nation. In Topeka, Kans., it took the Blues three months to get a decision; in Albany, N.Y., six weeks; in Cleveland, Ohio, three months; Boston, Mass., three months; Baltimore, Md., three months; Pittsburgh, Pa., three months; Wilkes Barre, Pa., three months; Philadelphia, Pa., three months; New York City, N.Y., three months; Chicago, Ill., six weeks.

**IN MICHIGAN**, the Blues filed a request with the state insurance bureau in December 1981 to increase rates for other-than-group subscribers. Here are excerpts from the Blues "tentative timetable" for the legal processing of the case:

Jan. 21, insurance commissioner issued order for notice of hearing. Feb. 11, Blues filed written testimony. Feb. 18, all applications for intervention filed. March 26, all follow-up questions based on Blues' answers to previous questions filed.

April 2, briefs supporting objections to any outstanding discovery questions due. April 8, briefs in opposition to objections to discovery questions due. April 9, hearing on objections and discovery requests. April 14, hearing officer's ruling on objections to discovery. April 23, Blues to file discovery questions.

April 30 (est.), parties file follow-up requests, if any, to Blues materials of April 23. May 7, Blues file responses to April 30 questions. May 24, hearing begins (depending on extent of discovery ordered April 14); one week estimated for examination and cross-examination of witnesses.

June 11, insurance and intervenors file written testimony. June 18, insurance bureau and intervenors present witnesses and adverse witnesses for examination and cross-examination; two weeks estimated.

July 5, Blues' rebuttal testimony. July 12, insurance bureau and intervenors' rebuttal testimony. July 19, all parties file briefs on issues. July 21, hearing officer's decision.

Aug. 9, all parties file exceptions to hearing officer's decision. Aug. 23, commissioner's decision. Twenty days after commissioner's decision, appeals to circuit court, if any.

Someone is paying for all those lawyers. Meanwhile, no one is being cured of any disease, and the Blues' reserves are drained.

May 1 is Law Day. I don't think I'll join the festivities this year.

## 'Frankly, I preferred SEMTA Park 'n' ride



## Lawmakers taxed brains to hike taxes

While thousands worry about the possibility of nuclear war and others are concerned about the fringes in the Middle East and South and Central America, the Stroller's attention is focused on the legislative halls in Washington and Lansing.

In Michigan's capital, lawmakers struggle until the wee hours of the morning for new ways to levy taxes. Some of their actions would be funny if they weren't so serious.

For instance, they are placing an added tax on cigarettes but pay no attention to the fellows who smoke cigars or chew what often is referred to as "the filthy weed." Why should cigarette smokers be singled out to help ease the state's financial burden? This is nothing new. Ever since the Stroller was a young fellow starting to earn a living, he has been puzzled by the many unusual tax schemes concocted by the men in political office.

**ONE BIG LAUGH**, in those days back in the Pennsylvania Dutch country, came the year they passed a bill taxing all the families that had installed indoor plumbing.

This created quite a stir. Folks charged it was a scheme for holding back the better things in life.

The poorer class howled, too, believing it was a scheme to do away with what were called "outhouses."



the stroller  
W.W. Edgar

They were in vogue at that time, and most families strung sweet peas up on the outside wall, believing the ground there was more fertile than in regular flower beds.

While that was an exceptional case, there have been many unusual taxes levied down through the years.

**READING HISTORY** one evening, the Stroller learned that way back in 1702 the Russians paid a tax on their beards.

In later years, here in America, a tax was levied on oleomargarine as a means of protecting the butter industry.

If that seems strange, the state of Indiana once levied a tax on ice used to cool bottled alcoholic drinks — but not on ice used to cool bottled soda or watermelons.

There was a time, too, when you did not have to pay a tax on salted or buttered popcorn when you went to the theater. But you had to pay if you chose the caramel-coated variety.

Would you believe it? During the 17th and 18th centuries, homeowners were taxed according to the number of windows in their homes. And in staid, old England, there were times when bachelors had to pay a tax.

In some states in the last century, there was a tax on tuna fish used as cat food — but not on the variety used as food for humans.

**THE MOST UNUSUAL** tax The Stroller learned about was levied by the Romans in the first century.

It was a tax on animal urine, which at that time was a great source of revenue because it was a highly valued agent in leather tanning.

So it is nothing new to find our lawmakers engaged in the most unusual ways of levying taxes. It has been done down through the ages, so it is nothing new to find them coming up with strange — and almost laughable — ideas.

But, try as they will, I doubt they will ever outdo the forefathers who once placed a tax on the pleasures of matrimony.

## Grass is brown in a small town, too

As the economic woes of metropolitan Detroit continue, more area residents are looking to depart for other areas of the country.

A recent survey of moving companies indicated that more persons were leaving Michigan than any other state. (Hawaii tops the list of states to which people are moving.)

But after several years of unquestioned "greener pastures" elsewhere, people in Michigan are beginning to realize that other areas of the country also have their problems. Former Michigan residents who have moved to the South or to small towns are telling tales of overcrowding, joblessness and discrimination. A warning has been sounded.

Recently, I spent a few days in a central Ohio town of about 5,000 residents. I experienced a different style of life than what I was used to in the suburbs of Detroit.

### HERE IS what I found:

- Recreation sources are limited. Forget about museums, galleries or live entertainment. Restaurants are few. The only movie theater was in a neighboring city about 10 miles away. Recreation is fishing, walking and skating at the local roller rink.



Nick Sharkey

- Meals taste better in restaurants. All meals are home-cooked. Coffee is freshly perked. If you stop in the same restaurant three days later, the waitress remembers what you ordered on the first visit.

- A speeding violation is a major arrest. Three policemen put the suspect in the back of a cage patrol car. An out-of-state license plate requires that bond be posted at the mayor's house late at night. The mayor sets up a card table in his living room and holds court.

- It is quiet every night. On most evenings the stars are brilliant. A breeze brings fresh air. Air and light pollution are forgotten.

- Most minorities are there to serve the white majority. Men routinely refer to the current count of blacks living in the town — 16.

- A brief walk is a social outing. Strangers introduce themselves. Motorists stop to see if they can give the walker a ride.

- The pace is slower. Walkers and bicyclists seem to have taken the place of automobiles. The few cars on the road drive at a slower rate. No one is in a hurry to check out at the grocery store.

- Forget about specialization. Doctors are all general practitioners. The General Store takes the place of the fashion boutique and sporting goods shop.

- Wage scales are lower. Most persons are employed in service industries and are paid a little above minimum wage. Prices on everyday items such as milk, bread and gasoline are on par with those of metropolitan areas.

Other locations and styles of living offer many advantages over living in metropolitan Detroit. It's wise, however, to investigate the liabilities as well as the assets before making a move.

The grass may only appear to be greener.