

LESSONS OF HISTORY

A few basic problems can be solved and the known solutions are begging for listeners. There is probably no excuse for waiting for solutions for all problems before solving the ones we know about. I cannot accept that a solution always brings a problem as bad as the original problem. What is true is that a scheme based on a faulty diagnosis usually just adds a problem to the original one.

Of all the problems we dread today, war ought to head the list. The net major war will leave no human survivors and very few of any other kind. War is an economic phenomenon and will not be prevented except by solving economic problems.

History, right up to the present, holds a long list of rulers who could have turned their respective countries into paradises. If you argue that they failed because they were greedy, they might have tried harder to find out how to do it because it would have made them richer. The real reason they did not do it is that they simply didn't know how. They cheated themselves by accepting explanations that they grew up with, and a fat fraction of them met miserable deaths to boot.

We mortals have a way of ignoring a situation which we might secretly admit could yield trouble. We use all kinds of excuses, but surely one of the worst is thinking there is no need to hurry because the trouble has not erupted yet. The Czars and other big shots of Russia were making haste to remedy the oppression of several centuries duration—after the revolution was breathing down their backs—too late. It may be risky to guess what Batista thought about the truly poor in Cuba until—oops, too late. Years before I ever heard of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, I had heard of the oppressiveness of the Somoza family rule.

Now it is El Salvador and the rest. In each case, we are terribly worried lest the revolting people are to be led down the communist path. Actually those people have heard of only two possibilities and they are fed up with the one under which they have been living.

Where were we during these decades when we had time to teach them how to insure a healthy economy which can supply the needs of their people? If there is any hope of teaching any of those people how to avert communism, it would be to start right at home and build a credible example. Do we have time? Maybe not now any more. If we fail to build such an example here, all of our military might will not help because many of our own people would see communism as an improvement over their present condition.

We had no candidate in the last presidential election who had any inkling of what causes our economic mess or what to do about it.