

# A New Morality Draws Defiance

By Philip Stoddard Brown

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## Our Changing Economy

# A New Morality Draws Defiance

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**P**AUL HOFFMAN tells about his first interview with John Studebaker, for whom he went to work as a young man. The old gentleman, when Hoffman entered his office, was slitting envelopes so that they could be used for notes to himself and his staff. "Downstairs," he complained, "they use paper pads but that's extravagant."

Well, our economy—and our way of life—has changed a lot since John Studebaker's day, and we in Washington have led the way. The shipment of waste paper from Washington, I was once told, is our biggest commodity export. But this is a mere byproduct of our principal occupation, paperwork.

Last spring, for one week, a public school teacher in Arlington kept a diary. At my suggestion, she jotted down every extra-teaching activity having to do with school duties. If her record were not so long, I should reproduce it rather than what follows.

### Teachers Have Little Time to Teach

A good deal of classroom time was devoted to distributing Civil Defense forms (3), Activity-Points forms, Vocational Rehabilitation forms, a glaucoma bulletin, library-fine notices and change-of-employment forms for parents. Children had to be instructed how to fill out these forms and then prodded daily about returning them properly signed by parents.

One afternoon was devoted to typing and dittoing a special form for homeroom teachers to use in excusing pupils early on a particular day for a language test. Also, on the same day, four pastry shops were visited. (Negotiations followed daily regarding plans for a Pastry Sale.) Another afternoon was given over to the Home Register (whatever that is), a monthly report of enrollment and a count of chairs and tables in the cafeteria. So it went.

Evenings and weekends were spent writing and dittoing



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minutes of a departmental meeting, writing-letters to textbook publishers, signing activity-points reports, filling out ballots and circulars of Arlington Education Association, correspondence with Guidance, making progress reports, tallying bus-miles travelled by students, and so on.

How this woman, who is a superb teacher, finds time to teach, I don't know. But effective as she is, she would be more effective, I'm sure, if she were free to teach full-times.

### More GNP; Less Productivity

Paperwork is robbing many of us of a lot of living. To be sure, it increases GNP. A good deal of GNP consists in writing progress reports, filing out vouchers, publishing newsletters and house organs, sending out stupid questionnaires, interviewing strangers, tallying replies, manufacturing file cabinets and generally passing around paper of little value. We are the poorer, I think, for such increase in GNP.

Worst of all, it has come to be regarded as moral and right to do one's paperwork, and do it promptly. A distinguished college professor, whose desk was piled with half-prepared reports, correspondence, and other papers when the president of one of our great corporations called on him some time ago, was told that if he were in the latter's employ he would be promptly dismissed or demoted. The sight of his desk would be taken as conclusive evidence that he was a bottleneck, "unable to organize his job."

We must fight this new morality, else teachers won't have any time to teach. Business men and Government officials will become completely deskbound. It's insidious . . . If we're not vigilant, one day we will discover that we have not only the biggest GNP but that we are the poorest of nations. Morality, here, as in some other spheres, is a greater danger than immorality.

But let no one call me immoral. This copy is submitted almost on time and in duplicate, with a copy for my files. What's more, I fully intend, in a few days, to answer all letters received in September.