

by Jack Anderson

WASHINGTON, D.C.

In the year ahead, Americans will be inundated with more election advice than they really want. The choosing of a President will inspire millions of newspaper editorials, television commentaries and other political guides to assist the voters. Yet the man in the Oval Office will have less impact on our daily frustrations than the government clerk in his cubicle. The greater need is for a guide to help citizens cope with the bureaucracy.

Taken in the aggregate, the bureaucracy is a marvel to contemplate. Consider its metronome-like delivery of millions of benefit checks, its irrigation of thousands of agri-farms, its moon shots and space shuttles, its highways extending to every horizon, its inexhaustible catalogue of services.

But its ultimate achievement is the finesse, the unobtrusiveness, by which it rules. So gently, prosaically, gradually and invisibly does it tighten its bonds that we never appreciate the extent to which we are in its grip.

Not too long ago, we Americans were distinctive throughout the world as a breed of self-starters, innovators, doers. Now we are becoming bound up in red tape—reduced to a nation of paper-shuffling petitioners, forever waiting for permission from some government office for our next step, continually putting aside the work of the world in order to fill out forms.

Many regulations are necessary, and many bureaucrats are effective public servants. Few question that. But the aggregate picture produced by regulations-run-wild is of a government whose pace is hobbled, whose progress is dribbling to a halt, yet whose growth is exploding beyond control or even comprehension.

Citizens caught in the benevolent toils of the bureaucracy come to feel powerless and quickly succumb to the nothing-can-be-done-anyway syndrome. Yet something can be done; there is a way through the dark tunnels of the bureaucracy. Here is my own guide. It might be called "How to Succeed With the Government—But Only After Trying."

1-27-1980

How to Outsmart The Bureaucrats

1. Remember who the sovereign is.

The people are the source of the power that the bureaucrats wield. So in any encounter with a bureaucrat, you are the sovereign and he is the servant. You would do well to be pleasant and patient. But you don't have to take "no" for an answer. Find out and follow the appeal procedure.

2. Don't let the bureaucrat hide behind his anonymity.

Bureaucrats are skilled at evading issues, shifting responsibility and diverting decisions to someone else. The more committees and conferences there are to share the burden of decision, the less chance there is that any single bureaucrat will be blamed. So try to identify and isolate the civil servant responsible for your case. Deal with him person-to-person rather than citizen-to-government. Perhaps you can reduce his feeling of splendid insulation from the populace. If he mishandles your case, name him; complain about him; proceed against him.

3. Fight paper with paper.

Many a faceless bureaucrat finds his *raison d'être* in the regulation books, developing a mastery of them with which he confounds the real world. He buttresses every move with paperwork. You can beat him at his own game if you, too, keep detailed records—letters, forms, receipts, memos. Put into writing any verbal promises you extract from a bureaucrat.

4. Don't start at the top.

It's useless to go over the heads of the bureaucrats to their political chief. The typical high appointee quickly discovers during the honeymoon that he is in bed with an octopus, smothered in its loving embrace, the undulating arms simultaneously caressing him and keeping him occupied. With too many arms to outmaneuver, the incoming administrative head usually becomes the pampered captive of the octopus he is supposed to control. So you may as well start with the lower official and work your way up

5. *Keep it cool.* The maligned government clerk, after all, is human. Try to deal with him face-to-face. Then you become a real person with a problem, not just a case number. Bring all essential documents with you, state your problem concisely. Don't spout, shout or threaten. The wrong approach can turn him off; the right one can persuade him to be helpful.

6. *A word on paper is worth two on the phone.* If you cannot confront the official, don't telephone him. Write him a letter. Make it businesslike. State your problem; give the facts; explain what you think should be done. Enclose copies of all documents involved and ask for a response within a reasonable time.

7. *If at once you don't succeed . . .* Try, try again; then raise hell. You see, the hardcore bureaucrat in his heart of hearts is at odds with democracy. He dislikes controversy, which disrupts the smooth implementation of plans and procedures. He embraces secrecy because what is not known cannot be disrupted. His craving for small certainties also discourages dissent. So if all other approaches fail, you may get a rise out of him by rocking his bureaucratic boat. Complain to his superiors; write to your Congressman; raise a howl.

8. *Seek legal help.* Abraham Lincoln's idea of government of, by and for the people has turned, in the bureaucratic age, into government of, by and for the lawyers. You will be better off, therefore, if you can afford the services of a lawyer.

9. *Yes, it does help to write your Congressman.* Most members of Congress, given the need for votes on Election Day, will help constituents with their federal problems. Congressional inquiries get top priority at most government agencies. You should seek the assistance of the Congressman from your home district or the Senators from your home state.

It is often less painful to submit to

the unjust government edict than to fight it, less expensive to pay the unfair tax assessment than to oppose it. But each generation must proclaim anew its Declaration of Independence, and the ascendant danger of our day is the government bureaucrat. The average American just wants the government to leave him alone—all the more reason why he must stand up to the bureaucrats and oppose their encroachments, lest they forget they are servants, not masters, of the nation. P