



# Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

It's with certain sadness that we watch our nation deteriorate before our eyes. No longer at war, we now have to call out the National Guard to patrol overpasses for snipers (after two truck drivers are killed), send trucks in convoys down superhighways, bow before the ridiculous demands of insane kidnappers and expect hand-to-hand combat at the gas station.

Someone has said if you scratch an American you find an anarchist. Perhaps that is one of the things that makes us great, for America has long deplored the centralization of power as we see it in the South American and European dictators. But it is also one of our weaknesses. As in the case of the 1961 fall-out shelter incidents when triggered by a speech by President Kennedy, thousands of Americans built underground fortresses and vowed to kill all but their own who might try to enter in case of nuclear fallout.

Yet when nobody is in charge, everybody is — and we have what Thomas Hobbes called the “war of each against all.” But who is in charge around here? “Czar” Simon says one thing, five other officials in Washington say five other things, the President is flying around saying we have no problems, the governors are screaming their heads off, even the mayors are getting into the act by announcing municipal “states of emergency” and establishing rules. Three months ago I thought gas rationing was a mad man's scheme. Now I can hardly wait until it is implemented.

Last Monday I sent my wife down to the one service station on our side of town that had any gas. They didn't open until noon, so I suggested she get in line about 10:30. She was 50th when she arrived and there had already been three fights, one major wreck, and the cop on duty had been forced to draw his gun twice. And 80 percent of those in the line were women.

Up in Cocoa a man broke line with his Imperial, forced the attendant to “fill it up,” then tried to charge the 15-cent purchase on his credit card. In Melbourne, when a man broke the line in front of a group of women, they all ran into his car at the same time, battering his doors and crunching fenders on both sides. The line-jumper, unhurt but furious, leaped from his car shouting obscenities but was no match for a 195-pound woman who decked him with one punch. No charges were filed since no one in the huge line of cars would admit to having seen the fracas.

America needs a common cause to unite us. We've always come together in times of crisis. In the fifth grade all the kids from Mrs. Scott's class marched to the lunch room deliberately stepping on the cracks in the sidewalk and chanting, “Step on a crack, break Hitler's back.”

But who is our enemy today? The Arab? Perhaps it's the chairman of the board at Exxon. We can't even blame the Japanese any more — they're in more trouble than we are. Maybe it's like Pogo said, “We have met the enemy, and he is us.”

It's too bad positive causes aren't popular. We can rally around a lynching, but it's difficult to get excited over the fact that we live in the greatest nation that history has ever known, and enjoy more freedom and material benefits than anyone else in history has ever dreamed about. It's tragic that we should destroy all this because we can't get together in love and trust. Even the mention of God makes people mad any more.

Well, maybe I should start the ball rolling by giving up my place in line at the gas station. But, on second thought, I hate the thought of walking while some less-deserving fellow rides. I guess I'll just wait until we have another war. Surely that will draw us all together again.