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There are measures, entirely within the control of business, that could ease two of our most pressing social problems without government programs or vast expenditures —

A BUSINESS SOLUTION TO OVERCROWDING AND INFLATION

by Reuben W. Abrams

Laventhol Krekstein Horwath & Horwath

MAKING the best use of our resources might seem to deserve but little attention. Yet it could well be the key to the solution to some of our most pressing and perplexing problems.

As it happens, the use of existing resources lies within the power of management. Requiring neither government sponsorship nor official intervention, plans for improving the productivity of equipment can be adopted and implemented by individual companies.

Those industries that follow this route will benefit, of course. And they will also be taking the most effective action to combat both inflation and overcrowding, as we

shall see. Improved use of equipment is not a problem at all; it is an opportunity to harness an enterprise to the public good.

Inflation is more than just a problem of the moment. Even if the present policies of the Nixon Administration and the Federal Reserve succeed in slowing the steady rise in prices for a while, there are likely to be more bouts with inflation in the years to come. Because future policies are likely to be adapted from present ones, it will help to examine some basic concepts in vogue.

Considerable reliance is placed on monetary policy. A combination of tight credit and high interest

rates has been the chief ingredient in the prescription for bringing inflation under control. Without examining in detail the mechanics by which monetary policy can operate to restrain the economy, we may make a few pertinent observations.

Restrictive monetary policies tend to hold back investment in new plant and equipment. High interest rates and difficulty in raising funds are expected to act as depressants, although the evidence on this score must be regarded as inconclusive.

Whether or not tight money is directly operative in reducing capital expenditures, it is certainly a

strong indirect factor. For tight money does affect consumer demand, which in turn casts a pall over plans for industrial expansion. One way or another, then, this monetary policy does slow both the rate of economic growth and the rise in price levels.

Unfortunately, reduced consumer demand produces unwelcome results along with the desired effect of a slowdown in the economy. Unemployment, which in itself is undesirable, must be looked upon as a necessary evil when tight money is the means selected to combat inflation. Whether unemployment is merely a concomitant of the slowdown or a link in the chain of cause and effect matters little to monetary theory. High rates of unemployment are inevitable.

Unemployment is a short-run effect of tight money; and it is necessary for us to have faith that employment trends can be reversed once inflationary pressures show signs of abatement. This may happen some time before inflation itself is noticeably reduced; so that rather difficult timing decisions are involved.

More dangerous than the short-run effect is the possibility that, over a longer period, tight money policies designed to defeat inflation may defeat their own objective instead. Put in its simplest terms, the argument here is that failure to replace worn-out and obsolete equipment and to enlarge manufacturing capacity will restrict output later on, so that fewer goods will be available for consumers' dollars to buy. Thus the inflationary aspects of hobbled pro-

ductivity come back to impede future efforts at stabilizing prices.

The most disturbing thing about the two dilemmas is that they operate independently: We may endure the hardships of unemployment over the short run only to suffer worse inflation in the long run. There is a depressing prospect, in other words, that we will find ourselves losing both ways.

Sources of inflation

There are deep reasons why inflation is so stubborn now and why it threatens to remain a problem far down the road. The causes are rooted in sociological factors at work in the world at large.

One source of inflationary pressure is the urgent desire of minority groups to share in the affluence they see in other segments of society. When a sizable number of people find that an intolerable earnings gap separates their life style from the life style of others, if their demands for more equitable treatment are satisfied, there is bound to be a strain on the economy.

Rising standards in one group, the poor, can only come from two sources: increased gross national product or redistribution of income—a larger pie or changes in the way it is sliced. For years, national economic policies went in pursuit of the larger pie, but the growth rate was not sufficient to carry all the demands made on our production (including a war, a space program, urban renewal, and anti-poverty projects). Redistribution of income by raising taxes was not attempted in time. The economy then effected its own redistribution of wealth through inflation, which favors the borrowers and the poor (greater employment of marginal labor and cheaper repayment of debt are boons to them) at the expense of the lenders and those on fixed incomes (notably the retired).

The recent swing toward restrictive monetary policy—even though it is now being reversed—

tends to hold back economic growth, so that further minority group demands for improved living standards will have to be directed at redistribution of incomes; the pie will simply not be growing as fast as it did in the Sixties. This creates a bleak outlook.

Any redistribution of income runs into heavy opposition from other quarters. Blue-collar workers, for example, have become quite vociferous in their insistence that their position must be secure and improving. And they are not alone. The beneficiaries of past economic growth, and especially the pensioners, view with alarm any threat of a setback to themselves.

Meanwhile there is a backlog of things to be done, and this backlog continues to grow. Urban renewal requires enormous expenditures. These projects would improve the lot of many Blacks and other minorities; so there is an overlap between urban renewal and economic opportunities for the disadvantaged. By the same token, there is an urgency attaching to urban renewal.

Improvement of mass transportation has suffered many delays. A source of considerable discontent already, it threatens to grow worse unless a tremendous effort is forthcoming to revitalize our commuter and inter-city transportation systems. This effort will be expensive.

The public has only recently begun to take to heart the warnings of ecologists that we are polluting the land, the sea, and the air at a rate that can only lead to catastrophe. Whether the effort to clean up is made by industry, local authorities, or the Federal Government, it will have to be paid for, and it will be costly.

In assessing the fresh outlays that will be required to revive the cities, unsnarl the traffic jams, and clean up our planet, we cannot count on transfers of resources from other areas. True, there have been large budgets for space and defense, and space outlays are dropping. But defense expenditures



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To use our resources better, we propose staggering work days and adding work shifts

will continue to be large, even if the war in Indochina can be ended soon and international tensions are eased as far as we can reasonably hope.

Where, then, can we turn for a solution to the problem of inflation? Obviously no single answer will suffice. It is likely that, at some point, fiscal policy will be tightened: that taxes will go higher and budgets in the public sector will be trimmed as far as possible. In the private sector, both business and labor will be asked to exercise restraint in seeking increases in prices or wages.

Another factor may also help to contain inflation. The worldwide need for capital to finance the development of industry will grow at an accelerated pace. Here at home, power requirements alone will force the utilities to seek huge amounts of money. Other developed countries will also step up their consumption of power. Then there are the underdeveloped countries, which cannot possibly accumulate capital fast enough to support the growth they desire.

This need for ever-increasing sums of money will tend to keep interest rates fairly high. Interest rates are driven up by the natural forces of supply and demand operating in capital markets around the world. To the extent that a return to high interest may serve as an inducement to people to augment their savings, the effect of all this predictable need for financing will be deflationary even though high interest rates also tend to raise the price of goods.

Still, there is a compelling need to look for a new and imaginative solution to the problem of inflation, and the preferred characteristics of such a solution can be readily limned out:

- It should require little or no investment of capital.

- It should increase the productivity of resources (either manpower or machines).

- It should increase total production of goods and services for consumers.

The reason for seeking a solution that requires no investment of capital is simply to avoid the immediate diversion of productive effort to nonconsumer items. Payrolls of machinery manufacturers tend to swell the sum of money chasing after consumer goods in short supply. So, for the short-range effect, it is useful to avoid expenditures.

Over the long term, equipment will be used up faster, to be replaced earlier by more modern equipment, with effects that we will discuss later on.

Higher productivity of either labor or machines (machines represent stored labor, a form of capital, among other things) is the ultimate answer to inflationary pressures. It is therefore an important long-range consideration that productivity continue to improve.

A solution that entails gains in productivity tends also to remove the rationale for artificially creating unemployment. For in the last analysis the reliance on unemployment to combat inflation must rest on one of two assumptions:

- that those who lose their jobs were not productive enough; or

- that the threat of unemployment will goad the employed group to work harder or for lower wages.

If these two assumptions are true, and if they actually cause more output to come from fewer people, then unemployment can be accompanied by gains in productivity adequate to combat inflation. However, the risk involved in pursuing a policy of unemployment for a long time is just too great to be worth taking.

Increased total production of

goods and services for consumers is a natural result of increased productivity of existing equipment without additional investment in capital goods.

This, then, is the objective: more goods and services available to consumers to reduce the inflationary pressures caused by the classical situation of too many dollars chasing too few goods. If we can achieve this goal, we may have found the answer we seek.

We have established criteria for escaping the dilemmas that inhere in current anti-inflation policies. Solutions that meet our criteria must obviously make better use of existing plant and equipment.

We will discuss two ways for industry to accomplish this objective: by staggering work days and by adding work shifts. But first let us look at the economy as a whole and the use we make of facilities not directly related to industrial production. For the quality of living, the life style of individuals, is clearly affected by the use of educational and recreational plant, regardless of whether that use is included in calculations of the gross national product. Indeed, a major thrust of our argument is in the direction of better employment of nonmanufacturing plant.

To begin with the simplest of situations, we propose to keep schools open twelve months of the year instead of nine. Students—and teachers, of course—would divide into four groups, each taking off one month in four. These vacation months would be staggered, so that group A would take January, May, and September; group B February, June, and October; group C March, July, and November; and group D April, August, and December. This plan increases the capacity of our schools by one-third, at a time when overcrowding prevails in many school systems.

Schools in many parts of the country would require air conditioning, but this is already being done in many new schools under construction and in any case would not be an impossible alteration job. It would certainly be simpler and cheaper than building new schools in areas that are now overcrowded.

The plan does more than increase capacity. It benefits parents by permitting them to schedule their own vacations outside the summer months. Air conditioning at home and at work have made summertime both more productive (from an employer's standpoint) and more tolerable for staying on the job (from a worker's standpoint).

In addition, air travel makes vacations desirable in any season. There is always a place to go, and a way to get there, as so many tourists have been finding out. And for those who, for whatever reason, don't choose to fly, resort areas, including ski areas, have become more accessible by car or train.

Perhaps the greatest boon is to the hospitality and transportation industries; for the plan allows them to make better use of their assets by spreading the demand over a longer season. In many cases, over the entire year. Some resorts wouldn't do any better than they do now; it's doubtful if Nova Scotia will ever be a popular winter resort. But Florida has shown that traditional winter resorts can do all right in the summertime too; and one of the most popular winter activities is skiing, so resorts in New England, the Rockies, and the Laurentians could fare very well under the work schedule we propose.

This is precisely the kind of advantage we are looking for. When hotels, motels, and recreation areas can remain open to receive guests throughout the year, the gain is not theirs alone: Their guests suffer less from seasonal crowding, and the economy gains from fuller use of resources. This is equally true for airlines, cruise ships, buses, trains, and even highways. In fact, it holds true for every business associated with tourism in any way.

We have mentioned that industry has more than one way to increase the employment of its equipment. Let us turn to staggered work days as the first method.

The customary work week is now five days, Monday through Friday, with plants shutting down for the weekend. It was not always this way. People have worked longer weeks; they have worked on Saturdays and Sundays (and still do).

The list of activities that operate on Sunday is imposing. It includes heavy industry, textiles, retailers, hospitality, health care, entertainment, transportation, military, police, fire, and emergency services. On occasion, many more industries carry their overtime work into Sunday. All in all, there seems to be little resistance toward Sunday work, especially when it is accompanied by a day off during the week.

Three work groups

Our proposal is to break from the calendar week and set up three rotating groups to work four days on and two off (or six on and three off). It might even be desirable to alternate: 4-and-2 for eighteen weeks, followed by 6-and-3 for the next eighteen weeks or longer. Over a complete cycle of six weeks, three groups working 4 on and 2 off would be scheduled as shown in Exhibit 1, page 25.

Overlapping would serve to maintain a continuity in operating and in disseminating information. Each group would have its own supervisors in order to establish normal working relationships.

This would work for most companies, not for all. Obviously, a concern where all workers would be needed at the same time couldn't function this way. Nor could a concern where managerial personnel have to be on hand at all times that workers are functioning. On the other hand, our schedule wouldn't by any means be restricted to factory-type work environments. Wherever work is of a routine nature, and supervisory levels are

adequately staffed, it could be done. A large insurance company—of which so many are already on staggered hourly work shifts—could institute it with comparatively little trouble. So could a bank. A small advertising agency or firm of CPAs, granted, could not—at least until its clients were on a staggered schedule themselves.

The groups we are talking about would all work the same shift (perhaps 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.). We will turn to a discussion of shifts later. For now, it is enough to say that each shift would have three work groups.

Each holiday could be celebrated on three alternate days within a week, in order to avoid plant shutdowns. Each group simply celebrates on one of its off days. (It might be objected that this does away with holidays; and we may point out that workers will still have more days off, while machinery doesn't care.)

Two kinds of holiday cause special problems; religious holidays and Election Day. For religious holidays that must be celebrated on a specific day and no other, individuals could arrange to switch days with non-observers in most metropolitan centers where there is a mix of religious groups. Election Day should not be part of a weekend pattern, lest voters be encouraged to leave town and neglect their civic duty. On this one day, it would be better to bring in all three groups for half a day and to operate at 75 per cent of normal.

On its face, this is a proposal for a shortened work week, and most inappropriate for an era whose major concern is inflation. In fact, proposals for four-day weeks (with three days off) were being advanced a while back, and they are probably now awaiting a more favorable climate of opinion before they blossom forth again. (An increasing number of companies are quietly using a four-day, ten-hour-day work week right now.)

But this superficial view is not the last word, as a few simple calculations will demonstrate. A typi-

EXHIBIT I

Week	Group	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1	A	X	X	X	X	O	O	X
	B	X	X	O	O	X	X	X
	C	O	O	X	X	X	X	O
2	A	X	X	X	O	O	X	X
	B	X	O	O	X	X	X	X
	C	O	X	X	X	X	O	O
3	A	X	X	O	O	X	X	X
	B	O	O	X	X	X	X	O
	C	X	X	X	X	O	O	X
4	A	X	O	O	X	X	X	X
	B	O	X	X	X	X	O	O
	C	X	X	X	O	O	X	X
5	A	O	O	X	X	X	X	O
	B	X	X	X	X	O	O	X
	C	X	X	O	O	X	X	X
6	A	O	X	X	X	X	O	O
	B	X	X	X	O	O	X	X
	C	X	O	O	X	X	X	X

cal working year is now 242 days, allowing 52 weekends, 9 holidays, and 10 vacation days. Our plan could allow 12 vacation days and still call for 231 working days, a drop of 4½ per cent. The work force would put in 11 fewer days.

On the other hand, a plant that now operates 242 days (allowing for a two-week vacation shutdown) or 252 days (with no vacation shutdown) would run either 353 days (with a twelve-day vacation shutdown) or 365 days (with no vacation shutdown), a gain of 111 to 113 days, or about 45 per cent.

There can be no question that the gain in machine output would exceed by far the loss of a few days' output from workers. We can actually eat our cake and have it too. We can have more leisure time while meeting increased demand with existing facilities.

As an anti-inflationary force, this advantage is strengthened by another one. With less call for capital goods, and less of the workforce engaged in manufacturing capital goods, there will be more consumer goods for people to spend their available dollars on.

Now consider the boon that this plan bestows on the hospitality, recreation, entertainment, and trans-

portation industries and their customers. By ending the sharp dichotomy between weekdays and weekends, the plans spreads out over seven days the use of all kinds of equipment. A restaurant in a business district will have seven operating days instead of five, and a restaurant at a weekend resort will have seven operating days instead of two. Even hotels that cater to both commercial travelers and tourists will be relieved to see their chronic weekend imbalance come to an end.

Transportation (including highways again) would gain an extra benefit from the fact that two-day, and perhaps three-day, rest periods would overlap for people in different companies, so that every day would find one group going off and another group coming back.

It must be recognized that this plan for staggered work days is primarily applicable to those industries with little or no seasonal variation. On this score, let us note two things in passing: First, pressures for a guaranteed annual wage will provide seasonal industries with an incentive to find ways for leveling production economically. Second, the plan for staggered school vacations, discussed earlier,

would tend to eliminate some seasonal factors, like a "back-to-school season" and a summer "vacation season."

Twenty-four-hour operation is not so uncommon as to startle people. Plants have been working on three shifts for a long time. In some industries, that is the entrenched tradition. Especially where shutting down or starting up involves costly procedures, as in steel mills.

Nor is the staggering of hours of work altogether new. On a small scale, it is practiced wherever some employees report in earlier or later than others. On a large scale, it has been tried voluntarily by employers in major cities who adjust their working hours to avoid the morning and evening rush.

We advocate two things:

- Extension of staggered working hours to achieve complete leveling of requirements for transportation and meals.

- Extension of round-the-clock operation until it becomes the norm (as indeed it is now in Las Vegas) whenever a factory or office has so much business that a new facility or expansion seems indicated. Instead, under our plan, the present facility would go on round-the-

But a moment's reflection will show inner city streets are unsafe at night . . .

clock operation each working day.

Round-the-clock operation is made practicable by modern lighting and air conditioning, which have brought sealed buildings, even windowless buildings, in which the climate is completely regulated. To those working in such a building, it matters not at all whether the sun is shining outside. Indeed, for those who prefer their recreation to be outdoors in daylight (golfers, for example), night work can be more desirable than day work.

There will be an immediate reaction to this suggestion: Employees won't come to the inner city at night. But a moment's reflection will show that inner city streets are unsafe at night because they are lonely; once they are populated they lose their danger. If enough people are going to work at midnight, it's no longer perilous to be out at midnight.

Once people become accustomed to the fact that businesses operate 24 hours a day, the limitations on staggering of hours disappear. A shift can then begin at 11 a.m. as readily as at 9 a.m., at 2 p.m. as readily as at 4 p.m., which is when many people now report to work. So hours can be staggered around the clock, even down to half-hours, with shifts starting at 11:30 and 7:30, morning or night.

That multiple shifts and staggered hours would relieve the commuting problem of our cities is obvious. That this solution would be inexpensive is also clear. Present facilities could easily handle the traffic in and out of cities if rush-hour peaks were removed.

The commuter himself would benefit in several ways: His trip would be faster, and it would cost him less. The commuter train now has two peak periods during the day—at morning and night. It returns to its source deadhead after

the morning rush, to make a few more runs half-empty during the day. Under the scheme we propose, much shorter trains could make the run in in the morning to return with a full load of those going off duty. And the trains that now run in the "off-hours" could carry a full pay load. In addition, the commuter would find transportation available at any hour of the day or night that he chose to go into town for any reason.

At mealtime, too, people would benefit from far less crowded conditions. And restaurateurs could serve cheaper meals, because they would be making better use of their equipment. With no more peak periods to contend with, restaurants could eliminate split shifts and other sources of discontent among personnel.

Put simply, our proposal amounts to keeping people out of each other's way. For if we do that, we may find that the planet is not so severely overpopulated after all and that we can lead better lives even as the score stands now.

Merely to depict the favorable aspects of round-the-clock operation, genuine as they are, would not be enough. There are long-standing objections to be reckoned with. Objections that are not so much time-honored as old and tired.

There are lingering prejudices from earlier times when more people were superstitious about witching hours and midnight fantasies. (Midnight fantasies in some cities are today not always fantasies, we concede. But we repeat what we said before. The dangerous street is an empty street. If the crush of people that jams streets at noon were spread out over twenty-four hours, if shops and bars and restaurants were open around the clock, who would hesitate to go at any hour?). With better lighting,

and perhaps in part because of urbanization, many people travel at night by choice: to visit friends, to seek entertainment, or to avoid traffic jams in the early evening. These same traffic jams just have been known to continue far into the night, especially on holiday weekends, making involuntary night owls of people with more conservative inclinations.

In any case, whether by free choice or under pressure of circumstances, people do keep later hours. They have little remaining reason to regard nighttime activity as a novelty or an aberration. Projecting long-term trends into the future, we can foresee twenty-four-hour-a-day living as the accepted mode. When that time comes, there may no longer be a late-late-late show on television, nor an early bird show. The same shows could be there, but their names would designate recognizable characteristics in a society that no longer thinks in terms of 3 a.m. as "late" and 6 a.m. as "early."

In that society all advantages of a particular shift will have disappeared. There will no longer be a "prime time" for selling by television. With audiences available at all hours, programming will have no peak periods to pursue. City streets and parks will be safer at all hours, too. In New York City, a program has already been inaugurated to reclaim Central Park for law-abiding citizens by providing popular and cultural entertainment late at night.

The breakdown of the day shift mystique is well demonstrated by the changed attitudes of office workers. Whereas they might have been expected to hold out indefinitely against night shifts, they have instead accepted the concept of continuous data processing to make full use of the potential of the computer. Data processing cen-

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ters now regularly offer round-the-clock service.

Improved long-distance communication and worldwide communication, fostered by increased international trade and international companies, provide a subtle, natural stimulus for putting to rest the prejudices of the segmented day. Should you want to call someone in London at 10 a.m. (his time) and you are in Los Angeles, you will have to make your call at 2 a.m. If you want to put through a trade in time for the opening of the New York Stock Exchange and you are in Hawaii or New Zealand or Israel, you will have to adjust to the realities of time zone differentials. As the world grows smaller, these time differences cease to be a source of wonderment or annoyance; an awareness of the relative nature of time becomes part of the intellectual environment in which we live.

Our combined proposals call for three groups working on staggered daily schedules within each of three shifts working on staggered hourly schedules, a total of nine work crews that would keep equipment running around the clock and through the week.

When equipment is used twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, by nine different crews, the need for preventive maintenance is intensified: Neglect will bring on repeated breakdowns that would destroy the effectiveness of the whole program to increase productivity. It is necessary to schedule some idle time for every piece of equipment in order to give the maintenance men a chance to keep it operational.

There are several ways to schedule maintenance work under conditions of continuous operation. One daily shift may be deliberately understaffed and its people rotated while equipment is made idle for

regular maintenance. Whole departments on all shifts may go on vacation while their machines are overhauled. In either case, the problem is not insurmountable.

Another type of question arises in connection with heavy use of equipment. Regardless of accounting methods, which may or may not reflect faster depreciation on a company's books, equipment does wear out faster when it is used more. Are the lower production costs of additional shifts illusory, then?

The answer is no. Much machinery is scrapped before its capacity to produce has been exhausted. This loss of productive capacity through obsolescence would be sharply curtailed by concentrated use over shorter periods.

Some old equipment, while less efficient than newer models, continues to operate because its competitive disadvantage has not reached a critical point. Intensive use of this kind of equipment, resulting in more frequent replacement of worn-out items, would mean that production came from equipment of more modern design. Thus, heavier use of a company's machinery can be an important factor in continually improving its efficiency.

There is yet another advantage accruing to the company that uses up the productive capacity of its plant quickly. Looked at from a financial standpoint, such a company is recovering its investment faster, which means that the total cost of carrying the investment over its life—the total cost of interest, real or imputed, that is—will be lower; the return on investment will therefore be better. In annual financial statements, this advantage shows up as a lower interest cost per unit of production (and sales).

At a time when problems of

great difficulty and enormous consequence threaten the nation's well-being, a solution to two sets of major problems should not be allowed to wait for implementation by later generations. The solutions we have proposed here, we believe, will one day be adopted. Their peculiar aptness for our time should make their adoption a matter of urgency for decision makers now.

The problems we are attacking are inflation and overcrowding. There is no need to describe their seriousness; much less reason to exaggerate their importance. Under the circumstances, solutions much more radical than ours could deserve consideration.

What we are proposing is really only a matter of freeing the nation from the bonds of an outmoded, tyrannical calendar week of seven days, of seizing the opportunities afforded by our newly won ability to control indoor climate, and of recognizing the meaning of extensive, rapid travel and communication. In these days of sweeping changes, our proposal is moderate indeed.

To summarize, we advocate these changes:

- Staggered school vacations to increase by one-third the capacity of schools and to contribute toward the damping of seasonal fluctuations in the economy
- Staggered work days to increase plant capacity by 45 per cent and to level the weekend peaks suffered by the hospitality and transportation industries and their customers
- Round-the-clock business activity and staggered shifts to multiply capacity by a factor greater than two and to level the rush-hour peaks suffered by commuters, people eating out, and the transportation and restaurant facilities that serve them.