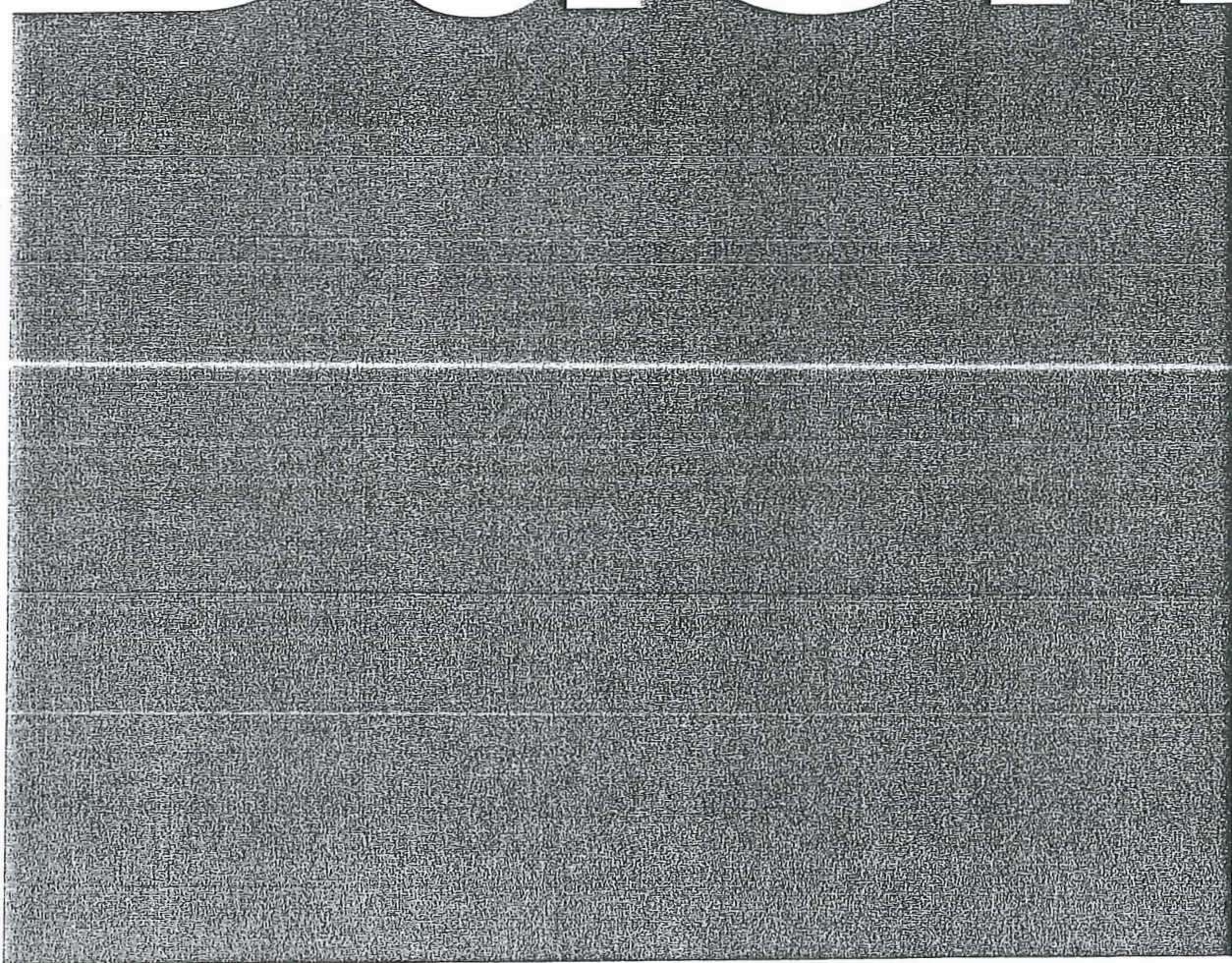


# defector from the Bush





US officials held as an article of faith that any American wishing to give up her or his membership in the club was either insane, drunk or stoned – or a combination of all three.

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### AMERIKA III

Av Michael Seltzer

Though this is a true story, I begin with *The Trial* – a classic of fictional storytelling. Kafka's tale is more than an account of Josef K's nightmarish experiences within a maddening bureaucratic system. Also it contains a tiny parable *Before the Law* about a little man trying to enter a system. But his way is blocked, forever it turns out, by a giant doorkeeper who keeps the door firmly shut. During the past four years, I have often recalled this tiny tale within a tale. Like Kafka's little man, I too have had to deal with many doorkeepers. But unlike him, I have been trying to exit rather than enter a system. And in contrast to him, I finally got through and can count myself today as one of the most recent citizens of Norway.

For me, this process took four years of writing letters, consulting lawyers and dealing with officials of all sorts. The reason for all this work is a simple one. Unlike Kafka's little man trying to get in, I met doorkeepers trying their hardest to keep me from getting out of God's country by giving up my citizenship in the

United States of America.

WHEN I FIRST HEARD of the long march through the bureaucracy from my political friends back in the 1960s, little did I suspect how bizarre my own march was going to be. The Chinese, I'm told, view survivors of the Long March as possessing a certain kind of personality endowing them with a special aura. Surely, one's self has to be transformed by slugging through some of the world's most rugged terrain for thousands of miles while fighting off enemies attacking on all flanks.

While Mao and his followers had to fight off ambushes on all sides from enemies ranging from bandits, defectors in their own ranks, war lords and organised armies, I had a much easier time of it. While Mao's marchers never knew who next was to ambush them, I never had doubts about the identity of my enemies. They all were seemed poured from the same mould and shared identical mindsets. Though I can not profess to be a mind reader, one reason I could grasp much of what went on in their heads was because their attitudes and beliefs were so depressingly familiar. To paraphrase Walt Kelly, a subversive cartoonist commentator of the McCarthy era in the US: I saw the enemy and it was me!

THROUGHOUT OUR SCHOOLING, all of us had begun each school day by solemnly pledging our loyalty to the United States of America. Further the solemnly intoned under God in the oath underscored what we were constantly taught: Americans were the privileged few chosen to live in a land divinely destined to lead and if

need be police all those unfortunate enough not to be American.

Since God had assigned us a place at the head of the table, we were dutybound to repay Him for his goodness by fighting against the forces of evil wherever and whoever these might be. This sounds good, we learned, if one says it real fast and does not think too much about it. The main practical problem, however was how fast the forces of evil and good kept shifting. Thus at one moment, the good guys were all those Cubans fortunate to enjoy the benevolence of our good friend ex-Sergeant Batista. But then on New Year's Day of 1958, we woke to discover that those nice waitresses, bellhops, pimps and prostitutes who had been happily serving us had been transformed suddenly into evil others. Castro had turned Cuba into a devilish dagger aimed at our heart from only 90 miles away. The Cuban problem, however, was just one of a multitude of changes confusing our divine mission. All around us, our (and God's) friends had this nasty habit of turning into our enemies. One day Saddam was a kind of male Mother Theresa standing firm on our side to stem the crazed hordes of Iranians determined to spread evil throughout the Mideast. Then one day, we awoke to be told that this ingrate who our CIA had helped to power was now a Hitler ravaging Kuwait, even though his actions weren't much different than what he had done while gassing and otherwise slaughtering the Kurds and others in his own country.

EVIL, one was taught as an American, was like quicksilver and could take on many

# Clearly, God had picked Americans to be his most dependable allies because of our energetic a

guises. I remember listening and laughing uncontrollably to an American colonel solemnly intoning how Nicaraguans with Sandanistas in power were evil crewmen on the landlocked aircraft carrier now threatening our shores. They had become so when their country was no longer run for the benefit of the our very good friends, the Somozas whose education at West Point had been paid for by our tax dollars. Allendes Chileans, we were taught, were truly an evil bunch, but quickly became our good neighbours when lead by Pino-chet and his band of angels. Greece without «our» Colonels in charge was a den of iniquities. Iran without our good buddy the Shah was peopled by devils that even had the affront to attack our embassy; and so it went all over the world. Good guys become bad, and bad good, and then bad again. God, we were informed in our schools and by our media, bestowed good and evil to the peoples of the world in unpredictable ways. Thus Americans always had to be vigilant to the constant shifts of good and evil in the global terrain. One day we were supplying the Tali-ban with Stinger missiles to shoot down our evil enemies, but the next day they were firing them at us. One day, Noruegia was our kind of guy, and the next he was an evil devil from whom the Panamanians were to be freed – by us.

**CLEARLY,** God had picked Americans to be his most dependable allies because of our energetic and hard-working ways. The degenerate French, effete Britons, untrustworthy Germans and hordes of layabouts in the Third World quite simply lacked the qualities He admired in us.

In such a constantly changing world,

it was no wonder that loyalty became a paramount concern among Americans. If the forces of evil could be so cunning in infiltrating and infecting the ranks of our friends, they also represented an omnipresent danger in our own midst. The fact that many Americans were first, second and third generation transplants from countries reckoned at different times to be unsympathetic to the master plan of Gods country compounded the problem. Thus all American youngsters were schooled to believe that if we were to meet this challenge, we needed extreme measures carried out by corps of specialists skilled at weeding out evil in our own garden. The answer to our special gardening problem, we learned in school, was the FBI assisted by others trained to detect disloyalty and treachery in Gods country.

**AS FAR AS I CAN TELL,** only American youngsters and German children under Hitler have been raised to deify their secret police. Becoming an American meant to be taught that our secret police were incorruptible, infallible, and always on the side of God, liberty and justice for all except those found to be disloyal. This group could include our own family members, friends, neighbours, teachers and other Americans as well as foreign subversives masquerading as our friends. As Ronald Reagan made perfectly clear, Margaret Thatcher in all her divine ways was nearly one of us. But thanks to God and His servants in the FBI, the evil intentions of her compatriots Charlie Chaplin, John Lennon and other false friends from Britain have been revealed.

Loyalty in the US begins at infancy.

Both my sons as toddlers had to sign loyalty oaths in order to receive their US passports. Since infants lack certain basic penmanship skills, I was required to sign their names and add by father to the various loyalty oaths presented to them. Although I am now officially a disloyal ex-American, I can gain some comfort in having fathered progeny who attested while still in nappies to the fact that they had never advocated the violent overthrow of the government of the United States of America. In addition, my sons are on record as never having been members of the many groups and organisations found subversive by the US government. I recall pointing out to a US consular official that it was ridiculous for the toddler I bore on my arm to swear that he had never been a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish Civil War.

**FOR GOOD MEASURE,** I asked how a group of volunteers fighting for the legally elected government of Spain against a fascist army backed by Hitler and Mussolini was somehow a threat to the United States. His narrow-eyed, tight-lipped response – one I was to meet many times in the years to come – was to the effect that if I thought it was ridiculous for a baby to sign such an oath, I could kiss good bye forever his chances of receiving a US passport.

Given officials bent on weeding out disloyal Americans from the nappy brigade, it should not be too difficult to imagine how they construed my request to renounce allegiance to Gods own country. As I learned the first time I tried this at the US embassy in Oslo, my



# d hardworking ways.

attempt to satisfy the final bureaucratic requirement necessary for me to become a Norwegian citizen was seen by American officialdom as proof positive of my disloyalty. By simply asking for this document, I became at once an enemy of the United States. A recruit to the forces of evil, the lowest of the low, a traitor to the cause of all that is right, just and blessed by God...

...but I am getting ahead of my story.

It really begins on a morning in late spring of 1997 when my disloyalty was first officially identified. Nearly all the Americans I encountered seem united in preventing me from leaving the club of which we were all members. As they single-mindedly toiled at this task and divested me of my initial innocence, I came to view the US embassy in Oslo as a kind of Dantean lair arranged in the pioneer tradition as wagons in a ring.

**ON THE OUTER EDGE STOOD WATCHMEN** recruited right out of Kafka. I still remember my first sightings of them as I stood freezing in a queue lined up by the side door of the US embassy in Oslo. Their main job as best I could see as the queue inched closer was to stop each person, inspect them visually, make some sort of assessment and then send them one by one through either the left or the right doors they guarded. While I and those around me were showing signs of impending frostbite, these guards seemed to glow with the kind of warm self-satisfaction and arrogance found I suspect among the jackbooted reception committees greeting arrivals to Auschwitz, the

Gulag and maximum security prisons.

As I moved steadily closer to them, I found myself flashing to scenes from concentration camp films as I watched them direct some persons through the right door of the embassy and others through the left. Finally, I reached their platform and presented myself. My presence they studiously ignored until one of them stuck a steely finger in my direction and then pointed out the door to the left.

There I immediately met two copies of the watchmen outside. At once, I was in a episode of Cops: one frisked me while the other dumped out the contents of my small knapsack into a plastic bin and began to comb through the few papers and books deposited there. He then instructed me to refill my sack and directed me through a metal detector where I met still another clone who took one of my papers (a grocery list, I recall) and inserted it into a slot on a black fridge size box topped with one green and one red light. The machine made a plinking sound and the green light lit for an instant. Later I found out this machine was to detect residue from explosives. He then returned my list to me and directed me through still another door whose opening and closing he controlled.

I entered and relaxed somewhat partly for having survived the guard, partly because the room was warmer, and partly because I foolishly believed in my early innocence that I was soon to get my certificate. Here two new queues had already formed up in front of two glass cubicles. Though there were now many of us standing, waiting and thawing in the queues, the speed with which we were now moving was quite brisk.

Sitting behind the glass at the end of my queue was a woman: though not in uniform, her posture and facial expression suggested some kinship with the gatekeepers I had just encountered.

I now could see what was the cause of the brisk pace of the line. As each person in my queue presented herself or himself to the woman, she inquired of them their reason for wanting to enter God's country. Clearly the answers she received to did not satisfy her and shaking her head emphatically no, she beckoned to the next in line. As I watched my asylum-seeker queue mates listening to her curt rejection, their smiles disappeared and their shoulders slumped. The statue of Liberty notwithstanding, the US of A no longer had place for the tired and huddled masses yearning to be free. Their dreams of a Hollywood America denied, they trudged dejectedly out of the building.

Finally, I was beckoned forward. When asked the standard question, I replied that I was there to renounce my citizenship. This clearly was not what the cubicle woman had expected and it upset her standard head shaking and nay saying ritual. She looked intently at me and asked me to repeat myself, which I did. Upon hearing me, she abruptly left her post and walked further back into the office landscape behind her. Here she beckoned to several other women and men who abandoned their desks to join her in a whispered conversation all the while darting glances in my direction. After a time, she returned to the window with a purposeful stride and set to her jaw.

# When I turned and asked: –Have I forgotten something? She screamed: – Remember, don't get arrested k

She began by informing me in an officious voice that I was required to fill out a declaration about my tax situation. – And then I get my renunciation certificate? I asked.

Shaking her head in a familiar mode, she then announced that I would have to schedule to be interviewed with a very busy consular official. Again I inquired:

– And then I get my certificate?

Once again, she shook her head no and the beginnings of a mean little smile appeared on her face.

– No, she added, once the tax papers are properly filled out and the notes of the interview typed up, they will be sent with your passport to Washington.

At this point, I began to get the drift and pointed out that she surely knew I needed my passport with its permits for residing and working in Norway. Her smile then became even meaner and broader.

–That's our rule, she sneered, no exceptions!

Trying a new tack, I suggested that I supposed I could live without my passport for a few weeks. Upon hearing that her smile became truly malicious and she intoned officiously:

–The minimum time needed in Washington is 3 months.

Now beginning to see the light, I pointed out to her that she knew foreigners could not reside legally in Norway without their passports for such a long time and that she was requiring me to break Norwegian law. This triggered a triumphant smile from her. Out of curiosity, I asked her:

– What is the maximum time my pas-

sport could be held in Washington?

Upon hearing that, her smile stretched from ear to ear and she snidely remarked:

– It doesn't say anything about maximum time in our rules.

–So, my passport could stay in Washington forever? I inquired.

– Perhaps it could, she said and it was clear from her tone that I had just made her day a very nice one.

**RECOVERING FROM THE VISIT**, I recalled the words of Saul Alinsky, the union and community organiser of my youth, who said if you make the enemy live up to his own rules, you beat him every time. Then and there, I resolved to fight the US with its own weapons and so began my long march through the American and Norwegian bureaucracies. It would be nice to say I was a skilled navigator weaving my way through these systems. What kept me from losing my sanity was the help provided me by a work comrade. She was a lecturer in law and had been for many years an official working to secure equal rights for women in Norway. In the following four years under her protective wing and with her guidance, I learned to think and act tactically.

**INITIALLY**, we tried unsuccessfully to convince the Norwegian government that the catch-22 of the passport in Washington was the cornerstone of the US governments maltreatment of those who dared to leave the club.

In the beginning, we found after much correspondence that this tack did not work because Norwegian bureau-

crats were all too rational. They believed the process I was caught up in should be a simple and straightforward one involving the procurement of properly attested documents. Though we tried to persuade them otherwise, they had a long running problem of not being able to comprehend that bureaucrats working in other systems would be so concerned with such emotional issues as disloyalty and treachery.

At one point, the Norwegian bureaucracy sent me a letter rescinding their original acceptance of me as a prospective citizen because they believed I was trying to avoid their policy of not honouring dual citizenship by holding on to my American citizenship! This triggered another long round of letter writing and ultimately I received notification that I was still eligible for citizenship and would become a citizen of Norway once my loss of US citizenship was formalised. This put me back at square one.

**NOT LONG AFTER** the Oklahoma City bombing, I came across an article describing how various survivalist and militia groups in the US were renouncing their citizenship as some kind of symbolic way of distancing themselves from a nation they viewed as controlled by various foreign powers.

This prompted me to search the internet for references to renunciation of US citizenship and I eventually came over a very helpful website. This appeared to be the obsession of a webmaster whose sole goal in life was to get the facts right so as to arrive at the truth. Luckily for me, his



# because we won't help you!!!

archives contained a reference about renouncing ones US citizenship. According to the webmaster, US officials held as an article of faith that any American wishing to give up her or his membership in the club was either insane, drunk or stoned – or a combination of all three. Thus it was the job of the consul to make an assessment of the applicant's mental condition.

Finally, I learned that sending the passport to Washington for an indeterminate time was also part of the ordeal to which potential club-leavers were subjected. As the webmaster succinctly put it, the tax papers, consular report and the passport were to be kept in Washington where «in the fullness of time» the certificate of renunciation might be issued.

I made a zerox copy of this description and wrote an accompanying letter to the Norwegian authorities. I pointed out to them that my situation was not unique but rather a common plight of all Americans foolhardy enough to try to jump ship. The Norwegian authorities replied and instructed me to send their 3-page letter to the US embassy. In it, they reiterated I satisfied all the requirements but one – the certificate of renunciation – for becoming a Norwegian citizen. Normally, the officials noted, this was a requirement for all those seeking Norwegian citizenship. However, it had come to their attention that some unspecified consulates in Norway made unreasonable demands and/or required bribes (one thousand dollars was given as an example) in order to issue these certificates. Therefore, the Norwegian govern-

ment wrote that they would give me a dispensation from the requirement if the US continued to remain adamant about sending off my passport to Washington.

Joyfully, I stuffed a copy of this letter into an envelope together with a note asking the US embassy to let me know whether or not they still wished to send my passport to Washington.

One month later, I opened my mailbox to find in a 3 by 3-inch envelope, with a tiny note inside informing me that I could come to the embassy to fill out «lots of papers» and be interviewed by a consul. If I wish to do this, I was instructed to telephone the embassy to arrange an interview time. Almost as a near forgotten postscript, the note ended with the following: «Since your passport expires in 2005, you may retain it while these papers are being processed.»

And so, more than 3 years since I first paid a visit to the embassy, I again found myself in a new queue of pilgrims lined up to journey to the promised land. The consul gave me a batch of official documents to read and sign. One, I remember, indicated that those who gave up their US citizenship lost approximately half of the pensions due them from the United States upon retirement. Clearly, one had to pay a price for such disloyalty. The consul then asked me to raise my hand and swear an oath. As best I can recall, it had something to do with the fact that I was aware of what I was doing. This, I thought, was the one aimed at documenting whether I belonged among the crazies, junkies and drunks the US believed were so deran-

ged or otherwise mind-altered as to desire to leave God's own club.

**IN ONE WAY**, it was a relatively normal meeting though both of us, I felt, were somewhat on edge. The reason for that I'm fairly certain had to do with the physical layout of the meeting. The consul was positioned on one side of a bullet-proof glass wall and I on the other. Throughout our meeting, we passed documents back and forth in a stainless steel contrivance. The glass and steel were there to protect US officials in the event I made a crazed lunge to bite off their noses, ears or other protuberances.

After some time, my name was called and I presented myself to the woman in the glass booth. She then asked me for a list of all the places and times I had lived in the United States. This I gave to her. Next, she gave me a few extra documents to sign. When I returned the last of these to her, she asked:

– Where is the document showing the reasons why you are renouncing your citizenship?

Though I was tempted to recite «let me count the ways»; I pointed to the box I had checked on one of the documents I had provided her where I indicated that I did not wish to give any reason for my decision. This appeared to perturb her and I saw the beginnings of the standard mean little smile.

– All right, now give me your passport so it can be sent to Washington with these papers, she said.

Upon hearing this, I produced from my pocket the 3 by 3 note, held it proudly

# What I had thought of as a bureaucratic process was, in fact, a divorce.

against the glass so she could see it and innocently inquired:

– Do you know the person who signed this?

She narrowed her eyes, read it and emitted some grumpy sounds. She then said: – Well, it is going to take some time to get this work done. You may be hearing from us in 4 or 5 months.

I smiled and turned to leave. As I was halfway across the waiting room, she shouted my name. When I turned and asked:

– Have I forgotten something?

She screamed:

– Remember, don't get arrested because we won't help you!!!

I then walked through the waiting room looking like Moses in the Red Sea as the ranks of those sitting there quickly parted to give me lots of space.

**AS I EXITED THE EMBASSY**, I suddenly experienced my moment of insight. At once, I finally saw what my years of struggling with the US have been all about. I knew it with the kind of dead certainty one hears at AA meetings in the voices of those recalling exactly when they realised that alcohol controlled their lives. Some AA members claim that these epiphanic moments were accompanied by the voice of a higher power.

My moment, however, was accompanied by the voice of Randy Newman. I heard in my head his song *Political Science* where he laments that since no one in the world likes us Americans, we should bomb them all. Though most of the world was to be atomically eradicated,

the song singled out South America as specially deserving annihilation since «they stole our name!» The song dovetailed with what had been there the whole time and I had been too slow on the uptake to see: what I had thought of as a bureaucratic process was, in fact, a divorce.

Clearly, I wasn't a criminal in the eyes of the woman behind the desk and her colleagues who would end up crying in vain for US help when I got caught for my misdeeds. Instead, I was a criminal because I rejected the love the US had for me. Like the spouse fearful of abandonment, the United States of America had been trying to prevent me from leaving those who loved me so much. Unlike other empires, Americans do not simply wish to rule the world; they want all those they rule to love them as well! And so, like all other rejected lovers wishing to preserve an image of themselves as desirable, they had to find something evil or criminal among those who earlier had been the objects of their desire, but who cruelly left them. In my epiphanic mood, I understood that Randy Newman's refrain lets drop the big one and there will no one left to blame us should really end with – «and there'll be no one left to reject our love!»

As Noam Chomsky has pointed out, the United States has shown an extraordinary talent in creating enemies among those who have escaped from American domination. Once countries have freed themselves from the embrace of God's country, Americans treat them as criminals and allies of whatever happens to be the evil flavour of the month. As such,

they then represent a threat against which the US can then justifiably defend itself by invading, dropping bombs, arranging coups, financing mercenaries, and mining harbours – just to name a few.

**FIVE MONTHS LATER** a period I would have been without a passport had I lost my battle – I received a call from the US embassy informing me that my certificate was waiting there. I was informed that if I still wished to receive this document, I was required to bring my passport to have it invalidated. And so on the 16th day of January 2001, exactly four days before the inauguration of the half-witted son of a former president and CIA chief and brother of the governor of the state ultimately electing him, I arrived at the embassy for what I hoped was my last visit. I did my queue time, entered the building, assumed the basic search position, and received the certificate declaring to the world that I was no longer an American. Its backside included, however, a notice that I had a one-year period of grace to return to the one who loved me if I decided to change my mind.

I sent the certificate to the Norwegians on that day and two weeks later received notice that I was now a citizen of Norway and subject of King Harald. Two weeks later, I received my new passport and for the first time in my life now can travel to any country in the world. Cuba is first on my list since I had been prohibited since 1958 from travelling there while I was still carrying a passport issued by a country proclaiming itself for all to hear to be the freest in the world.