
'Volunteerism'

A case study: the Guardian Angels

by Charles E. Herbert

Invoking memories of Calvin Coolidge and the United Way, President Reagan went on television to boost "volunteerism" as a remedy for insufficient public services. It seems that the cowboy in Reagan had been sold another "free enterprise" scheme that will in fact undercut business as well as organized labor. The salesman in this case is the American Enterprise Institute, (AEI) which promotes the "privatization" of the social services the government has provided since the industrial revolution of the last century. Because they are advocates of the "post-industrial society," AEI savants such as Milton Friedman, Arthur Burns, and Murray Weidenbaum have no qualms about undermining the services and infrastructure upon which American industry relies. Along with AEI, the *Washington Post*, Mobil, New York's Fordham University, Lazard Frères, and Equitable Life Insurance are among those bankrolling the campaign.

Their pilot project at the moment is the "Guardian Angels" citizens' crime patrol, whose successful test-marketing in New York City has led to the introduction of similar groups in 22 cities. The groups which prowl the cities' subways, are made up of gang members and others reliably reported to be still-practicing criminals.

Standing on Capitol Hill July 11, Curtis "The Rock" Sliwa, the 26-year-old head of the Alliance of Guardian Angels, Inc., addressed reporters after testifying before a youth violence subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Sliwa posed in front of a formation of Angels uniformed in army fatigues, T-shirts, insignias, and red berets. The *Washington Star* was quick to note the storm-trooper image.

Two days after Sliwa's appearance, the *Baltimore Sun* endorsed a free enterprise zone for the city, and praised the Guardian Angels, in terms reminiscent of 1933 in Germany: "In practice, the swagger and red berets of the Guardian Angels bring feelings of comfort to people in New York. More than two years later they show staying power and the group is now franchising its label where the market—a sense of helplessness at street crime—is right. Baltimore is next."

The sponsors

A probe into the wiring of the Angels uncovers the AEI's "Mediating Structures Project," run since 1975

by Jesuit Michael Novak. Its purpose is to promote "volunteer associations" as a substitute for municipal employees. The project has also been "mediating" the creation of free enterprise zones free of government regulation, and, eventually, free of all government "interference," including provision of services. And although the rhetoric of the Angels has shifted from "world revolution" to "free enterprise," their crime patrol is a vigilante squad and protection racket, and worse. "Do you want to know what the Guardian Angels are?" asked an official of New York's Transit Patrolmen's Benevolent Association. "Did you ever hear of Adolf Hitler?"

Are these what the President meant by volunteerism? The administration refers inquiries on volunteerism to Robert O. Woodson, current head of AEI's Mediating Structures Project. In July 1981, Guardian Angels' leader Curtis Sliwa, joined forces with the AEI and Woodson in a conference of gangs in Los Angeles. Before that, the connection had been kept secret. Nizam Fattah, chairman of New York's Inner-City Roundtable of Youth (ICRY) and one of Woodson's subordinates, comments: "Half the members of the Guardian Angels are my gangs, the Crazy Homicides, Savage Skulls, and Ching-a-Lings. They shift between Sliwa and me." ICRY was founded by a friend of Ayatollah Khomeini: Ramsey Clark. Since December 1980, Woodson, Falaka Fattah of the Philadelphia House of Umoja—an outfit cited by President Reagan—Nizam Fattah of ICRY and others have appeared in dozens of cities, including Hartford, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C., recruiting to the AEI volunteerism projects, setting up tax-exempt incorporated "former gangs," usually as "security companies."

The big push for recruitment to the AEI operation came after a December AEI conference in Washington, featuring representatives of the White House, the Rockefeller Foundation, the National Urban Coalition, ABC News, and the *New York Times*. There was also a different class of speakers: Flint Augusto of the South Bronx Ching-a-Lings motorcycle gang and Sister Falaka Fattah of the House of Umoja, tied to 88 Philadelphia youth gangs. James Hargrove, head of the National Black Patrolmen's Association, spoke on the "security companies" that he has incorporated in New York and Philadelphia. His Diego-Beekman Security in the South Bronx is staffed primarily by "Savage Skulls" and "Crazy Homicides" at \$3.75 an hour. The area is intended to become one of the first free enterprise zones pending state legislation.

Hargrove says: "We hope to put organizations like ICRY out of business, recruiting their members with jobs; this approach is growing because law enforcement agencies will never see the heights of manpower of their heyday, due to the economic crisis."

Anthony Francaviglia, a member of the Angels' corporate board from Bankers' Trust, indicates he is already lining up funds to incorporate the Guardian Angels' "escort and security crime patrol" in New York City's middle-class Parkchester Housing Project. Francaviglia is president of the business association there.

On Feb. 1, New York Lt. Gov. Mario Cuomo keynoted a Guardian Angels fundraiser. Attending were state and city officials, leading Jesuits, associates of mob attorney Roy Cohn, representatives from Equitable Life, Chase Manhattan, and Brown Brothers Harriman. That was the basis for New York City Mayor Edward Koch's public sanctification of the Angels in May.

Modus operandi

This political operation forced the New York City police to establish formal liaison with Sliwa's shifting and uncheckable Angels. Previously, police had conducted a wave of arrests of Guardian Angels on charges including violations of citizens rights in "citizens' arrests."

Everything points to the conclusion that there exists no traceable membership list for police to work with. Transit police union leaders say "It's ludicrous to believe they could perform the job of a trained police officer. They do not contribute in any positive way to the criminal justice system. Half of them probably have criminal records." Despite the Mayor's claims that membership lists are available to police, Denis Ahern of PBA says, "There's no identification available to us."

The way this "shifting membership" operates is highlighted by several cases. In April Sliwa's appointee as head of the Guardian Angels in Westport, Connecticut, Tom Coyne, was found with a bullet through his head after he had publicly criticized Sliwa's leadership. Sliwa claimed Coyne had never been in his organization, but was caught in the lie when the *Free Press* produced photos and witnesses of the two together in uniform, during interviews. Similarly, in August New York City Guardian Angel Malcolm Brown was shot through the head at the scene of a Brooklyn mugging. Accounts of the incident are hazy, because all witnesses were provided through the Angels' informant networks. Until Mayor Koch stepped in to clean up the group's image by awarding Brown a citizen's commendation, Sliwa was forced to waffle on Brown's ties to the gang, first claiming Brown was "off duty" from the Angels, then calling him "a former member."

Sliwa also denied membership when Rhode Island State Police last month arrested three uniformed Angels on charges of car theft.

This is the group the AEI has promoted nationally. Whatever the President's mental image of volunteerism, it shows the phenomenon in action.

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