

the homeless is largely of the "have-nots" peering in at the "haves." The nation splurged at Christmastime; the homeless could not afford food or shelter.

Since 1979 almost twelve million Americans working in manufacturing jobs have been displaced because of a globalized economy, and the evolution of the U.S. into a service economy is daily displacing individuals from a steady paycheck to a soup line. A newspaper article said this about it:

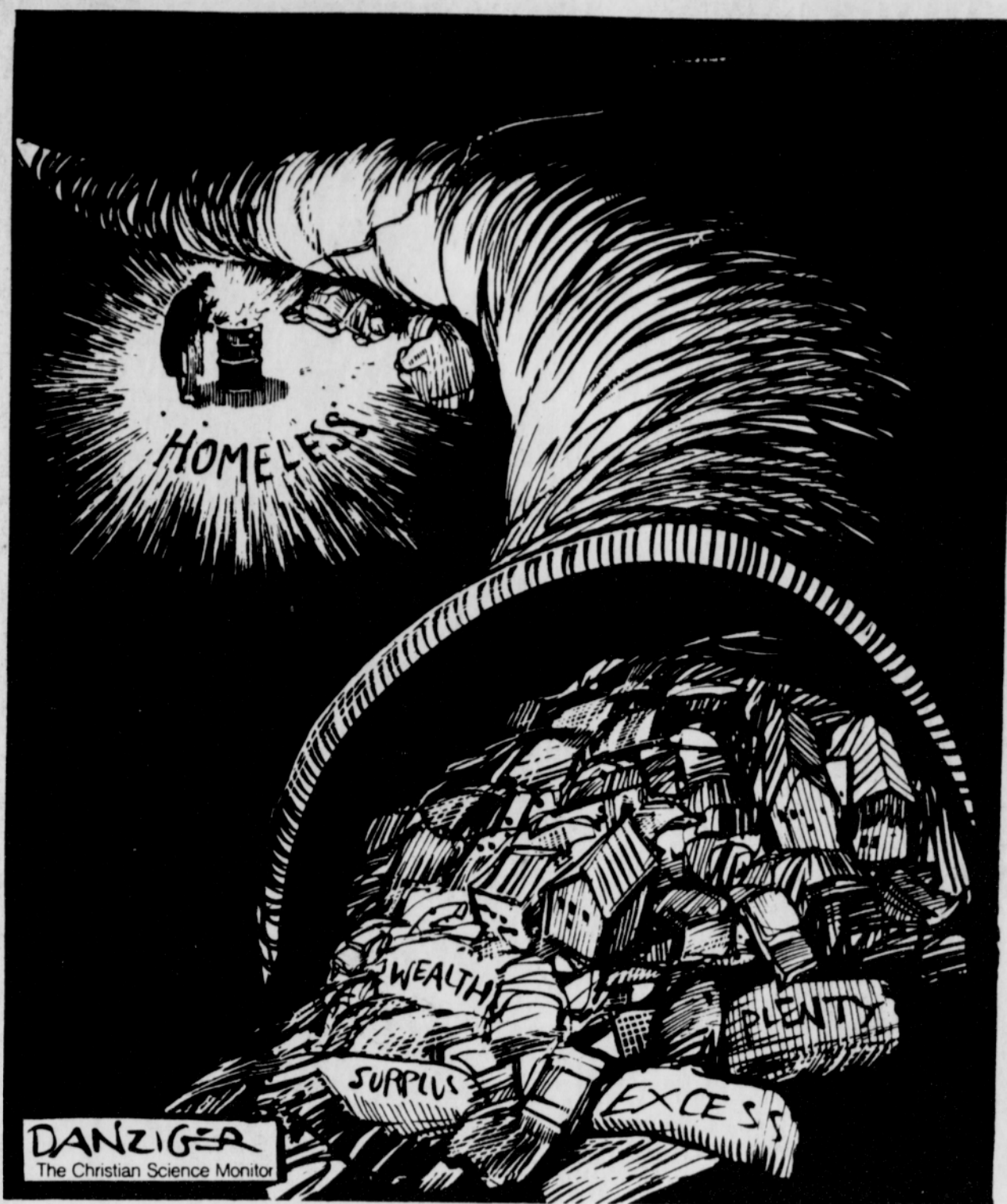
"Karl Marx predicted that capitalist society would eventually be torn apart by the conflict between a greedy bourgeoisie and a vast, rebellious proletariat. He did not foresee the emergence, within capitalism, of a mass middle class that would mediate between the extremes and create a stable social order. But with that middle class in apparent decline and with the extremes diverging further from each other, it would be easy to conclude that the Marxist vision at last fits America's future."

American farmers are killing themselves while the machinations of the corporate world writhe around America's farmlands, strangling to destitution thousands of small farm families, leaving them nothing but the highway and a swift kick.

The grim tale goes on and on. The problem of homelessness might not be reversed for a very long time. Today is the time to prepare for next year. We must respond, not only for the sake of the current homeless, but for ourselves also. We must get involved and help now because most of us are only a few paychecks from poverty. The corner any of us might find ourselves standing on could very well be just around the corner. Any of us might have to face the "intelligently refreshing knowledge that you are a ruined man," as P. T. Barnum said.

If anyone would like to help the homeless on the north Oregon coast with time, needed items, money or ideas, please contact one of the shelters listed. Last year there were no shelters; now we have three and all need our support. The shelters are:

Pioneer House Family Shelter, 861-1690.
Astoria Rescue Mission, 325-6243.
Tillamook Community Council Shelter, 325-6513.



DANZIGER

HOMELESSNESS KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES

by Richard Meyer

A small band of us from the Burnside Community Council in Portland were fortunate to attend a conference of the National Coalition For the Homeless in Washington, D.C. late last September. The Coalition is the center of a growing movement to ensure that people without homes in the United States get decent shelter, food and health care. It is made up of a myriad of groups, formal and informal, publicly and privately funded, both new groups and those long depended upon by people in poverty.

The Coalition surveyed twenty-one cities in preparation for conference discussions. In every case the message was bleak. While the ranks of the homeless continue to swell, with

an average of twenty-five percent over the past year, the gap between the need for emergency shelter and the resources to provide it widens. And while the causes of homelessness deepen, its effects continue to spread across demographic boundaries: families with children are now the fastest growing segment of the nation's homeless population.

These conclusions are based on reports by dozens of shelter operations, advocates and city officials around the country. Those working on the front lines reported this grim reality: shelters already full beyond capacity in summertime, turning away dozens nightly; increases in the number of shelters that are still unable to meet the need; waiting lists for subsidized housing that are years long; children growing up living in cars, abandoned buildings and dangerous welfare hotels.

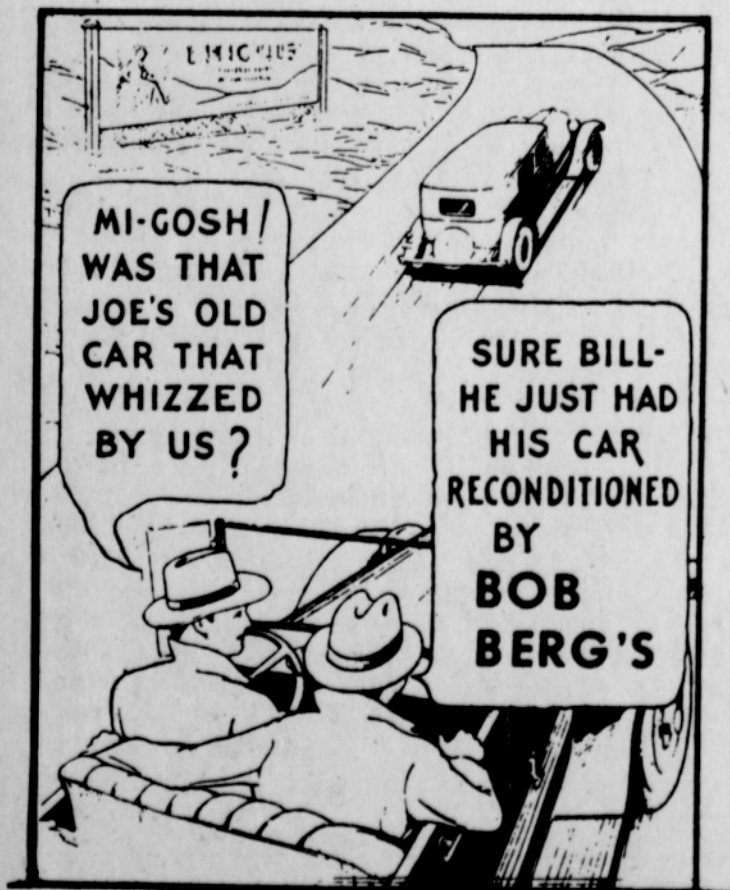
At this conference, the same basic causes were cited; primary among them was the extreme scarcity of affordable housing. Again and again, those working on the front lines described the effects of the recent massive cutbacks in federally subsidized housing. Again and again they cited the cuts in federal benefits programs that leave people unable to both pay the rent and put food on the table. Again and again, they spoke of forgotten people like the chronically mentally ill. Again and again, participants in the conference told of local efforts unable to meet immediate emergency needs, much less respond to the underlying causes of what has become a national scandal.

We were reminded at the conference that homelessness is a national problem, yet the federal government has virtually no policy to address it. Homelessness is a national crisis, yet the current Administration denies its very existence. No one is for homelessness, yet homelessness is the inevitable result of policies set and acquiesced in at the national, state and local levels of government.

If there was one major challenge that was a common thread throughout the conference for us, it was to advocate more. Shelter facilities like Baloney Joe's and the West Hotel in Portland should keep giving the bare basics, but on a clearly emergency basis, not to be confused with an institutional, longterm, and decent provision of shelter, food and health care. Connections with other helping people and agencies are vital, but less to grease the lines of client referral and agency interdependency than to get the word out. The general public simply does not know enough about homelessness. Our ultimate enemy is born of this ignorance, itself a product of distance from the reality of suffering and its sources.

We must look beyond what finally pushed each person onto the street; we must give a searching examination to the policies and indifference that sustain such cruelty. Only when we put our diverse understandings and talents together can we take whatever simplicity, patience and courage we have and begin to alleviate the unspeakable injustices that is homelessness.

Richard Meyer is the executive director of the Burnside Community Council in Portland.



IMPORT AUTO CENTER
Parts & Service for Imported Vehicles
733 Ocean Way, Seaside 738-8883

