

THE INVISIBLE ADVOCATE:
RICHARD V. GILBERT

by

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THE CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB • 1984

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History is a game played by Historians. Recently, the players have taken to arguing about the limited number of pieces visible on the traditional board. They (and we) have learned to do without the Kings and Queens. The more militant still list Clio herself on their rosters. Some point to Presidents and Prime Ministers; others to teams made up of the Great Social Forces. I am struck by the existence of a few inconspicuous figures of surprising influence, who are not listed on anyone's score-cards. Here for your consideration is the role of Richard Vincent Gilbert, one of the world's invisible men.

In a somewhat playful mood, I have been known to suggest that Dick Gilbert created a certain texture for this world in which we live. When in that mood, I may discourse on his virtues, and may make one or more of these claims: That it was Richard Vincent Gilbert, and not John Maynard Keynes, who initiated the practice of what we have come to call *Keynesian economics*. That Richard Gilbert was responsible for the American response to the so-called Missile Gap. That my favorite author among the secret artisans of FDR's speeches was Richard Gilbert. That Gilbert and his friends played an important role in the formation of the State of Israel. That the man who planned, and to a considerable extent implemented, the U.S. economic response to the Axis was R. V. Gilbert (and surely my auditors will grant that in that conflict, the economics of production, both civilian and military, were at least as important as the formal tactics of the military?). That a successful path toward the development of the world's underdevel-

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oped areas has already been demonstrated, in actual practice, and that Gilbert was the man who did so. And finally, that it was Richard Vincent Gilbert who laid the practical foundations of our modern mixed-economy version of the liberal state, beginning with the recognition of the government's obligation to maintain prosperity.

There is some truth to all this, apart from the exaggeration. There is no doubt in my mind, however, that it is Gilbert's anonymity that is the most striking part of the tale. After all, none of you has ever heard his name before. Behold the invisible man.

Dick Gilbert was born in Philadelphia, in 1902. To be slightly more accurate, the birth itself was recorded in Carmel, New Jersey, and the name on the certificate was Goldberg. At Ellis Island the family name, which had been Gaybord or Gaylbord, was misunderstood. The original was probably based on Gayl Bord, or "yellow beard." This may have been related to the albino strain which appeared in two of the five Gilbert siblings who survived to maturity. Three others did not live that long. Dick Gilbert was the product of a first-cousin marriage drawn from the Eastern European migration, which was then reaching its peak.

There was talk in those days of mental defectives flooding the country from Eastern Europe. It was foolish talk, sometimes by the powerful. New York City's Commissioner of Police argued that more than half of all crime to be found in that city was "foreign born." That may have been true.

Philadelphia still had the old Radical Library when young Master Gilbert gravitated to it, at the age of nine. By 1911, or earlier, he had already discovered the Anarchists, that world of Prince Kropotkin and Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, which some of the young seem bent on restoring to view. The Anarchists seemed attractive to him as people, but he rejected their views. At ten, the youngster read Karl Marx. He was soon a "semi-Marxist."

The explorations of childhood took Gilbert to the Anarchist colony in Stelton, New Jersey. Stelton was one of the institutions founded by Joseph J. Cohen, later an Editor of the *Frei Arbeiter Stimme*, the Free Worker's Voice. This J. J. Cohen had already been Administrator of the Ferrer School in New York City (the first progressive school in America; spiritual home to Will and Ariel Durant, Isidora Duncan, and John Sloan, among others). The year was 1915, and Gilbert was all of thirteen, when he met Joseph J. Cohen's daughter, Emma. Seven years later, he married her.

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He began college at the University of Pennsylvania, from which he almost dropped out, then transferred to Harvard. It is as Mr. Gilbert that he goes to college. The head of Philadelphia's Harvard Club had suggested that change of name. In doing so, Richard followed the lead of one of his uncles. Name changes in that era were common practice. Years later, for *Who's Who*, Gilbert recorded the lost original name. In the 1920s, Gilbert had been warned (politely), that Jewish economists would find slim pickings in academia.

He was still a "semi-marxist" when he arrived in Cambridge, "determined to confound the 'bourgeois economists.'" Although some of his contemporaries were to find or confirm a Communist faith while studying with the heirs of classical economics, Gilbert learned to reject Marx. The young student began to struggle with the creation of a twentieth century container for economic analysis, with which to replace the nineteenth century baggage that he had brought from home.

Gilbert was a Senior when he married Emma Cohen. Emma arrived at Radcliffe College knowing that *women* were not eligible for Harvard. In those days, Radcliffe was understood to be a place where young women went in order to absorb the words of Harvard instructors, but Emma was ignorant of the fact that such training was designed for the finishing of women who were young and single. *Married* women were unknown at Radcliffe. Having won a full four-year scholarship for tuition and room and board, she advised Radcliffe that she would not be needing the room. Consternation. Hurried consultation. The Deans of Radcliffe at last agreed to admit their first married female. (One Radcliffe Dean took the new Mrs. Gilbert aside to find out whether she knew anything about contraceptives. That communication was unlawful in the Massachusetts of 1922.)

In 1923, Mr. Gilbert received his B.A. from Harvard, *summa cum laude*, and his M.A. in 1925. As a graduate student, he supported himself by teaching. During its opening year, he was named one of the tutors at Harvard's Elliot House.

But he never published very much, which helps account for his later invisibility. Even the theses for his degrees were extracted from him with difficulty. *John Kenneth Galbraith, a contemporary of Gilbert's who later became Professor of Economics at Harvard, records of Gilbert that "Deeply averse to writing, he was thought to be completing his doctoral thesis at the rate of one page a week. Some said, one page a month."* Professor Bertram Gross of Syracuse once complained that

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he had hoped to write a biography of Richard Gilbert, but found that there were no records. It was all lost memoranda, missing speeches, unrecorded conversations. It was all ephemera; there was no way of setting down that kind of life. So we begin with the paradox of the academic who neither published nor perished, and whose brilliance was unquestioned.

Galbraith, then a fellow-instructor newly arrived from California, notes that of the scholars of his generation, "there was none like Richard Gilbert. We all accepted that he was more than a colleague, though of our age and academic rank. He was also our mentor. When Dick spoke, we listened, and in the end, agreed. When in trouble in an argument we cited Gilbert, and the opposition subsided. Of a late afternoon, we gathered at a tea shop, the Merrill, across from Widener, to listen and to admire Schumpeter. Dick, when he deigned to come, did so to correct him." In 1930, Gilbert received his Ph.D. from Harvard University.

A first child, Walter, was born in 1932. A daughter, Joanne, followed a year later. In 1936, in the midst of the Great Depression, Gilbert's own economic difficulties as a young instructor led him to send his wife and two children to stay for a while with his wife's father, in the Anarchist communal farm known as Sunrise Colony, in Michigan. Sunrise was one of those institutions which J. J. Cohen had founded; Cohen himself administered it. Later that year, Gilbert secured an appointment as a professor at the new Fletcher School of International Law and Diplomacy, where he taught International Trade and Finance, until 1939. This allowed Gilbert to recall his family back home to Massachusetts.

For fifteen years, from 1924 to 1939, Gilbert taught at Harvard. He assisted in teaching Economic History; served as a faculty participant with Alvin Hansen and John Williams in their seminar on "Fiscal Policy" at Harvard's Littauer School of Public Administration; and took over Williams' course in "Money, Banking and Business Cycles." He was a legendary teacher. The legend is that the students applauded every lecture.

The country remained in the throes of the Great Depression in 1939, despite five years of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, despite the Blue Eagle, and despite the National Recovery Administration. In that same year, a group of seven Harvard and Tufts economists published a small volume entitled *An Economic Program for American Democracy*. It is the only full-length, published book for which Gilbert is listed as an author. *"After Keynes," says Galbraith, this was "perhaps the single most influential tract of the New Deal years. I do not suppose that much of it was written by Dick. There was no need. Others were con-*

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tent to write what he said must be written." This small volume, along with a handful of articles, is almost all there is of the formal, printed record of Gilbert's views. One of the book's theses was that FDR, who had come into office with a promise to balance the budget, had come so close to actually doing so that he had snipped off the budding recovery. To our ears this proposition sounds somewhat obvious. President Richard Nixon, a former World War II employee of the Office of Price Administration (OPA), announced in the 1960s, "We are all Keynesians now." In the 1960s, this may have been true, but this story is still in the 1930s.

An Economic Program for American Democracy, proved much more convincing than had Keynes. Apparently, it fell into the hands of Harry Hopkins. In domestic policy, Hopkins was both *guru* and strong right arm to President Roosevelt, at least when Hopkins' health allowed it. The former social worker's formal, if misleading, title was that of Secretary of Commerce. It is said that Hopkins sought to find out which of the seven dwarves (for so they had become known) had actually written the tract; who was *really* responsible for its contents? It seems that Hopkins succeeded in piercing the cloak of invisibility; he was directed to Professor Richard Gilbert. Gilbert had already done some special studies for the Treasury Department, in Washington, in the Summer of 1937. While doing another study two summers later, Gilbert was approached by William Thorp, an economic consultant to Hopkins, and asked to see the Secretary. Hopkins wanted to set up and direct a team of economic advisers (initially, seven in all) to be based in the Department of Commerce, for which there was already a parallel in the Department of Agriculture. Harry the Hop (for so he had become known) asked Gilbert to leave Harvard and to become Special Assistant and Economic Adviser to the Secretary of Commerce. Mr. Gilbert goes to Washington, full-time, in 1939. The unemployment rate then stood at 17 percent, down from its 1933 high of 25 percent, but showing fewer employed than before the 1937-1938 recession. The new team began its work on August 1, 1939 (at 8:00 A.M., as Rod Riley recalls).

When Keynes' *General Theory* was reprinted, Galbraith provided a lead article in the *Sunday New York Times Book Review* entitled "How the Revolution Came to America." This article pointed out that Keynes himself had been unable to sell modern economic theory to the President of the United States. The professor assigned credit for the twentieth century's revolution in economics to a handful of people. He praised Alvin Hansen for his work

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in the university community, and also credited a tiny number of economists who had gone to Washington to preach the new faith, those who had put that vision of economics into practice. Of those, he carefully placed Richard Vincent Gilbert's name at the top of the list, and noted Gilbert's "peculiar" relationship with Harry Hopkins.

Shortly after that phrase appeared, I sought an explanation, although not from Richard. The story that was offered in response is here amended, based on Dr. Gilbert's own admissions.

Hopkins had been very ill in those days, and was often in the hospital. On one of those occasions, Richard took it upon himself to lobby for an increase in funds for the Works Progress Administration, the W.P.A. Somehow, Richard did not bother to drop a note to Hopkins suggesting the increase. Richard did, however, send a short note to each of several colleagues in *other* government agencies, arguing for the increase he had himself dreamed up. The proposed W.P.A. increase was apparently sufficiently substantial that when Lauchlin Currie delivered Richard's message to Marriner Eccles at the Federal Reserve Board, Eccles called a meeting. The participants were at a level which included the Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace. Eccles invited Richard to attend the meeting to discuss the proposal. *"Hopkins was in the hospital, so I didn't bother him with notes," pleads Gilbert.* In the discussion of Gilbert's suggestion, Wallace said that the Administration would be charged with trying to buy the 1940 election. "They will anyway," said Richard. "We might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb." The implicit, crucial question was whether Gilbert was speaking for himself, or for Hopkins—and therefore, for FDR. In the latter case, it was presumably "policy." Eccles went to the telephone, and insisted on reaching Hopkins in his hospital bed. Eccles told Hopkins what "your man here" was doing. There was a pause while Hopkins responded to Eccles, during which Richard stood petrified. But Hopkins agreed.

The legend is that Hopkins' actual words were: "If my man Gilbert says it, it's policy." Gilbert claims that this dictum is apocryphal, but admits the rest.

Stories of Gilbert's role sometimes reached the outside world, beyond the gates of power. There were apoplectic warnings from the Guardians of the Far Right, who from time to time dropped Gilbert's name into their tracts, as if they were describing one of the secret names of a powerful demon. More often he was simply grouped among those "Harvard professors" who were perceived as busily sinking the republic. In the meanwhile, inside the

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bureaucracy, within a relatively small group, Richard V. Gilbert's fame was spreading. There is some difference between being "invisible" and being utterly unknown.

"When he went to Washington he went into speech writing," says Professor Bertram Gross, "almost immediately, sensing that *that* was where the power was." For Hopkins, among other items, he drafted the Annual Report of the Secretary of Commerce for fiscal year 1939. *Walter Salant of the Brookings Institution has pointed out that in doing so, he wrote what was probably the first official expression of the government's responsibility for maintaining prosperity.* A variety of specific proposals were designed to go out over Hopkins' signature. But a proposal to Hopkins might induce months of study. He soon found a quicker route for the initiation of change.

Although Robert E. Sherwood and Judge Samuel Rosenman later wrote about their own roles in providing style for FDR's speeches, Richard Gilbert steadfastly remained silent for several decades with respect to his role in providing substance for several of those talks. In 1981, Galbraith's *Memoirs* reported that Gilbert had been chief of the research and speech writing team for FDR's campaign for a third term, with Sherwood, Hopkins and Rosenman providing "final elegance." In 1982, Gilbert felt that it had become appropriate to donate some of his papers to the Presidential Library at Hyde Park. There was some excitement, as researchers confirmed FDR's handwritten comments on early drafts of his speeches. Galbraith's memory, that of a formal Speech and Research Team over which Gilbert presided, does not jibe with Gilbert's own recollection. Gilbert confirms that he assigned G. Griffith Johnson to do the research which produced the Martin, Barton and Fish speech, but says that "Lots of people wrote speeches. Currie wrote some; Oscar Cox prepare the speech on lend-lease; there were dozens of others. . . . I wrote a number of them." He had no recollection of having headed a formal "team" with Galbraith and Milton Gilbert participating. On being pushed, he did recall having prepared the draft of a Democratic Party Platform, but does not recall how much of it survived the political process.

Writing speeches, as Gilbert admits, was a quick and easy way to help make policy. Most of his suggestions for Hopkins, however, were oral. Early in the war he stopped writing speeches for Hopkins, precisely because (a) it was easier to persuade Hopkins orally, and (b) he *had* found a quicker route to influence the President. It was easier to draft a brief suggestion into

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a memo, attach a draft speech, and send the combination on to Rosenman, "because that was the way his mind worked." If Rosenman liked it, and FDR bought it, it was policy; with the preliminary draft already on its way to the team of Sherwood as writer and Rosenman as editor. To go the alternate Hopkins route was to initiate a much slower process, complete with the possibility of adverse discussion. (Indeed, in one instance late in the Roosevelt Presidency, the speed of response to a Gilbert memorandum created an almost immediate Presidential Address which Gilbert was later to regret.)

Not all the proposals were successful. Some, such as the proposal for an Economic Bill of Rights (including the right to a job) still reverberate from time to time in the body politic, but are far from adoption. However, we are now ahead of our story. Please note that none of these ghost-writing activities provided high visibility, at any time.

In 1940, Richard Gilbert's base of operations was listed as Director Defense Economic Secretary of the Price Stabilization Division Advisory Commission to the Council of National Defense — a forest of nomenclature which Gilbert claims to be unable to elucidate. That organization, in turn, became the Office of Price Administration and Civilian Supply. With the coming of the war, Gilbert's title became simpler: Economic Adviser to the Administrator and Director of Research for the OPA.

One of Gilbert's main concerns, reports Salant, was to develop economic policies appropriate for war, as the approach of World War II became increasingly probable. Gilbert, together with Robert Nathan, led a group of Keynesians which sought incentives to increase plant capacity, and who argued that curtailment of public and private civilian spending was not appropriate in light of unrealized production potential. Presumably to help make that argument, Gilbert and his staff at OPA developed econometric methods of estimating that potential.

The OPA served as nerve center for the domestic economy in the war effort in World War II, complete with some 18,000 lawyers. As some of us may recall, price controls and rationing were central to the administration of the war-time economy which Richard Gilbert in considerable part designed.

This use of price controls was not welcomed by Senator Robert A. Taft, who was building his reputation as "Mr. Republican." Taft decided to make price controls a major political issue. A debate was arranged on a popular radio program, the *American Forum of the Air*. Gilbert took off his

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cloak, and his gloves, to deal with Taft directly. Going into that debate, Taft had a wonderful reputation as a debater, having attained his Ohio seat by defeating another competent orator, T. V. Smith. Just how persuasive Dick Gilbert could be, both Bob Taft and his listeners learned on that day. Taft, who had been misled by Gilbert's silence, was trounced. Afterwards, Gilbert managed to resurrect his obscurity.

If Gilbert's basic economic thesis had to withstand political enemies, it was not without theoretical, academic opposition as well. John Maynard Keynes had his own views on *How to Pay For the War*. Keynes and Gilbert were both well aware that inflation could be reached by an economy long before full employment was attained. Keynes' own prescription involved a system of forced savings. Gilbert favored a system of price and wage controls (with rationing in some areas). Walter Salant, a member of Gilbert's team who had studied with Keynes, arranged a face-to-face discussion of their differences between Keynes and Gilbert. This was held in the presence of some of Gilbert's staff, at Keynes' suite in the Mayflower Hotel. *"The difference of opinion was simple," writes Gilbert, if I read his scribble correctly. "Keynes thought the control of total demand through fiscal policy, including forced saving instead of increased tax, would prevent inflation. I tried to persuade him that the rapid increase of defense spending would or could drive prices up sharply at a point far below full employment, citing the experience of 1937 when prices rose sharply while one-sixth of the labor force was still unemployed. I proposed to avoid this by price and wage control, and keep up full steam in spending, pushing the increase in spending into income in production, and speeding the attainment of full employment."* Whether Keynes himself was convinced is not clear, but the British themselves later adopted a system of war-time controls, and we followed the Gilbert model.

For some reason, adoption of a degree of centralized economic policy-making in World War II has attracted little academic research, and even less popular analysis. By wartime, Gilbert points out, many of the people in the Roosevelt Regime knew and trusted each other. A continual barrage of Gilbert's memoranda, distributed among friends, on a wide variety of subjects, proved an effective leadership tool.

In dealing with Generals and Admirals, this civilian soon found that it was necessary to stress the consequences of the purported expertise which the military offered. To take one example, for 1942, the Navy sought to secure one million tons of ship production. Gilbert told the Navy they needed

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at least eight million tons. Admiral Land blew up. That's "ridiculous," said the Admiral: "We don't have the ways. If we had the ways, we wouldn't have the men. If we had the men, we wouldn't have the steel." But Gilbert had taken figures for submarine sinkings during World War I and superimposed them upon the World War II experience, and on the size of the U.S. Navy as it then stood. He pointed out that the Navy's production requests would soon create a situation in which we were losing more ships than we were building, and that America required, at the least, a rate of production equal to the rate of predictable sinkings. Gilbert, of course, won that debate; by the end of the war our ship-building production was up to twenty million tons.

On reading the above, Gilbert insisted that I was missing the point. "The point is, says Gilbert, that the military were not setting their sights high enough! The Nazis had embarked on a full employment policy in 1934 or so. I thought they were devoting about half their output to the military even before the war. I was trying during the defense period—after the war started but before we got in—to get the defense effort up. I had a study prepared showing the magnitude of a full employment, total defense effort in detail. I also sent Hopkins a study of current and projected rate of sinkings. The estimated rate of sinkings for 1940 was eight million tons. The target that year was only one million. In the discussion of the naval target, Admiral Land made the statement you quoted. I didn't discuss it with Land or others in the Navy. I sent a memo to Hopkins. I didn't win the debate at that point—only later—when sinkings confirmed our estimates."

There was a secondary effect to the Professor's work. He was training a generation of administrators to think in his terms. Neither Chester Bowles nor Leon Henderson, to take two examples from among the OPA Administrators, thought in Gilbertian terms until *after* he had worked them over. Somehow, he found time to draft speeches for Bowles and Henderson and former Senator Prentiss Brown, along with his other duties, but it was a very busy war for Dr. Gilbert. Gilbert (together with Roderick "Rod" Riley) later ghost-wrote a book for Chester Bowles, entitled *Tomorrow Without Fear*. So here was another case where Gilbert seemed to have found it easier to write something to be signed with someone else's name, than to come out with his own proposals directly. There is, however, no evidence whatsoever that Gilbert himself was ever aware of the extent to which his own actions appear to have courted "invisibility."

If he ever yielded to pride it was in the results of his war-time efforts: that he eventually guided the nation from 17% unemployment to zero unem-

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ployment, and then beyond full employment, all the way to a forty-four hour week, without inflation. And on top of that, he managed to fund the entire war effort without reducing civilian spending. *Although his nephew, Village Voice writer Joey Conason, put his finger on the crux of it all: "I think his only conceit," said Joey, "really was his modesty about all those things."*

As the war drew to a close, Gilbert (along with others) began to talk of the need to carry some degree of formal economic planning into the post-war period. While credited elsewhere with helping to create the Full Employment Act of 1946, he asserts that he did not participate in its drafting. Little more than the Council of Economic Advisers survived Congressional processing of that bill. But it marked a turning point.

By that time, FDR was dead, and Gilbert found President Harry Truman less than enchanting. Dr. Gilbert had now been in public service for almost seven years. There was a final quarrel with Bowles, and Gilbert resigned. Riley never forgot that the resignation came on the 22nd day of the second month of 1946, at 2:22 P.M.

Dr. Gilbert left to do private economic consulting, from 1946 to 1949, sharing an office with attorneys David Ginsberg and Harold Leventhal. Ginsberg, who served as Treasurer of the National Democratic Party, dubbed Gilbert "unquestionably the single most persuasive man in America." *Walter Salant agrees: "The combination of clarity of thought and decisiveness made him the most persuasive advocate I have known." Keynes wrote to J. M. Clark about Gilbert's "persuasiveness." Galbraith offers: "I never expected to win in contention with Dick, nor did anyone else."*

Richard participated briefly in the farce of trying to induce Dwight David Eisenhower to run as a Democrat in Truman's place in 1948; he joined Americans for Democratic Action in the year of its founding. He never even thought of joining the Progressive Party. He had fired Victor Perlo for insubordination *without recognizing his Communist role until later*, but he had known quite well what Paul Sweezy meant when he sent out German Christmas cards after the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

In 1948, Gilbert's classmate, Professor Seymour Harris, managed to secure a seven-page article from Gilbert, as part of an anthology entitled *Saving American Capitalism*. Miraculously, it was signed with Gilbert's own name. While the article is entitled *Controls*, it serves as a distillation of Gilbert's economic beliefs—and of his doubts. In a paragraph, he rejected the ideal types of pure anarchy and pure statism. Then he wrote:

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It is generally recognized that the operations of the free market within the framework of governmental intervention as we have known it result in serious and sometimes violent fluctuations of production, employment and income. It is also now generally recognized that mass unemployment is no longer politically, socially, or morally acceptable. Our problem, therefore, is to find that degree of intervention, that set of governmental controls, which will preserve the maximum degree of freedom of enterprise consistent with sustained full employment. And the test, as it has always been, is pragmatic. We must go as far as is required, but no further, to make our system work effectively and in the interest of all our people.

The style is lapidary. The article itself almost reveals that grace in discourse and mind which moved so many of those who heard him. Then he lapsed back into silence.

In 1948, he also showed an interest in the Palestine Problem. If he had remembered his Jewish origins before then, it had not been noticeable. Last year a reporter for the Los Angeles Times, doing an in-depth study of the Palestine question, determined to ferret out precisely *who* was responsible for the United States role in the formation of the State of Israel. The reporter came to the conclusion that a small group of then current and former federal administrators and advisers were primarily responsible for the creation of the State of Israel. His article explained that one night in 1948, at a dinner party, this small cabal decided that the time had come to urge a firm United States position in support of the potential state. The dinner group, he reported, proceeded to divvy up the federal bureaucracy for the purpose of making phone calls to key individuals. These messages, he suggested, had their effect. The list of participants offered in that fantastic story coincides perfectly with the names of Richard Gilbert's most regular house-guests. Richard Gilbert's own name is included in the reporter's list.

In attempting to validate this story, I talked to my wife, Richard's daughter. She tells me that she recalls her brother (Dr. Gilbert's younger son, then four years old) calling his father "Mr. Palestine," because the Professor seemed to be concentrated on that subject at that time. Neither Dr. nor Mrs. Gilbert have any memory of that. Nor have they any recollection of such a dinner party.

Before one decides that the reporter must have been mistaken, one might consider the case of President Hoover, who was found by an investigator to have no memory of the exceedingly liberal acts which Hoover himself had

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initiated in the latter portion of his administration. Forgetting his own actions enabled Hoover to repair the myth of himself as a consistent arch-conservative. Richard Gilbert has seldom shown any need for myths, but it is possible that Professor Gilbert's memory is faulty in this case. He has never been one to hold tight to the past. He has done what he has done, and moved on. Quite unnoticed.

For a short time after the formation of the State of Israel, Gilbert tried to help it, but soon dropped out of such activities. *Together with Abe Spinel and Max Swerin, Gilbert opened an office to try to push the establishment of a Jordan Valley Authority. He met with the Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, as well as Abba Hillel Silver, and others, but the attempt failed. After a few weeks, the office was shut down.* It may have been at this time that a group came to Gilbert and asked him to head up a new school. It was intended to become the first major university in America under Jewish auspices. Richard Gilbert declined. Albert Einstein had also declined. So Abram Louis Sachar became the first President of Brandeis University. Instead, Dr. Gilbert continued to work as a private economic consultant.

In 1949, Gilbert joined one of his consulting clients fulltime, as Assistant to the Chairman of the Board of Schenley Industries. It was either Bob Nathan or Ken Galbraith who once quipped that Dick Gilbert had "gone to work for Lou Rosensteil in order to prove that the most theoretical of theoretical economists could succeed among the robber barons."

Now Gilbert acquired the accoutrements of economic success: a sumptuous apartment on Central Park West, and a revolutionary-era home in Westport, complete with the not-yet-obligatory swimming pool. The surrounding grounds in Connecticut provided views of the neighboring meadows, and he moved to preserve those views by buying up the surrounding tracts. The house itself he restored with a fine eye, Richard supervising the construction work himself. He demanded a new doorway, only to find that he was restoring the original one. On more than one occasion, he required an opening which the workmen promptly discovered to be a restoration of the eighteenth century design, long hidden by intervening work.

Gilbert became Vice-President of Schenley's. After he had proved his point or made enough money or tired of his verbal wars with Rosensteil (take your pick), he went back to consulting.

The Eisenhower era was drawing to a close. Kennedy was just over the horizon, as was the great public debate on the so-called missile gap, which

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was to eventuate in those military expenditures on which the nation was to rely for the next generation. In December of 1958, Richard Gilbert testified before the Joint Economic Committee of the Congress:

For years we have known that the Russians had an overwhelming superiority in military manpower and conventional armaments. For over a year we have known that they have also achieved a superiority in the new weapons systems and in the research and development which produces them. For the moment the preponderance of offense over defense provides us the dubious security of a stalemate of terror. But if the Russians were to achieve the same superiority in the field of antimissile missiles which they have won in the missile field, if they could in this way undermine our capacity for retaliation, there would be nothing left for us but to surrender. Can anyone doubt that the Russians are making an all-out effort in this direction? Does anyone think or suggest that we are? . . . The contrast between the Russian performance and our own is not lost on the uncommitted nations of the world. . . . They can hear the hob-nailed boots pounding up the stairs as the silken slippers come down. . . .

In the long run it would be quicker and cheaper, while matching them on the military front, to swamp them in science, technology, in education, in growth of productive capacity, and in economic assistance to the underdeveloped countries of the world and thus to make it clear that, whatever they do, they cannot win the hot, nor profit by the cold war.

He went on to argue that the nation could afford to "quadruple the resources we are putting into the cold war." He called for "immediate and sustained economic mobilization, with all that means in management and controls."

The next Congress supplied the weaponry, but not the economic mobilization. Had the Congress done so in response to that clear, calm voice explicating apocalypse? The language Gilbert used a generation ago now jars many ears, in a world in which even the words of Adlai Stevenson II have come to sound bellicose. The intervening events in Afghanistan and elsewhere have not made our language more war-like, but rather less. A quarter-century later, the witness had forgotten his own testimony: "I had nothing to do with the missile gap."

In the late 1950s he threw himself deeper into gardening on a massive scale, transplanting entire rows of trees, establishing new vistas. A final three-year consulting contract with Schenley's drew to a close. He was al-

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most sixty and semi-retired. Casting around for a new source of income, he went up to Cambridge, to see if his friends there could be of help.

A decade earlier, Harry Truman's Point IV program had opened up technical assistance to under-developed countries. Technical Assistance had been followed by massive foreign aid. Now Harvard had set up a program of Development Economic Advisers. Edward S. Mason and David E. Bell offered Gilbert the position of Chief of the Harvard Development Program in Southeast Asia, to be funded by the Ford Foundation, with some slight assistance by the International Bank for Economic Development. So Mr. Gilbert goes to Karachi. Plato goes to Thebes.

On the way out, History played a funny trick. Some years after he left, the town of Westport renamed the street on which he had lived as "Gilbert Road," for reasons that were never disclosed. But the Gilberts themselves were no longer visible; the meadows soon vanished.

He found in Pakistan a country much of which seemed to have changed very little from the world of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*. More than once, he felt that he was still looking at the unchanging world of the Great Trunk Road.

As John Eddison (one of the Harvard Advisors) has pointed out, Richard Gilbert came to the business of economic advice to developing countries with no experience whatsoever. He had never been in such a country. At first, says Eddison, "he came and asked the most outrageous questions . . . and we would politely explain to the newcomer why it was the way it was." There was a brand new five-year plan in the works, the second in a series, and it had already been approved at the cabinet level. After two months, Richard called in his staff of fifteen Harvard advisors, and told them: "You've written a second five-year plan which is going to result in stagnation in West Pakistan and ever-increasing misery in East Pakistan, and in fact starvation there." And Eddison reports that Gilbert thereupon pulled out the numbers which he had developed which proved that he was right. And then Gilbert offered them an answer, a solution.

It was, said Gustav Papanek (head of Harvard's Development Economics Advisory Service), "an imaginative program to develop productive employment for the poorest in Pakistan, of which the cornerstone was a public works program, which had the shades of the New Deal written all over it." It was to be paid for under P.L. 480, a then recently-passed law which allowed the use of U.S. farm surpluses to pay for economic development in underdeveloped areas overseas. "The essence of this solution was simplicity itself, as so many great ideas are, once they have been stated. . . . The program, until it was subverted by political pressure, was a tremendous success. It became a model for

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similar programs elsewhere, and especially in Indonesia. All of this was accomplished, essentially, in one year."

It was not quite that easy. The design-frame had various cute parts. For example, some decentralization of planning was built in, with democracy at the lowest level serving as a partial check on the validity of local projects. Nor was it easy to achieve acceptance. The persuasiveness which others found so remarkable was often hard work on the part of the persuader. Dr. Gilbert wrote home to Dr. Bell: "I find myself getting furious at the array of argument, pseudo-analytical or practical, that is thrown up." He kept persuading people (*"this relentless, tireless persuading people; bringing them along with him," as Eddison described it*); the Government of Pakistan, the U.S. Government, his own advisory group, the Planning Commission people, the AID people, the World Bank people. *He kept, Eddison argues, more or less "whipsawing" them, using each to raise another's ante. "And the interesting thing is that although the targets of the first five-year plan were never even approached, these elevated targets of the second five year plan were reached and surpassed."*

After some years of working in Karachi, Richard Vincent Gilbert had provided Pakistan with an increase in Gross National Product of about six percent per year. A new generation of economists had begun to experience Richard Gilbert. In the meantime, the economics profession had discovered input-output models. Just what, asked Gustav Papanek, can any input-output theorist accomplish that Richard V. Gilbert can't do better on the back of an envelope? *Yet it was Gilbert who helped find funds for some of his younger advisors to help develop such models.* Gilbert served as Pakistan's chief economic adviser; he won that country's highest medal; he trained up the next generation of Pakistani economists and advisers. There was much hope. This time, imminent publicity for his obvious successes clearly seemed to threaten his invisibility. But he had built on sand.

Ayub Khan was replaced by Yahya Khan, followed by Bhutto who came into power chanting slogans which sounded exciting even to some of the small community of foreign advisors. The international collection of economists which Gilbert had helped gather from the United States, the Netherlands, Yugoslavia and elsewhere had already begun to make plans to wind down the project. Then Yahya had let the PLO open an office in Pakistan, and an astounding discovery was made. Almost all these economists from all over the world, who had been willing to give up their lives and comforts to help this Islamic state come into being were—or so the PLO charged—Jews

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by birth. The PLO was right, but the economists themselves had not realized that fact. They hadn't seen themselves as being Jewish at all. The PLO demanded that they be sent away. They were already packing.

After Gilbert had left Pakistan, and before the project had been fully closed down, war erupted between the two wings of Pakistan, and Bangladesh was born in a wave of horror. The country descended into the maelstrom of civil war. Both parts experienced severe economic decline, and began to drift toward the Mullahs. Gilbert's innovations were not forgotten, but the results withered away. Dr. Walter Falcon and Dr. Gustav Papanek, in dedicating a volume of essays on Pakistan's economic development, praised Dr. Gilbert as a humanitarian, as a teacher, and as an activist, but noted that it was his role as a teacher that would probably prove his most lasting contribution. The development economists had a collection of their essays, published by Harvard University Press, specially bound in leather and presented to him. To the world at large, he still did not exist. He had escaped fame.

He did some further project work in Indonesia and also in Afghanistan, and by then he was tired. On home visits, then as earlier, efforts to place him on TV talk shows were consistently rebuffed by him. He met with a group of young economists from Eastern Europe. They were all caught up in the wonders of the free market mechanism, and he was busy trying to convince them that there were *some* benefits to a certain amount of central planning. He visited Puerto Rico, where he found some of his old students in charge, and insisted that a system of incentives and tax and fiscal policy was insufficient, and reminded them of other, more immediate, social objectives.

Gilbert took another look at Jordan. Jordan wanted him to do as he had done in Pakistan, but Richard declined. "Do you know Richard is Jewish?," the brother of King Hussein was asked. The Crown Prince replied: "I'll bet I know more Hebrew than he does." But he would no longer be moved.

The American Economics Association invited an address, but he declined; his back hurt him that year. He elected to spend six months in Cambridge and six months in a small retirement town in the bright light of Arizona, where he swims.

One son, Alan, who was temporarily rusticated while at Harvard for touching a Dean during the student revolts of the 1960s, is becoming better known as the expert on *Marx's Politics*. That also serves as the title of his re-

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cent book, from Rutgers University Press. Professor Alan Gilbert had been a Maoist. Richard's arguments with his younger son were sometimes bitter, always instructive. The elder son, Professor Walter Gilbert, won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, in 1980. The prize was earned at a relatively young age, so that both Dr. and Mrs. Richard Gilbert could go to the award ceremonies. Their daughter, Professor Joanne Gilbert Schwartzberg, M.D. (cf. *Who's Who in American Women*), also wanted to see her brother receive the Nobel Prize. She and her husband went along.

There is now a Nobel Award in Economics, funded from Chicago. One wondered what Richard felt as he watched it being presented to Klein of Pennsylvania; Richard who had written so little to which he was willing to affix his own name.

Dick Gilbert had had a by-pass operation shortly before, and was sitting off in a corner, somewhat immobile. I walked over to Klein and told him that the Chemistry winner's father was Richard V. Gilbert, who would like to meet him. "Oh, of course," said Klein on the way, "I know of his work, of course. I've always wondered just what his relationship was with Milton Gilbert. Were they related? I was closer to the Gilbert of Pennsylvania, than to the Gilbert of Harvard, but that was a matter of geography." It was explained that the two Gilberts were life-long friends and first cousins. They had even shared a home for some years. Cousin Milton Gilbert had served as Chief Economist for the Bank of International Settlements (B.I.S.), and was therefore a chief among the Swiss Gnomes. Milton was hardly invisible, and had thrown a strange shadow on the greater figure. Lawrence Klein and Richard Gilbert chatted; outside the December sun cast very little light. Everyone enjoyed that trip.

Two years ago, a newer Nobel Prize-winner in Economics came to Chicago, from Yale. By then the writer of this piece had concocted an odd theory: to be a great economist of a certain age one *had* to have been influenced by Richard Gilbert. This particular Laureate had even been a student at Harvard, and at the right time. The ideas, the responses to questions, even the mannerisms seemed perfect. "Who were the economists at your university who really influenced you?," he was asked. "No one in particular," he answered. "Perhaps Hansen," he offered, somewhat apologetically. Oh. The questioner turned away; and then turned back. "Did you ever by any chance come across a Richard V. Gilbert when you were there?" There was a moment's puzzled look, and then: "Dick Gilbert! My section man in Economics

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... Wonderful teacher! Now there's someone who should have stayed in academia!" The almost invisible spark which had lit his flame seemed identifiable. Yet even he probably had no idea what that young instructor had accomplished; and those who knew that story were dying off rapidly.

The 1980s saw the continuing publication of Keynes' collected writings, including portions of his correspondence. The learned editors carefully annotated the recipients. One of the letters was addressed to "My Dear Gilbert." The editors carefully explained who *Milton* Gilbert was. That was too much for Walter Salant. Playing for our side, Salant picked up a sledgehammer, and let fly against Gilbert's shield of invisibility. In a review article, Salant explained that Keynes' correspondent was *Richard* and not Milton Gilbert. "Richard Gilbert was the outstanding unsung hero of wartime economic policy." Salant wrote of Gilbert's "combination of technical ability, imagination and persuasiveness . . ." Salant showed that Keynes himself had written of Dick Gilbert's "great gifts," "his persuasiveness," "his indomitableness." But if Walter Salant had succeeded in cracking Dick Gilbert's shield of invisibility, there was little sign of it.

Son Alan is working on a new book. Daughter Joanne has some new ideas she's trying out for health care in the home. Son Walter has resigned from his Harvard Professorship to go public as President of a corporation which he helped create, called Biogen. (Richard expressed doubts about Wally's leaving Harvard even for a fortune the size of which has become a matter for discussion in the national magazines. *Time Magazine* and *Fortune*, among others, offer Walter's portrait in living color. The son has reasonable hopes of bringing his father home a preventive for the common cold.) Emma Cohen Gilbert, the wife, child psychologist and mother whose own story has largely been left out of this narrative, continues to set new marks in calm and love and warmth and in the speed with which she completes the Sunday Doublecrosses. The six surviving grandchildren are all doing very well, thank you. Even my daughter, Gilbert's 19-year old granddaughter, rated six columns in a local edition of the *New York Times* last week, but who will remember her grandfather's name? Perhaps that shell of invisibility was the last gift given at Dick Gilbert's birth, to a man who had already been given everything else.

Richard, meanwhile, is making quiet noises about the threat posed by the nation's burden of debt, and just what we should be doing about it.

Last week, Gary Hart, candidate for President of these United States,

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started to indicate that maybe certain parts of the New Deal hadn't been the best thing for America, and Richard Gilbert threatened to get up and take him on, personally. As far as I am concerned, getting Gilbert moving us around again would be the best thing that Gary Hart—or any of us—could do for our country. And maybe this time some of us would actually get to *see*, in operation, the invisible man: my greatly beloved father-in-law, Richard Vincent Gilbert.

* * * * *

The preceding address, which has been slightly modified, was given at a meeting of the Chicago Literary Club on April 2, 1984. Shortly afterwards, a copy of it was sent to its subject. Looking back, his reaction may have been predictable. Its ferocity was not. That gentle figure, who had never descended to *ad hominem* arguments, ripped its author from stern to motive. Whatever force within Dr. Gilbert had so struggled against History's claims now rose as if to destroy this author, let alone this small paper. He tore at every line, as if he would shred each single assertion, even the unassailable ones.

The earlier version gave no firm citation for its missile gap conclusions; it provoked the response: "I had nothing to do with the missile gap." He reiterated: "I had nothing to do with the formation of the State of Israel." He minimized his speech-writing ("one speech; some sentences; some paragraphs"), even though he had previously discussed his actual role with me, in considerable detail. Before proceeding to savage what had been written, he scrawled the following:

I was one of many who accepted Keynes' thinking. I differed from him in seeing a need for price and wage control. Again I was one of many—but a fairly important one. I played an important role in the drive for full employment, for a total war effort, for price and wage stabilization. Anything more than that is an exaggeration. I played a much smaller role in laying the foundation of mixed economy version of liberal state. Roosevelt fits your description.

That FDR had continued to argue for the maintenance and importance of the gold standard as well as a balanced budget, long after he had become President, came to mind, but not to tongue. Dick Gilbert kept on; line by line he made his angry corrections. If I could suppress the paper I was to do so; if not, I was to correct it. He forbade publication.

His corrections have been included, wherever factual. The conclusions remain.

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Richard Vincent Gilbert died on October 6, 1985, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Some of his friends made the newspapers aware that a great man had died. Surprisingly, there were several inches of text in a number of the major newspapers of this country. There was a half-page tribute in Pakistan.

On November 21, 1985, a Memorial Service was held at the Memorial Church in Harvard Yard. That afternoon, it became clear that I was hardly alone in my conclusions. Most of the material which appears in italics above, which has been used to bolster the original effort, is taken from either Gilbert's own corrections (in which case he is identified as the source) or from material which came to light on that day.

There was much else said that day which is not here noted, such as HDEAS Adviser Joseph Stern's emphasis on Gilbert's role in institutional development, as in the building of the Pakistan Planning Commission. Alan Gilbert's portrait of a father is missing, as are several pictures of Gilbert as teacher.

History rarely touches on the immaterial, and is the poorer for it. History would certainly ignore Joanne's grace-note, that "If gardens and young children flourished under his concern, so did animals. . . . Even wild animals recognized his special spirit." Nor would She mark these words from a daughter-in-law, the poet Celia Gilbert:

His pleasure and his inner beauty were summed up in his smile, which as his body grew more worn, only became more luminous and radiant.

That same afternoon, Walter Salant was told about this strange speech and Richard's reception of it. He pointed out that it should prove easy enough to check out the "missile gap" point. Salant located the testimony which you have read, within the week, hidden under the title: "Relationship of Prices to Economic Stability and Growth." He wrote that he was surprised to find how "ferocious" a cold warrior Richard had been. In the course of checking another point, Salant stumbled across a set of almost full-text lecture notes which had been preserved by one of Richard's students for almost half a century.

This paper is being published at a time when the teachings of the young, liberal economists of the 1930s and the 1940s are hardly popular with the current administration. The economics of the early 1940s have slipped from sight. Richard Gilbert believed that the high-interest debt which has been created by the current administration and its prophets will trouble the economy for decades. It is for these kinds of questions that Clio is most useful. After the fact, She provides us with answers.

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As to this publication, it is painfully clear that Dr. Gilbert would not have forgiven the trespass. There is little escape from his tormenting words:

If I have chosen privacy, why would you strip it away? And if I have wanted to claim less than I may have merited, why would you think it appropriate to claim so much more?

John Eddison claimed that in twenty-five years as a foreign economic adviser, he knew of no greater example of the difference that one individual in the field of economic development could make, knew of no example which remotely touched that of Gilbert with respect to the development of Pakistan. There are those who believe that the same was true of Gilbert's earlier effect on this country's operation during the defeat of the Axis Powers.

Galbraith offered this, in final tribute:

No economist of our generation so showed what one supremely intelligent, strongly motivated and adequately stubborn economist could accomplish.

In death, Richard Vincent Gilbert will probably remain the invisible advocate, unknown to History or Historians. He would have preferred it that way.*

*This paper was written for the *Chicago Literary Club* and was read before the Club on Monday evening, April 2, 1984. An edition of two hundred copies was printed by the Club for its members.