

Opinion

Registration lines reminiscent of a Kafka novel

For some reason this University is determined to make my last semester as a journalism major a Kafkaesque experience.

Franz Kafka was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1883. He wrote several novels and short stories about innocent people trapped in governmental bureaucracy. Kafka's characters were subjected to inhumane treatment for no apparent reason. His life as a Jew in Austria and Germany during the turn of the century was often the inspiration for his works. For Kafka, it was over when he died in 1924. For me it all started last Tuesday.

I ran into a friend I hadn't seen since the end of the spring semester. She told me she heard that the last journalism class I needed to get my degree wasn't going to be offered this semester.

I went to talk to the professor, and he confirmed the ugly rumor. As visions of my diploma flying away for another semester filled my thoughts, he assured me that all was not lost. I simply could take another journalism class. The only trouble was that I would have to go through drop-add the next day.

Drop-add is on the list of things that I try my best to avoid. Given the choice of going through drop-add, castration or spending the afternoon with Jerry Falwell, I would be hard-pressed to make a hasty decision.

I got up early Wednesday morning to try to deal with this mess. I had to go to work at my other job at 9 a.m., so I thought that I would go through drop-add at 8 a.m. The lines were so long that I wouldn't be able to get through in time to get work.

It was a little after 11 a.m. when I was finished with work so I went to stand in lines. After 10 minutes some guy came back to the end of the line and said that registration was about to close for lunch

and that no one would be allowed to go through until after 1 p.m. These people didn't come up with the idea of taking off in shifts for lunch until later in the week.

I had bills to pay, things to buy, people to see and several other things to do that day, so I couldn't afford to wait around for almost two hours while the registration people stuffed their elderly faces.

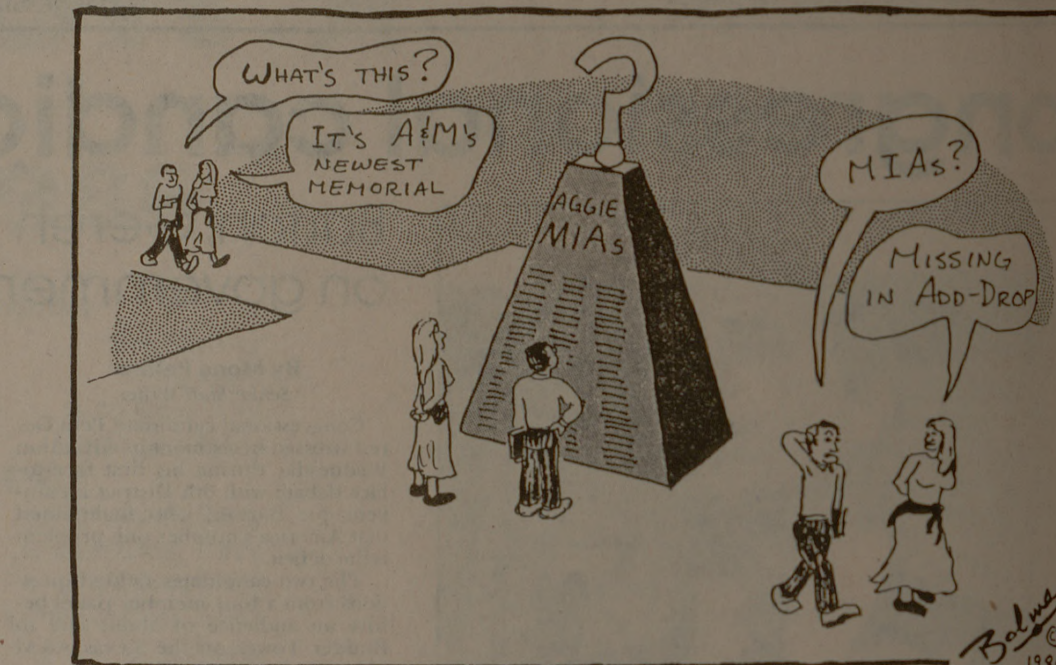
Around 4 p.m. I finished my errands and went back to the registration line. This time I had to wait around for almost an hour before I was told that they would not let me in this time, either. I would come back another day. My other job took me out of town Thursday so I had to wait until Friday.

I had heard that they weren't going to take drop-adds until after 1 p.m. on Friday so I didn't get in line until 11 a.m. For the first couple of hours the waiting wasn't too bad, I was talking to other people in line, and we were having a good time complaining about the lines and eating pizza.

After the three-hour mark things were starting to get hairy. There was no more shade, and it was getting hot. Once I finally made it into the building I began to notice there were a lot of strangers standing in line with me. After three hours you get to know a group of people but now, all of a sudden, I was surrounded by a bunch of twits who decided that the best way to beat the system was to walk into the Pavilion, look at the list of closed sections and try to blend in with the other students already in line.

I finally got to sit down at a terminal with a nice, elderly woman who didn't deserve the garbage she had been having to deal with for the past few days. She typed in my ID number and the screen flashed back that I was blocked because of excessive parking violations.

According to signs in the Pavilion and elsewhere, registration would be blocked for students with three or more unpaid parking tickets. At the end of summer school I had paid all the tickets I had accumulated over the summer, but I had got-



ten a ticket earlier in the week. Our wonderful peacekeeping force must have looked at that solitary, unpaid parking ticket, decided that I must be a threat to the security and well-being of this fine University and determined that I didn't deserve to go through registration until I paid their measly \$10 fine. I had to go stand in another line.

It took an hour to take care of my parking ticket — quite a bargain when you consider it only cost me \$10 dollars to stand in the police line for an hour, while it cost me more than \$400 to stand in the registration line for four hours and 30 minutes.

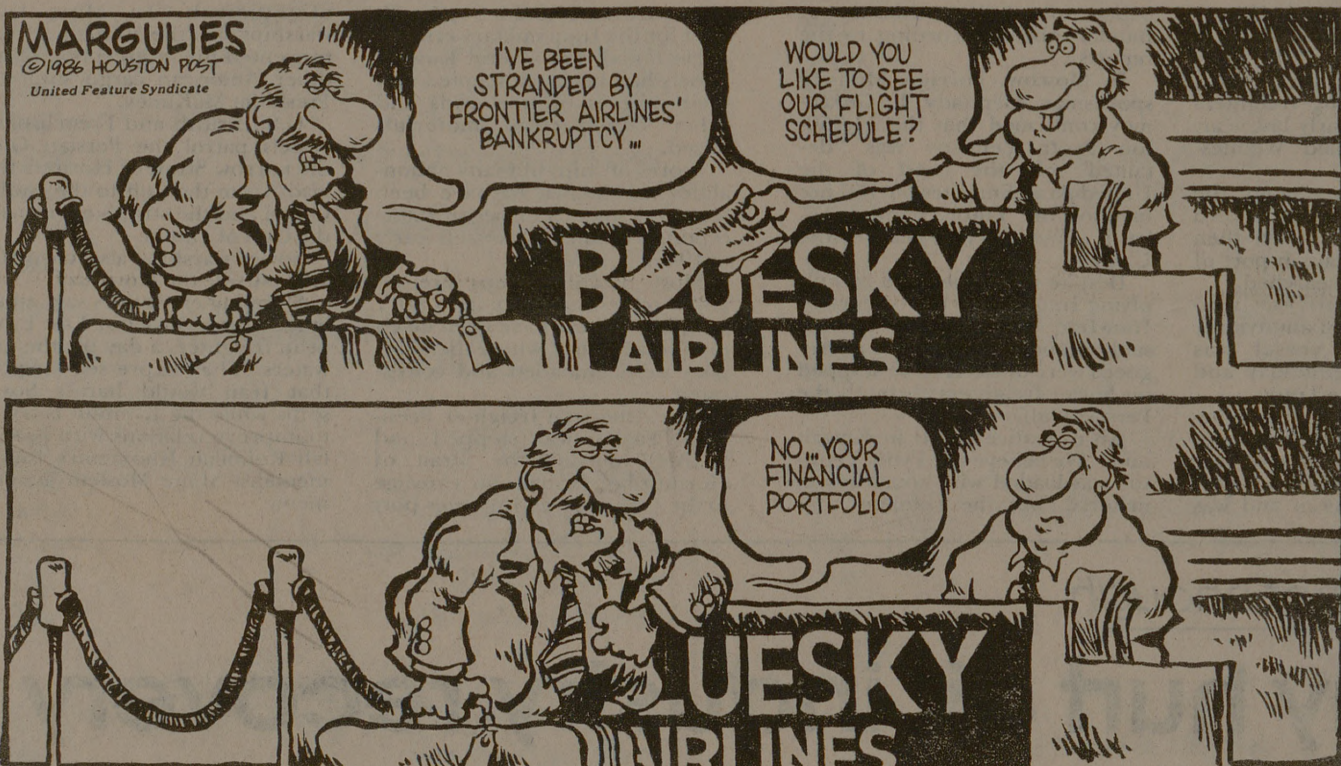
I went back to the Pavilion. This time everything went through without problems and I went on to pick up my schedule. It took over five hours and

30 minutes to drop one three-hour class and another.

After talking to people who have had to do with the line this week I realize that I was lucky. It could have been worse. We could still be using the old system we used before the school spent the thousands of dollars on SIMS. That antiquated system made you stand in line for, at most, two hours.

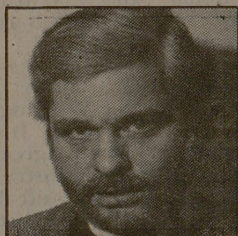
When Kafka went to law school in Austria at the turn of the century, they didn't have computers they did we might have been required to read great novels "The Trial," "The Castle" and "Drop-Add" in our literature classes.

Karl Pallmeyer is still a senior journalism major and a columnist for The Battalion.



Freed from Castro's grasp

Shortly after a Cuban tribunal sentenced Humberto Sori Marin to death, his mother went to visit Fidel Castro to plead for her son's life. Marin and Castro had fought as comrades in the mountains, and after the revolution they often dined together at Marin's home with Senora Marin doing the cooking. At the meeting, Castro assured her: "Don't worry, nothing will happen to Humberto." The next night, Castro himself ordered the execution.



Richard Cohen

That incident comes from the pen of Armando Valladares, whose book, *Against All Hope*, is an account of the 22 years he spent in various Cuban prisons for the "crime" of speaking out against communism. To say that the book is compelling is to understate its power; to say that it is horrific is also an understatement. With this book, Fidel Castro takes his place as yet another of this century's mass murderers.

The execution of Sori Marin was just another day's work for Castro. Turning on enemies and former colleagues alike, the Cuban dictator dispatched several thousand political prisoners (the exact figure is unknown) and imprisoned countless others. Valladares gives an account of a Latin Gulag where prisoners were terrorized, beaten, starved, tortured and casually executed, often on the caprice of some uniformed sadist. Many were like Valladares — convicted by tribunals that, for the sake of efficiency, handed down their verdicts before the trial had begun.

One of the benefits of being a liberal in a conservative era is that easy assumptions get challenged. One of those assumptions has been that Fidel Castro was not, all in all, such a bad guy. He was credited with improving the standard of living — particularly health care — for most Cubans, with cleaning up notorious Havana (the prostitution capital of the Western Hemisphere) and, of course, with toppling the repressive Batista regime.

It was conceded that he was a dictator, that he was responsible for human rights abuses. But it was argued that these were insignificant and paled in comparison to what was happening elsewhere in the hemisphere — Chile, Argentina, Guatemala and El Salvador. Liberals held their fire.

In an essay in a recent issue of *The New York Review of Books*, Aryeh Neier tries to account for such a double standard. Neier, vice chairman of the Americas Watch Committee, attributes the left's preoccupation with atrocities by rightist regimes to the tendency of those regimes to label their own enemies Castroites.

It seemed that to concede the case against Castro also would concede the case right-wing dictators were making against their own dissidents — not to mention the case being made by American conservatives. The reasoning is no more sophisticated than the old maxim that the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

Neier's credentials as a critic of all oppressive regimes are beyond reproach. He offers some reasonable justifications for what amounted to Castro playing American liberals for a patsy, but they in no way take the left off the hook. In

fact, not only were Castro's crimes ignored, but the man himself was depicted as the romantic revolutionary — a baseball-playing companion, a macho Hemingway type in the land of "Poppa" himself. Castro's compelling and attractive antics totally overshadowed the sinister aspects of his reign — so much so that even conservatives, who loathed Castro for his communism, remained ignorant of the true nature of his regime.

For whatever reason, the American left is at last coming to terms with Castro. The Neier essay, plus the reviews that *Against All Hope* received in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, has done much to rectify matters.

Now it is the conservatives who follow false messiahs. President Reagan's characterization of virtually any Third World anti-communist as a "Freedom Fighter" is the moral equivalent of calling Castro an agrarian reformer. We await patiently the mea culpas from the right.

According to Americas Watch, there remain at least 110 political prisoners in Cuban jails and hundreds more in so-called "political education programs." Some of them have been incarcerated for more than 25 years — old men whose executions effectively have been played out in slow motion.

In *Against All Hope*, Valladares tells their story just as surely as he tells his own. Through the personal intercession of French President Francois Mitterrand, Valladares was freed from Castro's grasp. Through his book, so have we all.

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While you were out...

Howdy Aggies! Welcome back to Texas A&M. I hope that you had a fantastic summer and are ready for an even better fall semester. I just thought I would clear all the notes off my desk and catch you up with a few things that happened while you were out. So from around the world and around the corner here are the events and some comments about what took place:

Mike Foadre
Guest Columnist

Sadly, starting with the end of last spring semester, an A&M student died of AIDS. Silver taps pending. Homosexual spokesman Marco Roberts said, "the A&M student community would be one of the last affected by AIDS." Well Marco, with the death of Bruce Whitworth, we already have been affected. So long, Bruce.

Elsewhere on campus, A&M Christian Fellowship, which has been affiliated for many years with Great Commission International, has changed its name to Great Commission Students to more closely unite with its 114 worldwide sister organizations. President Tom Rugh says, "Great Commission Students are the same great people as AMCF with the same purpose only that it will be much better as we are united with Christians all across the country." Great Commission Student activities are scheduled throughout the semester.

On the national level, many interesting things took place this summer which caused much controversy. First, the national press ranted and raved for weeks when South Africa censored its newspapers, but said little when Nicaragua's communist government closed the last free newspaper in that Central American country.

The drug-related deaths of two major sports heroes touched off a national awareness of the nation's huge drug problem. President Reagan began to take steps to curtail the problem both on the supply and demand side. These efforts are commendable, but it's obvious that the real struggle is going to be more on the state, local and personal level.

Another major controversy was the Meese Commission Report on Pornography, which caused 7-Eleven and other convenience outlets to pull pornographic magazines off their shelves. Whereas most conservatives lauded the report for its severe indictment of pornography's dangers, liberals such as

Barry Lyn of the American Civil Liberties Union said that the commission is trying to return us to "the sexual 1950s Ages."

You remember the sexual Dark Ages? That was when women didn't live in constant fear of being raped, and sexual abuse of children was an abhorrent rarity instead of an everyday occurrence. Back in the dark ages venereal disease was generally a disease of low-lives and scum, and AIDS was an appetizing prospect, not a frightening disease. Those days fidelity was the norm and had strong families which bred emotionally stable children.

But thanks to the ACLU and other groups like Norman Lear's People of the American Way, a group dedicated to counter the movements of the "Religious Right", we now have become more "lightened" people. Unfortunately we will feel the pain that their philosophies causes.

In state government, Texas Attorney General Jim Mattox made headlines this summer by saying that he would prosecute homosexuals who are in violation of the state's sodomy law, but on another occasion vowed, "to prosecute to the fullest extent of the law," those operators of pregnancy counseling centers that deceived women into not having abortions. He also relentlessly hounded a Fort Worth minister guilty only of helping a few needy boys and declaring something to the effect that the state, fact, owns our children!

Mattox is up for re-election this fall. Good luck at the polls Jim! You'll need it.

There are two final summer tidbits. The Rev. Phil Donahue broadcast a five-part series on NBC entitled "The Human Animal." This series followed the "voice of secular humanism" to preach his false gospel to television viewers all over America. It was reported that in his week-long investigation of life's most basic questions, Donahue did not once mention God, faith or any religious aspect of human life.

On a higher note, though, the Rev. Jerry Falwell won both his lawsuits against *Hustler* publisher Larry Flynt.

Well Ags, that was a summer wrapped up. I'm sure that there is more to come so watchful! Remember that we have an election this November, so choose your side and vote. Exercise your right to choose. Gig'em!

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