

Wonder Land / By Daniel Henninger

Democrats Sign Non-Compete Clause for U.S.

"What we will not tolerate is the Republican efforts to privatize Medicare."

That was the voice of Sen. Ted Kennedy, announcing a no-compete clause for all of Medicare amid the recent debate. It is the voice of the modern Democratic Party, which when you stand back and take a long look, appears not to want to compete at much of anything these days, other than winning the presidency. But even here the people running for the Democratic presidential nomination seem mostly intent on signing up the whole country to a non-compete clause.

Medicare, the public schools, trade, affirmative action, the environment, even the federal judiciary—persons of competitive or entrepreneurial instincts need not apply. How did this happen, especially now?

For most people in the United States, the idea of not competing is alien to their being. Sports stadiums in America fill up every night of the week with people high on the thrill of competition. Parents stand on the sidelines all weekend as their children learn to compete on the playing fields of Peoria.

Even Al Gore, the father of the information superhighway, purported some relationship with the more dynamic instincts of the American economy, claiming friends and funders around Silicon Valley, until the Valley vaporized on oversold dreams. But at least they had a forward-moving dream. What do Dick Gephardt and Howard Dean dream of at night? Smoldering steel mills and dairy farmers. Honorable work, surely, but not the future for the kids racing up and down those soccer fields.

Historically, the Democratic party has somehow managed to mix the water of the administrative state with the oil of private-sector energy. Europe's social democrats did too, until the ever-rising sea of public needs drowned the continent's competitive people.

For decades, the Democrats kept their party's ideological seesaw balanced at one end with socialists and the other with Wall Street admirers of government's promise, such as Felix Rohatyn, Robert Rubin and Cyrus Vance. Of late, however, the party has increasingly sounded as if it's become psychologically alienated from the private sector.

The Medicare fight was revealing. The federal prescription drug benefit for the elderly has for years been the great white whale of the party's Ahabs. But then the Republicans put the blood of competition in the water, proposing that private insurers' plans be allowed to "compete" with Medicare. Compete? Eeeek!

The Democrats tried to blow up the bill,

After Geneva

By Bernard-Henri Lévy

What is so special about this now-famous Geneva Plan, signed on Dec. 1, by two non-official delegations—led on one side by the former Israeli minister Yossi Beilin, and on the other, by the former Palestinian minister, Yasser Abed Rabbo? And why were we all there this past Monday, in this Swiss city, from Jimmy Carter to Lech Walesa, to Jews from all over the world, skeptical but enthusiastic, to see the birth of this new glimmer of hope? Here is why.

• This plan proves, firstly, that there remains, within both Israel and Palestine, another society of men and women who, against the lies and the war, the death, the doubt, the blood and the hatred, continue to want peace. What's more, they are ready to cede a part of their dream. Each had lost hope in the last three years, notably in the Israeli peace camp after the failure of Taba, having seen the Palestinians respond first with stones and then with war to Ehud Barak's offer of peace. But they all feel today that there is still, always, a partner—we have the proof that, in the two camps, and at a high level, there still remains a desire to talk about peace.

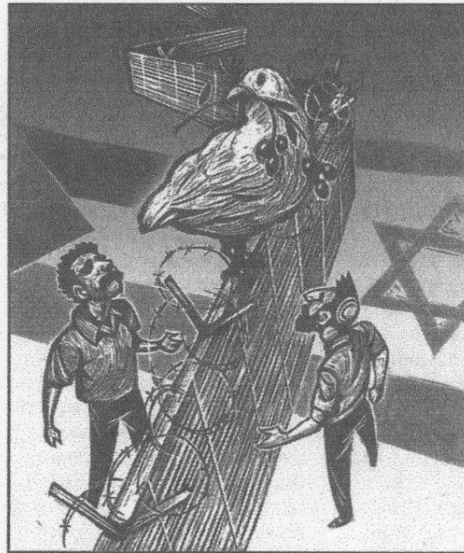
• This Geneva Plan takes up exactly where Mr. Barak left off. It is the same exact plan that was proposed by Mr. Barak and Bill Clinton at Camp David, then later at Taba—except that it confronts directly the two questions (the status of Jerusalem, and the right of return) on which the first plan stumbled. Plus, it demonstrates that it is possible to compromise on these two questions, and to come to an agreement.

From the Israelis it obtains the painful sacrifice that the Temple Mount will become the "Esplanade of the Mosques." It extracts from the Palestinians their renunciation, equally painful, of the right of return: exception is made for those "refugees" whom a sovereign Israel will decide whether or not to welcome; the text stipulates that this right will be exercised inside the future Palestinian state. In providing a clear response to these two questions, in putting these two responses within the actual text of the plan, Geneva succeeds where Camp David and Taba failed—it is a great lesson that shows us that failure, at Camp David and at Taba, was neither fatal nor necessary.

• The Accord states its grand intentions clearly. It reaffirms core tenets of the previous plans. It shares, along with all the plans since the Rogers plan of 1967 up until the "road map" of today, the aspiration of the simultaneous exist-

ence of two states, one Jewish and one Arab, because it breaks with the old habit of leaving to the end the most difficult problems, because it never says of any questions "It's too hot, too complicated, we will see about it later," because in reality it even breaks with the ideas of "steps" and "process" that comprised the central concept of Oslo, and because it is presented as a whole, take it or leave it, the plan eradicates as much as possible the room given to stratagem, double-talk, or maneuvering. It does not allow anyone to say, "Yes, OK, I'll sign, I am in the process, but I know that I will leave at step X, that I will escape at step Y" Neither of the two partners has the liberty to only partially comply, or to say, "It costs nothing to sign, I see there will be many meetings yet, and I can, if I change my mind, take back my word." This is an "anti-escape" plan. This is an "anti-second-thoughts" plan. This is a new kind of plan, which, if accepted—and which, if civil society, not just in Israel and Palestine but also elsewhere, forces this model on its statesmen—will literally defuse the landmines planted on the road to peace.

• For all these reasons: because everything is on the table and nothing is left unsaid; because it takes both partners as they are, not as they would like the other to be; because it in no way presupposes, for example, that the people love one another or that there is democracy in Palestine; because it no longer proposes as a preliminary this famous twin recognition coming



David Klein

from the heart (of which the Oslo negotiators continued to dream); because it is the first that says, "Let us make peace, not love," or, "Let's sign, love will follow," or, "Let us have a 'dry' peace, without romance or pathos, between people who understand that, for the time being, we are still not brothers"; because of all this, yes, this plan is the first where one cannot say that it is a gamble, a leap into the unknown, an adventure. It is the first plan in 30 years which gives the friends of Israel, all of whom, like myself, know that Israel cannot afford a mistake and is too fragile to allow itself a leap into the unknown, no longer any real reason to say: "Yes, OK, we will sign—but what about later?"

So one could of course refuse to sign. One could, if one is Palestinian, continue to want to flood Israel with refugees. One could, if one is Israeli, decide that sacred stones and sites are worth continuing bloodshed. And one could, if one were American or European, refuse to join in, on the grounds that the plan is signed by men and women who are no longer in official capacities, they may even return, but for now . . .