

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

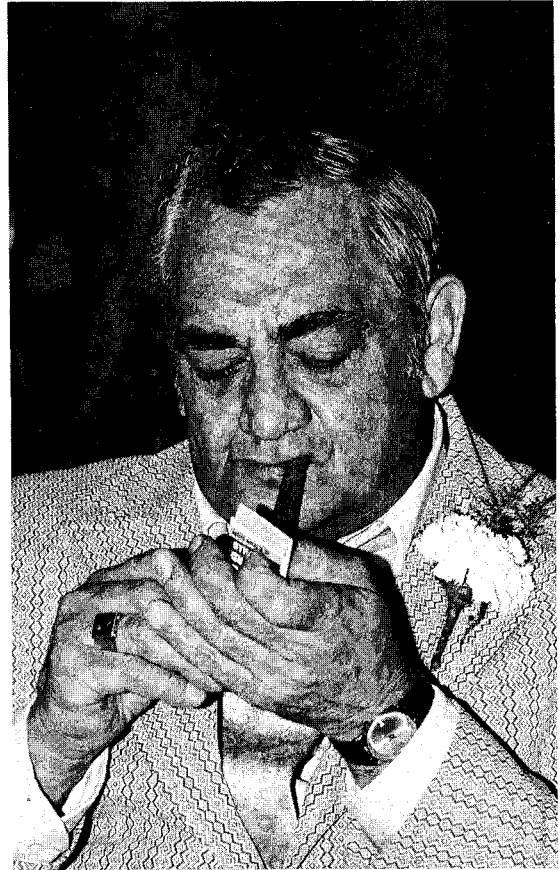
RJB- #33
A Retirement Party

98 Charles River Road
Watertown, Mass. 02172
January 10, 1975

Mr. Richard Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:

About ninety people paid eight dollars apiece to attend the family style roast beef dinner and retirement party for Alba Bocuzze at the Rendezvous Restaurant. Alba and her husband, Bucky, sat at the front table along with the three women who had organized the dinner, the master of ceremonies, the vice-president of the local union and his wife.



Richard Balzer is an Institute Fellow exploring the effects of social and economic change on lower-middle-class America.

Everyone else was scattered off to either side of the wooden dance floor at round tables, listening to the music of a three piece band. The leader of the trio, Elmore Prescott, a seventy-four year old Western Electric retiree, joked with many of his old friends. He told one woman he had just gotten his monthly blood earlier in the day so she shouldn't lean over too far.

Once dinner was finished the master of ceremonies, wearing a white sports coat, nervously began the evening's speeches and presentations with a series of "spontaneous" jokes, read from notes on an unused computer printout, including the following: "...we had a streaker on the schedule, but the police got him. Don't worry, they couldn't pin anything on him."

The jokes and introductions finished, the presentations began with Joe Sifferlen, Alba's boss, talking about Alba and what she had contributed to the company. Then came the gifts. The company's retirement gift, a chiming grandfather clock had been given to Alba earlier in the week. Since Alba had worked in the crystal rooms, she received an engraved desk set with a small uncut crystal mounted on the front. Then she was given a memory book by Millie Sirome--reminiscent of high school year books--in which all the workers in her area had written farewell messages.

Frank Talarico, the union representative, presented Alba with an honorary, gold-plated life-time union membership card. Later she received a life membership card from a representative of the Pioneers organization.



Alba smiles as she received each gift and heard each nice speech about her but already her face gave hint to the emotions welling up inside. She held them back for a long time, by discreetly dabbing a wet eye.

She could not hide her emotions after the next two gifts however, presented by her two friends Eleanor Coburn and Alice Howard. First Eleanor gave Alba the sunshine gift--a leather billfold and then Alice presented the friendship gift--a leather handbag. Each presentation included a hug, a kiss, and softly spoken words between friends who have worked together for many many years. By the time Alba sat down again her eyes



were much more moist. Bucky sat quietly through the speeches and presentations, supportive, smiling, letting himself be the good natured butt of several jokes.

Alba and Bucky then stood up and moved to the front of the table for a receiving line. The dinner dishes were cleared away and the band began to play, but the party remained fairly subdued. There was some dancing, but not much. Except for the Hully Gully, when the floor was packed with lines of people moving together in mysterious ways, the dance floor remained fairly empty. Some people began wandering off to the bar.

Later there were complaints that the dancing hadn't started because the restaurant was having another party in a nearby room and another band playing rock and roll was blaring competing music.

By ten o'clock the party had thinned out. The first to leave talked about needing to get up early for work on Saturday. By ten-thirty no excuse was needed, people just left. Bucky and I were sitting in a corner working on some drinks and long cigars. Alba suggested that Eileen (my wife) and I come back to her house for a while.

There were less than twenty people left at the party. All of a sudden the party began to pick up. It took on a new life, which seemed to suck all the remaining people into it. There were polkas, charlestons, rhumbas, and more Hully Gullies. Even my wife, who is usually shy at such affairs, rose with seven or eight other women, first to learn the Hully Gully and then to be led by a waitress in a long slow line in an attempt to master the steps to a Greek dance.

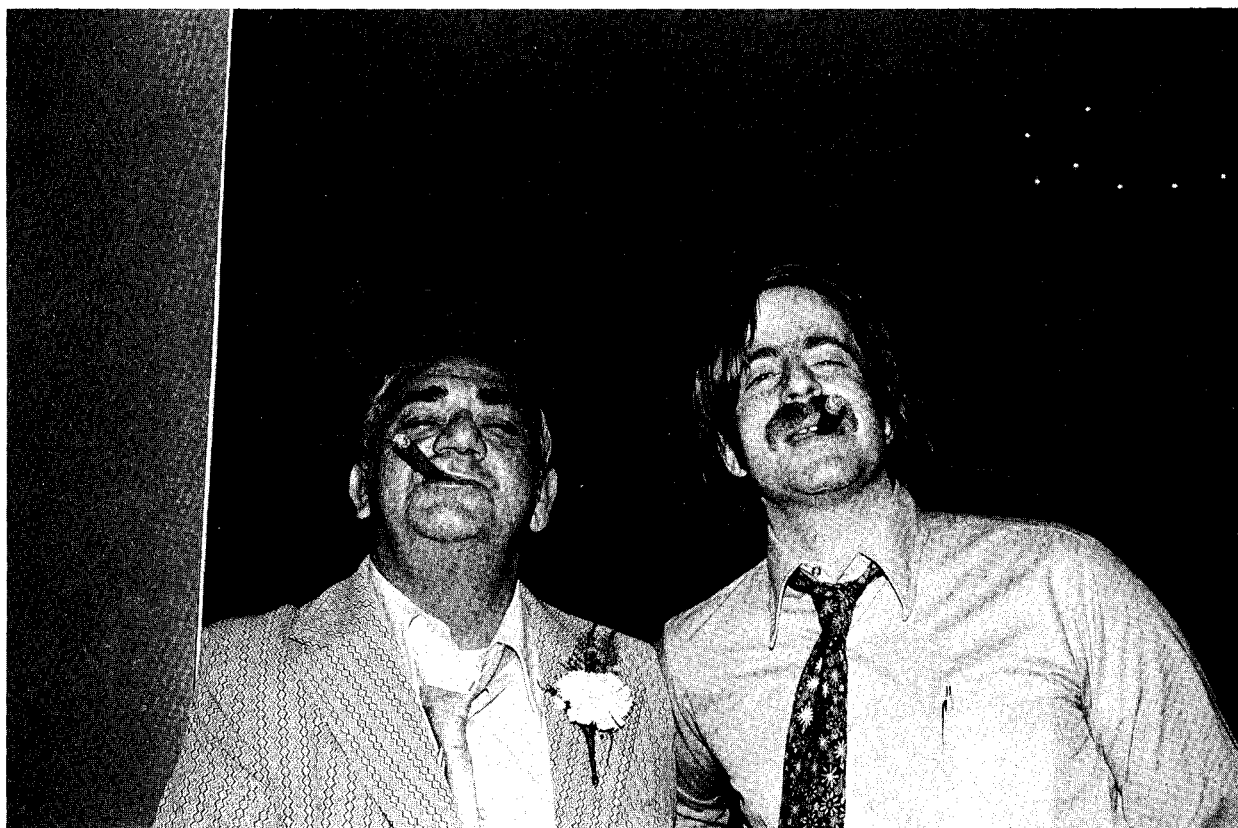
Several efforts were made to get Bucky and me into the dancing, but we contented ourselves with new cigars and new drinks. Those who remained dancing soon moved to the side of a baby grand piano and began singing old tunes. Off key, on key, right words, wrong words, the tunes kept coming: "I'm Looking Over a Four Leaf Clover", "Oh Marie", "My Wild Irish Rose", and many more.

We were now a group of fewer than ten, but now the evening seemed quite young. The trio, Elmore Prescott at piano, Charlie Nielson on the sax, and Peter More on the drums, played as though they could play all night.



It was well after twelve when we started talking about going back to Alba and Bucky's again. But we couldn't make it, and soon the idea was dropped, and the party ended. Slowly, in what appeared a happier frame of mind, the band packed up its instruments and carted them out into the cold frosty evening.

A few last remarks, a few last kisses and hugs were exchanged. It had become a helluva party, everyone smilingly agreed. The final touch, Bucky and I agreed, was one more cigar for the drive home.



Richard J. Bager

Received in New York on January 13, 1975.