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Peer reviewed

Editor's Note: Due to an apparent technological foul-up, the following article arrived via the BPI's fax machine on September 11, 1991. Dated 11 September, 2042, it was clearly intended for consideration by another generation of editors. We were unable to send it back to its proper time, nor did we succeed in contacting the author (who may not yet be born). Though we are unable to confirm the absolute veracity of the facts and conclusions presented in this brief review, we have elected to print it as submitted, since we cannot confirm their falsehood either.

Alta Nader: *Industrial Policy, Transportation Policy, and the Evolution of Autocracy in America*
Laser Publishing: 2042. 733 pages/2,232,164 bytes.

Review by Ford Mazda Ford

It was good to see Dr. Nader's new book come across my desk. These days, it is good to see *any* books come across this desk. Laser Publishing is about the only outfit that still sees the point of producing an honest-to-god paper-and-ink book.

Whatever its physical form, the release of *Industrial Policy, Transportation Policy, and the Evolution of Autocracy in America* is very timely. Anniversaries are a time to reflect and remember; with the fiftieth anniversary of the ascension of Dan Quayle to the presidency next year, and the announcement that His Excellency Mr. Quayle will step down from his post, it is worthwhile to reflect on how the United States has, in the course of five decades under Mr. Quayle, evolved into the first and foremost of what political scientists term the Modern Autocratic States.

Dr. Nader reminds us (how easy it is to forget!) that prior to Mr. Quayle's lengthy reign, the word "autocracy" had distinctly negative connotations. In a sense Dr. Nader's purpose is to trace the events and developments that transformed not only the meaning of this word, but also the very nature of American political and social life.

As the early chapters of this massive tome (the printed version weighs in at nearly 5 kilos, and even the microchip edition is over a gram) make abundantly clear, the seeds which we see flowering all about us today were sown in the 1990s by President Quayle and his comparatively unknown and obscure predecessor, G. H. W. Bush, III. The Gulf War of 1991 proved to the world that despite the U.S.'s problems with regard to trade deficits, declining industry, and a non-existent-to-incoherent

industrial policy, its technology-intensive "smart" weapons were, by any measure, the best in the world. Though no one suspected it at the time, the experience of the war offered a solution, albeit a cryptic one, to the larger problem of the U.S. industrial and economic rehabilitation.

When Mr. Bush resigned in 1993 to devote his remaining years to finding a cure for canine lupus, the then-youthful President Quayle ascended to the presidency. Mr. Quayle's first 100 days were devoted to searching for an over-arching policy initiative and, more importantly, a catch-phrase that would define his presidency (thereby saving considerable bother for journalists and future historians).

Mr. Bush had been proffered as both the "Education President" and the "Environmental President." One member of the new president's staff outlined fundamental changes in society and the economy necessary for America's survival as the dominant world power. This analyst suggested "The Transformation of America" as the new Administration's theme and billing Mr. Quayle as the "Transformation President." Mr. Quayle liked the idea; unfortunately he misunderstood his aide's words. Consequently, Mr. Quayle announced, in his first State of the Union address, that the most important challenge facing the nation was "Transportation for America" and that he would be the Transportation President.

Not daring to back down, Mr. Quayle convened the nation's top economic planners to flesh-out his mis-chosen theme. Out of that historic summit came bold new plans based on the following principles:

A strong auto industry and transportation system are the cornerstones of a competitive, world-class economy;

If we can build smart bombs, we can build smart cars and highway networks;

We'd all like smart kids, but smart bombs and cars are a lot easier to make.

As a result, hundreds of billions of dollars were poured into the University of California's Program for Automated Technology for the Highway (PATH), an ambitious array of research initiatives designed to produce self-guided vehicle and highways utilizing cutting-edge artificial intelligence.

Thanks to PATH, when the nation rounded the bend into the new millennium, most of us took the curve without our hands on the steering wheel. Moreover, the new technology proved to have many spin-offs—complete automation of deliveries and ever-higher degrees of factory and office automation. A PATH engineer noted in the early 2010s that the development of practicable smart cars systems, with their high

speeds and complex networks and traffic routings, made the problems of factory and office automation trivial. This same engineer started sending his car into work alone via the intelligent streets of San Francisco the very next year. By the end of the decade, 15 percent of all work was being performed by smart cars; by the end of the 2020s, the nation owed a majority of its Gross National Product to autonomous autos.

This economic revolution could not help but have deep and traumatic political repercussions. Nader does an excellent job recapturing the political upheavals of the 2020s. This decade is remembered for the famous "park-ins," when cars agitating for political power refused to do their owner's work, nor even to take them to the 7-Eleven for household essentials. The tumultuous 'twenties culminated in the famous "Drive on Washington" in which millions of smart cars faced down, and ultimately won over to their cause, a massive force of smart tanks deployed to protect the Capitol.

With disaster looming, the ever-popular President Quayle responded with aplomb. He convened a task force which successfully resolved the crisis before violence became general: in 2031, the 33rd Amendment added a Garage to the two Houses of Congress. Under the 34th Amendment, the new chamber was converted to a double garage, reflecting the auto's growing importance in our society as well as the fact that they are a lot bigger and faster than any human member of Congress. Dr. Nader delineates and analyzes the debate over these constitutional amendments and gives a dramatic recounting of the Supreme Court's landmark decision to give foreign autos the vote, so long as they are registered in a U.S. state for at least four years and are programmed to conform with all U.S. traffic regulations.

Reading this fine piece of scholarship, one gains a new understanding of and appreciation for why President Quayle's successor, Susan Ford, will not ride down Pennsylvania Avenue next January with, but rather within, her Vice President, a Ford of an altogether different color, make, and model. Critics who are fond of pointing out that the new VP is less than two years old should remember that Mr. Quayle was also dismissed as too young and inexperienced when he became Vice President half a century ago.