

FOUNDATION WATCH

A Publication of Capital Research Center

Rosenberg Fund for Children

Spies' Son Gets 'Revenge' By Doing Good for Activists' Kids

by Patrick J. Reilly

Summary: In many ways, the Rosenberg Fund for Children is a typical children's charity, helping struggling kids by paying for counseling, camp tuition, music lessons and the like. But at its core, the Fund is an intensely personal crusade by one man to relate to his tragic childhood. Robert Meeropol, the son of executed spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, is founder and director of the Fund. His leftist worldview, inherited from his parents and childhood guardians, is the deciding factor in determining who will — or will not — benefit from his generosity.

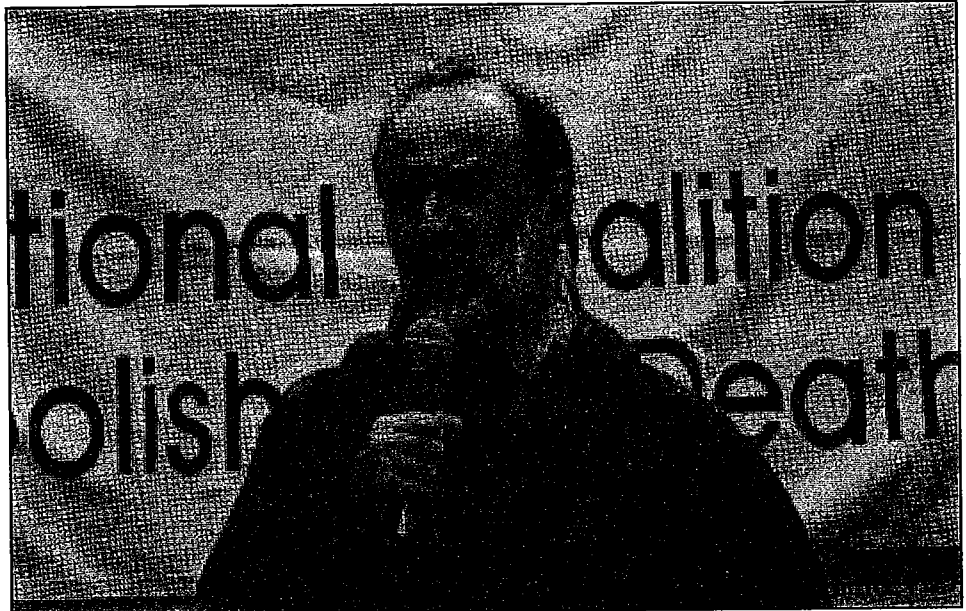
The six children of Robert Hanssen have difficult years ahead of them. If a jury convicts Hanssen, an FBI agent accused last month of spying for the Soviet Union and Russia for 15 years, his innocent family will bear his shame. If Hanssen is executed, his children will bear the grief of a family torn apart.

But they're not alone.

Robert Meeropol is the son of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who in 1953 were executed after being convicted of conspiring to steal atomic bomb secrets and pass them on to the Soviet Union. Meeropol, who uses his adopted name, was only 6 years old at the time. He has spoken publicly about the fear and humiliation that marked his life ever since.

Meeropol is the founder and director of the Rosenberg Fund for Children, a non-profit that awards grants to the children of leftist activists who have been harassed, found guilty of crimes and imprisoned, or died for their beliefs.

The Rosenberg Fund is unique. There are, of course, many charities that assist needy or abandoned children. There are even a few that do so while advancing a political cause. The National Childhood



Associated Press

Robert Meeropol speaks out against the death penalty at a St. Louis rally. Meeropol, the son of executed spies Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, is founder and director of the Rosenberg Fund for Children.

Cancer Foundation, for example, makes grants for cancer research while lobbying for government funds. The Middle East Children's Alliance aids Palestinian and Israeli children while advocating for peace in the Middle East.

But the Rosenberg Fund lets its political convictions dictate how it selects its grantees. Meeropol has argued that the children of political activists can suffer greatly and shouldn't be punished for their parents' actions, even when they break the law or violate common standards of decency. The parents' actions aren't considered by the Rosenberg Fund. Yet their political motives are paramount. The Fund restricts its charity to children of leftist activists.

Would the Hanssen children qualify? That was the question *Foundation Watch*

put to Robert Meeropol. He says the children "would only qualify for RFC support if Hanssen meets the RFC's defi-

March 2001

CONTENTS

Rosenberg Fund for Children
page 1

End Private Funding of
Government Activities: *page 5*

Briefly Noted: *page 6*

Foundation Watch

nitition of a targeted activist parent. I have no reason to believe that he does." Indeed, although Hanssen allegedly spied for the same Communists embraced by the Rosenbergs, the allegations against Hanssen suggest he was motivated by money and intrigue, not politics.

But if the Rosenberg Fund was established to help other children avoid the difficulties Meeropol endured as the son of convicted spies, why shouldn't he acknowledge the similarities between Hanssen and his parents? Indeed, in 1994 Meeropol publicly expressed concern for the 5-year-old son of former CIA officer Aldrich Ames who was convicted of espionage.

This time, Meeropol's response is curt. "I know virtually nothing about the Hanssen case." But, he added, "I'd be very surprised if Hanssen received a death sentence."

Only Leftists Need Apply

Meeropol calls the Rosenberg Fund for Children his "revenge" for his parents' execution and his years of suffering as an orphaned child.

"If you can take a negative — something that is really bad — and you can



Emanuel Bloch (left), defense attorney for the Rosenbergs, with sons Michael, 10, and Robert, 6.

transcend it, then you have gone a long way to taking revenge," Meeropol said. "But it is a positive revenge."

"For me, there's no doubt what happened is at the core of my existence," Meeropol told the Fort Lauderdale *Sun-Sentinel*. "The Rosenberg Fund is part of a process for me, trying to work that out, transforming a negative into a positive."

In 1988 Meeropol woke from sleep with the idea for a foundation to aid children who endured suffering similar to his own. Two years later, he quit his corporate law practice to establish the Rosenberg Fund in Springfield, Massachusetts and work full-time there.

Operating out of a small office on Springfield's Main Street, the Fund's mission is "to provide for the educational and emotional needs of targeted activist youth and children whose parents have been harassed, injured, lost jobs or died in the course of their progressive activities." The Fund defines "progressive" as supporting the notions "that people have equal worth, that people are more important than profits, that world peace is a necessity and that society must function within ecologically sustainable limits."

Despite these guidelines, Meeropol has said the Fund has no "political litmus test." But that doesn't mean parents with conservative views should bother to apply.

"If you're close to the center, you'll probably meet our guidelines," he told the *Boston Globe*.

Grants of up to \$2,500 are made to third-party organizations and professionals who counsel or otherwise serve the children of activists. Purposes typically supported by Rosenberg Fund grants include school tuition, camp fees, counseling, cultural lessons, outdoor programs and after-school activities.

"It may seem trivial to send someone for lessons, but we find that if a kid has a talent in some area and is given an outlet to exercise it, that becomes a safe harbor," Meeropol told the *San Diego Union-Tribune*.

Meeropol has met his original goal of raising \$1 million for an endowment that allows 100 grants annually totaling \$100,000. In 1999, the Rosenberg Fund made grants totaling \$135,000 and ended the year with assets of \$1.5 million. Revenues in 1999 exceeded \$500,000.

The Rosenberg Fund doesn't like to disclose the names of grant recipients. But general descriptions of children assisted by the Fund offer a glimpse of the Fund's interests. Recipients have included:

- the children of activists convicted of bank robberies and bombings to force U.S. banks to divest their holdings in South Africa;
- the son of a murdered Chicago labor leader;
- the son of a kidnapped and murdered tenants' rights activist in New York City;
- a peace activist's daughter, after the activist was imprisoned for dismantling a satellite control system;
- the children of a Los Angeles police officer who lost her job after speaking out against racism in the department;
- a child who was imprisoned with his mother, a South African civil rights activist;
- the daughters of a California environmental and abortion-rights activist injured by a car bomb;
- 17 refugees whose parents were tortured in Guatemala;
- the children of a Native American activist who protested plans for a nuclear waste dump;
- three children of an environmental

Editor: Patrick Reilly

Publisher: Terrence Scanlon

Foundation Watch

is published by Capital Research Center, a non-partisan education and research organization, classified by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) public charity.

Address:

1513 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-1480

Phone: (202) 483-6900

Long-Distance: (800) 459-3950

E-mail Address:

preilly@capitalresearch.org

Web Site:

<http://www.capitalresearch.org>

Foundation Watch welcomes letters to the editor.

Reprints are available for \$2.50 prepaid to Capital Research Center.

and union activist fired for protesting strip mining;

- two children of an Ohio community activist whose family was threatened by the Ku Klux Klan;
- the children of an aboriginal environmental activist in Canada arrested while protesting a hydroelectric project;
- the children of a Canadian government employee who was fired after complaining about racial and sexual harassment.

At least some of the activists whose children have been assisted by the Rosenberg Fund were convicted of illegal and destructive activities. Meeropol claims the Fund doesn't want to reward such behavior, even though the parent's political motivations determine a child's eligibility for funding.

"I know there are people who say you're helping these people who did these dreadful actions," Meeropol told the *Boston Globe*. "First of all, we're not helping them. We're helping their kids." In the case of the activists convicted of bank robberies and bombings, the Fund sent their children to a pacifist Quaker camp.

Despite critics, the Rosenberg Fund has high-profile defenders. Its advisory board has included celebrities Ossie Davis, Richie Havens, Susan Sarandon and Studs Terkel. Sarandon performed at a weekend event sponsored by the Fund for its grantees. Last year, Ed Asner hosted a fundraiser for the Rosenberg Fund with readings by actor Danny Glover.

Red and Blue Childhood

All motivation for the Rosenberg Fund comes from Meeropol's desire to confront what he sees as his own unnecessary suffering resulting from a botched trial. Then-FBI director J. Edgar Hoover saw the trial differently — it was justice served for the "crime of the century."

In 1950, Communist sympathizers Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were arrested and charged with conspiracy to commit espionage. The prosecution's key witnesses were also spies — David Greenglass, Ethel's brother and a machinist at the Los Alamos atomic bomb project, and his wife Ruth — who said the Rosenbergs had helped orchestrate efforts to steal atomic bomb secrets. The Rosenbergs refused to



Ethel and Julius Rosenberg awaiting execution after their trial in 1953.

admit the crime and were executed in 1953.

Those years were very difficult for the children of alleged Communist spies. Robert was 6, and his brother Michael was 10.

"After our parents were arrested, no one would take us in, and from 1950 until 1954 we lived a long nightmare until we were adopted," Robert Meeropol told the *Boston Globe*. His first clear memory of his parents is a tragic irony: in a visiting room at Sing Sing prison, Julius played the word game "Hangman" with Michael.

Ethel's mother initially took care of her grandsons after the Rosenbergs were arrested, but she sided with David and Ruth Greenglass during the trial and placed the boys in an orphanage. There they were harassed by their peers and the media. Later, Robert and Michael were banned from New Jersey's public schools because they weren't in-state residents.

The nightmare didn't end when the Rosenberg sons were adopted by Abel and Anne Meeropol, sympathizers of the Rosenbergs whose own children had died at birth. The New York City Welfare Department made a failed attempt to seize the boys, claiming the Meeropols were exploiting the children for fundraising purposes. Abel was a songwriter who composed "Strange Fruit" for Billie Holi-

day and wrote "The House I Live In," recorded by Frank Sinatra. (The elder Meeropols are since deceased: Abel in 1986, Anne in 1973.)

For several years, Robert attended the Little Red School House in New York City. The school was a haven for children of leftist activists, artists and educators, including playwright Arthur Miller and actor Jack Gilford. Students were taught to be social and political activists, studying issues like civil rights, the Cuban revolution and nuclear war.

Some students knew who Meeropol was, but his identity was kept secret from the general public. For most of his life, he lived in fear that he would be discovered and harassed.

In 1974, Robert and Michael Meeropol sued author Louis Nizer for his book *The Implosion Conspiracy*, which implied that the sons had rejected their natural parents. Of the 77 passages cited in the Meeropols' complaint, only 29 actually mentioned the sons. They argued that defamatory assertions made about their parents were harmful to them, but the court found that argument to be "tortured, contrived and meritless." The suit reportedly ended with a sealed out-of-court settlement.

In the process of suing Nizer, the sons lost their anonymity. Newspapers published their names and addresses, forcing

Foundation Watch

them to confront their heritage publicly. Since then, the brothers have spoken and written publicly about their childhood.

Robert and Michael Meeropol spent many years battling the federal government to obtain documents related to their parents' arrest and conviction. In 1986, a federal appeals court dismissed the Meeropols' suit. Although they had received about 300,000 pages of documents, the brothers claimed the FBI and other federal agencies had not provided sufficient information. The court found the government had made a good-faith effort in searching and providing records.

In 1992, former KGB agent Leonid Romanovic Kvasnikov went public, claiming that he was Julius Rosenberg's contact with the Soviet Union. Kvasnikov confirmed that Julius was a Soviet spy but denied contact with Ethel, and he said Julius "wasn't participating directly in obtaining information on the nuclear issue."

The CIA followed in 1995 with public disclosure of files from the "Venona" operation that broke the codes of Soviet KGB messages and led to the arrest of the Rosenbergs. Although the files alone prove nothing, they seem to agree with Kvasnikov's account and make a single mention of Ethel Rosenberg as a Communist who knew about her husband's spying.

Robert Meeropol claims he has sufficient evidence to prove his parents were wrongfully executed.

Yet despite questions about prosecutorial abuse in the case and disputes over how large a role the Rosenbergs, especially Ethel, played in Soviet efforts to steal atomic secrets, the record seems clear. Even some leftist scholars agree that the Rosenbergs were almost certainly criminals.

"All future discussions of the Rosenberg case, at least those that are reasonable, will have to begin with the historical fact that Julius Rosenberg was guilty of espionage," Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz wrote in a 1983 *New York Times* article.

Saving Radicals

Mumia Abu-Jamal, a death-row inmate convicted of shooting and killing a Phila-

delphia police officer in cold blood, is perhaps as notorious today as the Rosenbergs were years ago. He is the poster boy for opponents of the death penalty, who argue Abu-Jamal did not receive a fair trial.

In 1981, Officer Daniel Faulkner was found dead, shot in the back and between the eyes during an attempt to arrest Abu-Jamal's brother. Abu-Jamal, a former Black Panther and activist against police brutality, was also found shot in the chest but alive, sitting a few feet away from his gun and the police officer. At his trial, which critics say was rigged by police and a biased judge, Abu-Jamal was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to die by lethal injection.

Among Abu-Jamal's advocates is Robert Meeropol.

"He's the first political prisoner in this country to face execution since my parents," Meeropol told an audience at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1999. He added, "It's important to save his life so that his children and grandchildren won't be orphaned like I was."

Meeropol has used his leadership of the Rosenberg Fund as a platform for opposing the death penalty, moving beyond children's charity to embrace his activist roots. He has been a featured speaker at numerous rallies and protests in recent years. He is an advisor to Massachusetts Citizens Against the Death Penalty and a "founding endorser" of the Campaign to End the Death Penalty.

His arguments against capital punishment are practical, ideological and moral. In addition to diminishing humanity, Meeropol argues, "capital punishment requires perfection. You can't execute someone and bring them back when you realize you've made a mistake."

Meeropol believes the American justice system is racist because of the large numbers of minorities in prison. In his speeches he has evoked images of Kosovo and called imprisonment "our form of ethnic cleansing."

Meeropol is joined in his public opposition to the death penalty by fellow Rosenberg Fund board member Martin Espada, professor of English at the University of Massachusetts and an award-winning author of politically charged po-

etry. Espada's poetry was featured on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" until 1997, when he tried to read a pro-Abu-Jamal poem titled "Another Nameless Prostitute Says the Man Is Innocent." By age 7, Espada was already active in political activism with his father Frank, who has been a prominent Puerto Rican activist for civil rights since the 1950s.

Others who have joined Meeropol's crusade against the pending execution of Abu-Jamal include celebrities and political activists Maya Angelou, Ed Asner, Whoopi Goldberg, Woody Harrelson, Toni Morrison, Pete Seeger, Al Sharpton and Sister Soulja. Last year in Philadelphia, Meeropol joined Jesse Jackson and Jonathon Kozol in a protest outside the Republican National Convention to condemn the 139 executions in Texas during then-Gov. George W. Bush's term.

Despite his "red-diaper baby" upbringing, Meeropol has claimed to be "less ideological" than he once was. During his college years, he was involved in civil rights activism, anti-Vietnam War demonstrations and the Students for a Democratic Society. A few years ago, he described his politics as representing the "new Left," colored "fairly pink and fairly green."

Meeropol's efforts to oppose the death penalty raise important questions about the Rosenberg Fund and its purpose. Is it a charity, primarily focused on helping needy children who are suffering because of their parent's activities? Or is it just another arm of the Left, engaged in activism and subsidizing the families of other activists? The Fund seems to be a curious mix of both.

The Rosenberg Fund's duality of purpose is a reflection of Meeropol himself. Just as he wreaks his style of "revenge" by trying to make good come out of a nightmarish childhood, the Fund struggles to provide charity while bound in a political straightjacket. Both Meeropol and the Fund are unable to escape the past, locked away in the Little Red School House.

Patrick J. Reilly is editor of Foundation Watch and Organization Trends at the Capital Research Center.

End Private Funding of Government Activities

Excerpt from Capital Research Center's 'Mandate for Charity'

by Co-Editor Robert M. Huberty

It is disheartening to note that the largest American foundations increasingly act as puppet masters for advocacy groups in the thick of politics. As Capital Research Center's monthly newsletter *Foundation Watch* has disclosed, the political priorities of grantmakers have become the priorities of their grantees. Foundations that were once very careful to avoid political activities now support and even create nonprofit organizations dedicated to "issue advocacy" in specific areas (e.g. gun violence, tobacco control and campaign finance reform).

The environmental movement, in particular, takes its cues from a handful of grantmaking foundations that appear to dictate the agenda of the largest and most important (and most grant-dependent) environmental groups. Communities across the country have discovered that distant foundations have allocated funds to support green activists in local political controversies.

For instance, the Pew Charitable Trusts gave grants of over \$3.5 million to the National Audubon Society to assemble a coalition of nonprofit groups pushing the Clinton Administration to halt road-building in national forests. In congressional hearings, business and labor groups from forest regions in New Hampshire, Alaska and the Rocky Mountain states, joined by Capital Research Center, questioned the Philadelphia-based foundation's involvement in coordinating funding for a lobbying campaign on a divisive political issue. (For more on this, see www.capitalresearch.org/rhtestimony523.html.)

Under current law, private foundations have a right to select and support nonprofit grantees engaging in "advocacy." But as Congress and the Bush Administration debate the role of "soft money" in issue advocacy, they should remember to consider how the policies they enact will affect the foundation sector.

Foundation funding for policy advocates working within government agencies should end. Capital Research Center

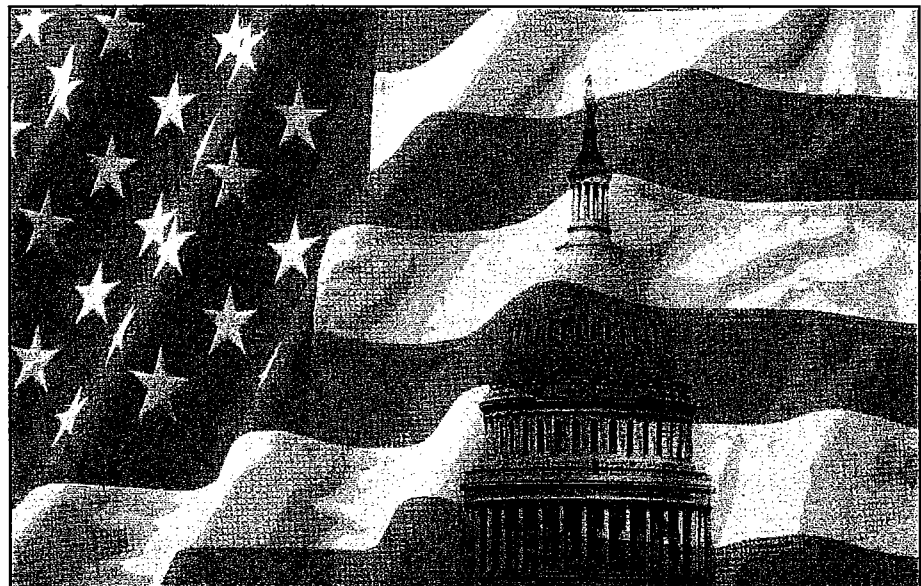
has reported that many state legislators have been surprised to discover that health and education programs they have not authorized are proceeding under state auspices using Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funding. See the CRC newsletters *Foundation Watch* (November 2000) and *Organization Trends* (January 1997). The Bush Administration should survey the extent of similar activities in the federal government.

Legislators and their constituents should feel confident that government agencies are accountable to them. But lines of authority are blurred when government

agency programs serve as the pilot projects of private foundations. A ban on foundation funding of government activities will help establish a bright line to divide private charitable activities from government responsibilities.

Foundation funding of government agency activities undermines public accountability. The people's representatives cannot do their jobs if private money not subject to legislative authority and oversight pays for public programs.

Robert M. Huberty is Executive Vice President and Director of Research at Capital Research Center.



Capital Research Center

MANDATE FOR CHARITY
Policy Proposals for the Bush Administration

Policy proposals and analysis on charity from the Capital Research Center for the Bush Administration, featuring recommendations from Rep. J.C. Watts, James Bovard, Marvin Olasky, Michael Horowitz and other experts.

For more information, see <http://www.mandateforcharity.com> and <http://www.capitalresearch.org>. *Mandate for Charity* is \$9.95 per copy. To order, contact Capital Research Center at (800) 459-3950 or crc@capitalresearch.org.

PhilanthropyNotes

Donors are abandoning Ralph Nader's nonprofits because of his unsuccessful presidential race that may have cost Al Gore the election, according to *Legal Times*. Fred Baron, president of the **ASSOCIATION OF TRIAL LAWYERS OF AMERICA**, has cut off funding for Nader's **CENTER FOR STUDY OF RESPONSIVE LAW**. "[Nader] won't be able to draw flies at an ATLA convention," Baron said. "In fact, he might need some protection." Pat Maloney, a San Antonio personal injury attorney who has given Nader groups \$5,000 to \$10,000 annually, now considers Nader "obsolete" and "a victim of his own ego." Trial lawyers are believed to be a significant source of donations to Naderite groups, but *Legal Times* reports that trial lawyers gave \$1.6 million to the Gore campaign and less than \$20,000 to the Nader campaign.

More than 100 wealthy Americans signed a petition urging Congress not to repeal the death tax, claiming the tax encourages people to make bequests to charities. "Repeal would have a devastating effect on charities," the petition said. The group included several leading philanthropists — including **WILLIAM GATES SR.**, **AGNES GUND**, **DAVID ROCKEFELLER JR.** and **GEORGE SOROS** — who published the petition in paid advertisements in the *New York Times* and other newspapers.

Philanthropy is slowing with the economy, according to recent reports. A *Chronicle of Philanthropy* survey found that 79 of 142 foundations expect their giving to decrease or at least remain at the same level this year. More than half the foundations said their assets have been shrinking. Indiana University's Center on Philanthropy reported a 2.7 percent decline in its Philanthropic Giving Index, a measure based on surveys of U.S. nonprofits. The *New York Times* reported that the stock investments of some foundations have been hit hard: the assets of the **PAUL G. ALLEN CHARITABLE FOUNDATION** dropped 39 percent to \$58 million last year. The assets of the **DAVID & LUCILE PACKARD FOUNDATION**, which are invested primarily in Hewlett-Packard and its spinoff Agilent, declined 25 percent to \$9.8 billion last year. Other foundations that lost more than 10 percent of their assets last year include the **ANNENBERG FOUNDATION**, the **ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION**, the **GEORGE GUND FOUNDATION** and the **W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION**.

The **BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION** has offered to give 10 to 15 Washington public high schools about \$500 per student if they agree to split into smaller independent schools of 600 or fewer students each. The foundation also has promised \$100 million worth of scholarships over the next 13 years to students from the newly established schools.

A smaller proportion of foundations are reporting their grants to the public, according to the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*. Although grantmakers must list grants in their annual reports to the IRS, which are available for public inspection, those reports rarely include much detail about specific grants. Since 1997, the share of foundations issuing more-descriptive annual reports to the public declined from 25 percent to 19 percent.

The **WILLIAM & FLORA HEWLETT FOUNDATION** is likely to become one of the nation's five largest foundations with assets of \$9 billion. After settlement of the estate of William Hewlett, a co-founder of Hewlett-Packard who died in January, the foundation expects to increase grants to \$500 million annually.