

Big Democracy

BIG DEMOCRACY is different from little democracy. The difference is the difference between the simple and the complex. Our governmental problem today lies in the question: "How can we be a complex society and yet be a democratic society?"

Basic Urges for Order and Freedom

With respect to social organization man has two conflicting urges. He wants security and order and he wants to be free. There is a dynamic character to these wants, too; he wants *more* security; he wants to advance; he wants *more* freedom. He is curious; he wants to learn. He is adventurous; he wants to dare. Life is at once a search for order and a search for change and betterment, a search for organized security and a search for freedom. We establish laws, institutions, conventions, and habits so that we may have order, so that we may have a feeling of what the world expects of us and what we may expect of the world. Social security is much more than economic security. But then we defy, modify, or abandon these same laws, institutions, conventions, and habits because life is change and because we thirst for life. If some mathematical-psychological philosopher were able to devise a series of formulas showing the workable ranges of relationships between disciplines and freedoms, he would rank at once among the titans of the art and science of politics.

Discipline is essential in all organized groups. Studies made at the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company show, for example, that an intricate discipline is developed by the members of each working group. This discipline is a part of the larger discipline involved in the worker's acceptance of plant administration. There are for him also the disciplines of his family, of his neighbors, of his friends, of his union, of his church, of his town, county, state, and nation, some of them social, some economic, some political.

Among the great nations of modern times, the disciplines of government have been lightest in the United States, and heaviest in Germany and Russia, with many variations between the extremes. Our national beginning was in revolution. Our development was through pioneering, each individual going out into new country on his own. Here the tradition of rugged individualism is high; here there is contempt for the too easily disciplined Caspar Milquetoast; here is contempt for convention; here there is hostility toward government. Yet the sequel to our pioneering is unprecedented and sudden bigness and complexity. With them have come many severe disciplines. But the interdependence of things somehow has not been very systematically organized. Our millions recognize their dependence on many vague things far beyond their control.

For them in certain respects the freedom to venture has little appeal, however attractive it may be to potential captains of finance. What they seek, rather desperately, is more order, more certainty, and more security.

In other countries the passion for adventure was never so great, but the search for security has gone to even greater extremes. There can be little doubt that here the height of the movement for security is still ahead. Shall we go from one historic extreme to the other and outdo even the authoritarian nations of the Old World? With such a swing, entailing as it would vast violence to our heritage, we might explode into anarchic chaos.

Surely the rational and conservative course is to develop now such a system of discipline and organization as we need for social security and then keep it tolerable by using it with a sensitive regard for individual values. These new disciplines, it goes without saying, should be informed with the spirit of democracy and administered through democratic techniques, and wherever possible there should be a conscious, compensating abandonment of other, outworn, and irrelevant disciplines.

The movement is on to a more intensive organization, a greater unification, a greater stabilization of our society. It will mean more authority in, and more action by, government. Hence we must improve the processes by which men are enabled to reach agreement for action. There must be increased realization of the importance of

establishing procedures which will discourage hair-splitting and filibustering. Since majority government is government by majorities made up of acquiescent minorities, we shall need readier acquiescence from minorities in those matters about which they do not feel deeply. If free government is to have the regard for minorities and for individuals that it ought to have and must basically have, minorities and individuals must learn to yield less reluctantly than they often do today on issues of secondary or tertiary importance.

All government ultimately, and democratic government more immediately and constantly, do those things to which a sufficient minority does not sufficiently object. When democratic government is faced with a basic necessity to do more, individuals and minorities who cherish democracy must in good faith acquiesce in more matters and do it more readily. Only by so doing can they look forward to a government that will abstain from action to which a relatively small minority very vigorously objects. The alternatives seem to be a government that imposes a majority or even a minority will on the whole people, and a majority government made up of acquiescent minorities each of which retains a right to veto. If we choose the second, better course, the impact of that government on its members will always be more or less tolerable and more or less in harmony with our history and our individualistic aspirations.

The basic urge of the American people reflected in contemporary government is toward an order that is more unified than the system of control maintained by business and more comprehensive, more representative, and more responsible than any of our other systems of non-governmental control. Government is not simply the summation of the needs of agriculture, business, and labor, and not merely the reconciliation of their competitive demands. Government must take into account tens of thousands of considerations other than those attaching to the pressure groups in the body politic. Government must be more powerful, therefore, than any single pressure group or any working combination of pressure groups.

Temper in the Use of Power

Assuming, then, that government is inevitably going to have more responsibility and power, what are the means by which that power

may be exercised in a way acceptable to Americans? First of all, governmental power must be conceived and developed as the power of a social organism rather than the arbitrary authority of a few. The reality here is far beyond what is ordinarily believed. What government does in any particular reflects an enormous number of influences, judgments, points of view, and responses to popular expectations. This is true because government produces an organized product.

Walter Lippmann is fond of saying that the Presidency is an institution, not simply a man in an office. This is true, but not simply because the man who is President today still operates in part according to executive orders issued by McKinley, Taft, Wilson, and other predecessors. In the same way heads of departments and establishments are also institutions. It is not simply that a secretary incumbent signs letters saying "I" did something or other twenty years before he was secretary. It is not simply that under secretaries and assistant secretaries sign statements accepting responsibility or assuming a new responsibility for a formal act of their chief or for one another. It is that whatever any of these high officials does is an intricate, organizational product growing out of the Constitution, a great body of Congressional enactments, and a great bureaucracy widely exposed and intricately influenced.

There is much discussion today of the powers of the President and of the powers of a department head. But there has not been nearly enough discussion of those many factors which, particularly in a democracy, temper the exercise of these powers by whatever individual may happen to hold either of these high offices.

The picture is the same whether one starts at the Cabinet level and works down, or in some work unit of a department and works up. In the work unit three or four persons closest to the particular function and to the people affected by it draw up an action "docket." In it they put the essence of what they feel combines the public, governmental purpose and what they feel the affected citizens will accept. The docket may be a revision of an old one, called for by persisting dissatisfaction on the part of citizens concerned. The new one will attempt to alleviate that dissatisfaction without, however, causing dissatisfaction among those persons who are not complain-

ing. Or the revision may be one dictated by a rather remote criticism made by the Budget Bureau or the Comptroller General, or the opposition party, or a few members of Congress who have no reason to be positively interested in that particular activity. Most dockets must take into account many such forces, influences, and considerations.

The work unit completes the docket. It goes to the section head, who reviews it for other such considerations, of which only he may be especially aware. Then it goes to the division head, where it is similarly reviewed, and finally to the bureau chief. In the meantime it has been in review by someone on the solicitor's staff who has looked at it from the standpoint of review by the courts or by the Comptroller General, and by someone in the finance office who has in mind budgetary, governmental, and appropriation-committees considerations. A press release describing the docket will have been prepared by the bureau information office and sent on to the department information office where it is examined with reference to the whole stream of such press releases and freshly appraised in terms of the public relations of the whole department. Dozens upon dozens of persons with many varied responsibilities have contributed from their sensitivities, their backgrounds, and their judgments. This internal process will, moreover, usually have been supplemented by conferences with interested visitors. But whether such conferences are held concurrently or not, everyone concerned will be well aware of previous conferences and thoroughly cognizant of the way the proposed action is likely to be received. Each person is anxious that the man to whom he is responsible will not have found him to have slipped in any way; each one knows the dynamite in every docket and the potentialities for public outcry. Finally, each one knows that trouble for top executives as a result of the docket will inevitably involve him.

By the time the docket reaches the secretary, the initials of half a dozen high executives of various responsibilities certify the completion of these several steps. No one person has exercised much power during the process, and each one's power has been restrained and directed to the end of ensuring an action as satisfactory as possible to the public. The secretary, too, can contribute only a little.

From his knowledge of the President's views, of the attitudes of other department heads, of conversations with Congressmen and publicists, he may *sometimes* be able to make a significant contribution, but not often. He may, in handling the docket, ask some penetrating question, news of which, going back on the grapevine of the bureaucracy, will slant their efforts a trifle differently in the next docket. Or he may send back a formal note suggesting that in successive dockets the course might be a little more in such-and-such a direction. Only rarely can he be certain enough about the importance of a change that he will feel warranted in refusing to approve the particular docket. Usually his questions can be quickly answered by those who have labored most on the docket. The secretary's usual influence is in respect to trends and is an outgrowth of his own exposure to broader influences. His main function consists in making general decisions.

No department head can hold principal executives responsible without going along with them substantially most of the time. Watching their product, he may, after an accumulation of dissatisfaction, displace them, if he can find men he thinks abler—but he must then uphold the new men substantially most of the time. Similarly, these executives must normally uphold *their* principal executives in the same way. Yet the consultative and reciprocal method in which these actions take form, and the occasional insistence for change at any one of several score vantage points, make for a representative product in which every official has been keenly aware of the limitation of his own power and most concerned about the public impact.

This process reflects in part a similar administrative process in which this and similar dockets are enforced. Administrative people work chiefly with affected citizens. They work under rules, but have always some discretion. It is natural for them to try to make themselves and their functions acceptable. When they find irritations which they think could be avoided by changes in the rules, they consistently recommend the changes. In the department all of these concerns come into focus with those of the larger public interest. So long as the people vote and have unrestrained the right to complain, the whole process of administration is in a sense political on every level. *In toto* it brings to bear the condensed political essence of the

entire nation. That is the essence of democratic administration. After insistence on free and regular franchise and the right to complain, nothing is more essential to making and keeping big government democratic than to conceive of governmental power and to develop it as the power of a social and political organism.

The various phases of this process are a product of tradition, growth, instruments, and institutions. They are carried on within a framework of standards and statutes laid down by Congress and subject to change by Congress. Together they form an instance of the exercise of national power. Unification of that power around a core of definite authority—unification first in bureaus, then in departments, and finally under the President—means that governmental action will have the character of a fair response to national social need rather than simply the sum total of a series of separate responses to many individual needs.

What is individually wise may often be socially unwise. The nation as a whole needs an embodiment. The embodiment is to be found in the national government, and the sole representative of the entire nation is the President. He is the democratic head of the American body politic, the organism which comprehends all the parts of the nation, but which is somehow more than the mere sum of those parts. He is the symbol of all the government's executive power, subject to Congressional specification and withdrawal. Through Congress, and through elections, it is a power popularly controlled.

Consideration for Citizens as Individuals

The government I am trying to describe, and for the most part it is what exists, is a government that grows out of the life of its people rather than one that is imposed upon them. The second chief requirement for government under Big Democracy already has been suggested. It is simply a conscious and steady emphasis on the consideration of citizens as individuals. This emphasis calls for a limited but important participation in government. But it involves an enlarged elasticity in administration and requires increased concern for everything that makes government more co-operative, considerate, receptive, and responsive toward its people.

There must be limits to the direct participation in government by

the citizens. It should be obvious to everybody that the town-meeting technique is not suitable for the big government of a great nation. In specific matters we must work out our salvation as a Big Democracy through representative rather than through direct popular government. On a titular basis the President represents the whole people; yet no one man can do that perfectly in practice. Congress represents the people according to geographical areas, yet not even Congress would assert that it can fully represent the nation or all of its interests and aspirations. The American Bankers Association, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the United States Chamber of Commerce all represent business. Though to some extent the Chamber of Commerce comprehends the other two groups, apparently it is not felt to represent adequately either bankers or manufacturers, else the two former associations would disband. Yet not all three together fully represent all of the important beliefs, needs and aspirations of American businessmen. For those businessmen also belong to churches, lodges, luncheon and country clubs. They read various books, papers, and magazines, listen to assorted radio programs, see different movies, and have different wives. They are of different ages and different experiences and have different numbers of children of various ages. The members of these three great business groups are not by any means unanimous on the questions of the day, even on those relating to commerce, or manufacturing, or banking. The ideas they have they hold with great differences of certainty and passion as mixtures of views about other matters influence them. All three of these business organizations have important and legitimate functions. They may properly influence government. But they should not *be* government, not even with respect to business.

This is equally true with respect to labor unions. Members of labor unions are many things else. Labor organizations do not and could not represent them in their whole capacity as American citizens. Labor unions can properly influence government, but they cannot properly *be* government or exercise governmental functions, even simply with respect to labor. And so it is likewise with farm organizations.

Government must show consideration for numberless organizations of citizens, can be influenced by them, and profits from that

influence. It may have a consultative relationship with all of them, but it must not have an exclusive consultative relationship with any of them and it cannot delegate governmental authority to any of them. Government can be responsible only if it exercises governmental responsibility. An official in government must be responsible to government—the whole government, the whole people—not to any single, special, or partial group. Persons who know business or labor or agriculture can helpfully serve government, but they can exercise governmental authority helpfully only when responsible to government, only when subjected to all of the influences that are properly brought to bear on governmental officials themselves. Government in action-administration comes into contact with individuals and not merely with organizations. It is therefore tempered, and should be, by all the diverse considerations they represent. If government is to serve the welfare of all persons and groups, it must therefore provide an open channel for each to “get through.”

This conviction has been widely shared in the Department of Agriculture. With adoption of its many large action programs it has endeavored correspondingly to develop its contacts with farmers and agricultural groups. County land-use planning committees have brought together representative local farm leaders to study and discuss programs. Discussion groups, county advisory and other committees, and state and regional committees of various kinds have brought into close association with government personnel perhaps a million people in the last ten years. Personal contact between department personnel and farm people has been at an average rate of at least two or three visits a year for all farmers, and at some times and places at an average rate of one a month. Hundreds of thousands of farm families have a strong sense of participation in, and shared responsibility for, our governmental agricultural programs. There is a vastly greater championship of those programs by farm people than there is resentment of them. The great majority of farmers come of course between these two extremes; their attitude is simply one of untroubled acceptance of the programs. Cultivation of these relationships has naturally made for better public relations for the department. But this has been only their smallest benefit. What is of

most importance is that they have made for better programs, for more flexibility, and for better administration.

The spirit of consideration for the citizen affected by governmental action must be fostered first in the administration of the department itself. Administration used to be thought of simply as giving orders and getting compliance. But it has already been shown that organizations cannot actually be so run. In recent years recognition has been growing that, by themselves, mechanical co-ordination and legal delegation can never call forth the full zeal of an organization or get the full advantage of the abilities of all its personnel. And that is the newer goal. Government departments which are themselves responsive and considerate and which operate with appreciation for human dignity and human diversity within their own staffs are the only ones that can hope to be able to have their personnel take a similar attitude with respect to the public with which they deal.

But not merely in government is this kind of administration desirable. Its greater development in all fields could contribute significantly to easing the burden of the disciplines necessary in our complex world. Fortunately it is already spreading. Relatively arbitrary business disciplines have been much tempered by changing social attitudes, by the demands of organized labor, and by the operation of governmental controls. Our more enlightened corporations have found that intelligent personnel policies make a great contribution to efficiency in production and management. Here the experience of the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company is most profound. But with the added experience of the Dennison Manufacturing Company, the Nunn-Bush Shoe Company, and many others we have the basis for enormous improvement in satisfying the needs of both workers and management.

Government, however, should try hardest of all to make these advances. Administration on these terms is what we need and what the public has a right to expect in Big Democracy. Let our public administrators cherish the importance and the value of individual differences among our people and they will never allow the disciplines that government must administer to become intolerable.