

Politics—Source of the People's Power

IN DISCUSSING DEMOCRATIC METHODS I have referred to the necessity (which exists for other reasons as well) to get an organized product from government as an insurance against arbitrary exercise of power. The larger check on arbitrary power is in the fact that we have *political* government. This phrase "political government" is rather absurd, since government is the science and art of politics. But so many persons talk about government as something to be improved only by reducing or eliminating its political composition that it is necessary to emphasize the facts that popular political processes, which are the essence of democracy, can only work through governmental organizations, and that all governmental organizations are not merely administrative entities; they are and must be political organisms. In its most common or popular usage the word "political" does not have the same connotations as the term "government." Some governments are more "political" than others. Democratic governments are far more political than authoritarian governments; that is in great part the measure of their superiority over such regimes. We have political government in the United States in the degree we do because of the rights of franchise and free speech. The improvement of our government is a political problem to be solved by political processes, whether citizen snobs agree or not.

In a democracy, bureaucracy is a tool of the people. The necessity for administrative delegation and co-ordination derives in part from the necessity for wide and intensive exposure of governmental action. Popular sentiments come to bear on all levels of all parts of the executive branch of the government and similarly on the legislative branch. Their influence is reflected in the co-ordinated action that results—action that is a product of that exposure. Such action takes into account myriad considerations important to the people, but comprehended in no other one organized entity than government.

There is much more to democratic government than bureaucracy. But it is all political. And in those political processes lies the principal guarantee of democracy, for they supply the all-important check on arbitrary power.

Political Generality and Political Detail

There are many levels in politics. On all the levels there are aspects of detail and aspects of generality. On the national level in the last twelve years the quality of our general political management and general political leadership has probably surpassed anything our history has to record. The more candid among the opposition party admit as much. Political detail, on the other hand, has not received corresponding attention. There has been some concern, to be sure, to extend and improve the use of consultative techniques by various administrative agencies, and this has been all to the good. But little attention has been paid to party organization, party prerogatives, or party discipline. The President's political management has been general and personal rather than organizational.

Political detail is not normally of immediate significance to the people, and for the most part they distrust it. Yet it is of great intrinsic importance. Magnetic personal leadership can of course relieve a political organization of part of the burden of detail it must carry. But it is not too much to say that some organized attention to political detail is always required to assure sufficient governmental unity. The formal leadership of the two Houses is, for example, of great importance to the President. The nucleus of support that comes from the simple fact that his party is in power is the base on which the President builds his political leadership. The sharp separation of our government into Congressional, Executive, and Judicial branches is on the other hand a great handicap to such leadership. The fact that the political fortunes of the members of Congress do not necessarily rise and fall with the fortunes of the President often makes his leadership extremely tenuous. The President may have what he regards as a clear national mandate, but it will not for that reason be easy for him to get the members of Congress, who will usually have been elected for local reasons, to follow him.

It is always desirable and generally necessary that there be many

matters of common concern between the President and the Congressional majority if they are to be able without difficulty to agree on a legislative program. Inadequate party unity and discipline obliges a President to rely on the personal attention he can give Congressmen and Senators, on administrative favors such as approving projects for their states or districts, on patronage, or on his personal strength with the people. President Roosevelt has had occasion to resort to all four of these stratagems, chiefly the last. Coupled with his unequalled political judgment and unprecedented political sensibilities, they have enabled him to function as politician-in-chief with rare success. He glories in the American political process, would not exchange it for any other, and likes to think of himself as one of its ablest practitioners. That is why Heywood Broun was thoroughly profound when he said: "Those who see Roosevelt making himself dictator would see Babe Ruth doing away with the home run."

With the increasing demands of his office, however, a modern President cannot possibly reserve enough of his time for interviews with Congressmen to enable them to bask in his strength in their home papers. And were he to devote all his time to such interviews, members still could not average more than one visit in about sixty days. This is unfortunate, for not only do they have their own necessities for maintaining their own leadership in their home states and districts, but it is to the President's interest that they maintain that leadership in connection with his own greater leadership.

Like the President most members of Congress function individually, too, rather than organizationally. If a Congressman is instrumental in getting a much wanted reclamation project for his district, his party gets some kind of reflected or indirect credit, but most of it goes to him as an individual. If a constituent wants a job, he is likely to write straight to the Congressman, and the Congressman is likely to try to get the job for him directly, without referring the matter back to the party committee. Not one per cent of the positions in government are filled as political patronage, but the handling of patronage is a matter of much importance.

Management of Patronage

Common assumptions to the contrary, James A. Farley exercised more of a personal leadership than an organizational leadership while chairman of the Democratic National Committee. He relied for his success on an amazing genius for getting acquainted with people and on his personal political judgment. Through his management of patronage he tended to build up individual Congressmen and Senators rather more than the party organization itself, for recommendations for appointment would generally come to the departments from Capitol Hill rather than from Democratic party headquarters. It may be that the departments were more responsive when the advices came that way, and, of course, it was also necessary to recognize Congress. But the procedure left party committees without much either of status or of function, and caused them to be irritated over appointments of which they had no prior knowledge.

When Ed Flynn came in as national chairman he attempted to reverse the process and require all recommendations to come from committeemen. Unfortunately, however, the committeemen know less of the actual functioning of Federal government than do members of Congress, and on the whole the departments find them harder to deal with. Moreover members of Congress are not easily disregarded. Flynn's efforts ended with the former procedure pretty much intact, but with somewhat more cross-reference between Congressmen and committeemen. This, of course, has been the theory all along: that for that small part of the government's personnel not selected by Civil Service processes Congressmen and Senators should receive recommendations from party committees, and that applicants consequently should be dependent for appointments on both the party and the member of Congress. Yet all Congressmen will need or want to act otherwise in individual cases. All of them want to have some personal patronage, just as all administrators will need to be able, and will insist on the right, to select some non-Civil Service personnel without reference to politics. The function left for party committees between campaigns is not very great.

The President also needs to make many of his top-place selections without much reference to strictly party considerations. This he is generally able to do; for whether he chooses for a Cabinet post John

Jones of Nebraska or Henry Smith of West Virginia has little national political importance, even though it may make a difference in Nebraska or West Virginia. The feeling of participation on the part of committeemen, from the precinct up, matters far more than actual choosing of top officials from party recommendations. But the presidential function is not exhausted in mere party leadership, and to do what he needs to do he will invariably make many very personal selections. They may be none the less adequately political selections, yet the method used will make them irritating to the party. Like other pressure groups, it wants a monopoly—in this case on the function of recommending and approving personnel. That monopoly cannot be granted.

Not All Politics Is Party Politics

It will help to illustrate the situation to call attention to the fact, which further restricts the party function, that certain departments have to play specific kinds of politics other than party politics. The Department of Labor, for example, has to play highly specialized labor politics far outside the competence of a national party committee, balancing things between the A. F. of L., the C. I. O., and the Railway Brotherhoods. The Department of Agriculture must play the complex of farm politics. In many instances this means that it can best support party politics by being nonpartisan. It is subject to patronage and other pressures from the farm front which are every bit as real and as political as party pressures. It has in addition, of course, technical and highly specialized managerial needs. Through the years it has learned that, in the long run, to do a good job is, far and away, the best kind of politics.

Much that is important, however, is bound up in such political detail. Relations between Roosevelt and Farley developed as they did because of differences in their political functions and the manner of handling the relationship between those functions. Relationships between the Executive and Congress have suffered for similar reasons.

Theoretically, one might argue that party politics can be made to comprehend all the specialized forms of politics. Actually, it is impossible. The differences in functions and responsibilities, as between party committees, Congress, and the executive departments are too

great. The functions are all related and all political, yet they are distinct and different parts of a political complex. Each part learns from and contributes to the others, but they remain separate. Where administrators are too technical or politically inept, trouble invariably develops. Likewise where party committees exercise too direct and specific a control over administration. Likewise where Congress as a whole or particular members of Congress insist on too close a surveillance. Likewise where the Executive pays too little attention to the political function of Congress. There is need for improvement in each field, and perhaps even in our basic political structure. But good government can be built and sustained only by a continuous reconciliation of the functions of the technician, the administrator, and the politician.

Democracy—Free Political Enterprise

Parties and pressure groups in a way are competitive. Both seek to dominate government. Both are political in nature. The League of Women Voters, the Federation of Women's Clubs, the American Legion, the American Bar Association, the American Bankers Association, the National Association of Manufacturers, the Chambers of Commerce, the various unions, the farm organizations, the lumbermen, the packers, the commission men, the millers, the bakers, the candlestick-makers—all of them are in varying degrees political. The press, the radio, the movies, educational associations, the churches—all have a political character, positive or negative, general or specific, constant or spasmodic, static or kinetic. The parties have no monopoly on politics. Nor do the parties and all these other groups put together enjoy a monopoly—not in a democracy. There are still the rugged individualists and they must be a special concern of intelligent politicians because they can turn minorities into majorities. Lastly there is always the fact of free political enterprise, the opportunity for new organizations and movements. Only government can comprehend all politics.

Voters in towns and counties understand roughly and sufficiently why the state does not respond to them in the way the towns and counties respond. But voters in states seem not equally to understand why the nation does not respond to them as do their states. National

pressure groups seem not to understand why the national government does not react as does the city government when the same group makes local demands. The differences are of the same kind, but greater in degree and in complexity. Voters in a state become generally aware of important state political forces. State politicians become expert in such matters. But even highly intelligent state voters will miss scores of national political considerations.

There are extremely few *national* politicians. These few tend to emerge suddenly and to function briefly on the national scene. For they usually reach this level at an age when physical mortality is high—and political mortality is higher yet. One of the great weaknesses of our Big Democracy lies in the fact that we have no adequate system for developing such a pool of national politicians. Members of Congress are essentially state and local politicians. They are under no particular pressure to become really national politicians, nor are they given any special opportunity or encouragement to do so. Some become sectional politicians, but very few attain national stature. Leaders of pressure groups are even more restricted in function and exposure and have even greater difficulty in formulating their proposals with anything like a national governmental perspective. Congressmen, by having to compromise local, state, and national differences, do, in that sense and in that way, tend to function nationally. But the pull of their attention toward local concerns is very great, and the national interest is something definitely more than a mere compromise of area differences.

There is virtue in a national point of view just as truly as there is virtue in a state point of view, and the necessity is even greater. It is by and through the joint endeavors of technicians, administrators, party spokesmen, members of Congress, and the leaders of interest groups in all parts of the country that democracy lives and acts. This is the political governmental process. It is the free and yet disciplined interplay of all these elements that makes the good society.