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THE NATURE OF THE EDUCATIONAL TASK

*W. G. Stucky, Educational Leader
The Center for Agricultural and Economic Adjustment
Iowa State University*

Public affairs specialists deserve all our support and all the help and encouragement they can get. You face with courage an awesome kind of task. You deal with the social and economic problems of the society that emerge as issues to be settled by the people. The manner of dealing with these issues is different than in most problem solving. When a physical scientist develops an apparatus to find a solution to a problem, he in all likelihood can discard the results of his work if the ends do not measure up to his criteria. He may also discard the apparatus he used in achieving those particular results. This is not like your problem. The results of decisions carried out concerning the production of farm commodities cannot be discarded. The surplus crop is part of the new situation. The apparatus (the policy, the laws, etc.) that produced it cannot be easily discarded either and, in fact, the apparatus and the results become part of a whole new problem—the new issue to be resolved. The Center is interested in these problems and issues and wishes to do what it can to be of assistance.

Economists, public affairs specialists, and a few administrators in the land-grant college system understand well the causes of the price and income problems in agriculture. They also understand the nature of economic growth and progress and the adjustments in society that are taking place, and must take place, if all segments in the economy are to share equitably in the benefits of that growth and progress.

The problem we are dealing with this morning is how this understanding may be efficiently and effectively transferred to all society—to all society because without better understanding the *status quo* tends to prevail and this, most agree, leaves agriculture in a disadvantaged position and, even worse, perhaps is eroding away some of the strength of the nation by allowing the rest of society to become less interested in assisting agriculture, which is still an essential industry in every modern society.

What is the situation in regard to the level of understanding of the “industry problems” of agriculture? We find great lack of understanding and confusion among farmers themselves. Witness the differences and actions of the Farm Bureau, the Farmers

Union, the National Farmers Organization, the Farm Policy Council, and other farmer representative groups desperately trying to articulate the troubles of agriculture and the courses of action desired for solution of these ills.

The largest segment of society, the urban consumer, is not concerned about agriculture much at all—food is easily available. But he has a somewhat violent reaction against taxes—especially those that to him seem unnecessary or that seem to be attempts to transfer income from his pocket to someone else's whom he regards as perfectly capable of taking care of himself. The farmer is put in this latter category. Since the consumer does not see clearly these industry problems of agriculture, he relates the agricultural issues to the individual farm family in the same way he relates his own problems to himself.

Political leaders who are responsible for acting in the general welfare are unable to move far from the *status quo* either. They do not move far forward because they, too, lack a high degree of understanding. Also the society they serve is a confused one and, consequently, they find that the safest political ground is near the *status quo*.

The problem of education we are confronted with is not alone the problem of helping farmers to understand—but also the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker as well as (and just as importantly) the teacher, the taker (consumer), and the policy maker. Considering the magnitude of the industry problems, the magnitude of the audience to be served, and the magnitude of the educational task involved, little progress will be achieved toward solution until research and educational forces of a magnitude tantamount to the problem are committed. More than token forces will be required to develop understanding sufficient to change the situation. The agricultural policy educators of the nation do not make policy either. Agricultural policy is decided by the people of the nation in the final analysis. The problem of deciding national agricultural policy is a problem of the whole interested public of the nation.

The special educational problem presented to us is how an organization such as the colleges of agriculture can cope with the task of literally engaging the whole society, not down to the last man of course, but a sufficient segment to establish a favorable climate for action, or as you public affairs specialists put it, a course of action having political feasibility.

Since society has designed the policy of abundance, it may also

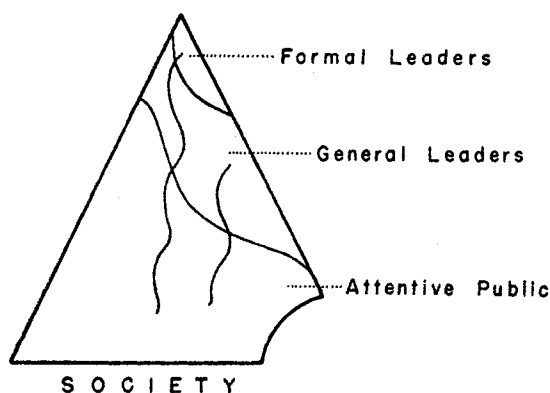
design a policy for use of this abundance in ways beneficial to society and its various components. Abundance is a mark of strength. From its position of strength society can pursue higher goals of economic development. It can do this provided the excess resources in agriculture become allocated to satisfy other needs of society.

If people in agriculture are left permanently disadvantaged, this would weaken a major element of our national strength—a healthy, productive agriculture. But the individual farmer cannot make society's decisions. His individual influence on the use of resources reaches his boundary fence. He needs constructive national policy that recognizes his needs as a person, the needs of the industry as a whole, and society in general. This involves society as a whole. Our national farm policy will not embrace the basic and core problems of agriculture until the whole society recognizes, understands, and acts on the basis of the true needs and situation. Intelligent action cannot spring from ignorance or from indifference.

A function of educational leadership is to develop understanding of changing situations in our democratic society and of the issues to be resolved—if the goals of society are to be reached. The ultimate power to resolve the issues rests with the people. Without education they may act contrary to their goals, fail to act, or act too late.

Leaders in government cannot act without the support and understanding of the people and still remain in a position of leadership.

You might look at this relationship of the leaders and the other citizens as a pyramid. This is not a fixed grouping. Rather, it is an unstable grouping with individuals moving up and down and from



group to group depending upon the issue or area of concern. A formal or general leader on public education may be only one more attentive public individual on farm issues.

Within this pyramid are formal and informal communication roots that lead from the top of the pyramid to the bottom, passing along information, both up and down, keeping the leadership in tune with the thinking of the attentive public (the folks back home and the boys in the back room) and vice versa. To take action toward the solution of a society problem in an unstable hierarchy as represented here, the formal leadership, the general leadership, and the attentive public must be somewhat in harmony on the identification and understanding of the problem and alternative courses of action.

When a political consensus emerges among formal and general leaders and the public, society will adopt a particular course of action. If this agreement does not exist, the formal leaders cannot act. If they take action not in accord with the views and support of the general leadership or the attentive public, pressure will develop to replace these formal leaders with others who better represent the wishes of the people. Equally important, an informed public is essential to permit the leader to lead, to be more than a pulse taker of public whim or will.

If American leaders are to act with wisdom and greatness, then the American people must be wise and great, both in the demands they make on their leaders and in their capacity to respond to great leadership. Thus, if educational leaders in the land-grant college system wish to perform a significant role in helping people deal with problems of society, they must reach concurrently the attentive public, the general leadership, and the formal leadership—the decision and action components of the whole society. This does not mean this must be done in the same way or by the use of the same methods. It does mean that the attentive public must have a degree of awareness and understanding that permits leaders to initiate and carry out action programs. Before leaders can act, they may require education that is direct and sophisticated, and that has depth. You are capable of doing this on a face-to-face basis with them.

Society is not likely to become sufficiently informed if the colleges proceed in a traditional manner—that is, by adding a fraction or one or two or more public affairs specialists to travel hither and yon, competing with all the other specialists and special interests for the time and use of the educational outlets of the

institution—the agent, the informational media, and the attention of the extension audience.

What is called for is a new dimension for the adult education function of the institution, a system whereby the precious and scarce resources of public affairs specialists are left relatively free from work on a face-to-face basis with the whole of society—an impossible task. The best use of the specialist is in developing educational material for a system that allows the county staff to administer a program of unlimited reach, leaving the talents of the specialist to work directly with the general and formal leaders in an educational context.

The land-grant college system should be interested in solving the farm problem. Considering the genesis of these institutions and the present programs predominantly dealing with agriculture and rural America, it is difficult to see how they could be aloof. They are not, although it may have seemed so at first. Scientists and educators at first did not recognize that output increasing technology in a mature society benefited consumers proportionally more in the long run than it did the producer—as long as sufficient adjustments in resource use did not accompany the new technology. The crux of the matter now is getting conviction that the process of adjustment is as legitimate a benefit to agriculture and society as is the improvement of efficiency.

This job of public affairs education requires the development of leadership and John W. Gardner (President of Carnegie Corporation of New York) sums up what appears to be the real challenge to us in the land-grant college system:

Leaders Must Lead! Leaders, even in a democracy, must lead. If our citizens are to recapture the sense of mission which survival demands, then our leaders at every level must have the capacity and the vision to call it out. It is hard to expect an upsurge of devotion to the common good, if leaders lack the moral depth to expect or understand such devotion, or the courage to evoke it, or the stature to merit the response which follows.

A free society that is passive, inert and preoccupied with its own diversions and comforts will not last long. But fortunately for our future, the American people appear to be waking up. And events of the years immediately ahead may further this awakening.