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7

THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS IN WAR AND PEACE

-by-

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It is a truism that in a democracy the will of the people should determine the policies of government. This may be accomplished through representatives selected by popular vote who may reflect the will of the people in the enactment of legislation in line with their expressed wishes. Difficulties stand in the way of the satisfactory operation of this process.

The people are frequently not in agreement on either major or minor issues because of lack of understanding, because of supposed differences of interest of one group over another, or for other reasons. Furthermore, conditions change after an election, and even the most serious minded and honest representative has great difficulty in knowing the will of the people.

Many other difficulties might be advanced but I should like to direct attention for a few minutes to the disagreement among the people.

Perhaps you agree to the broad generalization that some of the causes of World War II were of an economic character. Perhaps you also agree that the imposition and collection of indemnities from the defeated countries following World War I was an economic futility, when trade barriers were erected by the victors which prevented exportation of goods from those countries against which the indemnities were assessed.

Now, I would ask the question - How many laymen in this country understood this as a fact? Probably the percentage was frightfully small. And many of those who did understand, and accepted the fact, through some motive of self-interest, compromised on the issue.

What did economists do at the time these barriers were proposed? Over 1,000 of them supported a statement which was presented to a representative of the people, (the President) setting forth the facts and the principles. ^{1/} Perhaps you think this was as it should be; that the economists had done more than they were academically required to do. Under a dictatorship, perhaps, this would have been sufficient.

But we do not live under a dictatorship. Therefore, the economists "missed the boat" so far as actual results were concerned. At least their statement was not effective in directing governmental action in the right direction. You ask - What more could they have done? In turn I ask - From whom do the representatives of the people derive their functions in a

^{1/} See Congressional Record, 71st Congress, 2nd Session, Vol. LXXII, Part 8, pp. 8327-8328, April 29 to May 16, 1930. Also, The American Economic Review, Vol. XXXII, No. 2, Part 1, June 1942.

8

democracy? Did you or I make any concerted effort to lay the facts and principles before the people who chose the representatives? We set forth the propositions to their representative and patted ourselves on the back, if a bit anxiously, for we thought we had done "our stuff." It is the job of someone else, not the economists, to educate the people; but someone else did not educate the people. Norman Angell, in "Let the People Know," says ".... no education which consists mainly in the dissemination of 'knowledge' can save us. If men can disregard in their policies the facts they already know, they can just as easily disregard new facts which they do not at present know. What is needed is the development in men of that particular type of skill which will enable them to make social use of knowledge already in their possession; enable them to apply simple, sometimes self-evident truths to the guidance of policy." 2/

Do we, as economists, use that particular type of skill which will enable us to make social use of knowledge already in our possession?

No. Generally we are inclined to continue researching to ascertain new facts which in turn may be disregarded by the people largely because they do not understand.

Quoting again from Norman Angell, "The supreme fact in the shaping of our society, in achieving freedom and happiness, is the quality of the public mind, the quality of the common people's political judgment. No effective policy of victory or of stable peace can be successfully pursued if the mass of the public are unconvinced, confused, divided on the simplest and most fundamental principles of security, peace, and plenty. understanding is indispensable to the solution....lack of it may constitute, and repeatedly has constituted in the recent past, a complete barrier to the achievement of the people's purposes; a complete frustration of the people's intention."

Does the economist have a job to do in assisting citizens generally in getting an understanding of the facts as the basis for policy making?

I wonder what we mean by the term "democratic process?" Doesn't it mean considerably more than the election of officers? It means the formation of an enlightened and united opinion, the development of understood recommendations for policies and action, and taking part in carrying out programs that have been agreed upon by the masses of the people. Obviously, sound opinion and policies can be developed only on the basis of unbiased facts. Sometimes facts are already known on which policy can be based and action carried out; sometimes they are not known.

Experts have many facts at their disposal but they may not get far in directing the formation of policy unless the people themselves know those facts and help to formulate the policy. Frequently facts and conclusions therefrom get to the people's representatives; all too frequently these representatives do not accept the facts or conclusions or they may distort them toward some unjustified advantage of some special interest group. One way of overcoming such a situation might be to get the facts clearly into the thinking of the people themselves. Therefore the "marriage" of the expert and his facts with the layman and his judgment is a logical and necessary process.

2/ "Let the People Know," pp. 41 by Norman Angell; The Viking Press

It has been demonstrated that one of the most effective ways of gaining understanding is to have a genuine part in the assembling of pertinent facts. In many cases this is the easiest way that understanding can be obtained. The understanding is strengthened if they take part in organizing and analyzing these facts.

Frequently laymen have little time, inclination, or experience for assembling and analyzing facts. But if it is evident that the results may be of interest to a layman he may find the time and inclination to participate in fact finding. When the technician joins with the layman, teamwork of far-reaching importance is frequently developed. In the following quotation from Howard R. Tolley's recent book, "The Farmer Citizen at War" is a situation in which the expert and the layman can combine their efforts successfully and is simply stated. "We've got about three times as much machine power on our farms in this county as we'd need if it were all used efficiently. This year we're going to be short of hands. We'll have to make these machines do more work we need to take a census of the tractors, combines, corn pickers, and such. We could spot them on a big county map and a man in Washington Township wouldn't have to chase all the way to South Bloomfield to get his beans out if he found there was a combine for hire right down the road." 3/

The question might be raised whether it is important to get these facts, especially in wartime, rather than make extensive investigations as to the crew-duty of such machines. As a matter of fact, couldn't the researcher do his share of guiding and using techniques, and cover needed territory in a hurry, thereby making a real contribution to the war, if he will combine his ability with the layman's in such enterprises?

We have had Agricultural Extension Services for perhaps thirty years which were organized to translate the results of research into form for use of laymen. This plan was good, but it has reached too few of the people. And it has frequently happened that the "extenders" found they could do some practical researching of their own and be in a better position to "tell" farmers the results than when they merely attempted to interpret the results of research work done by others. The recently inaugurated "block system" involving neighborhood leadership, was intended by its sponsors to reach the "grass roots" through having laymen take part in fact finding, discussion, and policy formation. The success of this technique in this instance will depend to a large degree upon maintaining the interest and activity of the participants in worth-while matters. This technique precludes using the "funnel" method of education.

But the "block system" as a successor to local planning committees, has not been accepted by administrators to the extent that it should be if the people are to be reached. It has been shown in many localities that the people like the participating process; they get plenty of the "funnel" teaching over the radio and through the press.

Fundamental to the success of democracy "is the inevitable emphasis upon the consent on the part of the people, not passive acquiescence, but an active consent that is the equivalent of affirmative and vigorous action whenever that action is needed." 4/

3/ "The Farmer Citizen at War," Howard R. Tolley, pp. 22 - The MacMillan Co.

4/ "The Farmer Citizen at War" ibid. pp. 108

The disapproval that is frequently expressed concerning the multiplicity of "committees" and "boards" and "councils" and time consumed in meetings misses the fundamental concept of getting understanding on the part of the people. Tom Paine, in Revolutionary days, talked about "The facts.... unmutilated by contrivance or errors of tradition" in connection with a united and independent government. He said further: "When it became necessary to proceed to the formation of a government," in these critical times a conference of all the committees was held in Philadelphia. "Though these committees had been elected by the people, they were not elected expressly for the purpose, nor invested with the authority of forming a constitution, and, as they could not, consistent with the American idea of Rights, assume such a power, they could only confer upon the matter, and put it into a train of operation." 5/

Quoting again, "Congress, at its first two meetings had no other authority than what arose from common consent, and the necessity of its acting as a public body." Congress "went no further than to issue recommendations the strength of government does not consist of anything within itself, but in the attachment of a nation, and the interest which the people feel in supporting it. When this is lost government is but a child in power, and though it may harrass individuals for a while, it but facilitates its own fall." 6/

It is not my purpose to advocate committee meetings just for the sake of meeting. But I am of the opinion that we have had altogether too much individualism and not enough mutual understanding in the conduct of our work. I am somewhat intrigued by Paine's expression, "They could only confer upon the matter, and put it into a train of operation." What applies to "the people" doubtless applies equally to investigators, educators and various other technicians as well.

We have pressure groups today which are apparently endeavoring with all their ability to maintain or increase their prestige to the end that the immediate self-interest of the members of particular groups may be enhanced without too much regard for the general welfare. Ways can be found to bring opposing groups together. To illustrate, the California Land-Use Planning Committee included among its members men who were also members of "Associated Farmers." In the early deliberations of this committee the "influence" of that powerful group was apparent. But as committee meeting after committee meeting was held, and more and more facts were presented by technicians in an impartial way, it became apparent that previous "opinions" were being abandoned. An examination of the recommendations of this committee reveals that eventually real consideration was given to the facts; conclusions were drawn which were contrary to some that had been previously held. At the beginning of the operations of the committee this was scarcely believed to be possible.

We are going through a veritable revolution in this country which many do not recognize. The "rugged individualist" fears that he will lose, not his real freedom of action, but some of the privileges he has acquired, possibly at the expense of others. His unwillingness to change his ways, and his unwillingness to look the facts in the face, must be recognized as elements to be overcome in the interest of all the people. Perhaps a

5/, 6/ "The Farmer Citizen at War" *ibid.*

different kind of education is called for to meet the requirements of present-day society.

And a revolution is taking place in matters of administration of our government's operations. Administrators are not given absolute and autocratic powers without checks and balances. Can Mr. Brown make absolute decisions without reference to Mr. Davis, Mr. Nelson, or Mr. Byrnes? In times like these we are prone to call for the acts of a dictator in matters of administration to avoid delays and indecision.

In my own Bureau operations are conducted largely on a basis of mutual understanding. Decisions that were once thought to be the function of an administrator are made by committees and not the least of us chafe under the onus of one committee meeting after another. Real cooperation is not developed in a day. We are moving away from dictatorship in bureaucracy - the democratic process is at work even in administration. Even if some of us do not like it, certainly every individual in the organization has a greater opportunity to make his contribution than when he was under direct "orders" from some one, and I suspect that, after all, the maximum contributions in appropriate directions from each of us is an ultimate objective in a democracy.

I wish to emphasize four points from these sketchy remarks:

First: In this war the people should know what we are fighting for. If we are fighting for the "Four Freedoms" what are some of the important and specific elements that have a place in considerations of peace as between nations of unlike peoples? Let the people know so they will at least give unqualified support to the results of the peace deliberations. If force, military or economic, is essential to the maintenance of peace, let the people know what is involved in such policies and what we have to achieve.

Second: The principle of participation of the people in the development of policy is paramount in a democracy. This means taking part in the securing of facts wherever possible, in their analysis, and in the consideration of conclusions as to the policy to be based thereon. It means that every researcher should give thought to approaching his job in such a way that he will assist the people to an understanding of known facts as well as assist in the development of new facts. There is evidence on every hand that the people like this participation idea much better than the "funnel" type of teaching.

Third: The use of committees, boards, councils, etc., in arriving at mutual understanding, is a need that stares us in the face until some better technique is found. We may be slowed up in the war effort because of time lost in getting this mutual understanding, but we will certainly lose the peace, as we did before, if we do not have it. No matter how intolerant we may be of delay, red tape, and indecision, we must realize that we must have understanding if democracy is to thrive.

Fourth: Pressure groups can be utilized in the interest of the general welfare. When all the facts, impartial and unbiased, are adequately placed before the rank and file behind the leaders, these leaders come into line with the will of the people; it sometimes takes much time and patience to get the facts across. Is there any other way in a true democracy?

We, in the field of Agricultural Economics, might well re-examine our own abilities and inclinations, and possibly redirect our efforts toward greater accomplishments in these revolutionary times.

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Discussion of "The Democratic Process in War and Peace"
By Rex E. Willard
Paul A. Eke, University of Idaho

This paper displays the problem of the technician, particularly the social scientist, to get the general public to accept his finding and to conform to such pertinent facts. Mr. Willard correctly reflects our chagrin and impatience which we feel when we see the public violate the most elementary facts and economic and social principles in forcing public action. Mr. Willard's insistence that this condition is a major problem in a democracy coincides with my own observations in several parts of the nation. What can be done to minimize this condition? It would warrant the attention of all scientific workers and the life work of many gifted people. In the past it appears that only a few great artists have achieved such results in a big way and then only after a period of time. Walt Whitman is now coming to the fore (a poet and writer) as the champion of the common man. Abraham Lincoln, a social artist of rare ability, has become a shrine in the hearts of most Americans. Both he and Whitman were berated by leaders of public opinion and vested interests of their own generation. They were rated as visionaries and dangerous radicals. However, a safe and peaceful world is needed to allow the slow but effective work of men of this type. With dictators loose in the world can we await a poet or a saintly leader of the people to change over views on international trade, a world court, a world police force, in other words, America's responsibility to the world? We may have to wait, and in the meantime the blood of our young men will again and again be offered as living sacrifices on the altar of public stupidity. One-third of our own population have been "ill-fed, ill-housed, and ill-cled" while the bulk of the world population is even worse off and may remain so indefinitely all because the public will not or can not understand and accept a program which our physical and social engineers know how to work today. Will a dictator which Stuart Chase fears, be called in or will democracies rise to the occasion?

We may say more education is a solution, but as quoted by Mr. Willard from Norman Angell, "No education which consists mainly in the dissemination of 'knowledge' can save us." We know this is true when we contemplate the narrow and dogmatic stupidity often expressed by our specialists in scientific fields. These men often parade as mature scholars. The utter stupidity of Americans in accepting opinions of great specialists and business leaders on current social problems is often a tragedy. Most of these men have specialized to the exclusion of other fields and probably have less understanding than the "common man". They are perfectly sane and safe in their own fields but in other fields they nearly always resort to dogmatism or deductive reasoning (inclusion of extreme cases) or even worse--self interest or group interest. John R. Commons has written, "Deductive reasoning though it may be perfectly logical and valid as a mental operation at all times, on the assumption of unchanging circumstances is separated from the realities of actual life where choices are made between different degrees of different kinds of power each successive moment of living, both in emergencies and routine." It is the existence of this dynamic condition which makes it "----necessary to build up a practical service of administrative economics, in

contrast to the logical deductive science of the nineteenth century---." Most of our scientists and teachers and other leaders in all ranks still are in the nineteenth century in their modes of thinking particularly in other fields than their own. Therefore, we see the current force of "sabotage" and "fifth columnist" activity upon our active social engineers by many of the leaders of the day. They thus violate the large measure of confidence which they have justly acquired in their own fields. They find an exception to the smooth performance of a proposal near the border-line and it is forth-with condemned and not treated as John R. Commons proposes and Chief Justice Stone dictates in his latest decisions namely a "rule of reason"---"depending upon good judgment of time, place, quantity, kind, and degree---."

Perhaps in this discussion of Mr. Willard's paper I can only add more to the argument to prove the dangerous slowness of democracies in solving current social problems. Compromise is, of course, always necessary between special interest groups and time is required, but a true and charitable analysis of most situations usually shows more mutual interests than conflicts in this inter-dependent society. This is also true of international affairs. Our press and group spokesman more often stress the opposite situation and by appeals to selfish emotions close the doors to constructive solutions. Party politicians fall into the same class. Half truths which amount to complete lies pass as "legal tender" among our people. Lawyers in courts of justice use this device. Minds of people are thus closed to truth and hearts to good will. Lord Thomas Dewar describes the situation well, "Minds are like parachutes, they only function when open." As an example, our necessary sacrifices to win the war are being subjected to this process of closing minds to the great mental suffering and lessened efficiency of patriotic citizens. The same will be true with respect to the sacrifices needed to win the peace.

What are some remedies or at least palliatives needed?

1. Really educate our educators how to think administratively and how to feel charitably toward all men and objectively toward social problems.
2. Urge the people to elect persons to office whom they can trust to carry out administrative details and to change programs to fit changes in conditions. Guard these officers against temporary whims of public opinion.
3. Divorce advertising from news-papers and magazines, to allow the survival of publications on the basis of excellency of presentation and reputations for truthful news and accurate opinions.
4. Sponsor and develop group discussion of local problems in each community and then branch out into group discussion of national and world problems.
5. Encourage panel discussions on the radio for they are great value if they are not allowed to fall into a form of propaganda for vested interests or groups.
6. Mix articles on social engineering with articles on natural science to give perspective and meaning to such natural science. This is being done by Iowa State College in the "Iowa Farm Economist".
7. Endow gifted men who have proved their worth to spend part of their lives in interpreting the social scene to the public either by their art or as independent columnists or as

itinerant speakers and helpers on actual programs. Will Rogers was such a man in his day. We could use many lesser lights now and in the future.

8. Teach students to be charitable, fair and open minded and aggressive toward social progress and not to squat on the ground in their "blankets and moccasins" of custom, superstitions and prejudice as soon as school days are over.
9. Have churches teach more vigorously and in less diluted form the marvelous charity, good will, and open-mindedness of Jesus and his stress on the free and "abundant life" for all men.

By all these methods and others, develop democracy to mean more than voting for candidates. Develop it to mean formation of united opinions, policies based on charity, workability and participation in achievement by all active citizens.