

THE PUBLIC'S ROLE IN GOVERNMENT AT THE  
NATIONAL LEVEL

26 August 1955

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SECRET

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DR. HUNTER: General Hollis, General Niblo, Gentlemen: The subject of our lecture this morning is a certain symbol that appears fairly often on the editorial page of the Washington Post. This symbol appears in the editorials of the only man on the editorial staff of the Post privileged to sign his contributions. He is, of course, Herblock.

Now, as you will recall, most of the figures who appear in Herblock's political commentaries do so under rather unhappy circumstances: to wit, they are having their hides taken off and exposed to the public view in a most uncomplimentary manner. But, recurringly, there appears in Herblock's cartoons, sometimes as a minority participant, but often as just an observer, and a not too happy one, a figure who is invariably treated with great sympathy, and even affection, by his creator.

This figure is the symbol I referred to earlier. It is a man, an unimpressive little fellow, with a straggly mustache, and an expression of bewilderment, pain, or protest on his face. Very often he's the fall guy who's taking a beating. This little fellow, of course, represents the common people--the millions of ordinary folk who make up the body of the Nation, the people who comprise the flesh and blood of democracy but seem at times to be the forgotten men (and women) of our political system.

Too often, both inside and outside of government, the common people seem to be regarded as a kind of inert, plastic material, existing primarily to be shaped to the heart's desire of innumerable P I O's, P R O's--yes, and even by student committees at the Industrial College.

Now to deal with this often-neglected element in our political system, we have this morning a political scientist, Professor Somers of Haverford College, whose biographical statement you have read.

To ring a minor change on an old cliché, Professor Somers needs no further introduction. His performance will speak for itself.

PROFESSOR SOMERS: General Hollis, General Niblo, Dr. Hunter, Gentlemen. It is a great pleasure to be in this hall again. This is the fifth or sixth year I have given at least one lecture here. I am also acquainted with your sister institution, the Army War College, where I served as a consultant for several weeks last year. I enjoy coming back, because of the profound respect I feel for the educational work being done at the higher educational institutions of the military, and the great public service influence of these institutions. I am proud to have the opportunity to play a very small part in that work.

Despite the frequency of my appearances, I have not had the privilege of talking on my present subject before. Even though it was not of my own selection, I am pleased to have this opportunity, because it seems to me that the questions you have posed for me are among the most important you could pursue during the period you are studying American Government. Our understanding of, and the attitudes we assume towards, what is vaguely referred to as "the public" or "public opinion" lie at the core of the American democratic dream; they relate to the very essence of our political processes.

Although it is a term of every-day conversation, I have called references to "public opinion" vague. We all talk about it, but we are not very clear about what we mean. Who exactly is "the public?" How do we determine what public opinion is? Whose opinion are we really referring to? Because of its importance, and because of its complexity, a tremendous amount of specialized study has been devoted to this subject in recent years. There are enormous investments now being made by Government and private institutions on opinion research studies. Opinion investigation is a big industry in itself. The more progress we make in analyzing how opinions are formed, how they affect decisions, and similar questions, the more we are aware of how complicated the whole matter is.

It is a field which lends itself to loose statements. Everybody feels quite sure he knows what public opinion is about a particular matter. He talks to a couple of his friends about a question and if they agree, he knows what the public thinks; if they disagree, he will next day say 50 percent of the public believes this, and 50 percent of the public believes that. Even so-called scientists fall into that temptation.

I recently attended a medical convention where I heard a doctor tell his colleagues how some doctors arrive at "scientific" conclusions. A doctor visited a patient, a farmer, who had contracted typhoid. He put the farmer on a rigorous conventional typhoid diet. The farmer grew steadily worse none the less, and the doctor was discouraged. One day the doctor arrived and the farmer, who had appeared almost dead at the previous visit, was on his feet, very gay. The doctor said to the farmer's wife, "What happened?" She said: "He finally got disgusted with that diet of yours. I happened to have pumpkin pie in the oven. He ate half the pie last night. This morning he is all recovered." The doctor was pleased and much impressed. He made a note of the incident for future reference.

Two months later a preacher developed typhoid. The doctor put him on the conventional typhoid diet. The preacher declined rapidly, showing the same symptoms as the farmer. As a final resort the doctor said: "I had a similar case recently. The fellow finally ate some pumpkin pie. He recovered. Perhaps we ought to try it." So the preacher ate pumpkin pie that night. Next morning he was dead.

The doctor made a record of the evidence, in a scientific fashion, and analyzed the results as follows: "Typhoid--pumpkin pie: excellent for farmers; no damn good for preachers."

We have a good deal of that kind of thinking in discussions of public opinion, politics, and even administration. Grand conclusions are claimed on the basis of a single observation. One must be cautious. But there is in fact a great deal of well-founded and well-established information available in this field. Among the important facts which have been demonstrated is that for most purposes there is no such unitary thing as the "public." For most purposes there is no such thing as "public opinion," as a cohesive phenomenon.

"The public" is not an undifferentiated mass of people with one mind. Only rarely, under extreme circumstances, does there emerge in regard to anything but the most conventional matters a single view which can be accurately called "public opinion."

There are many publics, many distinct and differentiated publics. For different public issues there are different kinds of publics which are interested--some immediately, some potentially--or whose attitudes matter. In regard to different kinds of issues there are

different publics which are politically effective, and different publics which make the ultimate decision. It is by no means always the same "public" one is concerned with in public affairs. Sometimes the publics making or participating in decisions are small and sometimes very large. Sometimes they are tightly knit and unified; sometimes they are quite diverse, a combination of publics.

This is an elementary fact and an elementary principle of American political thought and American political life. We are a pluralistic society. And we believe in pluralism as a political principle. Whenever one talks about American society in monolithic terms he is likely to be incorrect. We are a society of plural interests, plural values, plural nationalities, plural racial backgrounds, and even plural public policies. Quite deliberately we may on occasion pursue policies simultaneously following opposite tendencies in order to satisfy different publics at the same time.

The fact, its recognition, and its theoretic formulation all precede the time of the Constitution. James Madison, writing in The Federalist Papers, made the point effectively and enduringly. You will recall that in Federalist No. X he talks about the fact that the United States is and must remain a Nation of different factions--his word. If we were to attempt to eliminate faction, to make the country unitary, we could do it only by force. In so doing we would cease to be a democratic society. Long before the word "totalitarianism" had been invented, the founders of American Government understood that pluralism--diversity and conflict--was essential to democracy.

DeTocqueville, writing early in the nineteenth century about a young United States in what is still regarded as one of the most perceptive critiques of American society, pointed out that the many minorities in America--the many small "publics" were extraordinarily conscious of the deficiencies in their own powers and therefore tended to organize for effectiveness more than in any other nation. This is still the case. The many and diverse interests in this country are generally organized on the basis of opinion, interest, nationality, occupation, and any number of other bases. Some are organized permanently; some for a special temporary purpose, say to influence a particular piece of legislation. Some cut across wide sectors of the whole population; some are restricted to people with particular credentials.

What is the effect of this? Let us look at a single individual, one citizen, an American with no unique qualities, one we could all recognize as real. Let us try to fit him into some concept of public opinion. We are interested in finding out what factors determine what attitude he is likely to have to a given public issue, if he is to have any attitude at all. I will draw him on the blackboard in the form of a circle. First, what kind of a man is he? The points I hope to make clear about our blackboard-man apply more or less to all men. But we have to start with an example.

Let us say he is a semiskilled worker in a textile plant. He is a member of a textile workers union, part of the American Federation of Labor. He has an identity with and an interest in labor. We draw an overlapping circle to show that. Many people will too readily assume that in any question involving labor, this man's identity with a union will determine his attitude, and you can readily predict his position. This erroneously assumes that the interests of labor are all of one piece. They are not. In any particular issue the interests of semi-skilled workers may differ from those of unskilled or highly skilled. The interests of textile workers often conflict with those of workers in other industries. We have seen that vividly demonstrated in regard to tariff issues.

But our man is far more complex. He is in addition to being a worker a member of the American Legion, a veteran of the last war. He is active in this organization and it also commands part of his loyalty and interest. He is also a member of a religious group. Let us say he is a good Catholic and an active member of his church. This too has a claim on his loyalties and his thought.

Let us say his original nationality is Polish. This may have a considerable influence on his attitudes to some public issues. He may be active in Sons of Pulaski or Kosciusko or another of the Polish-American organizations. He may also be a member of some service club like the Elks or the Lions. He could be active in local politics, perhaps a ward leader in his local Republican or Democratic Club. He may be interested in sports and be an active member of, say, the American Bowling Association.

It would not be unrealistic to continue adding more interlocking circles on the board, each indicating an interest and a loyalty of this one man. If we could be thorough we could add factors concerning other members of his family which command his loyalty indirectly. His wife may be in some "Equal Rights for Women" society. He may

have a son studying medicine, who has begun to identify his interest with the A. M. A.

All of these things, all these interweaving circles in some degree have a claim on this man's thought and emotion. When a public issue arises, many or all of these forces will in some fashion act as a tug upon his loyalty. But these many forces are often in conflict in respect to a particular issue. It may be a 2- or 3- or 4-way conflict of views. Clearly the organizations we have shown here are not always in agreement.

How our man responds depends on the particular issue. Suppose it is primarily a labor question. There are a few things which are purely one thing or another, or life would be simpler than it is. But in a matter of wages, let us say, we are likely to find that he is primarily an A. F. L. man: These other forces in his life play a lesser role for this purpose.

But suppose it is a large and more complex social issue, where several of these organizations get directly or indirectly involved. He may find that the Legion is taking a different position from the church. The Union may take still another position. The A. M. A. may take a strong position contrary to his Union. And so forth. The basis for predicting how our man will come out is now quite obscure. Different individuals in circumstances similar to that of our blackboard-man will react and opine differently. There will be great variation in intensity of different loyalties, in relation to different questions, as they affect different individuals. These circles would have different dimensions at different times and places. Even within the same general category of, say, "worker" or "civil servant" or "businessman," individuals will fall into different opinion groups for particular controversies. Businessmen may be at odds with businessmen. We are all parts of many publics.

As we know, on some important issues some of these organized groups may take no position. It may not concern them or they may find it untactful to adopt a position. These organizations must often be aware that their membership has divided and multiple loyalties. They must be careful not to antagonize too far a man's loyalty to another group or they may jeopardize loyalty to themselves. A high proportion of the UAW-CIO workers in Detroit are Catholics. When the Union addresses such a worker it must be cautious to avoid a position which would violate any basic position likely to be taken by the church. Thus

it is often possible for an organization to adopt tactical silence, or state a view without pressing it, on a matter which does in fact concern it. The same thing may result from internal conflict within a large organization. It is difficult for the Chamber of Commerce of the United States to take a clear position on a matter in which two or more of its own subdivisions may have sharply divergent interests, which is not infrequently the case. What favors one industry may hurt another, as anybody in the trucking or railroad business will testify.

This helps explain why it is usually risky to speak of "the Negro vote" or "the labor vote" or "the business vote." If you examine the data pollsters collect after an election you will find there is rarely such a thing as a 90 or even 80 percent agreement among a particular category of people, such as "managers" or "workers" or "Catholics" or "Jews." Our blackboard diagram indicates why. The tugs on all these people are many and of varying intensities. People often wondered why John L. Lewis was unable to deliver the votes of the mineworkers in the days when he announced his intentions. It was clear his members were generally voting differently than he advised. This did not mean they were not loyal to Lewis. They were extraordinarily loyal to him and followed with little reserve on union matters, in his role as head of the United Mine Workers. But when he moved over to political matters, he ran into the fact that he represents only one of these many circles which compose the lives of mineworkers and some of the other loyalties proved far stronger for these purposes.

So if you examine the breakdown of voting behavior of groups you will generally find that "labor" voted 55 percent for candidate A and 45 percent for candidate B. You may find that some group voted 65 percent for one candidate and only 35 percent for another, but that is generally quite extreme (if the overall vote is assumed to be fairly evenly divided). That is what political scientists refer to as "the law of imperfect mobilization of political interests." This means that a particular interest cannot be mobilized 100 percent, because men are not simple one-celled organisms. An election is a relatively simple matter, where the choice is either A or B. If it is a matter of "opinion" where four or five different lines of opinion may be held, the groups will divide four or five ways.

This also helps explain why there is no such thing as a constant majority. When we speak of "majority rule" or "minority rule" in this country the words may prove misleading. We have no single

interest that represents a majority of the country. We have lots of organized groups--the A.M.A., the Chambers of Commerce, the N.A.M., the C.I.O., the Farm Bureau, the Veterans--and many unorganized "groups." There are 2,500 or so organized groups registered with Congress as lobbies and God knows how many that are not registered. As we have suggested, these groups themselves are tightly knit only for limited purposes. On most matters, there are groups within groups.

On any particular issue the majority is made up of an unstable coalition of interests. It is a temporary majority. The uneasy grouping which was assembled to constitute a majority for Issue A is likely to fall apart on Issue B. They will no longer see eye to eye or no longer be able to arrange an acceptable bargain among themselves. Thus, another coalition will have to be formed in order to achieve a majority.

In short, the same things happen within and among groups as happen in the minds of individuals. The shifting majorities are in a constant state of exchange in personnel with the shifting minorities. No man and no group is always in the minority, and no group is constantly in the majority. That is one of the reasons we have a fairly stable society. It is one of the reasons there aren't many people interested in revolution, because only the rarest extremists are never in the position of being part of the majority. Almost everybody finds himself on the winning side on some issues. Therein is one of the best protections of so-called minority interests.

But our blackboard-man here does not get interested in every issue. He has all these forces tugging at him, but he must be selective. He is not professionally involved in public issues the way you, as public servants, and I as a professor, are. He has a full time job as a textile worker; he has a family; he has some outside interests as we saw; and he has neither the time, the energy, nor the inclination to be concerned with every public issue. Only sometimes can he be talked into being an "interested public;" most of the time not. The interest groups are wise enough to let him alone most of the time. Usually public affairs are settled without asking Joe what he thinks or trying to arouse his concern. The organized groups find they don't always succeed in getting a response if the issue is one which our man feels has no relevance to him.

To be realistic, therefore, we must classify publics not only in accordance with the many organized interests, but also in terms of character and degree of participation and influence in public affairs. A useful frame of reference--involving four public categories--has been developed by Dr. Gabriel Almond of Princeton University. If any of you would like to examine his classifications, and their meaning, in more detail than I can offer I commend to you his excellent book, "The American People and Foreign Policy."

In respect to important public issues, there are four groups of publics. I will again use diagrammatic presentation on the black-board to help clarify the points. At the summit is a tiny group we will call Group I. This is the official leadership, the elected political leaders of the society--the legal policy makers.

The second group, much larger than Group I, but still relatively small, we call Group II. They are political and opinion leaders of another level. This group is made up largely of the leaders of pressure groups particularly interested in the issue at hand, the administrative bureaucracy particularly involved with the subject, and the communications leaders--the owners and the controllers and the leading participants in the media of mass communication--radio, television, motion pictures, press. They are the policy and opinion elite. They determine what Group I can do. Group I has the legal authority, but Group II has effective political power.

Next we have Group III, considerably larger, but still of limited size. This is the "attentive public." This group is composed of the public which shows a lively interest in the issue and follows it closely. It is on this group that the pressure interests and others in Group II, as well as Group I, focus their influence and persuasion as vigorously as they can; they are the "opinion spreaders" as well as in some degree the "opinion makers." This group is composed of teachers, heads of community clubs, leaders in industry, people who actively discuss public issues and whom ordinary people generally respect and expect to be reasonably well informed. This group, too, varies in composition with different issues.

The fourth group, as large as the adult population, may vaguely be called "general public." On most public issues and at most times it is passive. It does not participate in decision-making, except in the most indirect fashion. Its moral values and general beliefs which set the tone of a society establish the outer limits within which

the leadership and the elites can act freely. At most times there is considerable flexibility in what the leadership is free to do in the area of public policy. The general public cannot be expected to follow every issue, or to take it as a matter of direct concern. It has of necessity delegated that task to representatives and to hired public employees. It is not ordinarily easy, or desirable, to arouse the general public about day-to-day matters. A good deal depends upon what is at stake. Even on an every-day type of issue if people sense that some actions are striking at their basic values--their moral or religious core--they will rise up readily. The outer boundary of flexibility for "the influential" will have been reached. Group IV can call effective "halt" when it chooses.

The membership of these different groups is quite mobile. They are continuously moving in and out of these different boxes. Group III is freely recruited from Group IV, depending upon the subject matter and upon the intensity of feeling about it at a particular time. Movement into the other two groups is not as free. The elite groups share the prejudices and values of Group IV. The subdivisions, the smaller groups, within Groups I, II, and III, as we have already seen, are continuously in competition and conflict with each other. They are competing in the opinion market place for the sale of their policies.

The conflict is not usually between right and wrong or good and evil. There is usually more than one truth and more than one avenue to the Kingdom of Heaven. Each of these different interest groups is usually quite sure it is protecting and speaking for the "public interest." The public interest looks different to different people, depending upon the angle from which they view it; and it is given to few, if any, to see it whole. Labor people are quite sure that their view represents the public interest. The Chamber of Commerce is surely sincere when it advertises that what helps business helps the Nation. Agriculture is quite certain that the fate of the Nation rests on the prosperity of the farmer. And they are all in a measure quite right. Anything which affects such very large numbers of people, playing indispensable roles in our economy, is bound to have quite a large influence upon the welfare of the Nation. But each of them generally has part of the truth, not the whole truth. As any group fails to sell the whole of what it sees as "right" through ordinary channels, it feels it must try to awaken the reluctant giant, Group IV, to the truth.

When we are parts of groups thrown into that position, and the general public does not appear to be responding to our view of "truth," we readily adopt the traditional view that there is something very wrong indeed about the fact that the general public is usually quiescent. You hear it alleged often that it is undemocratic that the vast mass of the people does not actively participate in public issues. You even hear it asserted that it proves "democracy doesn't work." Reformers are always expressing alarm and popping up with schemes to "arouse" the public to its "responsibilities." It seems to make a good story for some pundit in the press to come up with the results of a poll which shows that 45 or 50 percent of the people have never heard of or don't care about some particular matter which is currently disturbing the active minority. If these birds are right, democracy ought to be some sort of a continuous town meeting of all our 165 million people, all of them expressing views on every issue and feeling an intense personal concern about all public decisions. Is this really desirable? Is it even possible?

We must recognize that the ordinary demands on the average man, even the intelligent average man, are such that it is unreasonable to expect him to be informed about the intricacies of public issues which specialists and the people engaged full time in public matters think he ought to be informed about. The man who works forty hours a week in a factory and then goes home to offer the remaining few hours of his day to his wife and children and to a little needed rest cannot be expected to think about national defense in the same way you do or to regard international crises in the same way as an employee of the State Department. To put it bluntly, "That's what he hired you guys for."

If you insist that he is not a good citizen unless he is in a continuous state of excitement about public affairs, you will make it appear unreasonably, if not impossibly, difficult to be a good citizen. You make democracy appear too hard, too much of a strain. Fortunately, there is not much validity in the notion that democracy must make such impractical demands.

What is required for democracy and for effectiveness is that there shall be opportunity at all times for mass participation, that there be the opportunity for anybody normally in Group IV to move into Group III at any time, and into Group II if he has the capacity. Group IV reserves the right to raise its voice in a roar when it senses the occasion demands, but it cannot rightly be shouting all the time. Closely related is the obvious necessity that the membership

of the elite groups above be impermanent. They must be based upon capacity to win approval and consent. This is particularly true of Group I.

There must also be autonomy among the different groups, so that they compete openly and freely with each other. Only through the competition of viewpoints can the public of Group IV, and to a lesser degree even the public in Group III, learn enough about issues to be effectively articulate at the appropriate times. When it becomes clear that something large is in fact at stake, the dimensions of Group IV are rapidly diminished; the members move into Group III in great numbers--the "attentive public" now includes a public which can be attentive only for very special circumstances.

When, for example, General MacArthur was relieved of his command in the Far East, this picture in the diagram suddenly changed. Group III became almost as large as Group IV. Or, when Senator McCarthy was being tried before the Watkins Committee, Group IV seems virtually to have disappeared for a time. It is always open for the public to decide what it regards as appropriate a situation for it to become directly involved, when not to leave the task entirely to its representatives. However, the public retains this choice effectively only if the different competing groups have the channels of communication open to them. Not only Group II, but also Group III, must have easy means of passing their alarms on to Group IV. Group IV must be accessible to those with real or imagined grievances in the political struggle.

The advocates I spoke of earlier are, in effect, saying that democracy needs at all times a much larger Group II. The civil defense people are continually complaining about that matter; they fear that people are not sufficiently stirred up about the dangers of war. I hear considerable similar complaint from my friends at the military colleges. I think this may show some misunderstanding about the character of democracy and about where the real dangers may lie.

We must all be sensitive to the fact that if Group II gets enlarged greatly too frequently, if crises real or alleged rise up with regularity, we invite serious difficulty. Ordinarily, the latitude our leaders--civil and military--have in the formulation of public policy is quite large. This, you will surely agree, is normally proper. Democracy cannot be made an excuse for stultification of political and administrative processes by a straightjacketing of leadership. We would not demand that they continuously spell out and defend every move they make. We do not

want the kind of daily accounting which makes action impossible to take. But if the public is to be kept in a continuous stir, always alerted and always fearful, this is one of the prices which must be paid.

The degree of influence and flexibility of Groups I and II will vary inversely with how aroused and active Group IV is. The larger Group IV is at any time, the more freedom of movement at the top. Group III is always watching carefully. It is one of the safety valves. When it sparks and succeeds in igniting a large sector of Group IV, then the flexibility at the top is contracted, until satisfactory explanations or changes are made and things calm down again. At most times and for most purposes this is neither necessary nor desirable; we reserve that kind of action for special circumstances.

We must recall that people can stand being aroused only a limited number of times. The strain can get too great. If he, the average man, is required to be constantly on the alert, he may readily lose confidence in the capacity of the leadership of society, or even of the organization of the society itself. His confidence in the stability of the Nation depends on the degree to which he feels safe in delegating day-to-day decisions, even many of the big ones, to those whom he chooses for the task, through elections and through his interest associations.

Aroused public opinion is an essential reserve of democracy, to be used at times of crisis or threatened crisis or in decisions of such magnitude that they are not likely to prove commonplace. Each time it is aroused unnecessarily, the currency is depreciated. It will become more difficult to do the next time, because people become toughened and suspicious. Or, on the other extreme, and perhaps worse, they get into so great a state of jitters about their society that they are all too easy to arouse by any wanton rabble-rouser.

When ordinary people cannot stand the strains of being the attentive Group III too often, they may seek easy other ways out, turning to those who offer shortcut solutions to problems, who promise to take care of things with the kind of competence which will not require bothering ordinary people too much. There is much to be learned from the historic backgrounds of foreign dictatorships about the effects of emotional exhaustion and discouragement of ordinary people with the processes of their government.

Democracy depends not on day-to-day participation of Group IV but upon ultimate accountability to it. It is largely a matter of assuring that the general public has adequate means for holding the leadership accountable.

Democracy has often been challenged for this ultimate dependence upon the attitudes, values, and determinations, of the general public for approval of public policy. This challenge comes from a school of thought which insists that the general public is an irrational mass as well as ignorant. It responds, we are told, only to emotional symbols and not to knowledge and thought. It is pointed out that the advertising business centered on Madison Avenue, makes a handsome living by following this belief and depending on irrational appeal.

Even if we could readily agree upon what is rational or irrational-- what appeals to the other fellow and not to us is often referred to as irrational--I doubt that there is much evidence to support any view that what is commonly regarded as the irrational appeal has had much long-run power in American society. We have had our hysterias-- and who has not--but they have receded before the danger point has been reached. We have some built-in protections. In any case, do the so-called rational beings have any God-given right to rule over the irrational? And who is to choose the "rational ones" if they are to rule? Would we all have a right to participate in the choice? If so, aren't we back where we started?

I hope and believe all of us here believe sufficiently in the democratic process not to be taken in by this old argument of irrationalism, which goes back at least to the writings of Plato, and never could bear close examination. Nevertheless, it would be foolhardy to overlook our problems and neglect the nurturing and sustenance of those elements in the democratic process which offer protection against the possibility of the rule of "irrationality." What are some of these?

First there is the competition of opinion--a free marketplace for ideas and information advanced by the competing interests we have discussed. The freedom to propagandize, to petition one's government, to influence people are all directly or indirectly written into our Constitution. There is a tacit recognition that the nearest equivalent of truth we can peacefully arrive at will emerge from the adversary presentations of interested parties, very much as in the law courts.

Second is the need of a reasonably secure and prosperous society. People are better equipped for rational judgment in a society which offers reasonable economic security as well as security for different and unpopular opinions, which permits an atmosphere wherein men are not afraid to speak up and say, "This is wrong."

Third is the attitude required of officialdom, top leadership as well as administrators, towards the general population. Leadership must have regard for the variety and pluralism of the public. It must recognize both the inevitability and the value of diversity of viewpoints, and reject any disposition towards "the one right answer." It must distinguish between the ever-present responsibility for keeping all publics continuously informed, through a free flow of information, and high-pitched appeals to Group IV--selling campaigns--masquerading as information. It must respect the processes by which the public makes up its own mind. Moreover, it is dangerous to adopt the view that the public must share each official's enthusiasm for his area of responsibility. There is a natural temptation to forget that what is your specialty need not be every man's specialty. There is the temptation to assume that a differing evaluation of the degree of seriousness of the situation is necessarily caused by pig-headedness or ignorance.

It is most natural for leaders in all fields to do what some of your predecessors in this course have proposed. When they arrive at conclusions at the end of the year, regarding appropriate public policy in industrial mobilization, they say, "Now we must sell that policy to the public." As they are quite confident that the policy they propose is "right," they have no doubt it is proper to "sell" it and that they can succeed in selling it to everybody's advantage. There are, however, dangers in a democracy of confusing statesmanship with commercial salesmanship, of confusing government with a massive propaganda agency. The people are suspicious of the government agency or of officials who conspicuously enter the propaganda business. And it cannot ordinarily be done so subtly that there will not be alert interests ready to inform the general public that the propaganda wheels are grinding, and from where, and at whose expense. The general public, and many sectors of civilian government are particularly suspicious of the military in that role.

One of the reasons the military has maintained respect and influence in this country is that it has rarely been properly suspected of such political activity. You cannot become an agency of propaganda

during peacetime, even for matters which relate to military affairs, without being in a sense in the political arena. Military affairs now overlap every other governmental activity; this is particularly true of industrial mobilization. There are no important issues which are non-controversial. If you are mindful of the diversity of publics, it can readily be appreciated that there are no proposals you can make which will not hurt some important group. You will recall, for example, that a few years ago some people thought the expansion of foreign trade through reduction or elimination of tariffs was so clearly good for the whole country and the peace of the world that it could be presented in such terms as not to be a political issue. But foreign trade, as soon became clear, means different things to different people. Our man on the blackboard, for example, did not see the issue as most of the advocates did. Employment in the textile industry had been bad for a long time; still is. The dropping of trade barriers represented a threat of unemployment to him and his friends. Those who were proposing it did not look to him like quite the patriots they thought they were. He, his union, and his employers were ready to do battle and the advocates had to be prepared to take the political consequences.

Two can play at the game of "selling." You will inescapably encounter contrary interests on particular points, if not on your overall program. You must be prepared for counter-attack from powerful sources. Even motivations are subject to attack in the political arena. The military in particular must be cautious, because even those who may agree with its particular arguments may fall into the common accusation that the pattern of democratic life is disturbed if the military gets into the business of appealing directly to the public in public policy issues. It is possible to shoot away your reserves of influence and prestige, needed in a crisis, by making unnecessary opponents in avoidable squabbles during nonemergency periods. Furthermore, as has already been pointed out, it is useful to be mindful of the risk of building up public apathy or resistance to appeals for support or understanding by crying "danger" too loudly in what later may turn out to have been only illusions of danger. The public may even come to suspect a degree of self-interest in such cries.

Perhaps more fundamentally, the "public relations" approach toward public policy seems to me too often to reveal distrust of the basic assumptions of democracy. Democracy is based on the belief that every man is a thing of value and every man's view deserves to be counted. It includes the faith that, no matter how strongly we believe we represent the public interest, or wisdom, or higher

knowledge, no matter how noble our intentions, in matters of public policy the public must decide. We may be wrong. As is often said, in a democracy the expert must be on tap, not on top. The expert offers information, advises, and influences; but the decision is reserved for those affected by it. While business and government are not the same, there are advantages in adopting the necessary attitude of the businessman that it is the consumer who is ultimately the best judge of what is a desirable product.

If you read our history with care I think you will find that those who believe in these and related principles of democratic life--those who have trusted in the sense and virtue of the general populace--have scored the long-run successes in winning general support for their views. The salesmen and the manipulators have often had temporary triumphs but have not endured. They sacrificed confidence by their own techniques. The general public is too big, too varied, and has too many defenses to be "manipulated" successfully in the long run.

DR. HUNTER: All right, who has the first question?

QUESTION: In reference to that chart that you used, I believe you said that you wanted the public to be on top and the experts to be on tap. Isn't that sort of getting the cart before the horse?

DR. SOMERS: I don't think so. As I tried to indicate, in a larger sense our chart here is inverted. The ultimate power should and does rest with the general public. The people on top are leaders because they win consent of Group III and Group IV. The expert is on top only when he succeeds in persuading the general public or its representatives that his advice should be taken. As you know, the experts usually disagree among themselves, quite passionately at times. The public has often to choose among experts. Those experts prevail whose views are accepted by nonexperts.

QUESTION: That Group I is something that we put up there at the top to look at, but in the process it is just inverted? I believe that is the way it works, isn't it? When it gets to the top, it goes back around again. Is that what I get out of this?

DR. SOMERS: Yes. If you mean that there is a flow in both directions, up and down, that is certainly the case.

QUESTION: From your lecture, Doctor, could I conclude that the public always knows what is best for itself?

DR. SOMERS: You need not conclude that. The answer would rest upon how you define "best." I have been told for years by experts that spinach is "best" for me to eat. I presume that what they mean by "best" is a long life. But I reserve the right not to take the advice of the expert, because I'd rather live a shorter time and enjoy what I eat. And no expert can tell me what I enjoy. What is best? I decide for myself with the help of the information experts give me.

The view of democracy is not that the people know what is best by somebody else's criteria, but the public has a right to what it wants and values and this itself is a workable definition of "best." However, the public must be helped in effectively pursuing what it values by full access to the facts and by hearing the experts argue the matter out. Isn't that the essential difference between a democracy and a nondemocratic society, between liberty and lack of it--whether people have the right to decide for themselves?

QUESTION: In our national elections the percentage of the eligible voters who vote is sometimes quite low--as low as thirty or forty percent--as compared with sixty or seventy percent in British elections and as high as ninety in some countries--in the French, German, and Italian elections. Is that an index of the instability of the nation--that the higher the vote in those countries, the less stability there is, and that therefore we need not be concerned about our low percentage of participation?

DR. SOMERS: That is a very good question, although I believe your figures do exaggerate the situation a bit. In our last Presidential election we had about a sixty percent turn-out. The British got out about eighty percent. Your general point is certainly accurate.

Personally I doubt that the figures prove that Americans are generally less concerned about national politics than, say, the British. I attribute the difference primarily to the fact that it is much easier to vote in a country like Great Britain than in the United States. We disqualify millions of potential voters each year by difficult residence and other requirements. In most states a man must have lived within the state for at least a full year--in some states two years--and in his particular county or district for a lesser period, say six months, or

he cannot vote. In a mobile population like ours this affects a great many people in each election year. Also, we don't know how many people did not vote because they were ill on election day, or because they were unexpectedly called out of the city, or because they knew they would have to be away but lived in a state which did not permit absentee voting. There are many such factors which reduce the volume of the vote without indicating apathy.

But more directly to your point: The massive turn-outs in a country like Italy are related to the fact that there is an active danger that the Communists will gain control. Communists and non-Communists will make great sacrifices, if need be, to come out to the polls, because the results will be crucial. The Communists certainly show up, as they are under discipline. The non-Communists are rightly scared and show up because the future of the nation does hinge on the election. It is not a stable society.

In the United States we may get a great many fiery speeches during a campaign which are designed to scare people, and do some; but the average American knows that whether we have a democrat or General Eisenhower as President, our society is not in danger of basic revolution. We may feel one party has a far better policy than the other, but we know both parties believe in the same democratic principles and agree on the fundamentals of our community life. Consequently, we can remain reasonably calm about elections. We want to participate--it is our duty--but we don't feel that either result will bring on national disaster. I would like to see a bigger vote in this country. But I believe that to the extent we are apathetic or casual it is because we do live in a secure and stable society in which the extreme radical elements represent a minute, practically invisible, proportion of the public, and the public knows it.

QUESTION: You based your ideas on the ground that the public is the best judge of what it wants to consume. But I believe what Hamilton said is that there should be in the Government means for resisting the Government's will. I think he used the word "resist" because he thought we might decide to do more than just have the will to resist. I wonder if you would comment on that.

DR. SOMERS: If we are both thinking of the same Hamilton essay, in The Federalist Papers, I believe Hamilton spoke of "delay," which of course is a form of resistance, but not permanent.

I believe he said a good democratic or republic constitution must ultimately give the public what it wishes, but he felt that it must act through representatives and that the Nation must be protected against hasty and capricious public opinion. He said we should not take the public pulse every day and have public policy flip-flop in accord with hasty changes in view. Similarly, he recognized there were many publics; he did not want to make it easy for one public to impose its views on another.

That is why he advocated the building into our system many slowing-down devices. The two houses of Congress, the separation of powers, checks and balances, all contribute to a certainty that untoward haste cannot prevail and that those interested in resisting a particular policy will have every chance to delay until it has been long considered and battled out and even experimented with.

We need leadership. We need expertness. In normal periods we want to give considerable flexibility to both. And you don't want the general public in the daily debate and in daily decisions. But the ultimate check must rest with the general public. I don't think the Hamiltonian thesis would negate these points.

QUESTION: I would like to distinguish one point. I gather that you believe the public should have what it wants as much as possible. Now, isn't it the duty of the leader to lead and educate the public, based on his own moral conviction? Isn't there a moral aspect to what he considers right in reaching any decision by which the public is directed toward one path or another?

DR. SOMERS: I was not really trying to say what I believe the public should have so much as to present what appears to me to be the theory of democracy in regard to such questions.

Yes, there is or should be a strong moral aspect in all human affairs. Leaders have an obligation to lead. In doing so they must, as best they can, follow their moral as well as intellectual judgments. Leadership must not only make daily decisions; but in order to retain the necessary flexibility I have spoken of, it must also be able to maintain the conditions under which their leadership is acceptable. There is a moral obligation to make leadership effective through persuasion. A leader must win public support, a mandate to do the things he believes to be right. But, he has neither obligation nor right to proceed as he believes "right" when he has failed to persuade, to

impose his will or his view of what is "right" on others. He cannot play the role of God. If the moral convictions of the people affected by the decision lead them to a different conclusion, he has no right to a certainty that his moral convictions are better. He must be prepared to accept the view that he may be wrong and he must be prepared to act as those to whom he is accountable wish him to, or retire from public life.

QUESTION: Do you think it is the responsibility of leadership to sample the mass periodically or constantly because their position is no possible evidence that something should be developed or crystallized at a given time? Or should the mass be allowed to make up their minds? A good example would be, of course, the fact of this planning that was done before the last world war, which was completely ignored and we edged into the war in much the same shape as we did the First World War, because it seemed that nobody picked the thing up to see whether the people were ready for something.

DR. SOMERS: I think leadership would be well advised at all times to attempt to understand as well as they can the condition of public attitudes, and the reasons which lie behind them. There is no substitute for knowledge. A great many errors would be avoided if we did less guessing.

I think you give an excellent example in citing the industrial mobilization plan of a situation of misunderstanding of the role of different publics in our society. The industrial mobilization plan received a great deal of bad publicity during the thirties; the general public did not know what was in it but it was suspicious of it, because Group III was articulately suspicious. A very large section of Group II were omitted from the planning and the discussions. These important sectors of the public were also suspicious as well as resentful. History makes it clear that the plan had no real support in Group I either. The opinion leaders, as well as the general public, felt that something was being covered up. Quite aside from the merits or demerits of the plan--and these are worthy of debate--the atmosphere created was such that it is doubtful that it would have been politically feasible to adopt the plan as such. I gather from your question that a good deal may have been learned from that experience. I think perhaps that one of the things learned is the very point that I have been trying to make, so inadequately, this morning.

DR. HUNTER: There are more questions, but, unfortunately, our time has run out on us.

PROFESSOR SOMERS: You have rung the bell, and loudly for all of us. Thank you very much.

(4 May 1956--450)B/mmg