

"A civilized order is one in which all the significant relationships among men are governed by rule of law and custom and not by the arbitrary will of individuals, " - thus Walter Lippmann, in an article published in the "Journal of Social Philosophy", April, 1938, summarizes his last released book, "The Good Society". Lippmann lays the seeds for "The Good Society" in "The Phantom Public". If the former is the final exposition of his philosophy, the latter is the framework.

"The Phantom Public", although it contains no clearcut division, treats of two fairly distinct themes. One is an attempt to bring the theory of democracy into somewhat truer alignment with the nature of public opinion. Pursuing this theme, Lippmann analyzes the problem of democratic governments today in a realistic manner. He seeks to define things as they really are, and then build a workable theory of democracy on a foundation of realism. Having shown us a possible road to the realization of a more practical democracy, he branches off into a correlated and yet distinct, prelude to "The Good Society"- a treatment of the ideal society under modern conditions. Observe that there is an obvious distinction between the best "democracy," as we employ the term, and the best possible society.

From the beginning the author discards the definition of democracy as "the rule of the people". He describes that phrase as the vague banner of scheming politicians and the common misconception of serious, honest campaigners. Nor is there anything mystical about public opinion. It is neither the voice of God nor the voice of Society. It is not the ruling force in modern democracy, nor can it be, nor is it desirable for the welfare of the people as a whole and as individuals that their voice should rule!

But if the public does not rule, who or what should? Certainly not a few individuals wielding the concentrated force of a centralized

2

government. The answer lies in law and custom based on reason- but the laws and customs concerning the transactions of individual with individual. Generalized law might easily be tyranny to particular individuals in particular localities, therefore law is to be as specific as possible. The role of the government is that of an umpire.

The theory of the state as an organism must be dispelled. For this theory inevitably leads to centralized power which is most undesirable. The individual must be given free play to enjoy his liberty to the fullest -bound only by directing law and custom. Government finds a place only when individuals come to a disagreement over the terms of the law, and then the government must decide impartially which side the law favors. If the law or rule is not a good one (Lippmann Offers several tests for a bad law), if it is, for example, openly violated, then there is a need for an expression of public opinion as being for or against a proposed change in the rule. Notice that the public does not object to the existing law- individuals directly concerned do; the public does not propose the new law- the objecting individuals do; the public merely expresses its sentiments as being for or against the proposed change. Public opinion is, therefore, the opinion of the SPECTATORS OF ACTION. It is essentially the product of EXTERNAL observation.

Lippmann takes great pains to distinguish specific from general opinion since this distinction evolves as the crux of his interpretation of the role played by public opinion. Specific opinions are the opinions of individuals and give rise to immediate executive acts, General opinion, on the other hand, gives rise to "delegated, indirect, symbolic intangible results"; to a vote, to a resolution, to applause. The making of one general will out of a multitude of general wishes is not

a Hegelian mystery to Lippmann but an art well known to leaders, politicians, and steering committees. It consists essentially in the use of "symbols which assemble emotions after they have been detached from their ideas." *Lippmann at his best!*

Private opinions may be quite complicated and result in a series of actions and a mass of subsidiary opinions. But a public opinion must be given in a concrete, unqualified form. We vote "yes" or "no". We jeer. We applaud. Nor does the latter ^{TYPE OF} opinion have such immediate responsibility or continuous result. On a ballot marked "Yes" or "no" the results, whether a genius or an idiot has voted is a "Yes" or "no". Thus the masses, composed of discrete, dissimilar individuals, must, when they act, converge to an identical result. "And the more complex the collection of men, the more ambiguous must be the unity and the simpler the common ideas." Hence, public opinion is scarcely adequate as an executive force.

While Lippmann insists that the ordinary individual could not possibly vote intelligently on ~~th~~ a problem of which he knows little and sometimes cares little about, he, nevertheless, justifies majority rule in voting as a substitute for the use of actual force, although the former is really the force which resides in the weight of numbers. But majority "rule" is definitely not founded on ethical superiority, as the common man seems to feel because of the mystical atmosphere paced around it by modern philosophers and politicians. There is no such thing as the "divine right" of the majority. Rather is the principal of the rule of the majority a substitute for fighting. For what the public does is not to express its opinions but to align itself for or against a proposal. If we accept this theory, we must abandon the notion that democratic government of today can be the direct expression of the will of the people. "We must say that the popular will does not direct continuously but that it intervenes occasionally."

We must then drop "the Rule of the people" as an "unattainable Ideal"

It is unattainable because the problems of modern society are so varied and complex that the average individual could not hope to cope successfully with even a few of them. Indeed, since men can not possibly have valuable opinions on such a variety of subjects, we can not conceive of public opinion as a conserving or creating force directing society to clearly conceived ends. It is idle, then, to argue that although man evidently have conflicting purposes, a nation or mankind has some all-embracing purpose. "For did Justice, Truth, and Good depend on the spasmodic and crude intervention of public opinion, there would be little hope for them in the world".

Nations and men must realize that "right" and "truth" are relative things. The system of rights and duties of any age is simply the "modus vivendi" of conflicting interests. Even the most objective appeal to reason will turn out to be an appeal to desert one cause and enlist in another. But the interest of the public ~~is~~ is not in rules and customs themselves, but in the maintenance of a regime of rule and custom— rules that will define and predict the behavior of men so that they can their adjustments. Some system of rights and duties is necessary, but no particular system is sacred.

Having isolated public opinion so that one can more readily analyze it, one can now build an attainable ideal of democracy on a realistic foundation. (An ideal should express the true possibilities of its subject.) Lippmann goes ahead constructively to say that "The ideal of public opinion is to alignment during the crisis of a problem in such a way as to favor the action of those individuals who may be able to compose the crisis. The power to discern those individuals is the end of the effort to educate public opinion." Public opinion in its highest ideal will defend those who are prepared to act in their reason against the interrupting force of those who merely assert their will. (But when power, however absolute and unaccountable, reigns without provoking a crisis, p.o. does not challenge it.)

5

The place of p.o. being settled, what is the place of government? It is to render indirect assistance to those who are directly responsible. In short, the government is to be external, just as p.o. is to the actions of individuals. Government officials, some elected, some appointed, should handle professionally and in the first instance what p.o. handles spasmodically and on appeal. When the parties directly responsible do not work out an adjustment, public officials intervene. When officials fail, p.o. is called upon. BUT THE BURDEN OF CARRYING ON THE WORK OF THE WORLD, of formulating laws and moral codes, lies not upon p.o. and not upon government, but on those who are the responsible agents in the affair.

With the above statement Lippmann seems to move into the realm of "The Good Society". The emphasis from now on is not upon public opinion. True, one carries the previous remarks on as necessary background. But one can not help but feel that "The Phantom Public" is ended, and Lippmann is entering into a broader field of action.

The argument assumes the following proportions: in the issues engendered by the rise of the national state and the development of large scale industry are to be found the essentially new problems of the modern world. The field of international affairs and the field of industrial relations are the two great centers of anarchy in society. Out of the strong national state and out of great industry with its economic compulsion, the threat against personal security always rises. There arose strong powers in both fields organized at first, to defend themselves against other strong powers. But unless these forces are neutralized there can be no order, for order is an arrangement of power, and unless there is order, there can be no LAW.

"The reduction of capitalism to workable law is no matter of striking at it wholesale by general enactments. It is a matter of defeating its arbitrary power in DETAIL- in every factory, office, and market, and of

6

and of turning the whole network of relations under which industry operates from the dominion of arbitrary forces into those of settled rules.

In international affairs, private disputes across frontiers must be dissociated and treated separately to eliminate reasons for disputes between nations.

In the "Good Society" Lippmann carries the international point further and states that nations must practice the division of labor in wide markets. They must be ruled not by personal rulers but by the impersonal necessities of economic markets in which governments take part only by regulating against abuses.

The adjustments between men in their relations which must be made ARE society, and the best society is the one in which men have purposes which they can realize with the least frustration.

Lippmann's theory puts its trust chiefly in the individuals directly concerned. They initiate. They administer. They settle. It confines the effort of men - as a public - to a part they might fulfill, to an intervention which may help to allay a particular disturbance and thus allow them to return to their own affairs. The Lippmann philosophy is a condemnation of collectivism. He shows no faith in the actions of masses, but it is a challenge to all centralized government. He is essentially an advocate of "laissez faire" .

He dispells the possibility of government of, by, and for the people. His is a government of, by and for the INDIVIDUAL. Men have no all-embracing purpose in life and the force necessary to lead them to any such goal should not be held over them. Rather within the bounds of established rule and custom based on reason should men be allowed to pursue their individual goals. (Lippmann makes adequate provision for the possibility of changing these rules. His is not a static society.) Thus Lippmann seems to have found a somewhat satisfactory mean between an extreme individualism and the collectivism and centralization which might easily mean the antithesis of individualism. There is nothing

startlingly new in his philosophy. But it is his application of tried and true fundamentals to modern problems in a manner so forceful and profound that makes his contribution seem of great significance.

Today he is criticized by liberals both "old" and "New"- the Vincent Yarros "old" and "new". To the old liberal, he is radical.

To the new liberal he is reactionary. Yet Lippmann must be identified as a liberal. His course is progressive, yet not to "inevitable Collectivism". If he has done nothing else, he has shown us that the future is not only a question of Fascism or Communism- which will you have?-. Our democracy is imperfect, yes, but only because it does not recognize its ^{limi} limitations and capabilities. Recognizing the limitations of government by one, a few, or all of the people, Lippmann has added a fourth type of government to the lists of Aristotle and the succeeding philosophers. His is the government of individual with individual plus, it is true, a system of law approved by the majority but evolving from moral codes and transactions of individuals.

In granting free play to individuals, we will have the greatest development of individual talent. Specialization means greater efficiency and greater prosperity for all. Further, the inter play of ^{AN} ~~and~~ individual of one nation with ^{AN} ~~and~~ individual of another country as individuals and not as representative nationals will lead to greater understanding and less international disputes. Lippmann is a sincere internationalist. He is nationalistic in no sense of the ~~world~~-world, word.

We can not throw out his philosophy as a pipe dream. The successful operation of the gold exchange standard before World War I indicates that individuals can run their own affairs with a minimum of regulation, and the profits accruing to individuals and nations alike were far greater than those obtained under any "managed" ~~ex~~hang-exchange. Lippmann does not stand alone in his demand to break down the centralized industries. Some of our greatest economists insist that small scale, varied manufacturing in every town and village that can be supplied with electricity is a sure fire development in future years.

There are a number of writers today who feel that the trend of our so-called machine age is toward decentralization - a breaking up of large units.

Even the partial realization of his plan may be many centuries removed.
But I think that a plan which asks of the individual so little yet grants him so much in return is more likely to succeed than any of the beautiful theories now rampant which call upon the individual to sacrifice much of his freedom for the benefit of a gigantic, super-colossal society which he could not possibly conceive .

Report on
WALTER
KIPPMAN
inspired
by the
Reading of
"The Phantom Public"

Herbert
Baumgard

A very interesting
& provocative book
reviewed thoughtfully
& competently.

92