

The Political Importance of an Informed, Independent Minority

“INDIVIDUAL citizens and small neighborhood groups who make their desires known by letter or other communication will find eager listeners among their politician friends and representatives,” states Colonel E. C. Harwood in an unsigned article entitled, “Can Our Republic Survive?” in the July-August Economic News Letter. “Above all else,” he states, “a professional politician wants to know the answer to this question: In what direction should I lead in order to obtain your vote. In effect he is saying, ‘Remember, I have no irreversible personal convictions, at least none that will interfere with my doing your bidding; please tell me what you want so that I may keep my job.’ Also important for the independent minority to remember is that this is the professional politician’s viewpoint not only in early November of even-numbered years but 365 days of every year.”

Before outlining specific Constitutional rights of all citizens the author discussed “The Law of Human Progress,” as Henry George presented it in Book X of *Progress and Poverty*. He made a plea for an informed and independent minority of voters, and pointed out that even as small a number as the half million readers of the Economic News, and their immediate families are numerous enough to have decided every presidential election in recent decades.

Many thoughtful citizens have learned, for instance, that inflation is a great destroyer of organized societies; and they know from historical



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events, and from some which have occurred in their lifetimes, that republics have been especially vulnerable to the destructive influence of inflation (France is now struggling to maintain the Fifth Republic, the fifth since ours was begun, and Germany has its second republic since World War I).

But a question arises as to whether such an informed and independent minority will take the trouble to make their views known individually and personally. They would do well to reflect on the resolution and devotion of that minority which persevered to make possible the founding of this republic during the trying times of the American Revolution.

One fact is clear, failure on the

part of today's informed minority to function as an independent balance of power will mark the betrayal not only of the next generation of Americans but all that we know of Western civilization, which purported to become one of the best hopes of mankind.

Many American citizens seem to have forgotten or perhaps never have realized that they were provided with "a society so organized by Constitution, statute and custom that each adult member will be continually influenced to cooperate with others by serving their needs as they in turn are under a like compulsion to serve his, thus indirectly serving their own. The end desired is perfect cooperation, and the means clearly implied in the Constitution is free competition. 'Free' implies not the chaos of anarchy but operations under 'rules of the game' intended to preserve the maximum number of alternative choices for all."

The actual functioning of a republic (sometimes misnamed a "democracy") is described in these terms:

"The basic fact, regardless of the appearance as reflected in numerous 'splinter' political groups of professional politicians in a republic, the 'ins' and the 'outs.' The Ins are those who currently enjoy the lion's share of perquisites, power and pay; and the Outs are those who have to 'make do' with what is left.

"The basic and continuous struggle, the permanent major political issue, is between the Outs who 'want in' and the Ins who are determined to retain the spoils of office. . . . As for the citizens of a republic, evidently most of them vote according to inherited or early-acquired prejudices. Relatively few will trouble to inform themselves on public questions. . . .

"How then can a republic survive?

It can survive when a well informed minority of the public holds the balance of elective power between the Ins and the Outs and uses the balance of power judiciously. Politicians survive in office not by great erudition or firm convictions as to what is best for the republic, but by winning elections; and elections are won by getting a few more of the independent votes than those given to the opposition. Hence the assiduous attention paid by all politicians to minority groups: to the farmers benefiting from price supports who number fewer than one in 60 of the voting population, to the foreign-background minorities each of which is seemingly insignificant in voting power, and to numerous other groups that may weigh in the balance of power. The politician naturally thinks first and foremost of winning the election."

Some who accept the foregoing analysis may doubt that a republic can survive. However, as pointed out earlier, today the relatively well-informed and independent voters in this country constitute a powerful minority able to wield the balance of power in most Congressional election districts.

The half million readers of Economic News have been informed that the Institute for Economic Research of Great Barrington, Massachusetts, an independent scientific research and educational organization, provides useful answers on many crucial, economic questions. Moreover, with the help of a National Advisory Council they hope to foster the more extensive research and education needed on other problems of society. The Institute, under the leadership of Colonel Harwood, a trustee of the Henry George School, believes these activities and the actions of informed read-

ers and their associates ultimately may provide the means for safeguarding this republic and insuring its survival.


In an earlier article in this series, "The American Crises of the 1960's," entitled "Should We Put Our Friends in Socialist Straitjackets?" the author—after providing a detailed study of aid to Great Britain, West Germany, France and India—sums up his conclusions as follows:

"The general tendency of American foreign aid has been to foster socialism. The economic results have not been those desired by the American people. Some of the administrators probably are dedicated Socialists, and

many others are ignorant of the economic results from such programs. Our friends may survive American aid; but if they do, it will be because they somehow escape from the Socialist straitjackets into which we are trying to force them.

"What is the answer? Discontinue most foreign aid, set matters right in our own country as an example to the rest of the world, and encourage those to learn who wish to do so."

No. VI in the series (September) is a discussion of the "affluent" society, and comes "down to earth" with a number of important recommendations for survival.



Our Readers Ate Us Out of House & Home

FROM all population centers in the U.S. and from England, come enthusiastic endorsements of the special "Land" issue of *House & Home*, the professional magazine of the housing industry. It has been commented upon in many newspapers, also in *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Barron's* and other leading magazines.

Raymond Moley in *Newsweek* speaks of this as a major article, richly documented and brilliantly edited. Commenting on the "ugly sprawl" of slums he adds a timely example of two large pieces of land enjoying exactly the same advantages in accessibility on Fifth Avenue in New York.

"On one, the owner erected a \$65 million office building. On the other are some small structures. Before the improvement the land was assessed the same. Afterward, the tax on the land under the big building was raised 300 per cent. The tax on the other, although its value was

greatly increased by the improvement across the street, remained the same as before. The remedy is to equalize land taxation and force squatters to improve or get out or pay higher taxes, and also to lower the taxes on improvements," writes Raymond Moley.

The edition of 3000 reprints which we so happily offered last month has been exhausted. A new supply was ordered immediately and will soon be available to those who have been clamoring for copies to distribute. Naturally, because of extra labor involved in the reprinting, the price is a little higher, but still very reasonable. This 83-(large)-page publication costs only half as much as the entire magazine, and nothing is omitted but the advertisements.

So send your orders soon, please. One or two copies are 50¢ each. Twelve are only \$5, and \$10 brings you 25 copies which could be very important for use among the builders and public officials of your town.