

CONFLICTS, GAPS, DISCREPANCIES IN POLITICAL VALUES

The political values of a people are based upon and directly related to the moral, personal, and social values which they have accepted. Gaps, discrepancies, and conflicts between the ideas and ideals we profess in political values and those we practice certainly exist today. As we read history, we may feel that they have to some degree always existed.

In these days the space between professing and practicing has increased with the changes time has brought, with the greatly increased size of the country, with the growth of population and of city masses, with the very fact of bigness in all its aspects (business, transportation, education, etc.), challenging old value patterns and practices.

If we could set goals and make some progress in developing patterns of political

behavior based on sound personal, moral, and social values, we might help in no small way to strengthen the nation. Cynics may say this is impractical idealism; yet Horace Mann's battle for public education, the education of all the children of all the people, was based on principle, and the battle was fought and won. To implement that principle in an unsettled and changing world, with all the implications of change, is a task which cannot be ignored if democracy is to survive.

Let us examine some of the present discrepancies between political values we profess and those we practice. If questioned, we would all say we value our citizenship, I am sure. We are thankful we are not living in Czechoslovakia. Yet figures show that many citizens do not exercise the ba-

sic right, privilege, and responsibility of that citizenship. Too many citizens do not vote.

How many non-voters would give us their reason disgust with politics? Do they realize that imperfect as it seems, our system of politics has become the method of operating the government in our democracy? Do they know that the Founding Fathers planned, not the democracy of Lincoln's "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" but a representative form of government, in which selected representatives exercised certain powers? The electoral college elected the president (individual members free to vote for candidates as they chose), state legislatures elected U.S. Senators, etc.

If you say the average voter does not know these things, then I say to you that the public school should have taught him. As our concept of government has changed, our political system has evolved. In many ways that system is out of gear, retaining old procedures un-

sued to changing times. The election of the President by the electoral college and the complicated procedures that might follow illustrate the point. The election of 1968 focused public attention on this situation. Newspapers and magazines through editorials, articles, and syndicated columns have called for action to bring this election machinery up to date.

At this writing comes the first announcement of plans for Congressional action on the matter. Once action is begun, will the people concerned, professing as their goal the good of the country, support procedures benefiting certain groups — political, sectional, economic, or whatever they may be? Will the average citizen, professing to value his citizenship, follow the work of the Congressional group and exert any influence he may have for the best system? Will whatever compromises have to be made result in the general good?

If we value honesty in government, we will practice it. Gaps in the political field exist wherever there

is misuse of public funds, padding of accounts, undue influence of powerful lobbies, and graft. Whenever there gets to be a general acceptance of these practices, or apathy concerning them, there is certainly a discrepancy between ideals professed and actions practiced. Our political system makes it easy to practice dishonesty in words, too often illustrated in campaign oratory, maligning political opponents, and campaign literature and slogans.

There is certainly a conflict, also, between the idea of political power held as a public trust and the practice of its use for private gain. To what extent can we accept pork barrel tactics, nepotism, rewards and offices given for services rendered, waste of public money through the hiring of surplus employees, or unintelligent or uneconomical use of government funds, procedures too often practiced by the government but not tolerated by private industry? To what extent can we accept these practices and feel that the values thus exempli-

fied are acceptable practices in carrying on the government of our country?

Preservation of the two-party system to avoid the disastrous effects of the splintering of parties — as happened in France, making no party truly effective — will be a problem of the next few years. Attitudes regarding natural resources — land, water, air — and a fiscal policy for our country become matters of party policy. Many of these issues are complicated and complex.

In a democracy, citizens should be more than blind, uninformed adherents to a party. As Dr. John J. Mahoney, long a professor in Boston University's School of Education, has said: The vote ought to be an intelligent vote, the sober expression of a people's judgment concerning candidates and issues. After looking at specific values in our political life, and the discrepancies and conflicts between our profession of values and our behavior, we see the great need for public officials whom the public can trust. Let us hope there will be no

great discrepancies here, although history is not always reassuring.

As time passes, how will our democracy stand the strains within the country and the tremendous challenge of world problems that face us? It would seem than

an increasingly informed and alert electorate, choosing the leadership of men and women of character, however idealistic this may seem, must be the trend if democracy is to survive. — *by Agnes P. Mantor in The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin, Winter 1969.*

UNIVERSITY CONSTITUENTS

Alumni: In this country that strange phenomenon known as the alumni plays a weird and oftentimes a terrifying role. It is very odd, when you come to think of it, that people who have been the beneficiaries of an institution should think that they should control it, and for that very reason.

Trustees are in a different category from alumni. They at least have the undoubted legal right to control the institution. * * * But a university that is run by its trustees will be badly run. How can it be otherwise? Ordinarily the trustees are not educators: usually they are non-resident. If they are alumni, they must overcome the vices inherent in that interesting group. If of their own motion they take an education problem in hand, they can decide rightly only by accident. * * *

Academic Freedom is simply a way of saying that we get the best results in education and research if we leave their management to people who know something about them. — *Robert Maynard Hutchins, former President of the University of Chicago, in The Higher Learning in America.*