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Forms and Functions of Contemporary Representation

For a hundred and fifty years, roughly from the French Revolution to the Great Depression of 1929, it appeared that the formula for the good state all over the world was to be found in representative government. The reasons why its merits and success seemed assured are clear now in retrospect.

- 1.) Representative government seemed more reliable and rational than monarchical rule. It seemed to dispense with the superstitious magic of monarchy.
- 2.) The problems of man seemed amenable to objective solution or calm compromise.
- 3.) Certain nations that were respected for their ideas, that were technological in spirit and that were powerful were representative in form from the beginning of this period--England, France and the United States.
- 4.) Land had not lost its position as the greatest resource of a nation, and the territorial community was supremely important. Territorial representation therefore seemed inescapably logical and was simple to arrange.
- 5.) A social class system that united wealth, education, prestige and power in the same hands still existed, no matter what the new cult of democracy promised. Therefore, power could be trusted to representatives without fear that they might find some basically different ideology or interest to represent.

In the course of that period of time, however, two things happened. On the one side, the mechanistic devotion to the devices of representative government proceeded vigorously (one is tempted to say obsessively) until throughout the world, including the young Soviet Union, there was an amazing apparatus of representative institutions.

At the same time, on the other hand, the very foundations of representative government were rotting away.

- 1.) There were disturbing signs that the idea of "the people" could promote as much superstitious magic as the idea of monarchy.
- 2.) Bitter wars and class conflicts erupted. Parties were formed whose success was predicated upon the downfall of parliamentary regimes.
- 3.) Dozens of nations seized upon the forms of representative government but rejected the operational test of the forms.
- 4.) Land-tenure became only one factor among several in the political power complex; industrial development proceeded, world markets opened up, and the monetary standard of values was adopted everywhere.
- 5.) A separation grew up between those who possessed prestige in a society--often concentrated in the old feudal groups--those who had acquired new wealth, and those professionals who managed and held political power. Social solidarity was lost.

The results are plain to those who read history with a sober mind. By the beginning of World War II, several important representative regimes had come crashing down--Russia (and the early

Soviet regime), Italy and Germany. At the height of Fascist success, early in World War II, almost no representative government existed in the world. The Allied governments were placed in the hands of the executive branch of government with the intention of expediting the war effort. To be sure, this condition was partly temporary; once the war was over, free elections were held in many places and representative systems reestablished.

However, a description of the condition of representative government in the world today must admit to the following conclusions:

- 1.) The legislature, which was to be the great engine of modern government, is now hitched to the superior engines of the executive and bureaucracy.
- 2.) The personified executive has become the great popular institution wherever a presidential, communist, or nationalist system exists. The impersonal executive, the bureaucracy, has become strong everywhere, but is particularly dominant where a weak personal executive exists, as in France prior to General De Gaulle's latest accession to power.
- 3.) The social structure of the territorial legislature has greatly weakened, and it is difficult to invent new devices of representation to buttress it.
- 4.) All societies in the modern world, whether developed or undeveloped are in process of rapid change. In America, at one extreme, the rural areas are emptying into the cities and the city people are changing from one job to another as automation and invention

occur. In the undeveloped lands, the rural poor flock to the cities, there to constitute great lumps of humanity indigestible to the economy now and far into the future.

5.) In the highly developed areas of the world the social struggle has abated. In the United States and West Germany, communists are few. In Italy and France, the communists are numerous but the leaderships dare not agitate too vigorously for fear of losing their mass followings. In the developed communist countries, totalitarian rule based upon brute force is subsiding in favor of an administrative rule along the lines of ancient oriental despotisms. Only in the most undeveloped lands--and it must be pointed out that they count a majority of heads in the world--does the social struggle carry fire. But there, the few so-called exploiters of the colonial and native ruling classes were not difficult to turn out of power and wealth, and the major enemies that remain are in fact rival groups within the same social and ideological framework.

6.) Everywhere in the world the forms of representative government have triumphed. Everyone admits to the need for elected legislatures, apportioned usually according to territorial districts of roughly equal populations. Yet this legislature contains very little of the total political power of the country.

The balance of the power is distributed among the personified executive, the bur̄aucratic officials (including the military), the party leaders (often a single-party system now), and a small number of interest-group leaders.

All of them operate in the name of the people.

That is, in the world of the moment, the legitimacy of rule must reside in the people, no matter how deviously the actual rule operates to give power to nonelected persons. A century ago, republicans would ask themselves how they might rule in the name of a king and yet hold actual power. Today they ask themselves how they can rule in the name of the people and hold real power. "Cambia il maestro della cappella, ma la musica é sempre quella", goes the Italian saying: "The choirmaster may change, but the music sounds always the same."

Still, from ~~all~~ all of this kaleidoscopic movement, must there not be some eternal or at least fairly constant verities of representation and representative government? Or must one say with Vilfredo Pareto: "Let us not dwell upon the idea of representation; poppycock grinds no flour"?

There are several principles of human life in society which are best served by representative government--if not the representative government that ^{then} is known today, the one which is practically conceivable for the future.

1. Representative government based upon some mode of collecting opinions and will-powers from diverse parts of a population is a bulwark against excessive centralization of power and administration.

2. Representative government is most likely to be friendly to free and local economic enterprises.

3. Representative government is least likely to destroy individual liberties, even though there will be always some voices using the diffuse representative apparatus to cry out against each and every liberty.

4. Representative government is more likely than monarchical, totalitarian, communist, or bureaucratic governments to promote equal opportunity among the people and restrain the growth of fixed privileges.

5. Representative government emerges from the transactions of the people at the point in their lives and characters--both historically and individually--where they are most likely to be true to themselves and know what they are doing. In the life of the individual and in the life of groups, the age of republicanism is the golden age of human worth.

If such are the human services performed by representative government, what reforms of contemporary world political systems are needed to permit representative government to survive and possibly to flourish? These reforms are not easy to visualize, because the visions of most men today are focussed upon organizations of astronomical size and upon leaders whose characters and achievements are greatly magnified by the mass media. For the same reason and others, even if conceived, such reforms would be difficult to accomplish. Modern man can raze buildings and build new ones, and does so abundantly and every day. But he cannot so easily tear down useless

social structures and put new ones in their place. If he achieves the degree of hostility and aggressiveness required to pull down the old institution, he is usually too exhausted and full of conflicts to rebuild, but goes off like a savage abandoning his burnt-out campfire.

Perhaps the only method that will not cause more social destruction than reconstruction is a selective method, which would change critical features of the social landscape, letting much else change by itself later on. For instance, it is easier to get more local news, which reports and praises local social initiatives, into the magazines, radio and newspapers than it is to change the type of ballot used for voting in provincial elections. Yet the former is more effective than the latter in creating the proper social atmosphere in which representative government can survive.

1. In the first place, the reform of representative government requires a new applied science of administration whose principles will give men rules by which decentralization and local consultation can occur regularly and seriously.

2. Second, all administrative officials of the highest level should be regarded frankly as legislators and a system should be devised to test their "proneness to representation." Their contacts with the legislature and other elected representatives should be formally provided for.

3. In some countries, the central personified executive is divided into a relatively weak officer, usually called a president or king, and a stronger officer, usually termed the premier. The first provides expressive representation while the second provides efficient

representation. In other countries, such as the United States of America, the two offices are joined into one office and there is a permanent danger, under modern conditions of declining localism, that the president, who gives the masses both expressive and efficient representation, will cause or consummate a constitutional revolution, putting the seal of doom upon the weakened institutions of representative government--the legislature, the provincial bodies, the congeries of local, federalized and unintegrated national interests of the country. Worst of all is the effect that an uncontrolled chief executive will have upon the characters and minds of the common man and child. They will relapse into that primitive submissive, worshipful, and imitative condition from which they first began the long rise towards self-respect and independent intelligence. Therefore, machinery to control the central executive needs constant care and invention.

4. In every country, a reappraisal of the legislative branch of government is required, with a thorough overhauling in mind. On the agenda for redesign are the manner of electing personnel, the development of intelligence about social conditions, and the processes of decision. Means must be found to admit to the legislature more of the force of the communities of the nation than are provided by the simple system of letting anybody be a candidate, letting everyone vote for him, counting the ballots, and opening the doors of parliament to the winner. Modern industry does not even hire a clerk in that fashion. If it is true that democracy demands that the representatives be anointed by the people, it need

not be conceded that all efforts to improve their quality have to be abandoned.

Nor do contemporary legislatures go far in the direction of improved procedures for understanding their work. More and more, the solicitous partnership of the heads of government and the high bureaucracy lets them believe that all the information and intelligence required for legislation is contained in the packages handed to them. If parliaments permitted themselves the luxury of research and development, the so-called R&D, which modern industry employs, sometimes to the extent of 10% of its total expenditures, they would be more than a match for presidents and bureaucracies.

Similar reforms might prove beneficial in the area of decision-making. In legislating, legislatures often act in terrorem because of the threats and blandishments of the executive branch and the press. Since everything done in the legislature is publicized, the great virtue of open politics becomes in vulgar minds a vice. Forgetting that knowledge of what is happening in government is a hard-won achievement, one of the greatest in all of history, the public, press, demagogues and smug career officials often denounce the only institution where true publicity of difference and operations in government exists, on grounds that it shows up the faults of a country and its government. This is like tearing out the oil filter of a car engine on grounds that it is unpleasant to contemplate the collected impurities of the fuel system. Indeed, the reforms of the legislative process should extend to making other areas of government, and also private industrial, educational and associational decision-making, more like that of the legislature.

In a world that admires expertness, these recommendations may appear retrograde. But they are not in fact. Expertness is fine in its place. However, expertness is without motive and without links to the community. As a result, extremities of expertness cause massive popular nausea in the end. The people cannot get what they want by themselves--it is for this that we have representative government--but the people can overturn regimes and become passive and lazy and commit many another offense against the bureaucratic state. ^{By} thus defying ^{it, they effectively and permanently prevent it} ~~the~~ theoretically high efficiency. ^{from attaining it} In the end, representative government, ramified in spirit and institutions throughout a great community, can produce a far more productive and rich society and person.