



CSS PLATFORM Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat ON POLITICS

Will Durant

In preparing these chapters I have often looked into my 1929 ebullition, *The Mansions of Philosophy*, to avoid repeating old sallies and arguments. Sometimes I paused in admiration of my youthful eloquence (I was only forty-four, which is childhood in philosophy). But one chapter shocked me as the most one-sided, unfair, and immature disquisition that ever came from my pen.

It was entitled "Is Democracy a Failure?" And it described with enthusiasm all the faults of democracy in America: its dependence upon a public opinion misinformed, misled, and thoughtlessly passionate; its nominations controlled by political machines favoring obedient mediocrities; its municipal officialdom corrupt and incompetent; its legislatures and Congress subservient to lobbies and wealth; its leaders too busy with electioneering to have time to think. My nostrum for these ills was the establishment, in our universities, of accredited schools of administration, diplomacy, and government; the automatic right of any graduate of such a school to present himself as a candidate for municipal office; the automatic eligibility to state office of any graduate after serving two terms as mayor of a state's largest city; the automatic eligibility to Congress of any graduate after serving two terms as governor; and the automatic eligibility for the presidency or vice presidency of any graduate after serving two terms as senator. Party and machine nominations would continue, and would be open to all, regardless of fitness, but education would no longer be a disqualification for office; and even the parties might now and then nominate a man as specifically trained for public administration as a student is trained for the practice of medicine or law. I still cherish this nicely graduated scheme, and I rejoice to note how many universities have organized schools of government. But, for the rest, I repudiate that early article as a shameful outburst of ingratitude and spleen. (I shiver to imagine what I should think of the present essay if by some mischance I should live to reread it many years hence.)

Since 1929 American democracy has matched its defects with its achievements. It has raised the

Quality of its mayors, governors, and presidents: Franklin Roosevelt, Fiorello La Guardia, John Lindsay, and Nelson Rockefeller have inspired us with their courage, Integrity, and vision. The national government has met the challenges of depression, racial crisis, and two world wars. It has often been far ahead of public opinion in measures that later won general acclaim. It has made almost as many concessions to labor as to business; it has begun to protect borrowers from usurers, and purchasers from false packaging or labeling. And it has saved the American economy by mitigating capitalistic rigors with the welfare state.

I know that the welfare state is distrusted by many sincere conservatives as biologically unsound; Men, they believe, are naturally averse to labor, and need the fear of hunger or want as a prod to work. Some critics would add that poverty is mostly due to native inferiority in body, mind, or character rather than to inequities in the relations between employers and employees; a few would secretly agree with Nietzsche that the poor are the social organism's natural waste, and we must stoutly resign ourselves to its unseemly necessity. We recall Macaulay's warning that democracy would collapse when the poor used their electoral power to rob rich Peter to pay lazy Paul. Polybius expressed the same idea in 130 BC:

"When, by their foolish thirst for reputation, they [popular leaders] have created among



CSS PLATFORM

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

the masse an appetite for gifts and the habit of receiving them, democracy in its turn is abolished, and changes into a rule of force and violence. . . . For the people, having grown accustomed to feed at the expense of others, and to depend for their livelihood on the property of others, . . . degenerate into perfect savages, and find once more a master and monarch.”

So the Greek historian, following Plato, thought that democracy would by its own excesses pass into dictatorship.

The danger is real. I admit that thousands of people use pensions, relief checks, and unemployment benefits to finance long periods of indolence; that many employees live apart from their wives and children in order that these may be eligible for relief; and that voluntary idleness at public expense has become a drain on municipal, state, and national treasuries, which are maintained by ever-rising taxation. Nevertheless, the welfare state must be preserved and extended (in this matter we are far behind the British), not only as a dictate of decency but as a measure of insurance against class conflict at home and foreign competition for the suffrages of mankind.

It is to the honor of the American economy that it can flourish only if the power of the people to purchase goods rises step by step with their power to produce them; and production is repeatedly advanced by improved technology, management, and skills.

We have elsewhere argued that all men are born unequal; that these natural inequalities grow with time and the complexity of productive techniques; that the consequently concentrated wealth is mostly invested in mechanizing and accelerating production; that the gap between production and consumption widens until production slows to let consumption catch up. But the retarding of production lowers the total of wages paid, still further widens the gap between wealth and poverty, and threatens the existence of the free enterprise system. The cheapest alternative to this vicious spiral is an ampler distribution of the wealth generated by the zest and stimulations of capitalism. From 1933 to 1965 the government of the United States achieved this by encouraging the organization and bargaining power of labor, by extending the graduated tax on incomes and estates, and by payments from the treasury to promote public health, security, education, recreation, and employment; i.e., by extending the welfare state. Next to the brilliant repulse of Fascist Germany and imperialistic Japan, this has been the most vital achievement of American statesmanship in our time.

Largely for these reasons I have, since 1916, favored the Democratic as against the Republican Party, except that in 1928 I supported Herbert Hoover. As an aging cub reporter for the Scripps-Howard newspapers at the Democratic Convention in that year I was captivated by the handsome presence and buoyant spirit of Franklin Roosevelt, who there nominated Alfred Smith; and I suggested that the Convention would show good sense if it nominated the nominator rather than his religion-hobbled nominee. Of course no one listened to me, but I had my way in 1932, and I voted for Roosevelt as long as he lived. I rank him among our greatest presidents. He rescued democracy abroad by coming to the aid of France and England in 1941; he rescued democracy at home by making government the instrument of the common weal instead of the servant of capital. Because of him and his successors the American system was so chastened and strengthened that it has been able to meet every challenge and comparison. The grandchildren of our tycoons will build statues to him.

The war against poverty is in its early stages; it is an immense and unprecedented enterprise; it is entitled to make mistakes. It is handicapped by the growth of ghettos in our cities and of racial



CSS PLATFORM

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

animosities in our hearts. In these respects Western Europe is more fortunate than the United States. Its cities are better managed by officials better trained, its traditions of social order are more deeply rooted in time and character, and its unassimilated ethnic minorities are relatively small. I have been appalled, on my annual visits to New York, to see how foreign immigration, white emigration, and the differential birthrate are conspiring to make our leading city a confusion of poor foreign people surrounding poor white enclaves, amid a forest of hotel or office towers possessed by proud suburbanites who enter in the morning and flee in the afternoon. Are our great cities doomed to race hatreds, class war, and relief expenditures threatening municipal bankruptcy? How shall we ever absorb these hostile millions into American life?

We shall do it by passing their children and grandchildren through our schools and colleges, throughour political institutions, and through the training of skills in an “equal opportunity” economy. For a decade or more there will be suspicion, resentment, disorder, violence, but these will subside. Over a century ago, when the Know Nothing Party and its riots inflamed America, it was dangerous to be a Catholic; now in many of our cities it is dangerous not to be a Catholic. In my youth the Italians in America were digging ditches; today Italians control the largest bank in the United States. Consider the progress made by the American Jews in the last half-century: in my youth I knew them as the harassed and impoverished people of the Lower East Side in New York; now I know their descendants as forming one of the most numerous, affluent, and respected elements in Los Angeles. History does not forbid us to hope for a similar rise of our darker-skinned brothers and sisters. The melting pot still melts, though not so much by mingling bloods as by raising the level of education and the standard of life. The process has been retarded by color differences and excessive immigration; and yet there are hundreds of thousands of prosperous minorities in the United States today. How many more will there be after another half-century of universal free schooling, and widened access to positions that develop intelligence and responsibility?

I have followed with care the helpful criticisms that others have made of our educational system. Myown estimate of it derives from no systematic study but from experience as a teacher in a public school, a private school, a college, and a university—all, however, before 1938. I believe that European schools and colleges give the student a better training than ours do in knowledge, thinking, and discipline of character and mind. But I count not on the superiority of our schools so much as upon their number and reach. I see them responding to criticism, checking their laxity, paring their frills, and raising the mental level and equipment of a whole people, including racial minorities. It is a heroic enterprise, facing apathy, prejudice, and a taxpayers’ revolt; but when I am driven to my last stand I place my faith in the courage of our people, and our educational institutions, to justify America in history.

I know the defects of democracy; I have too readily advertised and condemned them. I know also, through history and travel, the other forms of government. I have read of Louis XIV, his gorgeous robes and the grandeur of Versailles; but behind that costly façade I have seen the dehumanized peasants described in the most famous pages of La Bruyère. I have no wish to exchange Moscow or Peking for Washington or Los Angeles. I believe that ability has more abundant opportunities to reach maturity and influence in our democracy than under aristocracies or monarchies—or under democracies still obstructed by aristocratic privilege. I am grateful for the freedom of mind that I have enjoyed in America; I do not think I should have



CSS PLATFORM

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

found so wide and open a road in any other land.

I recognize that many evils tarnish our record—aggressive war, childish chauvinism, political corruption, business chicanery, racial inequities, proliferating crime, broken marriages, declining morals, and decadent arts. Nor do I expect that the nature of man will change to remove the biological sources of our sins and ills. Against these woes the cries of our pessimists are justified and useful. But I see the best as well as the worst, and I will not apologize for my country. If the Founding Fathers could come back they would be amazed at the degree to which we have reduced poverty, drudgery, illiteracy, and governmental tyranny. A large part of the utopias described by Thomas More, Samuel Butler, Edward Bellamy, and H. G. Wells has been materially realized, along with the universal education, adult suffrage, freedom of speech, press, assembly, and religion which were among the hopes and dreams of eighteenth-century philosophers.

Let us continue to complain, to demand, and to rebel; this, too, is part of our virtue. But as for me, favored and fortunate (and countless Americans might say the same), I should be the worst ingrate if I did not thank the fates that deposited me here between these seas, and within these liberties.

CSS PLATFORM