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POPULAR PRESSURES ON GOVERNMENT

Until recent years the only type of popular pressure encountered by law-makers was the traditional variety represented by lobbyists, the mass media, and special interest groups. These segments of society sought to obtain special benefits within the existing social structure by following established procedures. More recently a new type of pressure group has arisen which operates in disregard of traditional methods and seeks to alter fundamentally the existing social structure. The future of the Republic will depend upon its ability to receive and evaluate such pressures before they degenerate into violence.

A lecture presented at the Naval War College

by

Captain Robert F. Delaney

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There can be no more important contemporary subject for serious, mature discussion—given recent events in our own society—than the topic “Popular Pressures on Government.” It is not only a terribly appropriate subject for a service college, but for the society as a whole. Unfortunately, I do not feel we are paying enough attention to it, so I extend my congratulations to you for raising what to me is a fundamental issue as we move into an era of change in our own country.

Indeed, given the delicate point of transition in which we do find ourselves, this presentation might more appropriately be called “Unpopular Pressures on Government,” for never in the history of the Republic have we been faced with a more successful onslaught on the part of various vested interests, on the part of pressure groups, on the part of

public opinion molders, each in his own way trying to exercise an influence on our lives. That power groups have become part of the fabric of democracy is obviously not new. If you look back into your history you will see that Thomas Jefferson in some of his writings complained vigorously about the pressures of the Federalists in trying to develop an influence for what he considered to be an overabundance of elitism in the society of that day. What is new, however, is that everyone, it would seem, with a constituency of more than 10 people now plays this game in the full glare of publicity, with thrust and counterthrust being daily represented with the happy aid and comfort of a vastly obliging, increasingly powerful national communications network, about which you have heard a good deal in past weeks. There is a

fervor, a passion, a cynicism associated with this modern "parlor game" of pressure which also represents a new and potentially dangerous factor in the popular give-and-take, check and balance of our democratic life.

Herbert Aptheker, a not unintelligent American Communist and Marxist scholar, calls this development in America "actual mass breakdown." I think this is a bit overstated, but it is an intriguing idea to consider.

From another point of view, Walter Lippmann, some 40 years ago in his classic work *Public Opinion*, prophetically warned of the day when our Nation would be directed by a popular plebiscite based upon the vagaries of a semi-informed public opinion. And indeed we can see today the very beginnings of this trend creeping into our society.

More recently, responding to the swiftly moving allegiances of today's public attitudes, that most clever and highly controversial critic, J. Kenneth Galbraith, commented, "Any matter on which Strom Thurmond, John McClellan, Joe Alsop, Al Capp, Spiro T. Agnew, J. Edgar Hoover, Joseph C. Harsch, and Walter Annenberg are in solemn agreement obviously has another side."

And not to be outdone, his conservative colleague and protagonist, Bill Buckley, responded with the comment that "No public issue can be considered definitively discussed until Professor Galbraith has addressed himself to it."

All of these *bon mots* are immediately picked up, it would seem, by a waiting audience of media specialists and partisans of one sort or another and whirled around the country and, increasingly, around the world to the glee of some and to the obvious anger of others.

And what, you might ask, has all of this got to do with the business of popular pressures on government? A great deal, for it seems to me that it

illustrates the state to which we have progressed. The state of the art has reached a very high point of delicacy and emotion. It seems, at least in my view, that over the past 2½ years there has been a fundamental, and indeed some call it a profound, shift in the traditional makeup of the continuum which constitutes the exercise of traditional pressures on a democratic form of government.

The talk and lectures you have had in the past on this subject at the Naval War College have isolated, defined, and described pressure groups to include the media, lobbyists of one camp or another—mainly industrial, business, or commercial—special interest groups such as veterans' organizations, one-man congressional virtuosos such as Mendel Rivers, Dick Russell in his prime, or even Carl Vinson, who today still remains the Navy's greatest legislative benefactor of this century.

It is not my intention to belabor the obvious. You already know these realities; you deal with them; you are familiar with them. Indeed, Professor Austin Ranney discusses the traditional spectrum with great perception in his December 1969 article in the *Naval War College Review*. I commend it to your attention if, by chance, you missed it.

What I do want to point out is the degree and intensity of change which have newly entered into the realm of pressure on government and to relate these changes, to the extent possible, to the military and foreign affairs field.

I consider this exercise important because, hopefully, it will give you perspective and, at the same time, rekindle your feeling that we are not going to hell in a handbasket which, I am sure, as thinking Americans you sometimes sense as you go home and mull over the troubles of the day. Actually, much of the change that we will be describing is the result of a success story. We have been so eminently successful that we have created a

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whole new set of problems. And these are the problems which are bugging us today. Indeed, we have now involved ourselves in the development of special constituencies which those of you from foreign affairs agencies have argued for over a long period of time in the dull hope that someone would rise to defend the institutions charged with the responsibility for the conduct of foreign affairs. We now have more than enough constituencies to do this, and this is the measure of the problem. This whole thing, the popular constituency, is in a way equatable to participatory politics. This new phenomenon of involvement, which we deplore in its extreme forms, is without doubt here to stay for the foreseeable future.

This concept, while still vague in its legal and philosophical aspects, is crystal clear as to its role in bringing noisy, strong, and, to a degree, effective pressures on government. All we need do is follow the daily news to gauge this response mechanism at work. This is new in American society, and this is potentially risky since at its worst it culminates in what Joe McGinniss has so irreverently alluded to as "The Selling of a President."

But if we stand back from this pressure-cooker of dissent, protest, and parochialism, we see, I suggest, a pressure pattern operating on two levels. First, the short-term, narrowly constructed, often superficial or symbolic forms of pressure: for example, fads, fashions, instant news analyses, industrial lobbying, overnight punditry resulting in flashy bestsellers, as in the latest darling to capture the popular imagination, Olson's book on Teddy Kennedy's misadventure at the bridge which holds that the Senator was not even in the car; a thesis which surely qualifies as the best work of 1970 in the use of the spiritual medium.

The second and more important level of popular pressure is the long-range basic drive for fundamental change. This

second level has prospered of late in direct proportion to the rise of communications technology. We are all familiar with the short-term pressures, the things that we see normally. That is what Professor V.O. Key, in his classic on American public opinion describes as "the basic ingredient of the American public opinion interfacing in its own democratic surroundings." This is pressure at work in a context we understand, whether it be a congressional trade-off, a Chamber of Commerce campaign to reduce excise taxes, the AmVets pushing for a Korean pension, or the Army lobbying for its main battle tank. We have absorbed this type of give-and-take into the system. What we do not fully understand and what we have not yet absorbed, even less appreciated, is the full implication of long-range pressure.

Popular pressures on basic issues have been around for years as, for example, the 20 years it took to fashion medicare legislation, starting back with Harry Truman in 1946. But our society has gone beyond this traditional form of pressure. We have come to long-term pressure in the streets, the pressure of protest, the pressure of dissent, and the pressure of counterreaction. We have even, we are told, come to that intriguing contradiction in terms, the pressure of the silent majority.

What has happened has been a profound shift from traditional pressure to participatory pressure, the public opinion equivalent of everyone doing his own thing. The dangers—indeed the potentialities—are obvious. As President Nixon said, "decisions can't be made in the streets." And, of course, this is especially true in national security affairs. But, by the same token, on issues of lesser national import, participatory protests, the calculated use of the street as a forum and as a threat has succeeded to an undreamt of degree. Recently, when President Nixon threatened to veto the Mine Safety Act, his mind was

changed overnight by a wildcat strike of miners in the Pennsylvania fields and by the sudden appearance at the front door of the White House of several widows of miners killed in mine disasters. Why did he change his mind? He changed his mind essentially because of the public pressure represented in the presence of these women and in the economic distress which would be caused by an extended strike. He reacted directly, if quietly, to the so-called forum of the streets, the participatory pressures that are now so vocal, so apparent, and yet so new in our society.

If one analyzes the social makeup of today's pressure groups, one sees that new elements have entered into the equation. These are the groups you will be dealing with because these are the groups intent upon making long-range fundamental change the order of the day.

Let us see if we can identify these groups. First, there are the ones we are familiar with: political parties, the vested interests, and the media. The new and more volatile ones include youth, students, intellectuals, the poor, the consumer, the political activist, and—this may surprise you—the national security apparatus.

Even a most superficial review of this listing reveals the degree of change and, I hasten to add, the intensity of change which these modern pressure groups have forced on American society. In fact, the interfacing and the interrelationships have been so basically altered that even the older traditional groups have been forced to change in order to remain competitive. As the chief lobbyist of Standard Oil of New Jersey put it recently, "Lobbying ain't what it used to be."

Or, to put it another way, as Pat Moynihan did when he wrote of pressures, "We must see more clearly that our essential interest is in the maintenance of the stability of the social order."

I think that is a rather perceptive observation of just how far modern pressure groups have gone to shake our confidence in our own system. For that reason this analysis is of more than passing interest to you as professional military officers.

The usual business of public opinion and pressure which is traditionally centered on the pork barrel is now centered on the very issue of the viability of our social order. This is a change of magnitude. It is no wonder that the middle American is disturbed, angry, frustrated, and not so silent any longer. He has discovered what the press, the businessman, and the huckster discovered long ago—you must exert your influence in order to achieve your political objective.

The middle American is also reluctantly learning that he is a member of various publics and subject to or initiator of various pressures. A recent survey, for example, showed that the typical foreign and military affairs public opinion molder in the Middle West, the heartland of the troubled American, was white, over 40, an avid newspaper and TV devotee, a holder of advanced degrees, possessor of an income in excess of \$10,000, activist in temperament, and likely to be a Democrat and a Protestant. Now this represents a fairly specific profile of leaders who exercise what is considered to be, as a result of this survey, the dominant influence in reaching people in the midwest. And yet they can hardly be called typical Americans.

Extrapolating from this, if you were to take data representing a similar profile on the west coast and, God forbid, on the east coast, you would find that establishmentarianism would be even more evident. Thus, in the field of military and foreign policy we are dealing with a small elite, quite different from the mass of middle America, who are exercising a major dominance—pressure if you will—on policies that will affect, not only your career, but our

national security posture and policy in the years to come.

Where does all this leave the millions of everyday Americans? It doesn't take a genius to discover that it leaves them confused and concerned. Americans are subject to the pressures from these various groups, incessantly hammering on their consciousness, and this is one reason why citizens are gravitating to the manner of traditionalism and to the cause of conservatism, pressures long dormant in our society but now active to a degree unknown in recent years. For when you get right down to it, there is no other place for the majority to go. You have already set up a situation with pressure on one side and the respondent or recipient on the other; no matter where the respondent turns, whether it be to the media, to his special interest group, or to the newer categories of pressure—students, intellectuals, the academic community, the poor, the disenchanted—they are hammering out the same message which puts the normal, average middle American either in a position of being ostracized or of being confused. There is no coherence, no simplicity, no black and white quality about this. It is all terribly gray, and the average middle American is likely to react to this massive pressure by defending the mainstream as he sees it.

The press, the fourth estate, stung by allegations representative of the thinking of the forgotten American, continues to manipulate its own pressure points. You note that the very subtle rebuttal to the Vice President is now beginning to unfold in the national media, and unfold in a low-key way. That it is there, that a formula has been devised, may be seen by anyone who cares to spend the time reading the magazines, looking at television, and studying newspaper editorial policies.

The basic question, it seems to me, is the problem of responsible, interpretive reporting versus the superficiality,

inaccuracy, and sensationalism of day-to-day news output. I recently did a very quick study of a leading Florida afternoon newspaper. What I tried to do was establish the correlation between photo captions, the headlines, and story content over a 45-day period. Over 65 percent of the captions and headlines represented inaccuracies as between the headlines or the captions and the story. It seems to me that this is an effort consciously to sell the paper to the person walking by the newsstand, rather than explaining what really happened.

This raises an even more basic question. How many people in our society get their news not so much by reading what the stories contain, but by observing the headlines, reading the captions, reading the subheadlines, and letting that become the news of the day for them? I am afraid that altogether too many Americans settle for that approach, and, as I have suggested, there is often an apparent distortion between the story itself and the attractiveness of the presentation designed to entice readers to buy the newspaper.

This is a problem that most journalists avoid with a great deal of skill. They must, nevertheless, face up to this particular issue, wherein rests their own personal responsibility for the accuracy and honesty of their reporting.

Today it is business as usual with the media, business as usual with the political parties, both of which might be considered basic and traditional forms of national pressure groups. It seems to me that this is also true of other traditional pressure groups. But it is anything but business as usual with the new long-term pressure groups that have evolved in the past 2 to 3 years. Once again, checking our base point, the middle American, we find that there is largely no place for him to go in comfort and in security. He objects strongly to the wrenching process that is going on all around him.

There is one other distinction to be

noted in the new groups. The poor, the activist, the young, the intellectuals represent media-oriented, politically energized pressure groups dealing with long-term basic issues as opposed to short-term traditional goals. These new groups are the dissidents—they are the reformers who, finding government sluggish in response to their goals and desires, have mastered the techniques of public opinion, have mastered the techniques of demonstration, and have mastered the techniques of the street and the forum. Whether the cause be environment, social welfare, or pollution, social alienation is a factor common in the psychology of the pressure applied.

In any of these groups the members feel, psychologically and politically, that they are the only defenders in the society at large of antipollution drives, of environmental change, of clean streams, of solving the problem of hunger. And they see in the refusal or the inability to find an instant solution an element of alienation, and thus they set themselves up in a situation where it is "we" versus "they." They have rejected the give-and-take of democracy to a disturbingly large degree, and they find in their own makeup that this alienation infuses them with energy and impetus to continue the struggle for what they think is right.

Now, when you deal with this problem it is important that you understand that the changes that they have urged are coming. There is very little that we can do to prevent, indeed if we want to prevent, these changes that are being forced upon us by popular pressures. The changes are going to be made, and we are already responding to them, although we are saying publicly that we are not. This may be part of the chess game of a democracy at work trying to adjust to an entirely new situation.

The middle American, in trying to come to grips with the basic elements in this dichotomy, does not fault our system. He complains about extremes in

taxes, extremes in the absence of law and order, extremes in the downgrading of public education. The long-range advocate of change, however, faults the very system itself, and this is a wide gap that you do not find in the normal course of events. When the American Legion starts pushing for a veterans' hospital in Newport, for example, they are working within the system. They are using the foci of power available to them through the normal channels of political interchange and political pressures. When these new groups decide to effect change, they ignore the established patterns, perhaps out of disgust, perhaps out of disillusionment, perhaps out of sheer rejection, and they go their own separate way.

You might ask, is there a common meeting ground for these two disparate groups? Yes, I think there is, but it is not presently a very comfortable one for the military. For it is against the social and fiscal background of national security, national defense, the existence of the Armed Forces, that these two pressure frameworks presently meet. They converge in a strange and curious sort of way on the issue of the continued high-level presence of a national security apparatus. These issues are long-range, basic, and profound, and they involve you both as citizens and professionally as military officers.

It is no wonder that you, as career officers, find yourselves in a dilemma, and I see this reflected in conversations I have had with you individually over a period of time. You represent one pressure group, the military. At the same time you are citizens, consumers, activists to a degree, and members of various economic strata. All of this creates a very real working dilemma for you. Beyond this there is a national security pressure group with strong industrial ties, with economic and political power, and with the security needs of the government as its goal. This could be termed—although I have avoided the

use of the expression—the military-industrial complex. It is separate and distinct, in my view, from the national security apparatus pressure group, because the military-industrial complex is more geared to the traditional give-and-take of lobbying and pressure politics. The national security apparatus itself is what is under attack today and has not, in any way discernible to me at least, risen to the defense of the issues at hand. The military-industrial complex has; but, as I am trying to point out, I see a basic difference between the two groups.

There is another built-in dilemma, and it comes down to this: which of our national priorities is the most equal among equals—our international security needs or our domestic environmental needs? Here you begin to see the scope of the argument we find ourselves in with differing levels of pressure groups in our society, and here you can readily visualize the extremes of the spectrum. We are, in fact, dealing with a continuum, for you cannot have a solution to domestic environmental needs without proper attention to our international security needs. If we, as a nation, go down the drain, who cares about pollution in the northeast! It is somebody else's problem then.

So we must, rather than seeing this thing as two contradictory extremes, somehow engage in the debates necessary to bring all these various vying groups together in terms of a continuum. We need both, and we need everything in between. The question at hand then becomes how we allocate admittedly scarce resources to satisfy, at least minimally, all of our national concerns. It is not an easy problem, and it is all the more serious because the situation today does not even address the problem in these terms, but rather in an either/or confrontation. Either you have defense at \$70 billion a year or you have environmental change at \$120 billion a year. One side apparently

has to lose. The loser in reality in such an equation is the American people. Because of the accessibility of the media, this issue has become a national battlefield, with pressure groups vying for power and influence. It is on this battlefield that each one of us will, over time, raise our voices. The issue, while joined, is far from resolved.

One danger in the resolution of this problem rests in the overflow of emotion and bitterness leading to violence, a tactic already uncommonly popular.

Another danger rests in what President Brewster of Yale has called "the manipulated society." What is the manipulated society? It is a combination of pressure groups which, because of their affinity to and knowledge of the media, can manipulate national opinion. I think you, as military officers, are particularly sensitive and aware of it and particularly concerned with it, because it has been hitting you day in and day out over the last year. The military has become the object of disaffection, and you have no adequate defense to meet this challenge. The only

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



This article is based upon a series of talks delivered at the Naval War College by Capt. Robert F. Delaney, U.S. Naval Reserve, who in civilian life is Director of the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. Captain Delaney, President-Elect of the Thunderbird Graduate School of International Management, is a former Assistant Director of the U.S. Information Agency and served on active duty as a Special Consultant to the President, Naval War College. He is presently Commanding Officer, Naval Reserve Intelligence Division 1-1, First Naval District, Boston. He served in Vietnam in 1965-66 as Deputy Assistant Director of the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office.

hope for stability in this pressurized reality in which we live is through the rational workings of pressure groups, new and old, hopeful that the listening audience to which we all belong as Americans will eventually respond with moderation and balance.

This is, as I suggested earlier, a new, dangerous game, an unfolding of different strains of opinion and attitude surfacing nationally in our society. It is not too outlandish to suggest that popular pressure on government has become so profoundly influential that the future state of the Republic is literally at stake in trying to establish a formula for the receipt, evaluation, and adjudication of pressure before it generates into the violence we so earnestly deplore but do so little about. And it is in this particular context that we have to revise our thinking with not a little charity and with considerably more attention to the mass of social science data which are available to us today to help in this evaluation and adjudication. Because these data are new, the argument is often made that we know very little about the poor, the consumer, the intellectual, and the dissident. In fact, we know a great deal about them, but it has not been put to proper use by the groups themselves and certainly not by the government. Yet it seems to me that if we have been able to preserve a democratic give-and-take with its checks and balances for nearly 200 years, there is surely room today to absorb these groups and to give them voice. In fact, if we do not give them a voice, we will be faced with going to the streets to counter violence with violence which for rational men anywhere, under whatever form of government, is hardly the logical solution to problems of change—problems which have arisen because we have evolved a society which is tremendously progressive and yet demonstrably imperfect. We have not, nor should we really expect to see the

perfect society evolve. The matter at hand is, How are we going to cope with the newfound pressure groups? And here you in the military will face a peculiar problem because, as members of the national security apparatus, you are now being forced to address yourselves to a national audience which traditionally you have shunned. You have resisted involvement with this audience on the grounds that you are professionals, technicians. But the ground has shifted from under you. Everyone else has become involved, therefore your involvement is being forced. It does not mean necessarily that you run out and stage a lobbying campaign of your own or buy up a section of the media—not unknown techniques to business and industry, or to politicians for that matter. But what it does mean is that you recognize your status as a pressure group in the modern society and use it judiciously. If you do not assemble some aspect of a public voice, you will eventually be pushed to the wall in a manner that may be something less than acceptable.

To sum up, you find in American society today (1) a tremendously new, highly intensified form of pressure being applied on the National Government with success; (2) anyone can play this game, and nearly everyone of importance has consequently organized into either big or petty constituencies to push their causes; (3) the country must somehow evaluate and assimilate this new question of participatory lobbying in order to integrate it safely and securely within the framework of our democracy; and (4) we should no longer look with disdain upon pressure groups. They are here to stay. Everyone is taking his piece of the action, and the sooner we recognize this and begin to find room in the system to absorb such alienated groups as the poor and the intellectuals, the sooner we will begin to have a more rational discourse. This is

perhaps the central problem of the seventies, and I leave you with this question: Is our system viable enough to permit this to happen?



Power politics is the diplomatic name for the law of the jungle.

Ely Culbertson: Must We Fight Russia? 1946