THE KNITTING TOGETHER

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GOVERNMENT AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The reconciling of conflicting interests that cannot be reconciled in the marketplace or elsewhere is not an unfamiliar or inappropriate task for our governmental institutions. The judicial branch pursues the task full time through the resolving of disputes. The other two branches come at it in more varied ways but their efforts, when they are functioning properly, are often attempts to reconcile the larger objective of the common good with the immediate reality of special interests.

Unfortunately, all too rarely have any of the special interests shown the slightest concern for the health of the political process. All too often they have been satisfied with incompetent, disorganized, or even corrupt government, provided that they could influence it. But a weak and corrupt government that sells out to one interest group will sell out to a rival group just as readily. The old wisecrack, "He's very reliable: if you buy him he stays bought," doesn't apply. What one buys from a corrupt government is preference until a higher bidder shows up. Once, as a member of the board of directors of a corporation, I commented to one of the executives on the weakness of the regulatory body under which our industry operated. He said, "We like it that way." Six months later he was furious when the regulators, under political pressure, showed shameless favoritism to one of our competitors.

Every organized interest should encourage the effective and equitable functioning of government. This does not mean more or bigger government. It might mean less government. Our political and governmental processes, functioning at their best, are designed not to impose arbitrary solutions but to preside over the peaceable competition of conflicting interests, and to reconcile those interests within the framework of our shared purposes. We cannot afford to continue our neglect of commonweal priorities.

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But government cannot do it all. In what Harlan Cleveland describes as a "nobody in charge** system, everyone had better be partly responsible for the good of the whole. It is essential that leaders from business, labor, the minority communities and so on address themselves to community issues. If we want to preserve the kind of society we have-a society in which a high proportion of the talent, resources and institutional strengths lie outside government—we must find ways of mobilizing those assets in behalf of the community when occasion requires. The only alternative would be for the nation to build into government at all levels the full capability of dealing with any and all crises and problems. Then business, the universities and all the other segments of the private sector could pursue their specialized missions with unruffled calm. For them, the alarm bell would never ring. But that would be a very different kind of society.

It has been a long time since a planter named Washington, a printer named Franklin, a lawyer named Jefferson, a banker named Morris and others of various occupations made themselves experts in statecraft in order to address their shared problems. On occasions since then—particularly since World War II and the immediate postwar period-we have seen that the spirit is recoverable, but we are far from that spirit today.

NETWORKING

A few years ago one rarely heard *network* used as a verb, but the usage has spread because it describes an increasingly necessary function: the process of creating or maintaining a pattern of informal linkages among individuals or institutions. In a swiftly changing environment, established and formal linkages may no longer serve, or may have been disrupted. New and flexible interconnections become necessary.

If each segment of our national life is to find a way of flourishing that is compatible with—even contributes to—the flourishing of other segments, the first step is to create communication among the diverse elements. And to this end key people throughout each system must

establish networks of informal give and take with people in neighboring systems. Obviously the same process is relevant in international systems.

Many a group bent on achieving one or another goal in the larger society has failed because it could not bring itself to enlist allies outside its own field. Businesspeople talk to businesspeople in terms that persuade businesspeople. The same is true of labor. Many a liberal or conservative group has failed because its members made little effort to communicate with those who did not share their views. We have all experienced the joy of talking "plain common sense" with those who share our illusions!

Sometimes, of course, leaders are willing to deal constructively with other systems but have a fatal ignorance of the people with whom they must deal. They know the people in their own organizations, their own cultures, so to speak, but how well do they know those outside? Legislators! Journalists! And so on.

In my first appearance at a congressional hearing, I didn't know any more about legislators than I did about armadillos, and it showed. I struck out over and over during that interminable session. In the years when Bob Feller had the most dazzling fast ball in the major leagues, Bucky Harris undertook to prepare a rookie who was coming up to bat for the first time against Feller. He said, "Go up and hit what you see. If you don't see anything come on back." That was my problem. I didn't see where the questions were leading until it was too late. Now, after years of dealing with legislators, I recognize how ignorant I was.

The higher one rises as a leader, the more certain it is that one has to deal with the media. The old saying is, "Never argue with people who buy ink by the barrel." Perhaps one should not argue with them, but one had better understand them.

A good many top executives go through their whole careers without ever understanding journalists as human beings. Journalists have been exposed to every form of guile and humbug. It is their business to detect duplicity and dissembling. They all live with the frustration of not getting stories they know are there. And at least for some of them, the more powerful one is, the more one stirs the natural predator in them. A leader

had better understand them, had better understand legislators, had better understand all the groups that may help or hinder the leader's work.

Leaders must build outside networks of allies in the many other segments of society whose cooperation is required for a significant result. Wise chief executives place in key positions throughout their organizations individuals who are networkers by inclination. They establish informal cross-boundary working groups. They devise assignments that send their most promising young executives out into the world; for example, for a year's internship in government or an assignment in a foreign country.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

We are a combative species. Our seemingly limitless capacity for contention has left no possible cause of dispute untested-mistrust between families, tribes, nations; economic and political differences; racial, religious and class tensions. The tribe that lives on the plains feuds with the tribe that lives in the hills. Neighbor clashes with neighbor. The field office resents headquarters.

Sooner or later every leader must face the task of dealing with conflict. The sounds of bickering are part of the necessary noisiness of a free society; but we are beginning to see that beyond a certain point, adversary action, confrontation and nonnegotiable demands may be counterproductive. If our leaders in all the various fields—business, labor, agriculture, the professions and so on—are concerned, as they must be, with holding the society together, they have no choice but to learn the arts of preventing, defusing and resolving conflict at every level. In a world characterized by multiple, interacting systems, substantial rewards flow to leaders who have mastered the bargaining arts.

That a conflict should rage openly and damage the joint enterprise is not the only bad outcome. It can go underground, remain unresolved, and do even more damage. Bringing unacknowledged conflicts to the surface is part of the leader's task.

Obviously, external conflict offers appealing opportunities to leaders vicious enough to exploit them. Hitler said, "The art of leadership

consists of consolidating the attention of the people against a single adversary."[1] We cannot tolerate those who foster external disputes in the hope of diminishing internal conflict.

Of course, every leader finds that he or she must occasionally engage in combat in a justifiable cause. Indeed the fortitude to engage in necessary combat is essential to leadership. Sometimes a wrong cannot be righted without precipitating conflict. But we should send a clear message to our leaders that we do not intend to reward them when they foster conflict for their own aggrandizement.

In the past half century a great deal has been learned about the resolving of disputes, and leaders should familiarize themselves with it.

Leaders experienced in dispute resolution bring their influence to bear on both sides to scale down irrational demands and provocations. They foster the transition from a cross fire of accusations to a collaborative search for solutions. They look for the underlying sources of misunderstanding: breakdowns in communication, differing perceptions of the facts, insensitivity of each side to the other's legitimate needs, and so on. One goal is to give each side the possibility of compromising without losing face. Brian Urquhart, former United Nations undersecretary general, says, "Don't ask either party to commit suicide. Provide a graceful way out."[2]

Leaders open many channels of communication between opponents and create many kinds of interchange, letting each side have its say and requiring that each listen. They recognize the inevitability of-but seek to reduce-the counterproductive forms of communication, such as lies and posturing before third parties.

Leaders experienced in resolving conflicts seek among the tangle of interests held by the adversaries those interests that constitute common ground and may be pursued to mutual advantage. They generate alternative possible solutions.

I recall one instance in my Cabinet days in which a Senate committee chairman and I were in grim and (we thought) hopeless disagreement on a proposed piece of legislation. The draft of the bill prepared by the senator's staff was unacceptable to me and the version prepared by my staff was unacceptable to the senator. Both sides were digging in for a test of strength when the late Wilbur Cohen, undersecretary of the

department, took a hand. Cohen, a wonderfully gifted negotiator, studied both drafts and proposed a number of changes in language that brought the two versions closer together without offending either side. Then with patient good humor, he proposed a variety of alternative solutions ingeniously drafted to fall between the two entrenched positions. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, we began to see a way of agreeing-and eventually solved our problem. Elliot Richardson said of Wilbur Cohen's negotiating skills, "He led you to join him in being resourceful about ways of resolving the dispute."[3] *The considerable knowledge we now have about techniques of conflict resolution should be taught in every high school and college in the land.*

COALITION BUILDING

Closely related to conflict resolution is the art of coalition building. Where dispute resolution typically involves two sides seeking to deal with one or more key points of disagreement, coalition building usually involves multiple parties with a welter of differing interests seeking ground for collaborative action. Dispute resolution envisions a reasonably early terminal point; coalition building generally envisions a long-term relationship. The parties to a coalition may disagree on many things and still work together provided their leaders find and foster a few important shared goals.

In 1967, when the urban riots were producing a frightening level of violence throughout the country, an extraordinary group of the nation's top leaders from the private sector came together to form the National Urban Coalition. Its purpose was to get at and remedy the racism, poverty and other grave ailments that afflicted our great cities. There were businesspeople such as Henry Ford and David Rockefeller, union leaders such as George Meany and Walter Reuther, mayors such as Richard J. Daley and John Lindsay, minority group leaders such as Whitney Young and Bayard Rustin, together with educators, clergy and others. Needless to say, the items of potential disagreement within the group were virtually limitless. My task as chairman was to hold them to their few shared purposes.

Coalition builders seek to formulate goals and values that lift all participants out of their separate preoccupations by gaining their commitment to larger objectives. It was not only the skilled conceptual work of Madison, Hamilton and others that finally forged thirteen former colonies into a nation. It was also the vision of something in the future, the destiny of a new nation, that lifted them out of their parochialisms and moved them toward union.

The other major task in coalition building is to establish trust among the participants in the coalition. It has been my experience that contending parties may agree on the facts, even see possible paths to agreement, but harbor such distrust of one another's motives that agreement cannot be achieved. Coalition requires that all parties develop habits of candor, that they hold posturing and game-playing to a minimum, that they be forthright not only about their real interests, needs and goals but also about their fears and suspicions. Such objectives are furthered not only through formal discussion but also through informal communication under congenial circumstances.

Leaders of a coalition must ensure that each member of the coalition becomes fully acquainted with the constituencies of the others around the table—what they want, what they fear, and what assumptions (or misconceptions) they hold concerning the subject at hand. Sometimes what seems irrational in the member at the bargaining table becomes wholly understandable if one knows the concerns of the member's constituents. And only through such knowledge can the group find what the late Cart Holman, a distinguished civil rights leader, called "convergence issues"-the common ground on which collaboration can go forward.

Often the process of coalition building fails to get started because there is no suitable convenor, or because those who could play the convenor role decline to do so. The convenor must be perceived by potential members of the coalition as neutral and trustworthy, but need not be seen as powerful; indeed, powerlessness has its uses. When a number of nations came together in the early 1950s to form the European Coal and Steel Community, the only source of power was their intention to work together. In the ensuing years a crucial role was played by

lesser powers such as Belgium and the Netherlands, at least in part because they did not arouse fears of domination.

Many committees are, in fact, coalitions. Any member of a legislative body who is seeking action on a proposal engages in coalition building. In a corporation the group of division heads who meet weekly to deal with company-wide issues are in some respects a coalition—and sometimes a rather fractious one. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are in important respects a coalition, not without its tensions. When General William J. ("Wild Bill") Donovan appeared before the Joint Chiefs to report on the work of the Office of Strategic Services in 1942, one of the chiefs asked him to explain the term *psychological warfare.* Donovan is said to have responded "It's what you fellows practice on each other."[4]

NETWORKS OF RESPONSIBILITY

If our pluralistic system is to regain any measure of cohesion, leaders from various segments are going to have to come together in what I have called *networks of responsibility* to appraise and seek to resolve the larger problems of their community, region, nation or world. The mayor cannot turn a city into a community through sheer personal leadership skills. The fabric of community must be woven by many groups-municipal agencies, civic organizations, businesses, unions, schools, churches, neighborhood organizations, the community foundation, community colleges and so on. Leaders from all segments, at all economic levels, must have formed networks that permit continuous collaboration among government, business and the nonprofit sector, identifying issues and moving toward consensus. Such networks do not flourish in the contemporary climate if they resemble the old exclusionary Establishments. There must be access and openness to participation.

The National Urban Coalition tried to create, in the major cities of the country, local coalitions composed of all segments of the community (in other words, networks of responsibility) but the idea took root in only a few places. As recently as 1986 a study undertaken at the request of Chicago's business and civic leaders concluded among other things that

- Effective public-private interaction in Chicago is extraordinarily difficult because key participants do not understand or respect each other.
- Public officials and business executives perceive each other as unwilling and unable to establish ongoing communication, with the give-and-take that it implies.
- There is no sustained forum for effective interaction between the public and private sectors in Chicago.[5]

Minneapolis-St. Paul and a few other metropolitan centers have demonstrated that leaders from diverse segments of the community can, in fact, collaborate effectively. Sometimes the networks form very swiftly in time of crisis. When New York City faced fiscal disaster in the mid-seventies, bankers, city officials, union leaders, real estate people and many others joined hands to save the city.

Instead of being sporadic responses to crisis, such networks must become a standard way of doing business. A network of responsibility does not need to have any official standing-in fact it may be better off without it. By avoiding such formalities, it remains free to approach the broadest problems of the city (or the nation) and its future freely and flexibly.

There are, however, some requirements. First, such a network must include every significant segment of the community. Second, those who participate must be respected members of the segment from which they come, though it is not necessary—perhaps not even desirable—that they be official representatives of their segments of the community.

It would be foolish to suppose that such networks can dissolve the real conflicts among powerful segmental interests within the community. The promise of the network is simply that segmental leaders may pursue more productively the hard tasks of mutual accommodation, and look more broadly at the largest questions of the community's future. The role of leaders in the process can hardly be exaggerated.

If leaders in all segments were to develop through such collaboration a habit of concern for the common good, top political leaders would surely find their work greatly facilitated. The mayor would find that, in addition to all the multiple special interests, there was a *constituency for the whole.* So would governors, senators, representatives and the president. I suspect that no other event would so quickly restore the attractiveness of public life.

Politics

These tasks do not evoke the conventional image of the heroic leader. I have even used the unheroic word *compromise.* But leadership has always involved politics and never more so than today. The political process generally involves taking into account the needs or demands (some of them mutually conflicting) of diverse constituencies, weighing the realities of power, calculating consequences, negotiating, and bargaining. An absolute dictator could dispense with much of that. In a land without law, brute force would have its way. We reject both dictator and lawless force, and ask politicians functioning in the framework of our representative institutions to accomplish the mediating and brokering necessary to reconcile diverse views.

When I think of the usefulness of politicians, I sometimes call to mind Congressman M. He was from a one-party district, the product of an entrenched political machine, a modest man, a survivor. An occasion arose in which environmentalists 'were furious at an amendment proposed by industry that would have weakened legislation they were seeking. Congressman M brought the two sides together and hammered out a compromise that was publicly praised by both sides. It may take heroes to challenge systems, and leaders to change systems, but systems that function successfully from day to day do so because ordinary men and women perform their appointed tasks well. Congressman M was performing with skill one of the unsung tasks of the politician.

Politics has its fraudulent side, as does business, education, religion and all else. But is also has its good and necessary side, and it is curious that a process so essential to a pluralistic society should be so widely scorned. One reason the average citizen has grave doubts about politics is that decisions one would expect to be simple become immensely complicated when multiple interests are at stake. That is as it should be-but the citizen longs for simplicity. When "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" he seems to cut through all the complexity and to show how simple it can be when common sense and integrity prevail. But that is the wonderful world of cinema.

With just a bit of exaggeration, one might say that the lay person's notion of high-level decision making is a simple one-act drama. The leader sits alone on a bare and silent stage. Two aides enter. One states the argument for choosing path A, the other for choosing path B. The lay person is strongly inclined to believe that one of the paths must be clearly right, the other clearly wrong. Black or white. The good versus the bad. The leader chooses.

Ring down the curtain on that charade, and lift the curtain on the real world of the functioning leader. The stage is crowded; there is not just one leader but several and they clearly have differing views. Everyone is talking at once and portions of the audience continually surge up onto the stage. And there is a large clock on the wall that ticks off the minutes like hammer blows. Before the clock strikes noon, a great many decisions must be made. And on virtually none of them is there a virtuous path A or wicked path B. Indeed there rarely are just two sides or two parties to the dispute. There is relatively little black and white, mostly shades of gray.

Sometimes a leader cannot do one good thing without endangering another good thing. Often short-term considerations are at war with long-term consequences. Sometimes a leader chooses a bad path A because path B is worse. Often it becomes clear that some intermediate compromise is the way to go. Sometimes there is no alternative to a dangerous path A, and the only issue is damage control. And the tyrant is the clock on the wall. A few of the decisions can be put off, but most demand attention now—and in any case the afternoon schedule is equally crowded.

In one instance the decision is on the merits of the alternatives; in another on the relative trust the leader has in the proponents of the alternatives (or relative indebtedness to the proponents). The leader knows that information is incomplete, knows that mistakes will be made, knows that hostility will be aroused. The clock ticks on.

INSTITUTIONAL POLITICS

Politics is a part of the life of every institution, be it corporation, school, church or union. The process does not always have the tumultuous quality just described but it is rarely tidy. As in the public arena, the connotations of the word *politics* are decidedly negative. To say of one's organization "We don't have any politics around here" is considered by some to be a high compliment. But it is almost certainly untrue. Even the most worthy ends are generally pursued through political activities—to reconcile conflicting parties, to sort out many purposes in search of a common purpose, to mobilize a group in pursuit of shared goals—or simply to keep peace in the family.

One of the reasons institutional politics has a bad name is that the word is popularly used to cover a variety of unattractive circumstances that transform an office into a piranha pool. When people say, There's too much politics in this place," they are generally referring to manipulation, mistrust and hidden agendas; or to envy, unseemly rivalry and self-promotion; or to favoritism and hidden alliances. Strictly speaking, all of these are organizational ailments-chiefly failures of honesty, integrity and loyalty—that may exist quite independently of politics.

All that we have been discussing—the fragmentation, the drifting away from shared purposes, the breakdown of communication—may be seen from another angle as the collapse of community. So we had better have a look at the concept and reality of community.

Endnotes

1. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943).

2. Comments at a seminar on the United Nations sponsored by the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, Wye Plantation, Maryland, December 4,1982.

3. Remarks at memorial service for Wilbur Cohen, June 17,1987.

4. The story may have improved in the telling. True or apocryphal, most early Office of Strategy Services officers repeated it as gospel.

5. *The Chicago Project: A Report on Civic Life in Chicago,* 1986. Staff director for the study was Professor Pastora San Juan Cafferty, University of Chicago. The report was signed by H. Laurance Fuller, President, Amoco Corporation and Duane R. Kullberg, Managing Partner and CEO, Arthur Andersen and Co.