

# A Few Reasonable Reservations About Planning National Goals

BY RAYMOND MOLEY

When a writer has doubts about the usefulness of a project, however nobly designed, he should state at the outset his opinions upon which such reservations are rooted. In this case, the project is the creation of a vast blueprint on national goals by a distinguished group of citizens headed by Henry M. Wriston. This was indicated as a desirable project last year by the President, but the members were not named until recently.

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My doubts about goals of a national character can best be stated in what I wrote in a book eight years ago:

"Liberty permeates the nation with a million forces; the achievement is unpredictable, and therein lies the zest of anticipation. As long as we are sure of the direction in which we are going and are sure of the motives and principles that guide us, we can anticipate a better life. That should be enough assurance for free men."

This, I should add, was a conclusion reached with deliberation after more than 300 pages in which I described the forces which had created American progress, the dangers that threatened it, and some of the principles in many fields of activity that should guide us.

Perhaps I was influenced by a memorable observation written a good

many years ago by a great citizen of Indiana, Meredith Nicholson. He wrote in his "Valley of Democracy" that democracy is "a quest," not a perfectly attained state of affairs. Perhaps I might add that my concept of the afterlife is not a heaven of happy but suspended animation but a continuation of the labor and striving that is our lot on earth.

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A professor who reviewed my book at the time, not unfavorably, expressed his regret that I had omitted "goalism." The word, which is a part of the patter of modern social science, always makes my flesh creep. I am inclined to associate it with the macabre ghost that pursued Tam O'Shanter and tore off the tail of his horse.

There are so many imponderables in our life, so many factors which are buried in the inscrutable recesses of human nature, so many virile minds at work in a free society planning in their own way, inventing and adapting, so many vagaries in public taste. I surmise that the automobile makers five years ago were unable to determine in advance how high to make the tailfins of their cars and how soon they would have to go back to lower posteriors.

When the President suggested this search for goals, he noted as a precedent President's Hoover's

Research Committee on Social Trends and its 1,600-page report. It was published toward the end of the Hoover administration, just as the Wriston goals will be announced at the end of the Eisenhower administration.

A copy of the Hoover committee's report came to those of us who were planning the objectives of the Roosevelt administration. After a glance at it, we discarded it completely and, so far as I know, it had no influence at all. It was a laudable experiment, but the new administration had plans of its own. So, I feel, will the Wriston report live on only to give dusty answers to the few who will consult it.

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The usefulness of the Hoover administration's guide was limited to a very important end. It gave employment, in a time of unemployment, to many a hard-pressed professor and statistician. As a guide, it was wholly ignored. People and companies were too busy getting under way after the crushing depression. Government was too busy getting its policies adopted and working. Politicians were too busy getting votes.

In a free nation men cannot be contained in plans made by those whom they follow. This might be noted by the elders who make up the Wriston commission.