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## *Political Acceptability of Suggestions for Land Adjustment*

AS I APPROACHED my assignment of analyzing and appraising the proposals for public action in terms of their political acceptability, and became increasingly aware of all of the frustrations and difficulties involved in such an undertaking, I could not but recall the classic reaction of Thomas Carlyle when told of the favorite statement of the New England transcendentalist, Margaret Fuller. To her proclamation: "I accept the universe," Carlyle's grim comment was, "Gad! she'd better!"

This is not to intimate that I am undertaking this analysis with the exuberant and expansive confidence and optimism with which Margaret Fuller accepted the universe. Rather, in Carlyle's grim spirit of inevitability, I think that "I'd better" recognize and accept at the outset those difficulties and frustrations which are inherent in the problem. I think it is the better part of academic wisdom immediately to face up to the limitations which such an analysis must have and the criticisms to which it can legitimately be subjected.

Such an analysis must, of course, be highly subjective in its definition of terms, in its selection of the factors which determine political acceptability and in its interpretation of the meaning and weight of these factors. In the first place, how is political acceptability itself to be defined? The meaning of political acceptability might be subjected to various refinements. For purposes of discussion here, however, let us pragmatically define a proposal as politically acceptable whose goals or purposes and the methods and procedures prescribed for achieving these goals are such that the proposals (1) could be enacted into law by the policy-determining machinery of government and (2) would be sufficiently acceptable to the broad masses of citizens affected by it that it would be enforceable. (The classic example of legislation which met the first, but not the second, of these pragmatic tests of acceptability was, of course, prohibition legislation.)

This is an example of government's being called upon merely

to restrain the citizen. Today, however, public action — particularly in the field of agriculture and natural resources — usually requires more in the way of consent from the citizen than merely refraining from taking action. Rather, he is expected to cooperate in a positive fashion — as is typified in the “sign up” in many agricultural programs. The second test of acceptability, therefore, is growing increasingly important.

A second question is: How is a proposal’s “acceptability potential” to be measured? That is, which factors or forces in the policy-making process are critical in determining a proposal’s political acceptability? The factors an individual selects as critical will depend upon his views of the nature of representative government, of the relationships between government and citizens and upon his interpretation of the workings of the decision-making process of government.

For example, does he view the decision-making process as power politics in the raw, a process in which political might makes policy? How much weight does he assign to the interplay of party politics? Commodity politics? Executive-congressional politics? Does he think that political acceptability could be determined if we could accurately measure the relative strength of the various blocs of power in the representative process? Does he feel that our elected representatives reflect the psychology and the views, and the needs and the interests, of the persons and groups of persons they are purported to represent? Or does he believe that the whims and fancies of the human personalities who are manning the policy machinery play a determining role? To what extent does he feel that the personal predilections of elected representatives, the shadows on the wall which congressmen and executive officials sometimes see as reality, the web of personal relationships, loyalties, obligations, friendships and personal antipathies affect the political acceptability of a proposal?

Clearly, one’s answers to such questions as these will influence one’s judgment upon the political acceptability of a proposed public action. Moreover, even if we could all agree on the relative weight to assign to each of the forces at work in the policy-determining process, we, as students, still have not sufficiently refined our tools so that we could precisely measure and predict how the interaction of these various forces would affect a given policy proposal.

The measurement of political acceptability is made still more difficult because the acceptability potential of a particular proposal is not static. Its acceptability varies with the particular point in time at which it is introduced in the decision-making process. In terms of time, a proposal’s political acceptability

depends upon much more than where it occurs upon the time continuum of American social progress. Obviously, ideas are politically acceptable today which would have been feared and hated in the days of McKinley, let us say. Many of the collective actions taken by Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal would have been totally unacceptable in the days of T. R.'s Square Deal. Thus, the political acceptability of some proposals for public action, which probably would not be approved by the machinery of government today, should be evaluated by projecting our social progress continuum over a 20, 30 or perhaps even 50 year future period.

Also, a proposal's political acceptability, in terms of time, will depend upon more than the social climate of the times. We all know that proposals for governmental action which are politically acceptable in a period of major economic depression, which generates a spirit for social pioneering, would be completely unacceptable in a period of prosperous, sluggish complacency, such as the 1950's. For example, nationalization of the United States banking system would probably have been politically acceptable, according to both tests which we have set up, in the early dark spring days of 1933. But can you imagine with what abhorrence such a proposal would be greeted today?

In short, it does not take a long period of changing social values and attitudes toward collective action, or even a national crisis such as a major depression or a military emergency, to change a proposal's acceptability potential. It does not even take a congressional or presidential election. The political patterns in the decision-making process which determine whether a particular proposal will be accepted are like a child's kaleidoscope. They are endlessly shifting as the multiplicity of factors in the policy-making process form and reform into differing prevailing opinions. The patterns of prevailing opinion shift and change as the perceptions, aspirations, fears, ambitions, loyalties and antipathies of the human personalities, the interest groups, the political parties and even the branches of government change. These patterns can be transformed, almost overnight, by such occurrences as the publication of the findings of a public opinion poll, a readjustment in the relationship between Congress and the executive, the flaring up of personal animosity between the secretary of agriculture and key congressmen in his own political party, a new rapport among several commodity interests in Congress, a sharp falling off in the price of hogs, the prediction of a bumper wheat crop, even the death of an influential senator.

For all of these reasons, any sort of *ad hoc* operational analyses of how, in particular instances, the forces within the decision-making process might combine to determine the acceptability of

particular proposals could only be highly speculative. Moreover, I think that it would be more meaningful and useful if we could view political acceptability more broadly and in longer-range terms — that is, if we could discover and define the confining socio-political frameworks which, under our American system of representation, set the outer bounds and determine the norms for political acceptability. Such frameworks are the broad, containing political patterns within which the lesser and more temporary political patterns form and reform. They, too, are in a process of change. But they are less ephemeral and transient. These frameworks might be compared with the great cyclonic storm systems which move slowly across the continent, with many lesser cyclonic circulations swirling around and changing patterns within their bounds. If they could be meaningfully and accurately defined, these frameworks could, I believe, provide broad measurements or guidelines for determining any proposal's acceptability potential.

These broad, containing forms which confine, shape and regulate our day-to-day and even year-to-year political behavior might be defined and classified in various ways. I realize that one's definitions will depend upon one's views of the nature of the political process. For purposes of preliminary discussion here, however, I shall suggest these four: (1) the frame of prevailing social attitudes, (2) the frame of the American constitutional system, (3) the frame of the two-party system operating in a nation of continental proportions and (4) the frame of basic interest. I do not insist that these are the only important containing frames, or that they are accurately defined or interpreted. I offer them tentatively, as suggestions which may stimulate further thinking and analysis.

The broadest and most fundamental containing framework is, I believe, the frame of basic social values. There is, I think, a force of broad, popular thinking which sets the limits within which the governmental decision-making process must find its policies. Unorganized, amorphous, groping uncertainly to understand its needs and wants, there is a body of mass opinion which, although influenced and sometimes distorted by the symbols and propaganda of organized groups and institutions, is somehow under and apart from the organized entities of society. This broad opinion is not to be interpreted in terms of an expression of individual or group interest alone; it is not the result of the weighing of particularized pressures; it is more than the sum total of special interest. Over the years, this broad stream of public opinion has rolled along, sometimes sluggish, muddy, unclear, and at other times turbulent and demanding. But, at all times, it has, I

believe, in the long run, framed and set the norms for political acceptability.

The first set of social values which, I think, helps to explain the shape and content of many of our agricultural policies today is a series of attitudes which arise out of what Felix Frankfurter once called the "unresolved inner conflict." This is the conflict within the individual between the traditional picture he has in his head of the proper and suitable role of government, on the one hand, and on the other hand, his increasing need for and reliance upon government brought on by the new environmental coercions he is experiencing.

Americans still quite commonly hold to a concept of government developed during their revolutionary past when their ancestors were trying to break the bounds of an arbitrary, if not tyrannical, government. This is a concept of government which, for over a hundred years, fitted Americans' needs quite well, because of the peculiarly open nature of economic opportunity in a rich and sparsely settled continent. It is a concept of government developed out of the eighteenth century enlightenment belief that there are natural economic and social laws which, if unrestricted by government, will efficiently work out men's salvation. The free market is, of course, the earthly manifestation of these natural laws. Therefore, government must be considered a "necessary evil." The government which is best is the government which governs least. A citizen has natural rights, including the right of property, which are outside the grasp of the state. Government generally is to be feared, distrusted and restricted to narrow limits.

At the same time, however, that the citizen holds to these eighteenth century concepts of the good government, he has found it necessary to go, albeit unwillingly, to government, seeking its assistance and protection against the new hazards his twentieth century environment is creating. What, then, has been the effect of this mass social schizophrenia upon resulting public policy? What limits has it set upon political acceptability? I am aware of the danger of reducing social behavior to an over-simple formula. Nevertheless, I believe that the conflict between the way we view the role of government in the broad, and the things we want from government for ourselves as individuals has been a powerful limiting force in determining what is politically acceptable — in determining what government should do and how it should do it.

First, it has limited the political acceptability of long-range programming. It has caused the political process to reject long-term solutions in favor of short-term palliatives, although such

palliatives may be both costly and ineffective. For, if one believes in the efficacy of an unfettered economy, then the economic maladjustments and particular hardships which the individual experiences must be considered to be mere temporary abnormalities which do not require long-term solutions. One goes to government merely to seek immediate relief from a temporary hardship. One does not, for example, see the need for a long-term land retirement program.

In defense of our political process, I must say, however, that I do not think that it is only "original sin" — in the form of an unresolved inner conflict — which leads our elected representatives frequently to reject long-term programs. Often, I think, it is because our laymen politicians are astute enough to realize that the experts themselves are confused by the complexities of the problems of agricultural adjustment, and sometimes are even in conflict as to what are the best solutions. Consequently, they are reluctant to commit government's power and resources, on a long-term basis, to any programs, based upon what Ray Bressler (Chapter 13) describes as "simplified and partial analysis," which sometimes is the best that the expert can offer the politician. Professor Bressler, in introducing his paper at the conference, frankly and modestly pointed out: "The end product will be a far cry from the 'ideal land use pattern' suggested by the Program Committee, but it will exhaust my abilities in that direction." With equal frankness, D. B. Ibach (Chapter 9) explained: "I have attempted to outline some of the factors by which we might project economic potentials in agriculture. For crop production, I have ventured some quantitative evaluation in relation to projected needs for 1980. Five years from now, probably sooner, I may want to alter the picture as presented for purposes of this discussion." Similar modest disclaimers can be found in many of the other chapters. Now, I submit that these honest statements from recognized experts are no way to "buck up" a politician's courage to vote for a long-term program! Seriously, however, I do think that the failure to adopt long-term programs may not be primarily a political failure, but a failure in our "expert knowledge."

Secondly, our social schizophrenia has limited the use of planning as a process for developing public policies. If long-range programs are not needed, then, it clearly follows that a planning process for developing such programs is also unnecessary. Planning as an organized entity in the process of government is still suspect as being the insidious enemy of an unrestricted economic order. As James Knowles (Chapter 2) pointed out, certain activities in a planning process have, over the past two decades, gained respectability. He began his chapter with this statement: "In the

last two decades the use of long-range projections of the growth possibilities of the American economy has become standard practice in many areas of public and private decision-making. Its use has become commonplace in the areas of agricultural policy, water resources development... and various other public programs...." Mr. Knowles emphasizes the "calm, routine character of such projections compared to the controversies of only a decade or so ago...."

We who were in the Bureau of Agricultural Economics during the 1940's — when even economic fact-finding stirred congressional furor and deeper budget cuts — can well appreciate what a significant step forward the public decision-making process has taken. However, fact-finding and projections are only the initial stages in a planning process. I rather suspect that the planning organizations in government today are still only tolerated as long as their activities are narrowly circumscribed and their personnel is circumspect.

Third, our belief in narrowly limited government lessens the acceptability of comprehensive and inclusive programs, within which the goals and methods used for solving particularized agricultural problems can be integrated into a consistent overall pattern of action. As Earl Heady (Chapter 1) pointed out: "We have created a maze of programs which simultaneously subsidize improvements of land to (1) increase current production at the expense of the future, (2) pay farmers for withholding land from current production and (3) conserve the land for future periods." These program inconsistencies have developed, in part at least, because of the refusal of the political process to view the variety of agriculture's maladjustments except as particularized emergencies which can be met on an ad hoc, piecemeal basis.

Today, within the political process, there is growing recognition and acceptance of the hard fact that agriculture's maladjustment is long term and fundamental. In the 1960 political campaign, the leadership of both political parties publicly attested to the need for long-range programs of broad agricultural adjustment.

Nevertheless, although the political process will undoubtedly recognize increasingly the basic nature of agricultural maladjustment, it cannot, I think, be expected in the near future to adopt those comprehensive and inclusive programs which could eliminate program inconsistencies. For, I submit, the inconsistencies we find as between the particularized programs, and also between the goals and the means adopted for their achievement within a single program, are more than the accidental by-products of initiating programs on an ad hoc, piecemeal basis. Such program

inconsistencies are, in a sense, the hedges which the political process has made against the danger of public action changing the structure of agriculture or the pattern of agricultural production unwisely or too radically. Program inconsistencies, then, are the counterbalances which tend to keep our total agricultural policy within an established norm. Standing in opposition, they limit change.

The governmental process may, as the political patterns in the decision-making process reshape themselves in the 1960's, seek to develop more horizontally inclusive programs which encompass the whole complex of adjustment, conservation, income and welfare. Conflicting and duplicating public actions may be thus, in part, eliminated. However, it is doubtful — because of the basic inconsistency in our attitude toward the proper role of government — if American politics is yet ready to adopt programs which are truly comprehensive in the sense that they are vertically consistent in terms of: (1) the adoption of means adequate for achieving prescribed goals and (2) the depth of program consequences which are recognized and dealt with.

The most politically acceptable programs — however inclusive they may be horizontally — are probably those which are oriented toward immediate ills and toward the individual farm or farm family. Programs which are vertically comprehensive and consistent, in that they foresee and attempt to cope with the circle of indirect consequences which broaden out from the first remedial action, are generally less politically acceptable than those which stop with the initial problem. The ratio between political acceptability and the degree to which a program broadens out to encompass the indirect consequences of initial remedial actions is probably inverse.

Thus, programs, such as Howard Ottoson (Chapter 19) suggests, which face up to and attempt to ameliorate the impact of land withdrawal on the nonfarm sector of rural communities and even of whole regions, or programs which deal with the need for retraining and relocating those human beings displaced by land retirement, are probably less acceptable than land retirement programs which ignore the residual problems ensuing from land withdrawal. For Americans' felt need for public actions to deal with the broad consequences of proposed programs is generally not strong enough to break through their stereotype of narrowly restricted government and make politically acceptable those comprehensive governmental actions which such residual problems frequently require. Broad, comprehensive programs of action, which could achieve both horizontal and vertical consistency, probably involve changes in the agricultural structure and patterns of



production which depart too widely from established norms to be politically acceptable at present.

Fourth, the conflict between Americans' general concept of government and their demands for government's assistance in meeting their particularized problems has limited the types of governmental actions which are politically acceptable. It has meant the development of programs limited in terms of (1) government's interference with the rights of landowners to make decisions concerning the use of their land, (2) the use of governmental police power to control the use of land and (3) the ways in which government resources are used to correct agricultural maladjustments.

The adjustment programs which have been most politically acceptable have been those which interfered least with the rights of fee simple ownership. Our political reluctance to interfere with property rights in land resources is evidenced by the half-way manner in which we have reluctantly adopted such land retirement devices as acreage allotments, marketing quotas and the Soil Bank, which divest the farmer of some of his property rights to determine the use which is to be made of his land. Moreover, even these use-control measures were considered to be politically acceptable only when accompanied by cash bounties. That the degree of land use control these measures achieve is not commensurate with the cash subsidies used to pay for such control is evidenced by the piling up of both unmanageable agricultural reserves and of government costs.

Walter Chryst and John Timmons (Chapter 17) reason persuasively that production controls which would not build government benefits into the price of the land could be achieved if government-allotted marketing rights and benefits — which now attach to individual parcels of land — were to "run with the person" rather than the land. Property rights are not a bundle of rights which are indivisible. Nevertheless, the reluctance with which the political process has curtailed use rights in property as a means of limiting production suggests that measures which stripped land of its marketing rights and attached them to the person would, at the present at least, be viewed as too radical an interference with traditional property rights. Moreover, as the owners of government-granted marketing rights became separated from the property to which these rights had previously been attached, the political pressures to give land, thus stripped of its marketing rights, new marketing privileges would build up to proportions which Congress probably could not withstand.

It goes almost without saying that the types of rural land adjustment which have thus far been politically acceptable have been

limited to "voluntary" programs — programs which obtain adjustment through land purchase or leasing, money payments for compliance and technical assistance incentives. The only national effort to restrict an owner's use of his land through the police power — the Soil Conservation Service's attempt to obtain the adoption of local land use ordinances — has been almost a complete failure.

It is entirely possible, however, that as the balance of political power shifts to urban representatives in both our state and national legislatures, the political concern for a farmer's "fee simple rights" may well decline. For, after all, city people are by now completely accustomed to being restricted in the use of their property. Therefore, if the cost of agricultural adjustment reaches what city people consider an unfair drain on the national treasury, we may well see rural land use adjustments which are backed by the police power of the state. Moreover, as the cities billow out into the countryside, farmers and rural people themselves may increasingly turn to the police power to zone out undesirable developments.

Finally, the bounds of political acceptability limit the ways in which, program-wise, money resources may be used. When one considers the magnitude of the cost of present agricultural programs, one might reasonably contend that the concept of limited government sets no real bounds on the use of government resources. Yet, the bifocal way in which most citizens view government does limit the uses which can be made of government resources in bringing agriculture into adjustment with the rest of the economy.

Clearly, it is not now politically acceptable to pay agricultural labor to be idle. Earl Heady remarks in Chapter 1: "I never expect to see a time when payments direct to agricultural labor become an acceptable means for reducing or shifting farm output." However, Chryst and Timmons (Chapter 17) and Ottoson (Chapter 19) indicate the real need for programs which subsidize labor withdrawal. Ottoson suggests such measures as subsidized retraining of displaced agricultural labor, individual job placement, payment of moving costs and subsistence and rental allowances during a relocation period.

We have already found unemployment compensation in the industrial sector politically acceptable and administratively feasible. Increasingly, as the squeeze which is forcing excess labor out of agriculture tightens and affects more citizens, programs which give those who must migrate out of agriculture personalized professional guidance, and even perhaps some economic assistance, will, I think, come within the bounds of political acceptability.

Because of our concept of a narrowly limited state, the use of resources to correct agricultural maladjustment through any widespread use of consumption subsidies has been generally unacceptable. Consumption subsidies have thus far been acceptable only for limited uses which involve strong countervailing symbols, such as the school lunch. Foreign aid to underdeveloped areas, partly because it provides a relatively painless way out, may rapidly develop into another such symbol which justifies consumption subsidization.

If Americans' unresolved inner conflict over the nature and functions of government was the only controlling social attitude which determined political acceptability, the prospect for future social progress would, indeed, be a dreary one. We know, however, that our political process has adopted vast programs of economic and social adjustment which are reasonably long term, broadly consistent and reasonably equitable and effective.

Such social progress has been made possible, at least in part I think, because we are slowly developing another picture of government which parallels and seemingly can live in peace with our traditional concept of narrowly limited government. Through this view, government is not viewed as a total entity. Rather, it is looked at pluralistically. Government is seen as operating as a series of functional blocs.

Under this pluralistic view of government, the bounds which confine political acceptability can be pushed outward, by a sort of transference process. It is a process which permits a governmental function, after its need and usefulness have been broadly and thoroughly established, to be transplanted outside our total concept of narrowly limited government. These transplanted functions are not subject to the same bounds of political acceptability. They, themselves, are powerful public symbols which command men's loyalties and allegiance.

Thus, over the years, such functions as public education, conservation, social security, have become established as areas of government which are not narrowly limited. Therefore, the political acceptability of any land adjustment program is increased if it can march under the symbol of "conservation." Although many economists and soil scientists may wish a clarification of terminology which would exclude some of the things done under the name of "conservation," it should be realized that activities which they believe should not be called conservation might suffer politically from disassociation with the conservation symbol.

The point which I wish to make here, however, is that there is a growth process at work in our political symbolism which is pushing out the bounds of political acceptability. Because of our dual

vision of government as a total entity, and government as a series of functional blocs, individual functions of government are able to escape from the confining concept of the narrowly limited state, and are able to develop into powerful symbols for further public action. This is a continuous growth and transference process. One by one, as our functions of government grow and develop, they frequently take on a symbolism which puts them outside the restriction of the narrowly limited state concept and, theoretically at least, permits the development of broad, consistent and effective programming in these areas. Thus, just as "conservation" has become a symbol which makes for political acceptability, it is very possible that the day will come when "agricultural adjustment" will be a powerful symbol which permits broadly consistent and long-term policy development. Therefore, I believe that the political acceptability potential for programs of agricultural adjustment must be projected over at least a 10-year period.

Another set of social attitudes which prevents political acceptability from being determined by power politics alone is a belief in certain "rules of the game" — such ethical values as a sense of national welfare, a feeling of responsibility to future generations, a belief in equity and fair play and a sympathy for the underdog. Even political analysts who do not admit the force of public interest in policy development, usually concede that there are certain "rules of the game" which, although they exist outside the arena of pressure group politics, nevertheless influence the course of policy development.

One of the most important of these rules of the game in determining political acceptability is, I believe, our sense of equity, our desire for fair play. After all, the belief that all men should have approximate equality of opportunity is as much a part of our democratic heritage as is the concept of the negative state.

Our sense of equity is reflected in present agricultural programs, and it will undoubtedly limit the political acceptability of proposals for future action. We all realize that geographical and commodity politics have insisted upon national program uniformity in acreage reductions, regardless of soils and locations. However, our sense of equity has also been a factor in making such program uniformity possible. It is the belief that farmers across the nation should share on an approximately equitable basis in agricultural relief, and that sacrifice in terms of restrictions on land use should also be equitably shared. The use of the historical base for determining program benefits and acreage restrictions is, of course, also grounded in this concept of equity.

This concept of equity will undoubtedly limit the political acceptability of proposals for developing new land use patterns which

are more consistent with national economic development. For shifts in the use of land which fall with differing weight upon different geographical and social regions will be contrary to our generally held criterion of equity. As Earl Heady (Chapter 1) pointed out, such shifts would "mean concentration of major land use adjustments in particular locations. It would mean a much less intensive agriculture and a further and more rapid shrinkage in farm and nonfarm populations in these locations."

Such proposals which threaten not only to close out whole farms but whole farming areas, whole groups of communities, and to upset the customary pattern of economic life in such areas, are bound to meet with fierce political opposition. Donald Boles and Ross Talbot (Chapter 18) have described the political furor which has been created because the Soil Bank program has taken whole farms out of production and disturbed economic activity in the community centers. This congressional reaction is a forewarning of the type of opposition such proposals will likely encounter. Of course, much of this opposition must be interpreted in terms of geographical politics. But it is being justified on equity grounds as well as in terms of agricultural fundamentalism. From the standpoint of our equity concepts, land use "extensification" in marginal areas, such as Howard Ottoson suggests, would probably be more acceptable than land withdrawal programs.

Here again, however, I think the politicians' reluctance to disturb the existing patterns of land use is also explainable in terms of our lack of sufficient expert knowledge. Ray Bressler (Chapter 13) pointed up the complexities in arriving at new land use adjustments which are more consistent with national economic development: "...it is clear that any serious attempt at solution must involve general equilibrium — interrelations between agricultural and nonagricultural sectors of the economy, between land and other resources and between farm and nonfarm uses of land. We visualize a complex interaction of available resources, technology, alternative uses, consumer demands and preference — all in a spatial context with appropriate interconnections in the form of transfer, processing, and marketing costs. The model should be dynamic, of course, to allow for changes in technology and tastes, for interactions between and within major sectors and for all the serial interconnections of these variables."

Perhaps the seminar on which this book is based, and others like it, may begin to throw enough light on these complex interrelationships so that our lawmakers may begin to see some reliable guidelines in moving toward a new type of land adjustment policy.

Americans' concepts of equity will in the future, I think, work

to put further limitations on the shape and nature of agricultural adjustment programs. As the urban representation in Congress strengthens, our concepts of equity will work with urban representatives in making politically unacceptable the programs of land adjustment which make inequitable demands upon the rest of the economy. Again, our sense of equity may cause a nonfarm legislative majority with its large representation of low income groups in the urban economy to reject regressive formulas for distributing program benefits among the various agricultural classes.

Closely allied to Americans' sense of democratic equity is their humanitarian feeling for the needs of the underdog. Although frequently this social feeling for the underdog has been weakly reflected in our legislative actions, it is another rule of the game which sets limits upon political acceptability.

At least up until World War II, this sense of sympathy for the underdog served a chronically depressed agriculture well. Moreover, as the farmer's political strength weakens, it perhaps will be increasingly important in making programs of agricultural adjustment, which must be implemented with financial subsidies, politically acceptable.

However, it may be difficult to sell, on the basis of equity, the idea of adjustment subsidies if the size of farms keeps enlarging. For it may be difficult for the public to see the big farmer as an underdog — even though he may be caught in the cost-price squeeze on each of the hundreds of acres he owns. Moreover, it will also be difficult for the public to view the growing number of part-time farmers, who make good wages in industry and are protected by labor unions, as suitable objects for public assistance in a land adjustment program.

Finally, I do not think I should leave the problem of the underlying social attitudes which confine and control political acceptability without at least mentioning a social value which is rather particularized, in that it has force only upon policy developments affecting agriculture. This is the force of agricultural fundamentalism. Americans' feeling for the fundamental importance of agriculture as the basis of all of our economic activity and as the source of a virtuous national life has been one of the controlling social attitudes throughout our history. It has consistently and broadly affected the shape and content of our agricultural programs.

It has been an important factor in obtaining consistent support from the national treasury for agricultural programs. It has committed the government to programs designed to keep people on the farm. Our agricultural fundamentalism has made us

politically reluctant to face the proposition that our advancing agricultural technology is making it necessary for people to leave farm life. In part, at least, the political reaction against taking whole farms out of production under the Soil Bank program was a response to agricultural fundamentalism. Americans' reluctance to accept the fact that a substantial part of our farm population must leave the life of the farm and make its living in cities will probably be a limiting factor in obtaining programs for guiding and assisting people in their farm-to-city migration.

Our agricultural fundamentalism has also made programs more politically acceptable if they help to keep the little farmer in business. Agricultural fundamentalism, which glorifies family farm life, has committed our political process to the preservation of the family-sized farm. Building programs of land adjustment which do not conflict too radically with the family farm symbol are made more difficult by the fact that, although, for the economist, the family farm is an elastic concept which expands with an advancing technology, the size of the family farm as a political concept is not so easily expandable.

Thus far I have discussed only one of the four frameworks which I originally outlined as setting limits on political acceptability. I intend to treat the remaining frameworks only in summary fashion.

Both our constitutional and our two-party systems complement and reinforce our prevailing social attitudes in setting bounds upon political acceptability.

All I want to point out about our framework of constitutional powers is that whereas it was once a narrowly restricting frame which prevented action, since 1937 court decisions have so broadened it out that today any proposals which qualified agricultural economists would deem wise and feasible would probably come within the limits of government's constitutional powers. Donald Boles and Ross Talbot (Chapter 18) have outlined the constitutional means through which land adjustment can be accomplished. They pointed out that "no major legal or constitutional obstacles presently exist to prevent programs aimed at removing excess agricultural cropland from production."

However, the force of our constitutional system of checks and balances is to drive proposals for public action toward the central norm in political acceptability. Only proposals with a relatively high "acceptability potential" can usually successfully run the gamut of both houses of Congress and the presidency.

Our two-party political system, operating as it does over a continental area, also serves as a force which prevents radical departures from established patterns of action. Because both

parties, to achieve a majority coalition, must compete for the vote of all groups and sections of our society, they must strive to strike the "great average" in political attitudes. Neither party can afford to adopt a policy which appears to be a radical departure from present norms and habits of mass political thinking.

Finally, we come to the framework of basic interest. Henry Adams once said that practical politics consists in ignoring facts. But the force of basic interest in our representative process is one large fact which no politician can afford to ignore. Regardless of the prevailing social climate, regardless of which political party is in power and regardless of the political coalitions which pressure-group politics may be forming in Congress, political acceptability will, at least approximately, reflect the relative strength of the basic interests of our society.

The fact that the political strength of agriculture, as a basic interest, is on the decline is the large political fact that those who are proposing new policies for agriculture cannot afford to ignore if they wish such policies to be politically acceptable. As we all know, in the 1950's the farm population declined more than 15 percent and will probably continue to shrink as agricultural technology marches on. Moreover, the nature of the farm population's occupational interests is changing. The shrinking and changing of the nature of the farm population cannot but weaken agriculture's political strength.

Today, there are only 263 congressional districts whose working farm population comprises 5 percent or more of the people in the district. By 1971, it has been estimated by the Census Bureau, seven of our ten most rural states will have lost ten more congressional seats. Moreover, the urban interest in these so-called "farm districts" is strong. Not only do such "farm districts" frequently contain such large urban centers as Des Moines, Iowa, but the occupational interests of the growing number of part-time farmers, who also are frequently wage earners in town or even industrial workers in the city, are divided. It has been suggested by one of our shrewdest national politicians, holding one of our highest offices, that today only 100 of our 437 congressmen are directly affected by the farm vote.

The question, here, then is: How will the decline in the political strength of the basic agricultural interest affect the political acceptability of future proposals for agricultural adjustment? During recent years the voting record of urban-based congressmen on farm legislation indicates that, if they are not coerced by their political party, they are inclined to vote against farm programs which seem costly to urban consumers and taxpayers. Moreover, their voting record also reveals that it is becoming



increasingly difficult for the political party to persuade such congressmen to vote even for party-sponsored bills. As the farm population continues to decline, there is a growing possibility that the political party itself may feel that the farm sector is no longer a major partner in the group coalition on which it is depending to win elections. Thus, the political acceptability of agricultural proposals increasingly cannot be measured on the basis of farmer majority strength.

The problem of agricultural policymakers, in the future, will be to develop programs which will be politically acceptable to an urban-oriented Congress and presidency. The solutions which in the long run will be politically acceptable within this developing new frame of basic interest, I believe, (1) must have some coincidence with our commonly held concepts of the general welfare, (2) must be effective in actually solving the farm problem, (3) must not be excessive in cost in terms of other demands upon the national budget and (4) must not have an inequitable impact upon other groups in the population.

Curiously enough, the force of basic interest may, in the future, be a force which pushes out some of the bounds of political acceptability which certain of our prevailing social attitudes have set. The force of basic interest may insist upon agricultural programs which are not costly, uncoordinated, stop-gap measures. It may neutralize the agricultural fundamentalist belief that changes in the economic structure of agriculture can be held back by political fiat. In short, the force of changing basic interest may compel our political process to modify the boundaries which have been set on political acceptability. It may make increasingly acceptable those proposals for agricultural adjustments which are more consistent with national economic development.