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Trends in the Political Position of the American Farmer: A View Based on the Looking Glass of Foreign Observers

AMERICAN POLITICS, like all forms of public activity in the United States, is always in the process of becoming. The pull of change is constantly being exerted on the rock of stability. The pressure relaxes and intensifies; the direction is varying and often uncertain; the primary causes are perplexing and undetermined, although, at least to some degree, man-made and man-guided. So it has been, at least, as one views the historical trends in the political situation of the American farmer. He has been caught in the semifinal, or probably the final, stage of W. W. Rostow's cycle.¹ America has, in a somewhat unsteady fashion, been constantly moving toward the status of an urban-industrial nation. The farmer has utilized the technological and materialistic advances, but he has rather consistently fought against the changes in political power which were almost surely to follow the shifts in economic and social power. The political lag in the United States may be viewed as a portion of the overall cultural lag, although it can be studied as a separate phenomenon and partially accounted for through the unique and oft-times perverse processes of our political system.

After the first reapportionment of the United States House of Representatives, 101 of the 106 representatives were elected by farmers and planters.² By 1957, Vice President Nixon is alleged to have remarked that only 100 of a then House membership of 435 were "directly affected" by the farm vote.³ As the 1960 census reports for the states continued to dribble in, a tentative conclusion appeared to be that the migration from rural areas is even more substantial than predicted. According to the 1959

¹ W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 1960.

² A. N. Holcombe, *Our More Perfect Union*. Harvard University Press, Boston. 1950. P. 53.

³ Des Moines Register. September 20, 1957.

calculations of the United States Department of Agriculture, the number of commercial farms will have declined from the then estimated 3.1 million to 2 million by 1975. Thus the continuing conflict between majority rule and the protection of minorities will increasingly involve rural America.

One way to view the political struggles of the American farmer is to reflect on the writings of foreign observers of the American scene. To reconstruct the trends of political power in this manner is somewhat hazardous because the farmer was not the central focus in the studies of Tocqueville, Bryce, Ostrogorski, Brogan, Laski or Beloff. Only if we view Graham Hutton as a political observer do we find a person who was closely interested in the farmer. However, this approach does seem to have some real merit. At any one time, the farmer has only been a part of the total political context. Within this limited role, these observers have been rather consistently perceptive in their portrayals of him.

DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA⁴

By the time Tocqueville came to America, we had concluded what might be termed a peaceful political revolution. Power had passed from the remarkable and aristocratic Federalists, to the more democratic but quality-conscious Jeffersonians, and on to the more egalitarian Jacksonians. Within this changing environment Tocqueville looked, studied and wrote. His now famous doctrine of the tyranny of the majority was a prediction on his part, not an analysis of an immediate condition: a forewarning to Europe of the oncoming of democracy because of the almost, but not quite, inexorable course of events.

Tocqueville was not a particularly acute observer of agrarian life either in France or the United States.⁵ But his observations of the American scene led him to conclude that "...the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people came out of the townships and took possession of the states."⁶ He was obviously impressed by the New England town meeting and considered this institution to be one of the principal causal factors in the growth of a democratic America. On first reading one might receive the

⁴Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Phillips Bradley (ed.). Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York. 1945. (Vols. I and II.)

⁵George Wilson Pierson, *Tocqueville in America*. Abridged by Dudley C. Lunt from Tocqueville and Beaumont in *America* (Anchor A 189). Doubleday and Co., Inc., New York. 1959. Pp. 446-47.

⁶De Tocqueville, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 56; also p. 65.

impression that Tocqueville had a strong tinge of agricultural fundamentalism in his personality make-up. His admiration for Thomas Jefferson lends additional credence to the idea. However, at this point Tocqueville seems more moved by fear than love. He definitely feared the growth of cities;⁷ he loved what we might term a natural, although not necessarily a landed, aristocracy.

Consistency is not Tocqueville's principal virtue, although this difficulty seems to arise in part because of his inability to distinguish clearly between short-run and long-run trends. At one point, he remarks that "in America land is cheap and anyone may easily become a landowner"; at another time, he states: "Agriculture is . . . only suited for those who already have great superfluous wealth or to those whose penury bids them seek only a bare subsistence."⁸

His first comment seems accurate for much of 19th century America; the latter statement points to the trend in farming in the latter half of the 20th century. The political implications of these two views of American farming are now becoming manifest in the American political scene. Entry of new farmers into commercial farming is becoming increasingly a matter of inheritance or marriage. The movement up the agricultural ladder from subsistence farming, or hired worker, to the status of commercial farmer is constantly more difficult and improbable.

One of Tocqueville's signal contributions was his discussion of "political associations"; that is, what we would today call pressure groups or, more objectively, interest groups. He recorded their activity, in a general fashion, and outlined the causes for their existence and the means by which they were institutionalized. He noted the paradox, and one so evident in rural America, between the drive for individual freedom and the desire to combine in order to achieve the benefits of the various forms of material power.⁹ Perhaps one of his most prescient insights was his prediction that these associations would become, in limited form, a new aristocracy: "Private citizens, by combining together, may constitute bodies of great wealth, influence, and strength, corresponding to the persons of an aristocracy."¹⁰ Is this not what is happening in modern America — rural and urban?

Tocqueville does believe that the idea of equality "suggests"

⁷Ibid., Vol. I, p. 129.

⁸Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 186 and 154, respectively.

⁹Ibid., Vol. I, Chap. XII. Political Associations in the United States. Pp. 191-99.

¹⁰Ibid., Vol. II, p. 324.

to Americans "the idea of the indefinite perfectibility of man."¹¹ Such an idea had a firm hold on the farm organizations and certain farmer-oriented political parties of the last century. Modern farm groups, and particularly the largest — the American Farm Bureau Federation — have neglected if not forsaken this conception of man's nature. The notable exception to this observation is, as usual, the National Farmers Union (formally, The Farmers Educational and Co-operative Union of America).

One might suggest that it is within this issue of the nature of man that we find a primary cause for the present conflicts between the farm organizations: the Farm Bureau leadership believes in social Darwinism — the farmers who are "fit" are those who will survive. The Farmers Union leadership and perhaps to a lesser extent that of the Grange, are the egalitarians — "as the twig is bent so the tree inclines." Some portion of the present alliances of political interests can be accounted for through an understanding of these respective beliefs regarding man's nature.

THE AMERICAN COMMONWEALTH¹²

Lord Bryce was certainly no stranger to the United States. He traveled here in 1870, 1881 and 1883-84. From 1907-13, he was the British Ambassador to the United States. It was in 1888 that his two-volume study — The American Commonwealth — first appeared in the British bookstores. So there is something like a fifty-year gap between Tocqueville and Bryce. When the latter's first study of the United States was published, the Civil War was still strongly evident in American politics. The party system had gone through a unique metamorphosis. Southern slavocracy had become the guiding element in the Democratic party just prior to the Civil War and was now attempting to revive its shattered power. Lincoln and the Civil War had led the American farmer into the Republican bulwark.

Within the executive branch, Jacksonian emphasis on presidential supremacy had been discarded. The Democratic party was returning to the Jeffersonian idea of legislative supremacy, with one major alteration in that the power of decision-making over substantive policies was moving into the rooms of the

¹¹Ibid., Vol. III, First Book, Chap. VIII. How Equality Suggests to the Americans the Idea of the Indefinite Perfectibility of Man. Pp. 33-35.

¹²James Bryce, The American Commonwealth. 2 Vols.; used herein were Vol. I. Macmillan and Co., New York. 1895; and Vol. II. Macmillan and Co., New York. Revised edition, 1910.

standing committees. This trend was weakening the efficacy of the party caucus. The Republican party, at least under the aegis of Lincoln, had grasped the idea that the president was the American tribune, our form of the elective kingship. However, by the time Bryce began to prospect American political institutions, we were imbedded in a period of "Congressional Government." The presidency was in a state of quietude and subordination, if not frustration, from which it was not to emerge until the days of the first Roosevelt.¹³

Lord Bryce was an advocate of what might be termed the "look-see" approach to the study of social and political phenomena. He became much more closely acquainted with the American character than did Tocqueville and perhaps as much as five-sixths of his exposition was based on personal conversations.¹⁴ He found the American farmer to be "a keener and more enterprising man than in Europe," an "honest, kindly sort of man, hospitable, religious, practical." But the farmer was also "naturally a grumbler, as are his brethren everywhere" and inclined to "lending too ready an ear to politicians who promise him redress by measures possibly unjust and usually unwise."¹⁵

Bryce believed that "a sort of natural selection carries the more ambitious and eager spirits into the towns, for the native American dislikes the monotony and isolation of a farm life with its slender prospect of wealth."¹⁶ The political implications of this necessary isolationism are found in his comment: "A farmer of western New York may go through a long life without knowing how his representative behaves at Albany."¹⁷ But Bryce was heartened in being able to conclude that "of the tendency to aggregation [of wealth] there are happily few signs so far as relates to agriculture."¹⁸

It is perhaps one of the ironies of American history that the American farmer had the least political power when he had the most numerical strength. There are rather evident reasons for this situation, among the more important being that the farmer

¹³ The generalizations about the course of American political parties are based largely on W. E. Binkley, *American Political Parties — Their Natural History*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York. 1943 and 1958 editions; his *President and Congress*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York. 1947; and Holcombe, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*. Edited and abridged by Louis Hacker. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York. 1959. Vol. I, p. xi.

¹⁵ Bryce (1910 edition), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 298-99.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 300.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 240.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 918-19.

wanted to be "let alone."¹⁹ He sought the freedom to work out his own destiny with the federal government helping out in terms of low tariffs and cheap land. Beginning at about the Bryce period, there was a willingness to permit the formation of land-grant colleges and experiment stations so that he, the farmer, could "make two blades of grass grow where one grew before."

However, Bryce does seem to be deficient in his failure to note the evidences of agrarian discontent. Low farm prices, along with the "vicious" practices of the railroads and "Wall Street," were stirring the farmers into organizational protest and political action. The rise and decline of the Grange, Greenback Party, Grand Alliance and the like might have been observed by Bryce, but he makes little note of them. The farmer was just beginning to understand and practice, and doing neither at all effectively, that policy is made through institutions that are based on organized power.

One of Bryce's major contributions was his observation and analysis of the American lobby.²⁰ But it is indicative of the farmer's weakly-organized position that Bryce does not even comment on the existence of the farm lobby, at least not at the Washington level. He does observe, as did Woodrow Wilson in his Congressional Government (1888), that the policy-making process in Congress is "really a plan for legislating by a number of commissions,"²¹ that is, by standing committees. However, the powerful House and Senate Agriculture Committees were just beginning to take important and aggressive steps in the development of national farm legislation. As an addendum to this point, there is evidence that these committees are now declining in authority.

DEMOCRACY AND THE ORGANIZATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES²²

In the critical days of 1960 when we are encircled by Sputniks and depressed by the ominous rumblings that have followed the fall of the U-2, it may be prudent to take only quick note of the views of a Russian, M. I. Ostrogorski. His study of the American party system was published just after the turn of the 20th century

¹⁹ Earle D. Ross, The Civil War Agricultural New Deal. Social Forces. 15(1, October, 1936): 97-104.

²⁰ Bryce (1910 edition), Vol. I, Chap. XVI, The Lobby. Pp. 677-82.

²¹ Ibid., Vol. I, p. 172.

²² M. Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties. Vol. II. The Macmillan Co., New York. 1902; and Democracy and the Party System in the United States. The Macmillan Co., New York. 1926.

and in it he deplored the three evils, as he viewed them, of Democracy, Party and Plutocracy.

His general hypothesis might be stated as follows: The United States Constitution was an excellent and remarkable document, but the wisdom of its framers has been controverted through the growth of extra-constitutional devices. The "multitude" (Democracy) had forced into positions of almost absolute power the "caucus-controlled" parties that were largely the instruments of the Plutocracy, which controlled the party organizations through bribery and other forms of corruption.

Such a capsuled synopsis hardly does justice to Ostrogorski's detailed analysis, but it does enable one to make a few general comments about his thesis as it pertains to trends in the political position of the American farmer. Ostrogorski was not opposed to political parties, in fact he accepted the necessity of parties in a democratic political system, but he did deprecate their permanence. Political parties, he thought, should be organized around issues at each election and then dissolve once the election had been held — just as Madison had erroneously predicted, in Federalist 10, would happen.

However, these party organizations became entrenched in Congress, as well as in the state legislatures, and came to constitute a sort of iron oligarchy. Lobbyists, "the agents of the corporations,"²³ were influential in imposing their privileged point of view on the legislators and thereby on legislation. The rigid discipline of the caucus prevented the elected politicians from being concerned with the "general interest" and placed them in the position of doing nothing. Or, a more likely possibility was, he thought, that the legislators would be involved in the self-perpetuating practice of "sending to their farmer-constituents packets of seeds (distributed at national expense), by providing their 'workers' with offices, and by appropriating in cash as much as possible for their districts."²⁴ Perhaps his most famous remark concerning the House of Representatives was that "every interest is represented in it except the general interest."²⁵

Unfortunately, for our purposes at least, Ostrogorski had little to say directly about the American farmer. He did observe that "the farmers' movement created a hotbed of social discontent in the West, which became a permanent menace to the political stability embodied in the traditional parties"²⁶ — an insight

²³Ibid., 1926 edition, p. 291.

²⁴Ibid., 1926 edition, p. 373.

²⁵Ibid., 1902 edition, p. 698.

²⁶Ibid., 1902 edition, p. 441.

which, in the more accurate idiom of his day than ours, probably puts "the cart before the horse."

Ostrogorski developed a theory of weak political parties which would still prove attractive to the present-day Farm Bureau and, to a lesser extent, the Grange. But his emphasis on the need for proportional representation and the possibility of having the "interests" represented in the Senate — although they would be in a subordinate position and called Associate Senators — strike one as rather impossible proposals for our times, considering the almost endless proliferation of interest groups.

GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE AND POLITICS IN AMERICA²⁷

Certainly one of the most insightful foreign observers of the United States today is Denis W. Brogan. Of his several books, the two that are directly pertinent to our subject were published in 1933 and 1954. In terms of both time period and point of view, we may classify the first period as pre-New Deal and the second as post-New Deal.

Much had happened in farm politics between Bryce and the first study of American politics and government by Brogan. The farmer had passed through the halcyon days of 1909-14 and, income-wise, the prosperity of World War I; then into the trough of despair and bankruptcy as he suffered the early and sharp impact of the Great Depression. Just prior to this period, the National Farmers Union was founded, had enjoyed the dizzy prosperity of numbers, but emerged with little in the way of substantive policy. By 1927 the Farmers Union was rather completely reorganized and its immediate center of activity was shifted to the Great Plains area. A local "farm bureau" had been sponsored by the Binghamton, N. Y., Chamber of Commerce and was to be fostered in other areas by the Federal Extension Service and its growing local officialdom called county agents. The Farm Bloc had been organized in Congress during the early 1920's, perhaps due to Farm Bureau efforts, and had achieved some success, although it had been thwarted in its efforts to convince President Coolidge of the value of McNary-Haugenism.

In 1933, Brogan was clearly pessimistic of America's future and rather subtly antagonistic toward the American farmer. He

²⁷D. W. Brogan, *Government of the People*. Harper and Brothers, New York. 1933; *Politics in America*. Harper and Brothers, New York. 1954; and Preface, 1943 edition of *Government of the People*. Harper and Brothers, New York. 1943.

believed that the Supreme Court's use of its assumed power of judicial review was harmful to democracy and the national interest. Both political parties were, in his view, coalitions of sectional interests and had little to offer in the way of programmatic reforms. He did not foresee, at least not as clearly as A. N. Holcombe, that the rise of the American city was about to make its march apparent within American politics.

Whatever the facts, the fiction of American politics is still that everything must be done to foster 'a bold peasantry, a country's pride.' To incline the balance in favor of the country and to look to the farmer for the American answer to social and political problems was the official creed.²⁸

Brogan's contention that the American farmer was primarily interested in tariffs and prohibition seems rather hyperbolic,²⁹ but his chapter entitled "Country Versus City" is still very worthwhile reading. In it he describes, as well as has any political scientist, the constitutional, political and social causes for the farm-small town overrepresentation in Congress and the state legislatures.³⁰ Brogan believed there was little indication "that the rural American, no matter how disillusioned he may be as to the results of prohibition, will lightly let go his political power or abandon his watch over his erring city brother."³¹ Later, with perhaps some sense of wry satisfaction, he prophesied that "once the tide [of political change] is obviously on the turn, the politicians will turn on their recent [rural] allies with ferocity."³² Such an occurrence seems just barely possible, considering the nature of American politics, but the prediction should be one, today, that would give the farmer and his organizations cause for reflection and judicious concern — as no doubt it has.

The period of the 1930's was the most brilliant decade in American agricultural history, at least in terms of action if not accomplishment. Never, perhaps, were social, economic and political conditions more favorable for a "New Deal." Relief and welfare measures were mandatory and forthcoming; credit facilities were created or expanded; price support programs became

²⁸Ibid., Government of the People, p. 101.

²⁹A few years before, however, André Siegfried had observed: "The low-selling price (of farm products) was not due to favorable output, but rather to the effect of world prices on a partially export industry. As a result the farmers no longer believe in free trade, but wish to serve a protected home market and to dispose of their surplus by dumping." André Siegfried, *America Comes of Age*. Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York. 1927. P. 187.

³⁰Brogan, *Government of the People*, op. cit., Part III, Chaps. 1 and 2.

³¹Ibid., p. 114.

³²Ibid., p. 115.

the hinge-pin of farm policy; the existing emphasis on the research and educational function was intensified and enlarged; soil conservation activities were initiated on a nation-wide scale; and crop insurance was experimented with. In all of this eruption of subsidy and turmoil, the trends in the political position of the farmer were rather shadowy and obscure. Seemingly, all segments of the American society were participants in the Great Crusade (or Grand Barbecue, if you wish). The farm organizations maintained a fairly constant coalition of purpose and strategy, except for their evaluation and support of the Farm Security Administration.

It was probably a combination of conflicting ideologies, personalities and interests that brought about the existing schism within the farm organizations. Ideologically, the Farm Bureau could just barely tolerate the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in the early depression years and thereafter the question came to be as to just when the FSA must go, which it did by 1946. In the area of price support legislation, there was a fair amount of organizational unity even through the Agricultural Act of 1948. The election of President Truman that year divided the farm groups into rigid or flexible price supporters and, soon, into opposing camps in regard to the Brannan proposals. Since that time it has been somewhat of a novelty to find the farm organizations to be in any particular agreement over farm policy matters. More explicitly, the gap constantly widened as the emphasis on ideology increased and the search for the farmer's interest became more neglected.

In his 1954 study — Politics in America — Brogan was obviously a happier man. The New Deal was to his ideological tastes. The American political system, despite its cumbersome deficiencies, had come through the storms of depression and war. He viewed our political parties as chaotic and would have approved of much more highly centralized, class-structured, programmatic parties than we now have, but there was more hope than despair over our predicament.³³

Brogan was still just as disturbed by agricultural fundamentalism as he had been in his earlier work. "The farmers are [still] sacred" and, in some indignation, he quotes Frederick the Great's remark about Empress Maria Theresa, regarding the partition of Poland — "she wept and took." And, writes Brogan,

³³ For reasons that are not at all clear, Brogan takes a more pragmatic approach toward American political parties in his 1943 preface to *Government of the People* than he does in *Politics in America* (1954). Note pp. viii and xiv.

"so does the American farmer."³⁴ However, he has become more perceptive in his observations of pressure group politics. He notes, although in no detail, that the American farmers have a diversity of interests within their own industry, that these interests are not likely to be class-based but are primarily commodity-based, and that because of this diffusion of power within agriculture, as elsewhere in the American economy, "members of Congress have acquired a good deal of sceptical skill in dealing with the claims of pressure groups."³⁵

Brogan's own value system disturbs, in some instances, the incisiveness of his diagnosis. When he states that "no victory of the economic underdogs fighting as a class party is possible unless farmers and workers are allied,"³⁶ he misses the trend in American farming. For better or worse, the American commercial farmer is becoming increasingly business-oriented and at least mildly antagonistic toward organized labor, with the exception again of the leadership of the National Farmers Union, and an unknown portion of its membership and that of the other major farm organizations.

MIDWEST AT NOON³⁷

Graham Hutton is clearly impressed with the qualities of character which he claims to have discovered in the midwestern farmer. His impressions, however, are not directly related to political trends, perhaps because of his assignment with the British Information Office. Nevertheless, a couple of his insights might be considered quickly. "Midwest farmers," he writes, "and many other farmers, still expect to end on a cross between two city slickers, an American on one side and a foreigner on the other."³⁸ To be facetious we often tend to exaggerate and distort. The rural, Protestant, midwestern American has been forced to stretch his vistas beyond such a narrow parochialism.

³⁴ Brogan, *Politics in America*. Pp. 357 and 361, respectively. There is neither the space nor the need to recount all of the major pieces of New Deal farm legislation. A lively and accurate portrayal of the early years of that period, and its effects on farm policy, is found in Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s two volumes (thus far) — *The Crisis of the Old Order*. Houghton, Mifflin Co., Boston. 1957; and *The Coming of the New Deal*. Houghton, Mifflin Co., Boston. 1959.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 356.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 72. Brogan can just barely tolerate the materialistic tendencies in the farmers' political attitudes and actions — "When the American farmer is prosperous enough to ride to the polls, he votes Republican." (1943 Preface, op. cit., p. xi.)

³⁷ Graham Hutton, *Midwest at Noon*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago. 1945.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

In another vein, Hutton discusses the individualism of the American farmers in contrast to their "genius for organization and association to further their common interests."³⁹ It is at this point that the American farmer is going to have to act even more effectively if he is to counteract the loss of his political power. One can well agree with Hutton that the modern farm organization is almost infinitely more efficient than were its predecessors. But the emphasis has been on supplying producer and consumer services — gasoline, insurance, feed, fertilizer, farm equipment and the like. The central issue now is: Will the farmer so discipline himself that he will be able to control sufficiently the production of his varied commodities?

To some extent at least, James Harrington was accurate in his diagnosis: Political power follows economic power. Although the rural areas have some built-in political advantages in the protection of their declining numerical strength, efforts are under way to counteract their diminution in political power by an improvement in organized economic strength. The Farmers Union wants to acquire this economic bargaining power through the means of national legislation; the Farm Bureau wants to employ its own national and state organizations to do the job. It would appear that in the first instance, the political power is not sufficient; that in the latter, there is neither the organizational will nor the group discipline that would be necessary to accomplish the objective.

THE AMERICAN DEMOCRACY⁴⁰

Harold Laski brought to the American scene his own pair of ideological glasses. He had taught at Harvard and later at several other of our colleges and universities, had traveled widely throughout the United States, and had known many of the "greats" in American political life. But his portrayal of the United States was in terms of 1933 and not 1948, when his magnum opus on America was published. He wrote of "the immense horde, perhaps as many as five millions, of migratory workers and their families who today haunt the highways of America," believed that "the fate of the family-sized farm is not less grim," and apparently convinced himself of "the reality of an American peonage."⁴¹

Laski had a constant desire to reform America in light of his own ideal images. In some real sense, as Alfred Cobban has

³⁹Ibid., p. 78.

⁴⁰Harold Laski, *The American Democracy*. The Viking Press, New York. 1948.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 487, 489, 242, respectively.

indicated, this was Laski's strongest quality. He was a political scientist-philosopher with a mission. This unity of direction, when fused with the intellectual abilities which were his, gave him a wide, if not a notably sympathetic, audience.

But Laski's ideology often did not fit in with the real America. That is, he was excellent at justifying his own preferences but often inaccurate in stating conditions. Strongly committed to the need for a farmer-laborer alliance⁴² in order — from his viewpoint — that we might have a potent liberal-socialistic, centralized party to combat the powerful and omnipresent, if not fascist, business interests, Laski was not able to step back and view the American farm economy with any remarkable degree of objectivity. What he wrote about in 1948 might have been politically possible in 1933, but not a decade and a half later. The American conscience should be disturbed about the conditions of our migrant workers, both domestic and foreign, but their miserable social and economic conditions are becoming less significant in American farming, if for no other reason than that they (the migrant workers) are less in demand and fewer in numbers. Their political power is weak and inarticulate.

Laski was probably correct in his diagnosis that there was an increased spread in the class structure within American agriculture. The social-economic-political gap between the haves and have-nots might well be a cause for legitimate concern. Even when concerned, however, a democratic course of action does not present itself to us either as clearly or as neatly as it did to Laski.

THE AMERICAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT⁴³

Max Beloff's analysis of the American political system is probably the most balanced and judicious study of our political institutions that we have had from a foreign student. Urbane, incisive and knowledgeable, he writes in a style which is meagre in quantity but persuasive in quality.

Mostly by indirection does Beloff concern himself with farm politics. His over-all thesis would appear to be that our political institutions are not geared to the role we must play in the modern world. Our diffusions of power have been protectors of human liberty. But we now live in a domestic society in which the

⁴² For example, *ibid.*, pp. 238-39.

⁴³ Max Beloff, *The American Federal Government*. Oxford University Press, New York. 1959.

demands on government are beyond what our present political institutions are able to supply, and in a world society wherein our power position is waning because of an inability to provide a concerted and dynamic sense of direction in our relations with friend, neutral and antagonist.

Although he never quite says so, Beloff indicates that the position of the American farmer is one important manifestation of our increasing difficulties. "The older agrarian America is still present over enough of the country to make the pro-agrarian bias of some American political institutions something with which the American statesman must always reckon." Again, "the Department of Agriculture comes to be the spearhead of the farmers — and its head is likely to prove a major political liability if he rejects the role."⁴⁴

In the area of foreign policy, Beloff notes that the shift in agriculture to a form of "dumping program" — albeit a program with some genuine benefit to the national interest — brought with it a shift of control over the agricultural attachés from the Department of State to the more amenable, at least from the farm organization's outlook, Department of Agriculture.

Although Beloff does not make this exact analogy, it does seem to be of some importance to note the impact of our federal system of government on the structure and process of farm organizations — which are also federations, if not confederations. That is, one of the realities of farm politics is for the national organization to be pushing and pulling in one direction, the state organization in another. This condition is particularly evident, at times, within the AFBF in their relations with certain state organizations, although it is not unknown in the other farm groups.

Without rancor, but with sympathetic understanding, Beloff points to what might be termed the "external" American dilemma. Thrust into a position of leadership within the free world, harassed by the strategy and the increasing power of the Communist world, we continue to be uncertain and timid in our endeavors to modify our free institutions in such a manner that we will be able, through the long pull, to be both free and secure.

FUTURE TRENDS — SHORT AND LONG RUN

What are the future trends in the political position of the American farmer? Any sensible estimate seems to depend on the assumptions set forth regarding the central issue of war and

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 13 and 88, respectively.

peace: Herein we will assume that there will be no major shifts in the existing and tenuous balance of power between ourselves and the Communist nations; the cold war will continue, or be slightly accelerated.

In the short run — say, perhaps, within the present decade — there is considerable evidence that the farmer's political power will not seriously deteriorate. He is overrepresented in a considerable number of the state legislatures, and these institutions still have potency in terms of taxes, appropriations, economic regulations and reapportionment — among the more important reserved and concurrent powers which they still exercise. Charles Hardin has clearly outlined the rural advantages in the halls of Congress: overrepresentation in the House and, in terms of the principle of majority rule, in the Senate as well; control over the powerful Committees on Agriculture (and Forestry, in the Senate) and the subcommittees on agricultural appropriations; protection in the form of undisciplined parties from the harassing cross fire that might strike agriculture if our congressional policy committees could truly direct party policy; maintenance of the status quo because of the unity of intent between certain congressional committees, special interest groups, and rather semiautonomous administrative units within the Department of Agriculture; and assistance from the realization that the farm vote, though dwindling, might still be a crucial vote in a presidential and, especially, a congressional election.⁴⁵

The "farm vote" of then Senator Kennedy shows how the farmer receives additional and substantial reconsideration when a politician moves from the nonfarm sanctuary of a highly urbanized state and strives for our highest political office.

James Burns points out that during Kennedy's last three years in the House his vote was "often" to cut the appropriations of the Departments of Agriculture and Interior, and that in doing so he departed from Democratic party policy.⁴⁶ Kennedy did give a "distinctly favorable nod toward the controversial Brannan plan,"⁴⁷ but the compensatory payment features of that plan would have been of some economic assistance to the urban low-middle and low income groups. At the 1956 Democratic convention, it was apparent that the midwestern and Great Plains delegations were "sticking solidly with Kefauver," partly because Kennedy had voted against rigid, 90 per cent farm price supports.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Charles M. Hardin, Farm Political Power and the U. S. Governmental Crisis. *Jour. of Farm Econ.*, 15(5, Dec., 1958): 1646-59.

⁴⁶ James M. Burns, *John Kennedy*, Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York, 1959, pp. 88 and 91. The years were 1950-52.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

As has so often and necessarily happened in American politics, a presidential candidate must attempt to accommodate the wider and more diverse interests of a national constituency in a considerably different manner than was done when he represented a local or state area. Former Senator Kennedy has, we may assume, learned this lesson well. The Congressional Quarterly made a comparison of the farm vote of senators Humphrey and Kennedy.⁴⁹ The results were as follows:

<u>Year</u>	<u>In Agreement</u> (per cent of total votes)
1953	0.0
1954	36.7
1955	20.0
1956	51.4
1957	70.0
1958	90.9
1959	95.2

The political cynic might speculate that it would soon be necessary for Senator Humphrey to prove that his "liberal" position on farm policy was as advanced as that of his opponent's. The point is, however, that the diminishing farm vote is still sought after in the clash of the presidential electoral process.

Holbert Carroll's study brings forth excellent evidence to show that the farm groups and the farmer-oriented congressional committees on agriculture have directed American foreign policy into channels which are of primary advantage to the farmer. He points out several instances in which the international aspects of American foreign policy have been distinctly subordinated to the domestic interests of the American farmer.⁵⁰

Foreign observers still stress the ideological potency of agricultural fundamentalism in American politics. Daniel Bell contends that the American belief in the sanctity of property rights has enhanced the farmer's power and lessened that of organized labor.⁵¹

But there is considerable data of a damaging nature on the other side of the ledger. There have been quite distinct, but still largely unorganized, rumblings of discontent with current farm

⁴⁹ Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, week ending March 25, 1960, Vol. XVIII, No. 13, pp. 472-73.

⁵⁰ Holbert N. Carroll, *The House of Representatives and Foreign Affairs*. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1958; for examples, pp. 34, 48, 55-56, 63, 125, and 274.

⁵¹ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology*. The Free Press, Glencoe, 1960. P. 194.

policy. The urban housewife is becoming more articulate and any fresh talk of higher price supports or "bread taxes" can and has brought down a wrath of letters on the representatives of the urban constituents. Costs of the present farm programs are extensive, even though the farm organizations and certain members of Congress have plausibly contended that the allocation of costs is unfair to the farmer.

The Bureau of the Census has estimated that reapportionment in the House of Representatives, based on the 1960 census returns, will bring nearly a 10 per cent change in the present allocation of House seats — there will be approximately 20 gains and 20 losses. Although these changes will not occur until 1963, and the rural-small town control over most of the state legislatures will not have been relinquished by that time, it would still seem almost certain that the farm vote in the House will be further depreciated.

The urb-suburbanization of the United States has weakened noticeably the vigor of the belief in the family farm. Empirical evidence on this point is still sketchy and inchoate, but random conversations in a few metropolitan areas lead this writer to the conclusion that it is later than the farmer thinks.

The ideological split between the Farm Bureau and the Farmers Union-Grange-commodity interests alliance (a group of allies with something quite less than a unified position on matters of strategy and goals) has weakened the farmer's political posture. If continued, it will further the likelihood that the urban areas will be the progenitors of farm policy in the future. This division can probably be healed only by a new and less ideologically oriented farm leadership, which is practically to say that in the short run it cannot be mitigated.

The farmer himself is entwined in his own enigma. He would like a higher income from the products he sells but a decrease in price of the things he must buy. Overproduction and inelastic demand curves do not cause him to control carefully his own production plans. Politicians are fearful of taking the control or the free market route because, among other reasons, they are afraid that either approach will affect them adversely in the rural-small town ballot boxes.

W. R. Parks recently pointed out that the economists themselves have, to a degree, frustrated both the politicians and the farmers.⁵² Their analytical tools and largely inarticulate major

⁵² W. Robert Parks, *The Political Acceptability of Suggestions for Land Adjustment*. In *Dynamics of Land Use: Needed Adjustment*. Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa. 1961.

premises have brought forth a medley of proposals which have added to the environment of uncertainty and discontent.

CONCLUSION

Some of our finest studies of American political institutions have resulted from the efforts of the foreign observers that we have discussed herein. As political anthropologists, they seem to have outstanding qualities in terms of the clarity, depth and scope of their presentations. We might hope for somewhat more specialization; not an inquiry into endless detail, but rather a more thorough analysis of some of the "functional" politics of the American economy.

If the invitation could be issued in the form of an agenda of suggested areas for study, it might be outlined about as follows. First, will future trends in farm politics see an increasing emphasis placed on the growth of economic power with less and less reliance, for reasons already enumerated, on the actions of Congress? Why the intensity of the ideological divisions within American agriculture at just the time a few social scientists are writing about the decline, if not the end, of ideology? Is this phenomenon only an outgrowth of the intense desires of certain farm leaders, or do significant ideological schisms exist within rural America?

The proliferation of commodity organizations could be a third area for fruitful study. Does not their increasing and persistent presence indicate the competitiveness within American agriculture, the materialistic goals and pragmatic methods of the farmer and his distrust of the major general farm organizations?

The fourth item on the agenda might be concerned with the growth of vertical integration and contract farming. Will the farmer become more and more the handmaiden of the business organizations? In essence, this issue centers around the question as to the future of the farm cooperative. If the farmer is to achieve the type of bargaining power which will place him in a truly countervailing position with business and organized labor, it would appear that his fate rests with his cooperatives.⁵³

It might also be enlightening to study the changing policies of the farm press. For many years, the more liberal elements in American politics have contended that this was a "kept" press;

⁵³An excellent presentation of this point of view is found in the annual address of George B. Blair, president, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives. 1960 Blue Book, Official Yearbook of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives. Pp. 1-7.

that it represented business interests who were the actual power behind our farm policy. But the casualty rate of the farm newspapers and periodicals has been considerable. Have the remainder begun to adopt a more flexible point of view in matters involving farm policy and political strategy?

Next, the price support, P.L. 480, cotton subsidy and other such programs have made certain business interests an integral part of our farm policy. Those who have storage warehouses, trucking firms, shipping lines, along with others who want to obtain certain metals and minerals through barter have become very active political participants. To what extent are these business interests behind U.S. farm policy?

Lastly, the foreign observers should take a long look at their picture of the modern meaning of agricultural fundamentalism. Their stereotype of the way the farmer views his role in American life is becoming more and more inaccurate. Will the dominant picture come to be "the farmer in a business suit," or the farmer in a pair of union-made overalls?

The political position of rural America will continue to deteriorate; rural Americans will continue to seek ways to slow down the pace.

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Discussion

MOST POLITICAL SCIENTISTS would affirm, the writer thinks, that the foreign observers cited by Professor Talbot have made significant contributions to our literature on American government. Graduate and even undergraduate students in political science have been obliged to become familiar with the works of these men, with the exception perhaps of Max Beloff and Graham Hutton. The commentaries by Tocqueville and Bryce have pointed up the changes occurring in United States society and politics between the 1830's and the turn of the century. Ostrogorski's book is basic reading for those who seek an understanding of the American party system and, to a lesser extent, Laski's observations on the American presidency are thought to be valuable. Brogan can be offered as a lesson in style for political scientists and others.

The writer would question, however, whether we could learn much from the works discussed here about trends in agricultural politics which will be important during the 1960's. Professor

Talbot in fact found little in his citations which was useful in his concluding section, and it seems to this writer that this should have been expected, for two reasons. In the first place, as Professor Talbot pointed out, all but one of these men were interested in the broad picture of American government and politics, in which context agriculture received scant attention. According to the testimony here, for example, Bryce was presumably not much interested in — if in fact he even knew of — the discontent among farmers in the Plains, the South and the Midwest. He apparently made no mention of the farmer organizations which had already secured the passage of unique and highly significant state and national legislation and which, shortly after his book was published, put together the most impressive third party in our nation's history. Surely a man so inattentive to the politics of agriculture during his own time could contribute little to the present subject. In fact, one gains the impression from Professor Talbot's discourse that the occasional comments by these men upon agriculture were more often than not misleading or erroneous.

If our primary interest here is in current trends, and trends which might be significant in the future, rather than trends occurring in the past, then the writer would offer a second reason for seeking evidence elsewhere than in the writings of these men: their observations on agriculture have been outdated by the impact of relatively recent events in this field. This is especially true with reference to Tocqueville and Bryce, who had no inkling of the automobile, the tractor, the college of agriculture and the REA. Therefore it seems to this writer extravagant to promote, as a commentary on farmers in the 1960's, a remark made by Tocqueville in 1835 — a remark, incidentally, in which he employed the present tense verb. It is true that the other men wrote during the present century, but even their most recent commentary fails to take note of the shifts in farm politics which occurred in the late 1940's, of which some American analysts were aware. Nor is it likely that they could have predicted the events of the 1950's, when the impact of the explosion of productivity was not fully taken into account even by those who conducted our great farm policy debates.

It might be suggested, in short, that if we are to look abroad for a better understanding of current and future trends in agricultural position, we should seek an observer who has given major attention to this problem, and who is well-informed about the present situation. We might turn, for example, to the London Economist.

The writer intends to proceed a little differently than he did from this point in the discussion which he prepared for the

conference, and he would like briefly to explain the reason for this. Professor Talbot very kindly sent the paper to me about a month before the conference, and after reading it over, the writer sincerely felt that there are trends in agricultural position which were not within the scope of the paper, and that note should be taken of these trends at this conference; the discussion during the past two days has convinced the writer that this is so. The writer originally planned to make reference to the evidence of other trends in a series of questions, hoping in this way to avoid giving the impression that he was presenting an independent paper, although his questions were pretty obviously leading questions. But since attention has been drawn, repeatedly, to the crime of straying from the main paper, the writer knows now that he would be convicted despite his precautions. So the writer means to make a clean breast of it, bad conscience or no conscience, and in the time available, to follow up his leading questions with less restraint.

One occurrence in agricultural politics during the past ten years has been the development of partisanship in the consideration of agricultural policy. In the House vote on the 1959 wheat bill, 60 per cent of the urban Democrats, according to the Congressional Quarterly, voted in favor of the bill, despite the efforts which had been made to marshall consumer opinion against it. The bill was opposed by 100 per cent of the urban Republicans.¹ May we consider this to be one indication that the day has passed when congressmen from the rural areas could hope, like Ostrogorski, that after the elections the parties would silently steal away?

If bipartisanship is of declining utility, what might be done to cement coalitions along party lines within the Congress? There is ample basis for continued cooperation between the Farm Bureau and some business and professional groups, which McCune has revealed. Is it realistic to expect that this assemblage will meet opposition from an enduring farm-labor coalition? It is true that many farmers do not like unions — some national farm magazines would in fact give the impression that farmers view unions as the cause of all their troubles. Yet 23 per cent of the farmers in the Wisconsin Agriculturalist poll had carried union cards,² and surveys by Wallaces Farmer, Iowa State University,³

¹ Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report. June 26, 1959. P. 851.

² Wisconsin Agriculturalist, April 19, 1958. P. 18.

³ As reported in Wallaces Farmer, January 17, 1959, a survey conducted by Iowa State University in 1958 revealed that 51 per cent of the Iowa farmers interviewed were "very anxious" to see industry move into their town, and another 40 per cent thought it "would be all right."

Lubell,⁴ and others have indicated that many farmers are becoming more sympathetic toward the desires of the urban worker. Democratic congressmen and senators from mixed constituencies outside the South have obviously found it possible — and presumably quite expedient — to be completely receptive to the demands of both groups.

Can the urban Democrat reciprocate by supporting legislation which would raise farm income? He hears from the consumer, of course, but one may speculate that Senator Clark of Pennsylvania reflected, before voting in support of the 1959 wheat bill, that he might receive more help on the things in which he was interested from senators Humphrey, McCarthy, Douglas, Hartke, Hart, McNamara, Morse, Neuberger, Proxmire, Church, McGee, Carroll, Young of Ohio (and who knows who may be there next year from Kansas, South Dakota, Iowa and Nebraska) than he might have obtained from senators Bricker, Thye, Potter, Ferguson, Cordon, Welker and other Republicans.

A study of the apparent decline in bipartisanship will lead, the writer thinks, to the discovery of some trends in regional position within the Congress, especially with reference to the South and Midwest. The Southerners have provided most of the Democratic component for the bipartisan coalition which formerly dominated the farm policy process in Congress. Fifteen of the 22 Democrats on the House Agriculture Committee are still from what might appropriately be called Southern constituencies, although five of the eleven Democrats on the Senate Agriculture Committee are now from the Midwest. The group making up the other important part of the bipartisan farm policy team were rural Plains and Midwestern Republicans, whose numbers have dwindled somewhat during the past eight years. In seeking basic causes for the decline in congressional bipartisanship, one finds much to indicate that cooperation between representatives of the South and Midwest is becoming increasingly difficult, at least with reference to agriculture. In the realm of agriculture, Southern areas are increasingly aspiring to competition with the Midwest in the production of corn, meat and dairy and poultry products. As a result Midwesterners might be as enthusiastic as Southerners would be unenthusiastic about a quota system which would prevent rapid expansion of the area in which these commodities are produced. Southerners are also trying with some success to lure midwestern industry, which reminds one of the fact that the politics of one area is increasingly union-oriented, while the other continues to resist unionization. There is the old

⁴Samuel Lubell, *Revolt of the Moderates*. Harper and Brothers, New York. 1956.
P. 174.

but rejoined debate over the place of the Negro, which bursts out whenever representatives of the national Democratic party come together. The civil rights question has forced the South into a fairly conservative position on other issues, such as education and housing measures, which are increasingly championed by midwestern Democrats.

In the search for trends in agricultural position we might pose another set of questions relative to the ascendancy of the presidency within our national political system. Recent events which have heightened the crisis in world affairs make it unlikely that the next president will share President Eisenhower's modest concept of the role of the executive branch. It seems to the writer that there is a crisis also with reference to policy dealing with certain agricultural commodities, especially wheat. Over the past eight years the expression "freedom for farmers" has apparently involved, at least in part, the freedom of farm spokesmen to hassle interminably over matters which, from the point of view of the State Department, the taxpayer and perhaps also the farmer himself, need to be resolved. Has the time about come when some decisions will have to be imposed upon the clashing ideological and economic interests of which agriculture is presently composed? In the field of agriculture, too, there is a complexity which has, the writer thinks, been recognized in recent legislative proposals which would provide the executive branch with a variety of tools for dealing with the farm problem, and which would permit the president a good deal of discretion in the use of these tools.

To the extent that the executive branch does undertake, and is permitted, a dominant role in the initiation and development of farm policy, and to the extent that farm policy does become a partisan matter it becomes most relevant to ask what influence farmers can bring to bear in statewide elections and on the process of choosing presidents. The number of farmers is relatively small, and will of course diminish, but there exists abundant evidence in surveys and election returns, corroborated by the testimony of numerous politicians, that the farm vote has been pivotal in recent elections within some states outside the South, due to the fact that this vote is extremely volatile.

Illustrative of the volatility of the farm vote is the spectacular shift which occurred in the Wisconsin farm vote for senator between 1952 and 1958: while there was only a 4 per cent change in the Democratic majority in the three highly populated counties (which produced 35 per cent of the vote in 1958), the total state vote switched from 54 per cent Republican to 57 per cent Democratic.

After comparing the voting behavior of Wisconsin population groups through four elections, Leon Epstein concluded that "the

lavish attention which politicians of both parties give to farmers and farm issues," was due to "the demonstrated capacity of Wisconsin farmers for wholesale switching of party allegiance."⁵ That farmers in some other states similarly possess this capacity has been indicated in studies by Michigan's Survey Research Center,⁶ by V. O. Key,⁷ and by Wallaces Farmer.⁸

What has been the effect of the farm vote since 1952 upon party fortunes? Of the 26 districts held by Republicans in 1952 in which the 1950 population was classified as 65 per cent or more rural, ten of these are now Democratic, or to put it another way, the Democrats have increased their representation in such districts outside the South by 100 per cent. It is also worth noting that in these 26 districts the average percentage of votes cast for Republican candidates declined by 5 per cent as between 1952 and 1954, by 2 per cent as between the 1954 and 1956 elections, and by 4 per cent in 1958, for a decline in average percentage as between 1952 and 1958 from 63 per cent to 52 per cent.

Other evidence of the impact of the farm vote is perhaps to be found in the fact that after the 1958 elections 11 of the 14 states participating in the Midwest Democratic conference had Democratic governors, in the fact that Republicans lost control of the lower house of the state legislatures in eight of the 17 states outside the South in which 1950 populations were 22 per cent or more rural, and in the other 9 states the Republican legislative majority was trimmed.

As to the potential effect of the farm vote in presidential contests, it had, the writer submits, a considerable impact on preconvention politics within the Democratic party in 1960. With respect to the importance of the farm vote in a national campaign it can be noted that a pre-election survey conducted in 1956 by the New York Times indicated that the farm issue appeared pre-eminent in a number of states. A Wallaces Farmer poll following that election revealed that it did have an impact in that state, although foreign policy was, as one should expect, the major issue.

In summary, there is evidence of at least four trends affecting agriculture position — the movement of farm policy into the partisan arena, the growing need for strong leadership from the executive branch on agriculture policy, the widening incompatibility of the South and Midwest, and the increased power of the farm vote in elections.

⁵ Leon Epstein, Size of Place and the Division of the Two-Party Vote in Wisconsin, Western Political Quarterly, 9(March, 1956).

⁶ Angus Campbell and Homer C. Cooper, Survey Research Center, Group Difference in Attitudes.

⁷ V. O. Key, Jr., Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups, Fourth Edition. Thomas Y. Crowell Co., New York. 1958. P. 581.

⁸ Wallaces Farmer. August 1, 1959. P. 46.