

## THE ROLE OF PRESSURE GROUPS IN THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

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A democracy... is the most complex of all the forms of the state, for it has to begin by uniting the will of all so as to form a people; and then it has to appoint a sovereign over this common union, which sovereign is no other than the united will itself.

This 200 - year old statement by the great German philosopher Emmanuel Kant is not a bad text with which to begin a lecture on «The Role of Pressure Groups in the American Political System» The enormous multitude, diversity, and sophistication of such groups involves complexities which Kant could not have dreamed of - just as he could not have envisaged a democracy spanning a whole continent and embracing 250 million people, whose individual wills would have to be united in order to form a people - the United States of America.

The founders of the United States, contemporaries of Kant, who were engaged in inventing a constitution for perhaps three million settlers on a relatively narrow strip along the Atlantic coast of America - a reasonably homogeneous population largely of British and Protestant stock, overwhelmingly occupied with farming, artisanal industry, or commerce - were also only faintly aware of the full dimensions of the problem of citizen participation in democratic - or what several of them preferred

to call «republican» - government. They felt that the collective wisdom and integrity of a parliamentary body neither too large, nor too small, interposed between the greed and other evil passions of the citizenry, on the one hand, and governmental action, on the other, would improve the chance that concern for what is good for the people as a whole would, at least most of the time, prevail over private interests. They saw in a bicameral legislature, with a Senate very differently constituted from the House, an additional safeguard of the public interest. They were aware of the problems of majority rule and concerned about what Jefferson called a «sacred principle.»;

... The will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will to be rightful must be reasonable; that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal law must protect; and to violate would be oppression.

And, even in that small society of three million, a man like James Madison was well aware of the threats to unity. He wrote in one of the Federalist papers:

Among the numerous advantages promised by a well-constructed union none deserves to be more accurately developed than its tendency to break and control the violence of faction... By a faction, I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights or other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.

And, probably most of them would have agreed with Edmund Burke, the great British statesman and political thinker of their time, that for any system of representative democracy to function well, at least most of the representatives in a parliamentary body would have to be able to rise above their loyalty to their narrow constituency and vote accordingly to their conscience of the public good - to be «not a member for

Bristol, but... a member of parliament.» Yet, Burke did not suggest that constituencies could be ignored:

To deliver an opinion is the right of all men; that of constituents is a weighty and respective opinion, which a representative ought always rejoice to hear; and which he ought always most seriously to consider.

The American Constitution was more categorical on this subject. The Bill of Rights begins with this injunction:

Congress shall make on law... abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble to petition the Government for redress of grievances.

There could, then, never be an absolute shield between the people, individuals or factions, on the one hand, and Government on the other. The people as a whole could speak every two years by casting their ballots for those who were to present them - but in between they could look for other peaceable ways to speak as well.

This was simply a pragmatic recognition of the fact that human beings will be impatient in pursuing their self - interest, often couching it in the garb of general, public interest; that they will seek allies and form factions in its pursuit; and that they have always done so, under any system of government. Various pressure groups, religious as well as economic, had much to do with the initiation of the various Crusades, British governmental actions in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were profoundly affected by various trading companies pursuing their commercial interest. Neither did it take very long - two or three decades - before the young American republic began to experience the intervention of rich and powerful individual and corporate interests in its political life. These often used venal and selfish methods to get legislative results in State capitals and in Washington. Chief among their methods

was bribery, where legislators traded influence for money. These deals often took place in the lobbies of legislatures and of the Congress. The pejorative term «lobbyist» to denote influence peddlers was current in the American language by 1832.

The past 150 years have brought no change in the desire of Americans to influence legislation or the actions of Government. But the framework, the dimensions of the society, the variety of interests pursued, the methods employed, and the laws regulating them - all this is totally different. In the process, the sordid and secretive business of rich man «buying» a legislator or executive branch official has become as far as anyone can tell, a rarity. Pressure group politics and lobbying have become respectable, recognized by most as an essential component of a very complex political system. Clearly, every one of us still objects to pressure groups and lobbies representing views and interests opposed to our own - but we tend to regard with some benevolence those with which we agree. But, when pressed hard, most of us would admit that the larger the variety of opinions effectively and persuasively pressed on the political marketplace, the greater the chance that balance and good sense will prevail in the end.

The United States has become a very large and complex nation, indeed. The equivalent of Edmund Burke's «member from Bristol», let us say, the representative from Lafayette, Indiana, has a constituency (including children) well over half a million people. The two Senators from Indiana share over ten million constituents. Each of these is more than just a citizen of Lafayette, or of Indiana. Each is a man or a woman, and at a given time, on a given issue, this may be more important to him or her than geographic allegiance. Each is a worker, or small business owner, or employee, or housewife, or farmer, or college professor, with a whole set of interests and opinions deriving from the particular occupation - and the occupations are far more numerous and differentiated than they were in the eighteenth century. Most constituents also relate themsel-

ves to some kind of ethnic or racial origin - for example, Italian, Irish, Polish, Black, Armenian, American, Indian, Greek, Jew, Arab - and for many, loyalty to their roots has become a dominant determinant of political views. Many of the constituents have strong religious - or anti-religious - views and their particular upbringing or allegiance will determine their views on a whole set of issues, social and political, tying them more closely to some people in California or North Carolina than to their Indiana neighbors. Some constituents are war veterans, or physically handicapped, or old, or lovers of music or other arts, or enthusiastic hunters or fishermen, and each of these circumstances or preferences may help determine their interests and their opinions. Some hold stock in a paper mill or chemical company whose plants pollute water and air - but all are drinkers of water and breathers of air. The list of particularities that can split the Lafayette congressman's constituency into groups - and unite them with constituencies elsewhere - could go on. It is not astonishing that all Americans can no longer feel that they are adequately represented by and representative, let alone any Senator, for whom they cast their ballot.

Organizing groups and associations for political, social and economic ends is an old American tradition. In 1963, some 57 percent of all Americans belonged to such groups. The number is probably a good deal higher now, and it would be much higher if churches, many of which are active in these areas, were included. I could find no estimate for the total number of such trade, professional, and other groups and associations, many of which function only on the local or state level, but I would guess it to be in the tens of thousands. There are about 2,000 which maintain permanent offices - most of which are, therefore, national in scope - in Washington, D.C. Many more have Washington law, public relations, and «lobbying» firms represent them on a retainer basis. They range from the AFL - CIO trade union federatino, probably the most powerful single pressure group, and the prestigious «Business Round Table,» consisting of two or three hundred chief executives of the largest American business corporations, to the «Frozen Onion

Rings Parkers Council); from the Nation Council of Churches to «Common Cause,» a citizens' lobby of some 200,000 members partly devoted to limiting the influence of lobbies. The explosion of pressure groups and lobbies of this kind has tended to diminish the importance of the lobbying activities by individual corporations, though most of the largest of these, as well as many individual cities, states, major universities, and church denominations continue to maintain Washington offices charged with looking out for their specific interests. This explosion has also coincided with the marked decline in the role and power of the two political parties.

The parties always functioned differently in the American political system than in European ones. The Constitution did not foresee their development; but parties soon came into being as convenient mechanisms for uniting parts of the voters behind, or against, one or another issue at a simple and happy time when there were, or seemed to be, only two sides to an issue. They were never truly ideological, or at least never for long. They also became mechanisms for selecting candidates and, if possible, getting them elected, and this gave them some power and control over the actions of elected officials and the ability to occasionally enforce some degree of party discipline on some issues in the Congress - though never to an extent typical of most European parliaments. As the size and diversity of the country grew, this discipline weakened. After World War II, a series of party reforms tended to decentralize authority, as Congressional reforms also diffused authority within the legislative body itself. There are arguments among political scientists about whether it was these reforms that weakened the parties. I myself believe that the reforms simply reflected political realities - above all, the reality that the infinite diversity of views and interests in modern America could no longer be brought to common denominators in two parties alone. Strong voter commitment to them was no longer possible to maintain. They simply became election mechanisms. But election mechanisms are only as powerful as they are effective. When they no longer possess monopolies in the ability to provide funds and

organization for the election of candidates, they no longer have much influence over them after their election. That may be a blow to traditional representative democracy, but not necessarily to democracy itself.

Organized pressure groups have in recent decades certainly eroded this monopoly of the parties. Typically, a candidate for Congress finances his campaign, in addition to personal or family funds or gifts from individuals who know and trust him, from «grass roots» contributions raised by various groups that agree with his stand on various issues of interest to them, and from grants by various organizations closely tied to organized pressure groups or business corporation. Their campaign workers, often much more important than money thousands of people calling on or telephoning potential voters, providing transportation for them to go to the polls, and distributing campaign literature - usually also come from the same grass roots organizations, from local units of national organizations - from groups able to marshal commitment for or against an issue. The parties provide little more than an endorsement and occasionally some support in the form of visits and campaign speeches by nationally known politicians.

The electoral role of pressure groups is, of course, fundamental. The campaign financing laws of the 1970's, originally designed to restrict the flow of private contributions to political campaigns, actually increased that flow. A large number of so-called «Political Action Committees» sprang into being to channel funds of corporate, trade union, or «citizen» origin to the campaigns of candidates judged to be sympathetic to one group or the other. There are relatively few documented cases of a candidate being elected or defeated exclusively by those groups, let alone by a single one among them, but there have been many instances in which they could permit a candidate to circumvent his party's organization in order to get on the ballot and to get elected. Very few congressmen or senators can be said to «belong» to any pressure group or coalition of pressure groups. For that, they tend to command too few votes

in any district or any state. It can be said, in general, that what they get for their often heroic efforts and financial sacrifices in campaigns is «access» to a legislator. Access is the first and vital step in what is perhaps the major activity of pressure groups - lobbying.

I have said that lobbying has become respectable in the United States. It has joined other ancient arts once looked upon with contempt in most societies - like commerce and money lending - in becoming a profession. It is a profession numerous enough - some 20,000 practitioners in Washington alone - to constitute an association designed to lobby on behalf of issues of concern to the lobbyists themselves. The good lobbyist disposes of research resources that make him one of the two or three top experts in the capital on the issue which he seeks to advance or to defeat. The profession is described by one of the chief lobbyists of General Motors in these terms;

Lobbyists are first and foremost experts in government, its structure, its programs, its policies and its legislative process. Lobbyists provide information, advocate and implement policy positions and defend economic, political, technical and social «philosophies.» And, in addition to being the principal contact with the political policy-makers, they are integrally involved in planning and executing the related strategies to accomplish political objectives.

The typical lobbyist will not use his time and his access to approach a legislator whom he knows to be opposed to his quest. He will call on those sympathetic to his cause and on those who have not yet made up their minds. He will not attempt to threaten or to put pressure on those whom he sees, nor hold out rewards to him. He will simply make the best case he can for his cause, supporting it with the best expertise and the fullest set of facts and statistics that can be obtained. The kind of paper on a single issue that he is likely to leave with the legislator is not readily available to the latter in spite



of the extensive research facilities of the Congress and of individual congressional staffs. As he is a professional, who will need his «access» later, for other causes, the lobbyist will make his presentation accurate and complete. He may add to the paper some language he would like to see included in a pending bill.

The congressman or senator will normally seek similar briefs from other lobbyists on alternate sides of the issue. He or his staff will study them all, and perhaps arrange to include representatives of several pressure groups as witnesses in congressional committee hearings on the issue at hand. Being human, he is likely to be influenced by his own preferences, by whatever he owes to a given pressure group, by its probably influence on the vote in upcoming elections, but also by the merits of the case and by something intangible called «public opinion.»

This concept however elusive, has preoccupied political thinkers and politicians at least since the emergence of the printed periodical press in the eighteenth century. Hegel wrote:

Public opinion is the unorganized way in which a people's opinions and wishes are made known. What is actually made authoritative in the state must operate in an organized manner as the parts of the constitution do. But at all times public opinion has been a great power and it is particularly so in our day when the principle of subjective freedom has such importance and significance. What is to be authoritative nowadays derives its authority, not at all from force, only to a small extent from habit and custom, really from insight and argument.

John Stuart Mill, writing about the same time, took a less positive view, writing about the opinion of «mass, that is to say, collective mediocrity».

...What is a still greater novelty, the mass do not now take their opinions from dignitaries in Church or State, from

ostensible leaders, or from books. Their thinking is done for them by men much like themselves, addressing them or speaking in their name, on the spur of the moment, through the newspapers.

It would not be difficult to find an echo a day in the thoughts or words of American political labers in positions of power - though such thoughts or words are less likely to come from those seeking power. An examination of pressure groups in American politics cannot exclude the concept of public opinion, because the use of modern mass communication - the whole landscape of thousands of newspapers, radio and television stations - was and is an essential condition of both the development and the functioning of modern pressure groups. Issues tend to be more newsworthy and dramatic than political parties, and issue - oriented pressure groups are more likely to get media exposure than party organizations. Media expcsure is even more essenial to forming interest groups spread across the country than to politicians, most of whom seek elections in a limited geographic area. But the saturation of the whole atmosphere, especially in the capital. Washington, with media and opinions expressed in or through the media undoubtedly has an effect on members of the legislative and executive branches of the Government alike.

The media, like the pressure groups, can rarely cause anything to happen. They are, however, very much part of the overall system in which things happen. And, the effective pressure group, the competent lobbyist, is very much aware of this. He works hard to get the media - those in a given congressman's constituency, as well as those in Washington - to embrace his cause. With or without the help of the media, he may also attempt to organize mail campaigns by which the legislator's constituents let him know where they stand on a bill under consideration. All this is bound to have an effect on the legislator as he searches his soul and tries to make up his mind. He knows the origin of the press or mail campaign, so they will have no automatic effect on his vote, no more than

the lobbyist's own presentation did. But he may change his estimate of the influence of a pressure group in his home district. It will be a factor. He is not likely to be «owned» by a pressure group or a lobbyist - there are too many of both for that. But it is all part of the discussion and discussion of issues is probably the principal good which pressure groups facilitate in our political system. They provide relatively small and definable fora within which people can express their concerns and which, in turn, can bring these concerns to the attention of public opinion and of the body politic.

I have said early on that pressure groups and lobbies have always existed in all political systems. The American phenomenon may be unique in three respects. First, that a great many of these groups in the United States are devoted to other than the identifiable material interest of their members. The dramatic development of so-called «public interest» lobbies for the protection of the environment, for various aspects of civil rights, or for governmental reform, especially in the last two decades, would deserve another lecture. These groups have also found ways to pursue their goals through the court system, literally writing legal history and assuring a livelihood for thousands of lawyers. The second American peculiarity comes from the fact that most American pressure groups, even the largest and most powerful trade union Committee on Political Education, have found that they must form coalitions - sometimes coalitions embracing oddly disparate groups - in order to obtain legislative results. This has tended to discourage pressure groups from wanting to transform themselves into political parties or from trying to work within one party alone; and, since the coalitions are generally temporary, for or against a particular bill, individual groups are prevented from accumulating a dangerous measure of influence and power. Finally, the most unique feature of the American situation is that these groups and their lobbies are legal. There were, in the nineteenth century, many attempts to eliminate lobbying, but the combination of human nature and the broad guarantees of freedom of speech, assembly, and petition in the Constitution

defeated all of these. Since then, a number of laws have regulated lobbying in the Congress with greater or lesser effect, all of them principally designed to force lobbyists - especially those representing foreign interests - to register and reveal themselves as such; to have the amounts of money spent in lobbying disclosed; to prescribe the limits within which individuals, corporations, and organizations can participate in the electoral process through campaign contributions; and to restrict the lobbying activities of non-profit organizations entitled to tax exemptions. For, it should be stated, a large part of the cost of lobbying and pressuring government for or against a given law is financed by the government itself through tax exemptions. It also frequently finances the cost of law suits brought against its organs by the so-called public opinion lobbies.

This then is the general, hastily drawn picture into which you must fit the only lobby known by most of my Turkish friends - the so-called «Greek Lobby.» Perhaps a little over one percent of the population of the United States consists of people who consider themselves to be Greek-Americans. There is not a large number compared to many other ethnic or racial groups, though, of course much larger than that of Turkish-Americans. They are fairly widely spread over the United States, and there are not many significant concentrations of them in any one place. Many of them are successful in business, the professions, and academia, even in politics; articulate enough and, apparently, cohesive enough to make themselves heard in the cacaphony of voices in the American political market place. They are mostly heard on issues of concern to Greece and to Turkey. Whatever influence they have - for they certainly have no power - comes not from the handful of congressmen and senators who are proud of their Greek heritage, as many Americans are proud of their ethnic roots; not from the voting power of the Greek-American community as a whole; nor even from some kind of sinister conspiracy against Turkey - but from the articulateness and commitment with which they have been able to present their case and establish a small

«public opinion» for it. Turkey, with the help of the small but increasingly active Turkish-American community, has been more successful in pressing its case of late than in the past. I wish you good luck, as your success will make my job much easier.

The political scientist's job is to observe, to describe, and to analyze - not to judge. It would be idle for me to discuss the philosophical or moral rights and wrongs of the American regime of pressure groups and the positive or negative effects of the role of lobbies. Clearly, much could be said on both sides. It is, however, Useful to remember that they are an instrument by which large numbers and a vast diversity of Americans make their voices heard in the political arena. They may be one of the reasons why the principal threat to democracy seen by that astute observer, Alexis de Tocqueville, who noted the role of «private associations» in American politics, has failed to materialize. He wrote in 1835.

If ever the free institutions of America are destroyed, that event may be attributed to the omnipotence of the majority, which may at some future time urge the minorities to desperation and oblige them to have recourse to physical force. Anarchy will then be the result, but it will have been brought about by despotism.

Not a likely scenario, as we would say in 1984.