PART III. THE PROSPECT FOR ACTION

11. *Sources of Support and Leadership*

Readjustments in the structure and operation of the political parties, such as those here proposed, are in the nature of institutional change. Most of these readjustments will not require legislation or any other process of formal enactment. Rather, if they are to come at all, they must result from the growth of supporting opinion. They *call for a widespread appreciation, by influential parts of the public as well as by political leaders and party officials, of the kinds of change that are needed in order to bring about a more responsible operation of our two-party system.* The writing of this report will have been in vain unless the necessary support and leadership are available to bring forth a sufficiently widespread appreciation of the needed change.

Such support and leadership must be found among the groups and the influential individuals that make up the active political forces of the country. Each of these active political forces will have to examine its own position on the matter of a more effective party system. Hence it is worthwhile to review the main elements in the body politic to discover where they may be expected to stand. Perhaps we shall find that the forces of inertia and of opposition are not as great as may be thought.

1. *The Economic Pressure Groups.* If responsible party action is an alternative to government by pressure groups, will the pressure groups oppose change?

Obviously some of them will—particularly those that fear any kind of program based on popular preference and are opposed to having government so organized that it can formulate and carry out such programs. By definition these groups would be groups accustomed to achieve their ends by means other than action based on membership strength. The groups most likely to be in opposition are those *highly organized special interests with small or no direct voting power* which find their main stock in trade in the bad features of the present situation. Such groups *are best satisfied if the individual legislator and administrative official are kept defenseless in the face of their special pressure.* Fundamentally, the groups in this category hold an antidemocratic position.

Organizations with large membership are not in the same category. There are many such organizations, especially in agriculture, in labor and also in business. These organizations today find the public looking over their shoulders, as it were. Even if they wished less attention, they would be unable to escape it. They know that the demands they make upon the parties must at least appear justifiable to large numbers of voters. In other words, organizational demands increasingly tend to

be so formulated as to fit into a more broadly inclusive party program. In turn, the scope of its success in the political arena is being explained to its members by each large-membership organization in terms of the need for compromise with other interests indicated by the party program.

On balance, the large-membership groups should have little to fear, even as interest groups, from responsible party operations. Probably all of them could find points of gain among the proposals of this report. The question of where they will stand as organizations on the broad issue, however, is one that does not lend itself to easy prediction.

Any one of the large-membership organizations may be expected to oppose expressions of party responsibility in particular tactical situations where it finds itself in opposition to the program under which the majority party is trying to operate. Such situations will doubtless recur from time to time. They will inevitably tend to confuse views and weaken loyalties on the problem of a responsible party system as such.

Nevertheless, *it is reasonable to expect that those large-membership organizations with wise leadership will generally support the turn toward more responsible parties.* This will be true especially where either or both of two conditions exist. First, it will be true when the organization feels that it can effectively identify itself with a major part of the electorate, and can thus expect to be recognized in the program of one or the other party. Second, it will be true when the organization is prepared to come to terms with other groups whose interests may be different, and feels that such terms can be worked out more effectively within an improved party structure.

Moreover, any national organization whose members identify themselves mainly with one major political party has special reason for being favorable to more responsible planning and control within the party. The members themselves are likely to clamor for it and the organization has a vital interest in dependable party commitments.

In short, responsible parties may not be desired by special-interest groups that live on concentrated influence in the legislative and administrative spheres rather than on voting strength. But the broader the base and the more general the interests of the group, the more likely is the group to be favorable to party responsibility.

2. *The Party Leaders.* If such responsibility at the national level requires a strengthening of the national party leadership, will state and local leaders oppose it?

Some of them undoubtedly will, especially local *leaders who represent divergent sectional or other special interests within each party.* Again, however, it seems clear that this group is in the minority in each of the two

parties, although some members of the group occupy positions of power. They *will look with disfavor upon any reforms that hit specifically at their personal vested interests.* But this group could be more than offset by the opposing groups in each party who frequently have helplessly watched as the interests of the national party were disregarded with damaging results in their own local situations.

State and local leaders often differ from national leaders of their own party in their responsiveness to national problems, particularly problems that do not have a visible local impact. Such local leaders may be reluctant to see a strengthening of the party's national organization. One answer is intensification of political education within each party. Certainly it is necessary for each national party headquarters to outline emerging national problems with sufficient precision for local party workers, so that all may understand the issues that arise and the necessity for national party action.

The greatest stake of party leaders at all levels is in the winning of elections. Ability to win elections is linked to the party's ability both to arrive at a program that will appeal to a majority of the electorate and to convince the electorate that the program will be carried out. For this reason many party leaders are interested in achieving an organization that would make the parties better fitted for responsibility in government.

This is particularly true of the party officials who hold national party office without occupying a governmental position with its separate interests. Virtually every chairman of a national party committee over the past decades has found grounds for complaint in the situation as it existed, and many of them have striven to do something about it. In the past they have had only limited support either from the public or within the parties. Yet their efforts have led to the first steps toward strengthening the position of the national party headquarters.

Most of the forward-looking leaders in each party are convinced that changes should be made. Many of them may welcome proposals for party reorganization. To some these will be an inducement to come up with effective suggestions of their own.

3. *The Governmental Officialdom.* If responsible parties are an alternative to government by bureaucracy, will the officialdom oppose it? Would such opposition make any difference?

To take the second question first, the answer is that it could make some difference, but not much. The influence of the administrative officialdom exists, but it is of a specialized character, and it is least potent of all on matters of internal party organization and operation.

Even the higher officials who carry some measure of political responsibility are subject to marked limitations on their effectiveness in party affairs.

On the first question, some administrative officials do find their interests closely linked today with certain special-interest groups. But this is largely the direct result of the absence of a good basis of support for a party program which means what it says. On the other hand, officials who work in agencies with strong program interests are among those who would most like to see fuller political responsibility at the top levels. They are the ones who inevitably must identify themselves with popular preferences and who are most strongly affected when these preferences fail to bring about a coherent governmental program.

To the extent that one may talk of government by bureaucracy, it exists because the officialdom has had to fill a vacuum. The vacuum arises precisely because the parties as parties have not been prepared to take responsibility for coming forward with national programs. Hence *greater program responsibility at the level of the political parties is likely to appeal to administrators and the career officialdom.* Certainly the stabilizing effects of party responsibility would in general run parallel to the basic interests of responsible officials in the executive agencies.

4. *Congress.* Will Congress willingly become a factor in support of party responsibility?

The balance of forces and the orientation of the leadership in the national parties is different from that in the congressional party organizations of the same label. In Congress, party organization has favored the "safe districts" of each party, which reflect a one-party system devoid of free competition. On the other hand, the national parties have found that they cannot win national elections with presidential candidates from one-party states or with platforms that have little appeal to the electorate in the two-party states.

As long as Congress gives most of the powerful committee chairmanships to members from the one-party districts and states, the interests of the congressional leadership of each party will show divergencies from those of the national parties and of the electorate as a whole. *It* therefore *cannot be expected that all* of the *congressional leaders*—particularly the senior committee chairmen with divergent sectional or other interests—*will be sympathetic to the concept of party responsibility.*

Each Congress, however, includes a large number of individual members from two-party districts, some very influential in their own right. Many of the outstanding members of Congress in each house are the product of political competition. In some instances, they are able to

acquire enough seniority to reach positions of real power within Congress.

These members can become rallying points for the rank and file when the formal leadership is unsatisfactory, and their effectiveness *as leaders of national opinion* is particularly noteworthy. Such *influential members of each party in Congress can give strong support to the idea of party responsibility.* They can pull together large groups within each house, in the national parties and in the electorate generally.

5. *The President.* What is the stake of the President and of candidates for that office in the invigoration of our party system?

The President in office at any given time *can probably be more influential than any other single individual in attaining a better organized majority party, and thus also prompting the minority party to follow suit.* This is a problem of which no President has been entirely oblivious and to which many of them have given acute attention.

The President occupies a triple position. As chief of state he is expected to rise above the level of party claims and obligations. As party head he is expected to lead the party along lines that will increase its capacity for securing and carrying out a popular program. As an individual in a post of great responsibility, he may well feel that he should have personal power commensurate with what he takes to be his responsibility.

It is clear that any President or candidate for the presidency who intends to work consistently and continuously in the direction of party responsibility may have to be prepared to share responsibility with other truly representative leaders of the party in the shaping of the party's program. He must also be prepared to use the party and its leaders in the process of policy-formulation.

The President could gain much when party leaders in and out of Congress are working together with him closely in matters concerning the party program. As party head, the President could then expect more widespread and more consistent support from the congressional leaders of his party. These, in turn, would present a more united front. As a result, on issues where the party as a party could be expected to have a program, the program of the party, of the party leaders in each house of Congress, and of the President would be the same program, not four different programs.

This general objective requires that the party's program organs become not only stronger but also more representative in a national sense. Here the President and the congressional leaders can exert decisive influence. *With greater party responsibility, the President's position as party*

leader would correspond in strength to the greater strength of his party, and he would be far less in need of going his own way.

Situations will remain, of course, where the President must accept an unshared responsibility both as chief of state and in raising issues of national importance. But on all those broad questions on which in the end it is necessary to appeal to the electorate for support, the President cannot safely dissociate himself from his role as party head in seeking timely counsel with his party.

6. *The Electorate.* Is the electorate a political force so far as the achievement of party responsibility is concerned? If so, where will it stand?

The electorate in the large has always the power to give and the power to take away. On occasion it uses that power decisively. Considered as the total body of citizens to whom both party and governmental spokesmen appeal, *the electorate consists of three main groups: (1) those who seldom or never vote; (2) those who vote regularly for the party of their traditional affiliation; and (3) those who base their electoral choice upon the political performance of the two parties, as indicated by the programs they support and the candidates they succeed in putting forward.*

The first group is clearly no source of support to effect needed change. But it is likely to turn into a source of reward for those who promote such change successfully. Nonvoters can be converted into voters when they become sufficiently convinced that voting is important, which in turn depends upon whether a real choice is presented on matters they personally consider important.

The second group contributes to some extent to the inertia of the body politic, but it does include substantial numbers of citizens who take a continuing interest in the decisions of their party. In each major party, many members can be expected to favor change in the direction of a more responsible conduct of party affairs. Moreover, *the rank and file in each party want their party so organized that the views of the party majority will be respected and carried out.* Only thus can the parties remain confident of continuing support from their following.

The third group, made up of the active but less than wholly committed voters, is usually the deciding factor in elections wherever the two-party system functions effectively. This is the group that enables the electorate to choose between the two parties and to replace one with the other when the voters so decide.

Of these three groups, the first is virtually leaderless. The second finds its leadership mainly in officeholders or candidates for party or governmental office. The third group is assiduously courted by political leaders of all ranks, most of all by the President and by candidates for that

office. It finds its own distinct leadership in all of the places, high and low, from which opinion develops.

In the end, *it may well be the members of the third group, in making their choices at election time, who will decide the question of our country's progress in the direction of a more responsible party system.*

Undoubtedly this group has mixed feelings on the issue. Characteristically, it tends to applaud the mavericks in each party when those mavericks show courage, honesty and devotion to the public good. Measures of party discipline have so far found relatively little support from these elements of the electorate in their capacity as keepers of the public conscience.

Such reactions rest in part on the well-founded conviction that the parties have not been sufficiently responsive to the broad interests of the electorate or of their own membership; that party programs have frequently resulted from processes insufficiently representative to merit enforcement of commitments; and that party discipline has often been used without regard for a responsibly formulated program, and hence for the wrong reasons, or at the wrong times, or toward the wrong people.

These reasons for reluctance toward proposals for stronger party machinery would be in large part removed if the parties became more representative, more program-minded, and more concerned with winning the electorate on issues rather than personalities. Again it is the third group and their leaders that feel most strongly that the present situation is seriously deficient. It is this group that is willing to make an electoral choice and wants a choice to make; that wants to vote for a program and resents not having it carried out. *It is this group that occupies a place of critical importance in supporting a party system able to shoulder national responsibility.*

12. *The Dangers of Inaction*

Support for needed change comes from understanding of the change needed. If the case for change is conclusive, it makes no sense to ignore it stubbornly. In particular, it makes no sense to insist that there is always some risk in effecting changes, for the eventual outcome may not entirely conform to expectations. This result, no doubt, is possible, but it can be averted by appraising new experience while it is gained in observing the changes initiated. To magnify the risk of change out of proportion is to urge equally or more risky inertia. Doing nothing is no help when something ought to be done.

As the preceding section indicates, making the two parties better fitted to carry responsibility for the general line of national policy is an undertaking in which many hands must share. The motivation for sharing in

this undertaking will not be exactly the same in each case. Expected benefits will differ in particulars, depending on the vantage point of each group and each individual playing a part in building a more effective party system. But one strand of reason is common to all of those participating in the effort. All will acknowledge the value of a party system that serves the basic interests of our country in its healthy domestic growth and its international security.

Today this is not a goal to be attended to at leisure, with unhurried step, as time permits. Time, on the contrary, intensifies the pressure for readjustments designed to build a stronger two-party system.

We have looked in one direction in order to find out what sources of support and leadership there are to bring about a strengthened party system. Now, at the end, we should also take a look in the other direction in order to find out how safely the country can wait before starting with the job. What are the dangers in doing nothing? How great are the dangers?

Anything as close to the vital process of representative government as the party system is bound to affect the nation's political life in more than one way. Whatever impairs the essential operation of the party system also produces serious difficulties in other spheres of national existence. Inaction in the face of needed change in this central area therefore increases the dangers which may be present.

Four of these *dangers warrant special emphasis. The first danger is that the inadequacy of the party system in sustaining well-considered programs and providing broad public support for them may lead to grave consequences in an explosive era. The second danger is that the American people may go too far for the safety of constitutional government in compensating for this inadequacy by shifting excessive responsibility to the President. The third danger is that with growing public cynicism and continuing proof of the ineffectiveness of the party system the nation may eventually witness the disintegration of the two major parties. The fourth danger is that the incapacity of the two parties for consistent action based on meaningful programs may rally support for extremist parties poles apart, each fanatically bent on imposing on the country its particular panacea.*

1. *The Danger of an Explosive Era.* Since the end of World War II, Americans have been enjoying a precarious and peculiar peace—peace of a sort. They are accustomed to talking about Two Worlds, with East and West facing each other. In this situation they have come to admit reluctantly not only that the United States must be on its guard but also that its national security must be commensurate with the realities of modern warfare. This means new ventures and new goals in planned

utilization of all our great resources, financial, diplomatic, military, productive, educational, psychological. The degree of needed coordination of these resources for national ends in itself does not pose an unattainable task. *But the political foundation of appropriate governmental programs is very unstable when it is not supplied by responsible party action.*

The same is true with respect to our domestic welfare proper. The Employment Act of 1946 expressed this country's new policy to take care actively that the economy remain on a high level of employment and production. Congress decided that the new policy could not be supported by any single legislative or administrative device but would have to be carried out by coordinated measures in many different fields of governmental activity. Again the necessary political basis can only be furnished by parties committed to programs. Should we ever tumble into a serious economic crisis for lack of such a firm basis, the loss of stature as well as strength may well prove a turning point for freedom throughout the world.

2. *The Danger of Overextending the Presidency.* The presidency is the greatest political office in this country. There is no other republic, in fact, that entrusts to its President as much constitutional responsibility as Americans have entrusted to the President of the United States.

He is the Chief Executive, and as such in command not only of the civilian departments of the Federal Government but also of the whole military establishment. His executive authority puts at his disposal all the administrative resources—in management, fact-finding, analysis and planning—that are available in the departmental system. By making authoritative legislative proposals and exercising his veto power, the President under the Constitution has a significant share in the work of Congress. In addition, he is the central figure in the leadership of his party, in and out of Congress.

It is still more important, perhaps, that the President is the only politically responsible organ of government that has the whole nation as constituency. Elected by the people at large, the President must look upon himself as its spokesman. In him alone all Americans find a single voice in national affairs.

It is therefore a natural tendency that time and again governmental responsibility for formulation of coherent programs and unity of action has been placed upon the President. He has been charged with the preparation of the annual budget—the work plan of the Federal Government that goes to Congress for review and final determination. He has also been charged with the presentation of the government's economic program, submitted to Congress in the periodic economic reports of the

President. He cannot relinquish the burden of establishing the general lines of American foreign policy. He has been charged with the development of coordinated policies to safeguard the country's national security.

In each of these large areas, the President is called upon to prepare the ground, to initiate the process of program formulation, to come forth with proposed programs for which he is prepared to assume political responsibility. As a result, Congress has the benefit of prior effort and concrete recommendations. This division of functions reflects a sound formula, evolved in practical experience. But to apply it effectively, somewhere *dependable political support has to be built up for the governmental program* as finally adopted. *When there is no other place to get that done, when the political parties fail to do it, it is tempting* once more *to turn to the President.*

But the President has no magic wand. If he acts in pursuit of a broad program that has been democratically formulated in his party, nearly all of his party is likely to put itself behind the measures called for by the program. Then the question of political support presents no difficulties, which is the solution suggested in this report. Lacking his party's support for a broad program, the President is left with only one course. He can attempt to fill the void caused by the absence of an effective party program by working up a broad political program of his own.

If he does, however, he has to go out and build the necessary support for that program through his personal effort without benefit of party. There are people who say that this is a realistic way of getting somewhere with good political ideas, especially ideas bound to leave cool both Congress and the larger part of the President's party. Some others say that the scheme is not the happiest thing but the only one practically available under presidential-congressional government.

Yet can there be much doubt about the ultimate implications? *When the President's program actually is the sole program* in this sense, *either his party becomes a flock of sheep or the party falls apart.* In effect *this concept of the presidency disposes of the party system by making the President reach directly for the support of a majority of the voters.* It favors a President who exploits skillfully the arts of demagoguery, who uses the whole country as his political backyard, and who does not mind turning into the embodiment of personal government.

A generation ago one might have dismissed this prospect as fantastic. At the midway mark of the twentieth century the American people has reason to know better, from recent and current examples abroad, what it does not want. Because Americans are so sure on that score, they

cannot afford to be casual about overextending the presidency to the point where it might very well ring in the wrong ending.

3. *The Danger of Disintegration of the Two Parties.* It is a thing both familiar and deeply disturbing that many Americans have only caustic words or disdainful shrugs of the shoulder for the party system as it operates today. This attitude is a provocative comment on American democracy as a realistic proposition. With the national agenda crowded with problems and issues of great import, with the need for effective political processes to act on this agenda growing more urgent than ever, how can the two-party system in its present form survive repeated demonstrations of ineffectiveness and widespread public disaffection? How can the two parties hope to go on?

A chance that the electorate will turn its back upon the two parties is by no means academic. As a matter of fact, this development has already occurred in considerable part, and it is still going on. Present conditions are a great incentive for the voters to dispose of the parties as intermediaries between themselves and the government. In a way, a sizable body of the electorate has shifted from hopeful interest in the parties to the opposite attitude. This mass of voters sees itself as the President's or his opponent's direct electoral support.

Continued alienation between increasing numbers of voters and both major parties is an ominous tendency. It has a splintering effect and may lead to a system of several smaller parties. *American political institutions are too firmly grounded upon the two-party system to make its collapse a small matter.*

4. *The Danger of an Unbridgeable Political Cleavage. If the two parties do not develop alternative programs that can be executed, the voter's frustration and the mounting ambiguities of national policy might also set in motion more extreme tendencies to the political left and the political right.* This, again, would represent a condition to which neither our political institutions nor our civic habits are adapted. *Once a deep political cleavage develops between opposing groups, each group naturally works to keep it deep.* Such groups may gravitate beyond the confines of the American system of government and its democratic institutions.

Assuming a survival of the two-party system in form though not in spirit, even if only one of the diametrically opposite parties comes to flirt with unconstitutional means and ends, the consequences would be serious. For then the constitution-minded electorate would be virtually reduced to a one-party system with no practical alternative to holding to the "safe" party at all cost. The other party would not mind pushing the government into innovations in the political process from which

there might be no return. Granting that the majority of the electorate showed no taste for such innovations, the large probability would remain that the constitutional party might grow fat and lazy on the assurance of continued support. A spoiled party could not measure up to the strain of our times.

Orientation of the American two-party system along the lines of meaningful national programs, far from producing an unhealthy cleavage dividing the electorate, *is* actually *a significant step toward avoiding the development of such a cleavage*. It is a way of keeping differences within bounds. It is a way of reinforcing the constitutional framework within which the voter may without peril exercise his freedom of political choice.