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Pick Leaders Out of a Hat?

Chicago newspaperman Sidney J. Harris devotes his widely syndicated daily column to the task of stirring up men's minds, of provoking discussion and thought. This was the goal of the article below, reprinted from The Chicago Daily News, in which he proposed that officeholders be chosen by lot. How well he succeeded in his mind-stirring may be judged by the remarks of four men from four countries who read his article at the request of this Magazine, and were stimulated to range over a broad field as they sought to answer the questions he raised. The result forms our symposium-of-the-month. – The Editors.

The chief thing wrong with democracy is that it is not democratic enough. I would like to see American officeholders drawn by lot, as they often were in ancient Greece.

There is little democracy in the election of officials under a party system. Each party chooses a man, and then the voters have to choose between two men who are largely dedicated to their own self advancement.

I am convinced that democratic government would average out higher if we put names in a bowl and drew them out at random. By accident we might find a few good men.

Some observers of government are fond of saying that we need to train a professional class of politicians, as we train diplomats for foreign service. They forget that diplomats have done more to start wars than to prevent them.

Most politicians all over the world are alike. They go into the business because they are ambitious, gregarious, power driven, and usually self serving. The exceptions – and there are some – to this rule are freaks who usually become freaks or martyrs.

Socrates remarked that the only man who deserves to be given power is the one who doesn't want it – for he is the man most likely to treat his office as a trust and not as a trough.

And it is both a historical and a psychological fact that people are always better than their Governments. The virtues of the Russians or the Germans were perverted and used for evil purposes by the Nazi and Soviet Governments.

The amateurs could do no worse than the professionals have done in several thousand years. Men of decent instincts, it is true, might change after they take office; but many politicians do not even have decent instincts to begin with.

Techniques of government can be learned in a relatively short time. There are plenty of technicians who can operate at lower levels. What we desperately need are men of goodwill who are not motivated by the lust of privilege, position, and publicity.

Cynicism about politics – which is widespread today – is the most dangerous enemy of our society. The people feel they have little to say about the running of their Government – and especially about the manipulations that may suddenly lead to war. Would we do any worse to pick our leaders out of a hat, in hopes of a lucky hit?

Is This a Jest?

Asks Frederic J. Gysin

Director, Swiss National Museum

Zurich, Switzerland

Am I to take the columnist seriously? Am I to believe that he means what he says? I cannot. Indeed, I doubt we should dignify his proposal by giving time, though, and paper to it.

For tens of thousands of years man has been at work on the problem of how best to choose his leaders. And by great effort and bitter experience he has evolved various systems which, whatever their shortcomings, represent the best mankind so far has been able to think out. Shall we now, in a moment of caprice, throw away all we have learned and say it was of no account?

The columnist respects the ancient Greeks. How much more of their democracy than the mere name survives in country after country the world around?

In Switzerland we choose no man by lot for any post of governmental leadership, and we do not expect to begin doing so. In the 17th Century, it is true, our guilds chose men by lot for service on the town council in some cities. It is also true that in the 17th and 18th Centuries the councils of some of our cities used the names-in-hat system to select governors for lands just beyond the city boundaries. They were choosing men from within their own

numbers, however – men well acquainted with each other, and they themselves had been selected to sit on the council by democratic election.

Modern Switzerland is, as you know, often termed by our visitors as a model of democracy. I will at least say we have evolved a highly representative, very stable kind of government which embraces 25 cantons, and serves our 5 million people well indeed.

Our highest national authority, as you may know, is the Swiss Federal Council, an executive body of seven men representing all our parties and appointed by our two legislative houses. The Executive appoints all principal officeholders and, because of its all-parties make-up, cannot show any favoritism in its choices of men.

One fact which greatly simplifies governmental leadership in Switzerland is that we have no “foreign policy.” We are here. We are neutral. We are the same to all.

I cannot of course speak for all of my countrymen, but I am sure they are generally satisfied with our forms and systems and would agree with me that hats are for wearing, not for choosing leaders.

“The Cry of Despair” (FALSE)

Thinks M.H. Hasham Premji

*Rice Distributor,
Bombay, India*

The Sidney Harris suggestion certainly presents a new angle to the eternal problem of selecting **correct leaders**. The question is mathematical. What are the **chances** of picking **the correct leader** from the hat and, more important, what are the **chances** of **picking the dud** or, worse, **the naïve**? What names will you put into the hat? That is another question Mr. Harris fails to answer.

A people will get the government they deserve. The system of party government with all its defects is **the only workable system** if adult franchise is **the basis** of democracy. Mistakes are bound to occur in **a democracy** in the selection of representatives. It cannot be denied that charlatans have succeeded to seats of authority through the ballot box. But democracy and the process of election as we know are **the only means known to man** after 2,000 years of experiment which **ensures dignity of the individual** and the fundamen-

tal rights of the common man. Harris' is the cry of despair. The answer is to educate the electorate to use their common judgement and to realize the value of their vote. Thus alone can corruption be eliminated and the power of the party caucus and the party boss considerably reduced, if not made totally ineffective.

After all, the party represents or should represent the collective will and wisdom of a section of the people, having common approach to certain fundamental aims and objectives in organized form and to sustain the democratic process of rule by a majority.

Ultimately by process of elimination, it can only result in the final representation of 15 or 20 percent of the electorate if allowance is made for elimination at various stages in the primaries, in the party, and in the electorate for the final choice of the executive representative. But it is better thus than a rule by the few, however intellectual, imposing their will on the many. Continuity and stability can only be obtained by the collective wisdom, however unwise it may show itself at stages and at periods in the history of a nation.

Democracy has the good fortune to produce good leadership at times of national emergency and crisis. England in two wars produced Lloyd George and Churchill, America a Roosevelt, and India Ghandi, Pandid Nehru, and Sardar Patel. These instances can be multiplied manyfold. It can certainly not be contended that greater men could have been produced by any other process than the ballot box.

If this proposition is accepted, then the diplomats and others are only ancilliary to the national policy carrying out ultimately the will of the majority..... Blah, blah, blah ~ RW.

Whose Names in Hat?

Asks W.A. Stevenson

Life Underwriter,

Sherbrooke, Que., Canada

My first reaction to Mr. Harris' proposal that officeholders be drawn by lot is that he is not entirely serious. [*“Not entirely?”*] He is undoubtedly bitterly critical of present forms of democratic government, [*no such “things” has ever ,been*] the system by which candidates are chosen, and the type of

men who are attracted to [🗳️] political careers [🗳️]. Perhaps [*ah hope, ah hope, ah hope*] his suggestion to “pick our leaders out of a hat” is merely his subtle method of attracting attention to this dissatisfaction with the many shortcomings of our present system [*which, in fact, is Oligarchy*].

If he were serious about his proposal, the first thing he would have to explain would be by what method names would be chosen to be placed in the hat. Obviously, everyone’s name cannot go into the hat – the results would be too entirely fantastic – so there would have to be some plan of selection. [*What is so “Obviously” is that this num-num cannot fathom the basic fundamental of “democracy.”*] It is altogether likely that any suitable selection arrangement would gradually develop into nothing but a duplication of the present system. [*Presumably unknowingly (?), what this num-num is so blithely defending is Oligarchy.*]

I certainly have no knowledge of any instance where a leader for any important group was chosen by lot. However, I must admit that I can lay no claim whatsoever to being well informed in this connection.

There is little doubt but that all wars are started by the “diplomats,” if by “diplomats” we mean the leaders of Governments. Certainly they are the ones who have to decide to “declare war,” along with the members of their Governments. [*Notice how several of these people so honorably capitalize the noun “government” the same way we ordinary folks capitalize “God.”*] I do think, however, that with any of the wars which have occurred during our lifetime, there was simply no alternative. If an aggressor nation takes such steps as force our leaders to declare war, does this become a war “started by a diplomat”? Technically, it would be the “diplomat” at the head of the aggressor nation who started it, I suppose. [*An “aggressor nation” like the USA invades currently in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and just recently into Pakistan, I presume?*]

In the earlier days democracy – as we *do not* know it today – groups of people in the various communities gathered together to choose the man they wished to have represent them. Usually the man chosen had already been a leader in the community who enjoyed the respect and confidence of the citizens. [*Has it ever been that the label “politician” has been anything other than an invective?*] It was a high honor to be chosen, but that came very near to being the only reward which could normally be expected. Consequently, it was usually a man of means and high integrity who was chosen. [*Whew! That’s “George-Washingtonizing” demons if I ever saw it!*]

As population grew, this method gradually became more and more unworkable. [*Now yer talking, Bub.*] The whole plan became much more impersonal and, as remuneration from these offices kept going higher, men were attracted to seek office because it could be more profitable for them than their normal means of earning an income. This was the beginning of the “man seeking the office,” and has grown to such an extent that it is now far more the common practice than the exception. [*This Canadian is going to bypass the reality that it is not merely “the voters” who elect what we have routinely suffered but, more precisely, it is the master propagandists in “Mainstream Press & Media” who psycho-engineer that slight majority into voting the way it does. And, more pointedly, it is to that veiled but highly organized ilk behind the propaganda apparatus and their wishes that politicians are first-of-all beholden.*]

In my humble opinion [*Ha!*] we shall never get back to attracting the best men [*Plutocracy*] for candidates unless we can eliminate the profit angle, and public opinion can be sufficiently aroused [*via the oligarches’ Propaganda Central?*] that we will make an effort to seek out the best men [*Plutocracy*] and, by our endorsement and enthusiastic support, convince them that we want them to represent us. [*Dream on, Mr. Stevenson; dream on!*] In so doing we [*sic*] might bring back that feeling of being honored as the true choice of their constituents.

This would have to be a pretty general action, however, as many of our best men [*Plutocracy*] are now restrained from seeking political office because they will not submit to the indignities of a heated political campaign. If I could offer some plan whereby such an arousal might be achieved, I would be a most remarkable person. [*“Offer some plan?” Shoot, this guy can’t even recognize a good plan after Mr. Harris put it right under his nose!*]

Little Precedent for It

Finds Albert P. Bantham

*Owner, Credit Bureau
Schenectady, N.Y.*

Before we take an objective look at Mr. Harris’ proposal we should clarify his reference to “ancient Greece.”

Grecian democracy [*partial EL but never blanket EL*] spanned a consid-

erable period of time and encompassed a number of self-governing “city-States.” At the risk of oversimplification, let us take Athens as an example. It is believed that the population was slightly more than 300,000, but only about 40,000 were citizens and therefore eligible to vote. Excluded from the franchise were women, slaves, laborers, and all those who were subject to someone else, which, interestingly enough, took in most merchants. Actually less than one person in seven theoretically had the right to be selected by lot. *[Bantham has immediately identified – albeit inadvertently – one of the two main reasons why Athenian EL was fatally flawed from its outset – because of this very anti-democratic, pro-oligarchic factor. Their only-partial/not-blanket employment of EL plus this undemocratic restricting of the pool of “candidates” well within the “Non-Deferred-Adults-Only” limitation created a huge foothold to – and no doubt by – the special-privileged oligarches, ultimately for reintroduction of their Total Oligarchy to which History attests. That which is only the illusion of democracy, Friend, is not, is not “democracy.”]*

The number of eligibles was still further reduced. The State of Athens had within its boundaries some rugged mountain country, where roads were scarce or non-existence. When meetings were called for legislative purposes, it was unusual to have as many as 3,000 in attendance, and most of them came from the city itself and its environs. Those people constituted the “Assembly.” Identified with it was another body, the “Council,” which in time became a sort of executive committee of the Assembly. This executive committee selected one of its members daily by lot to serve as Chairman. In effect, this man was the chief of State, its highest officer, so that in practice Athens had 300 or more “presidents” each year.

The Athenians also had a board of ten generals who directed the army and managed military affairs. These men were always chosen by ballot. It also appears that treasury officials and other officers whose jobs required special training or knowledge were also chosen by ballot.

From this very incomplete statement it is apparent that although some of the officeholders were chosen by lot, there were severe restrictions as to the eligibility for the drawing. *[Yes Mr. Bantham, and it was this compromising of the democracy of EL which limited its lifetime to only 105 years.]* Such restrictions in this country would be contrary to our basic concept of equality of citizenship, yet it would be obviously impracticable to draw lots among the 177 million-plus citizens in the U.S.A. An American election district with the same population as Attica, for instance, would contain at least four times as many voters. *[Voters ? Under BEL, there would be none; only candidates.]*

The Greek city-States have been a part of history for more than 2,000 years. It would be unfair to say that their method of selecting leaders was responsible for their decline, but it is agreed that it contributed to the ultimate result. *[No Sir, barbaric invasion plus the incompleteness of EL at home and the absence of EL abroad were the chief contributors to the fall of Greece.]*

As for Mr. Harris' contention that "diplomats have done more to start wars than to prevent them," I would say that it is one of those cliches which is difficult to prove or disprove. The lack of agreement among *[the Establishment's]* historians as to the causes of specific wars in itself precludes generalizations. I think we should keep in mind, also, that in many instances diplomats are "instruments of a higher power." *[The Oligarchy's "religious card."]*

What can we do to obtain the best type *[?]* of citizens for public office? I believe the problem is at least twofold. We must first convince ourselves that holding public office is the highest type of service to which a citizen can aspire. *[Oh, oh; there's that deadly "aspiration" thing, and coupled with "service" too. "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity."]* This objective calls for a vigorous and continuing campaign of education *[their as-always "better schools" card]*, and concurrently it needs a dignifying of the office, *[Ye shall know them by their fruits,]* whatever it may be, by word and form, much as we already do in the judiciary. *[Corrupt politicians appoint their own kind to the Judiciary – always have and always will.]*

We should go one step further. One of the greatest deterrents to the acceptance of public office is the current practice *[1960 – half-a-century ago!]* of villification of our officials. I do not mean that they should be above criticism *[- double-talk -]*, but I do think that we can surround them with sufficient legal protections *["hate-crime" laws?]* that candidates and officeholders, and their families, may be spared this unhappy manifestation of "democracy" as we understand it. *["we?"]* Those who criticize in bad taste should be subject to laws of libel and slander and punished severely for infractions of them. *[Whew!]*

Looking back over my lifetime, I think that, generally speaking, we are getting better public leadership than we have deserved, but we are far from making ourselves into the utopia toward which we should aspire. *[Ah ha! Assigning the primary blame on the accusers – the ultimate ploy of a deceiver.]*