

## BOOK REVIEW

AMERICAN DEMOCRACY UNDER PRESSURE. BY DONALD C. BLAISDELL. New York: Ronald Press Company, 1957. Pp. v, 324. \$5.00.

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It ought to be said at once that Professor Blaisdell's book is not to be mistaken for other than a rather pedestrian textbook for early students of government at the college level. Its usefulness for lawyers and legal education is the glimpse it gives of our rather scandalous lack of organized knowledge about a major institutional development in modern society and politics.

Not that the state of knowledge is as chaotic as this volume would make it seem. When a field is new to scholarship the case study method is the most rewarding device to use. Enough work has been done by American political and social historians to enable an author to make provisional case studies of pressure activity over our entire history. Such groupings as these are pertinent: high degree of involvement of public attention throughout the nation; middle and low general involvement; regionally segregated concern. If a scheme of this type had been systematically used by the author to block out what he was talking about the chief contours of the development would have come into the open.

As it is we have a mish-mash of unbalanced details chosen, it appears, because of availability rather than relevance. The historical sequence of methods favored by private influencing groups is not coherently reviewed. Court records have not been sampled to supplement the episodic revelations of modern congressional investigations. Even the information supplied in Table II about the groups that positioned themselves regarding the Revenue Act of 1951 is not in perspective. The research of economic historians on promotional activity has not been exhaustively combed to provide a working estimate of the stream of national resources that has gone into operations of this kind. The definition of pressure groups does not distinguish, and then apply, gradations of persuasion and coercion that give this subject significance. The social goals put forward for the appraisal of the influencing process are stated without rigor; estimates of the future are unimaginative and dubious; proposals are relatively routine.

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Perhaps a few affirmative remarks about the problem will induce or provoke appropriate scholarly talent to deal with the analysis and appraisal of the pressure network. It is plausible to believe that the system is the twentieth century's addition to the party systems that were evolved by the mass electorate politics of the nineteenth. During earlier years the pressure role was carried out by lawyers, promoters, writers and party politicians serving in "task forces" whose relationship to the modern pressure structure is parallel to that between eighteenth century "factions" and the "political party system" that came afterwards.

Why did the pressure network become conspicuous in this country? Because a decentralized society was undergoing rapid economic development and turned to organized informal methods of influence in order to speed up the elimination of weaker components, the abolition of early crystallizations of privilege and the making of stable working arrangements among a few major groups in nearly all fields of activity. What are the future prospects? The system is becoming routinized and crippled by checks and counter-checks to such an extent that the highest pay-offs will probably shift back to private deals and party managers.

What, if anything, needs to be done about the pressure system in order to harmonize it with the goals of modern popular government and society? Undoubtedly current proposals have some limited usefulness: the network should be less coercive (where it is so), less corrupt (where a "cut" is the tactic), less invisible (where it operates in the dark of the moon of disclosure).

But many Americans are attacking "pressure groups" under the impression that they are striking a mighty blow at a graver danger. Since "pressures" reflect differences we are asked to overcome disunities on foreign and domestic policy by controlling the pressure system. This is a fundamental error. Effective politics must face up to the necessity of doing it the hard way by mobilizing the initiative and capability to dominate the present vortex of contending demands.

It may be that the national enterprise suffers mainly from the cumulative cost of the myriad of "little privileges," such as the devices invented with the aid of lawyers to defeat the tax gatherer. As a nation we are groping after a balance in which the community, acting through the channel of government, hires enough legal talent to outsmart or counter-smart the talent hired by private parties and other government agencies. It may be that we can presently state ratios to guide the apportionment of bodies and talent that will release the largest net flow of resources for public appropriation as against private diversion. Operations of the kind may extend elsewhere through the body politic on other matters. Altogether these measures can dissolve more crystals of private privilege than can be eliminated by direct reform of the by now bureaucratized associations of the lobby-propaganda system.