

## ECONOMIC PLANNING IN THE SOUTH IN THE LIGHT OF PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATION

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After having read the report of President Roosevelt's committee on economic conditions in the South, I am disposed to defend almost any policy that offers any promise in correcting the situation it describes. I shall try, however, to detach myself from this emotional attitude and consider the proposal from a basic philosophical point of view.

The preparation of a paper for this occasion is made difficult by my not knowing what will have been said by the time it is to be read. Economic planning may involve nothing more than recommendations on the part of the planners, or it may involve complete authority in the hands of the planners to carry their plans into effect. Again the character of penalties for failure to carry out the plans may differ. Failure to comply might draw a penalty of death, imprisonment, or banishment, as in Russia, or, it might simply mean a denial of certain economic advantages.

I am going to assume that this proposal to plan for the South carries in some form sufficient power to make the plans effective. I am going to assume also, tentatively, that such planning as will be necessary will involve the surrender of customary freedom and initiative on the part of the citizenship of the South—at least of the farmers and other producers of raw materials.

Stated in this form we are called upon to decide first whether or not such a program could function without the active support of the schools; and second, if it could not, what position the educational leadership should take toward such a program.

In all of the countries where such planned economics do exist, they have felt it necessary to enlist the active support of all educational agencies. In fact the schools, press, radio, movies, and even the churches, have been forced into service to bring the will of those affected into harmony with the government's plans.

If the schools were called upon to do nothing more than explain the pros and cons of the program, there should be no objection from any of them. But would that satisfy? As stated, it has not in countries that have a planned economy. The educational agencies are free to do but one thing, and that is support the government's plans. In fact, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and academic freedom have ceased to exist in these countries. Now if we are called upon to decide what position educational leadership should take upon a proposal that involves these fundamental issues, it seems that there can be but one answer, and that is opposition. Whatever the prospect of material betterment for the immediate present in such planning, it would in the long run be disaster for the future.

It may be argued that the fact that totalitarian states have made education subservient to the state and taken from the schools freedom to question the state's plans is not conclusive proof that such procedure is necessary for the success of the plans. Perhaps it is not, but it is evidence that autocratic or bureaucratic forces are disposed to regard such measures necessary. We have observed that here in democratic America with its long tradition of freedom of speech and freedom of the press, a strong tendency on the part of government officials to resent criticism of some of the New Deal programs. But assume that such plans do not depend for their success

upon uncritical support from the schools and press; that they shall remain, as now, free to question any and all phases of the plans. In this case there could be no objection. It would be the democratic way.

The issue we are trying to face is this: throughout our history we have regarded the schools as agencies of a democratic society, which means among other things, freedom of discussion, freedom for the majority to choose its own form of government after full discussions, and freedom to change its government at will. Shall this traditional procedure now be abandoned, and in its place substituted a bureaucracy that will think and act for the masses? This is the issue. So long as the schools are free to teach and respond to the wishes of the community that supports them as they are today, we have nothing to fear; but the moment they cease to have this freedom, we will most certainly be in danger of losing what is vastly more essential to our happiness in the long run, namely, a maximum degree of personal freedom and our traditional way of life.

If a system of economic planning can be worked out within the framework of a democratic concept of government, it will have the hearty support of the schools; and I think such a program is possible. In fact it seems inevitable that as time goes on there must be an increasing amount of centralized control, not only in economic matters but personal and social affairs as well. This has been true in the past, and there is no reason to expect it to stop. In fact, we may expect the tempo of this change to increase. I read a statement somewhere that over two hundred thousand bills were submitted in legislative bodies during the past two years for enactment into law. Probably the majority of these were designed to restrict personal freedom. Even so, there is nothing undemocratic in this kind of restriction. So long as the people are unhampered in their opportunity to discuss and learn about proposed measures and are free to repeal them after they have tried them out, it is the democratic way. But when we shift large powers to the hands of bureaus and departmental heads who are not directly answerable to the people affected by their powers, it ceases to be a democratic procedure.

If, then, we may accept as a fact that our democracy is to delegate in a democratic way, more and more power to its governmental agencies to control our lives, how may the schools make their best contribution? What changes in policies and programs should take place?

I think there is no question that one of the chief items in the conscious and unconscious Americanization programs of our schools has been the doctrine that individual initiative is to be encouraged on its own merits, that America is still a land of opportunity, and that a man is entitled to keep whatever he wins as long as he observes the laws and pays a reasonable tax. This seems to have been regarded as almost as basic a principle as freedom of speech or freedom to worship as one chooses. We have encouraged initiative in nearly every possible way: we have pointed with pride to self-made men like Edison, Lincoln, and Ford, praised the young man who has "done well for himself," offered courses in salesmanship and personality-building, told our psychology student how to win friends and influence people; we have dangled new automobiles, radios, washing-machines, suburban cottages, before their aspiring eyes; we have raised a temple to individual initiative and smiled on its natural rewards. Is this practice designed to defeat any type of economic planning? Let us consider two groups into which society falls: the satisfied, and the thwarted.

Enterprising men who have succeeded in their enterprises, will feel justified in resenting any interference on the part of the federal or state government which will tend to diminish the fruit of their success; they may go so far as to claim that their own achievements are the only valid measure of their deserts, and that the very fact that they have been able to win

profits is a warranty of their right to the full unhampered enjoyment of those profits as well as of their right to continue their efforts to gain further profits by the same methods.

On the other hand, enterprising men who have failed in their enterprises will feel that they have been cheated out of their proper rewards; they will demand protective tariffs, subsidies, anti-trust laws, unemployment insurance, taxes on large incomes and corporation profits, and finally, possibly on a planned economy; if they are employees they will feel entitled to a general increase in wages; if employers, a general decrease. It is obvious that the demands of these two major groups are conflicting; but the remarkable thing is that both groups will seek to justify their claims by appealing to the same principle—viz., the right of the ambitious individual to a reward proportional to his ambition. Moreover, both groups will probably appeal to democracy as the type of political organization best suited to guarantee this right, and to capitalism as the social system most likely to permit its exercise. But the successful group will look upon any governmental interference as “undemocratic,” “authoritarian,” “socialistic,” and “contrary to the true spirit of capitalism”; while the unsuccessful group will complain that the successful group has constantly exploited the “genuine capitalist democracy” of an earlier era and succeeded so well in undermining it that long before the year 1929 our social system ceased to be the simple laissez-faire individualist economy that “capitalist democracy” was originally supposed to be.

So long, then, as we continue to stress the individual's right to enjoy a reward proportional to the extent of his ambition, the adoption or rejection of a planned economy will depend upon the relative size and prestige of the unsuccessful and successful groups: as long as success is widespread, planned economy will be postponed; as soon as success is confined to too small a percentage of the body politic, planned economy will probably be demanded, no matter how well the successful group has succeeded in educating the public to doubt the feasibility of such a program. This has been pointed out many times. But I think it is worth while to notice that our American faith in the rights of the individual is a constant factor in determining the outcome, whereas the ratio of the successful group to the unsuccessful group is an essentially variable factor. Both factors are dynamic. But our individualism will lead us in one direction as long as the successful group predominates, while it will lead us in another direction as long as the unsuccessful group predominates. As long as this attitude sets the stamp of social approval upon individual ambition as such, the actual course of events will tend to follow the channels into which that ambition is forced by any shift in the balance of power between the successful and the unsuccessful groups. So far, then, as our education has tended to inculcate this attitude, it has prepared the way for some type of planned economy if the economic set-up is such as to make the unsuccessful group predominate.

This brings us to another question. If our emphasis upon the right of the individual should thus facilitate the introduction of a planned economy, how far can we continue to stress those rights when the planned economy is established?

I see no reason why the administrators of a planned economy should inevitably be forced to campaign against individual ambition if the new order is to maintain itself. The new order will be adopted primarily because individual ambitions have demanded it; if the new order is economically and sociologically feasible, it ought to be able to continue its effectiveness without abandoning the slogan which helped bring it into existence.

On the other hand, the educator who seeks to preserve a planned economy in the name of individual rights will have to explain very carefully

that individual ambitions deserve encouragement only when they do not interfere with other individual ambitions. He will have to eradicate the conception that a man's achievements are the primary measure of his deserts. If he fails in this, he will have left the door open for a return of the old system; and if the new order itself is unsuccessful, it will not be easy to keep this door locked. Accordingly it seems to be policy in most countries where a planned economy is now installed, to redouble precautions by adopting a rigorously anti-individualistic educational policy, in which state supremacy is emphasized at the expense of individual ambition.

Need this happen if a system of economic planning is installed in our Southern states? I can see no good reason why it should. While economic thwarting of the individual ambitions of a large group within the state was undoubtedly one of the chief factors which led to the totalitarian planned economics of Italy and Germany, it was by no means the only factor. In these countries the very state itself and not merely one group within the state, was conspicuously unsuccessful as compared with the other great powers, and a formidable military dictatorship seemed the only way to reestablish lost prestige. Dictatorship demands unanimous support. In Russia the problem was somewhat different; but obviously the illiteracy and helplessness of the peasant and the industrial worker would have made the "dictatorship of the proletariat" a hollow phrase indeed if new dictators had not themselves submitted to the dictatorship of a Lenin and a Stalin and the rigors of communistic indoctrination.

We feel an understandable reluctance to abandon our traditional practice of glorification of the individual. Whatever its limitations, it has had a large share in developing individual initiative and drive that has placed this nation in the forefront of the nations of the world in the production of consumer goods and the consequent high standards of living among its citizens. If the time has indeed come when the greatest good to greatest number demands that this traditional policy be abandoned, or partially so, then it is the school's responsibility to point out that it is equally glorious and noble to seek mass objectives through cooperative mass efforts.

There is certainly one other thing the schools could do, and would be expected to do, and that is to explain and interpret fully the planned program. As before suggested the program contemplates its full and free discussion by the schools. This would mean that the public school authorities and teachers, and the teacher training institutions should be taken into the full confidence of the planners. They should know what the plans are, the objectives to be reached, the details of their administration, and everything about the plans that could possibly affect their judgments. Under these conditions the schools would have a clean-cut responsibility to bring to the pupils and the community of which it is a part, a full understanding of the plans.

Whether a planned economy would increase or diminish the amount of peculiarly "cultural" material in our curricula, is harder to predict. A great deal would depend on whether the planned economy were guided by the ideal of maximum production or that of maximum leisure. In the former case, vocational training would presumably gain at the expense of cultural training; in the latter case, cultural training might get the upper hand; for after all, culture is a thing to be enjoyed. To anyone with the right background and an adequate I. Q., a volume of Milton or Voltaire is much cheaper than either a radio or an automobile, and quite as much satisfaction.

To conclude then: democracy is a "way of life"; it involves freedom to change, freedom to limit its own freedom, if it desires. If economic planning can be introduced in the South in a democratic way, and maintained in harmony with democratic principles, the schools could be counted on to perform their part in making such plans work successfully.