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## Untitled Essay on the Need for a National Convention, 1936

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The breakdown of American national life, that is evidenced by about 7,000,000 unemployed and by the ridiculous spectacle of famine and suffering caused by plenty, shows that official democratic government has ceased to rule, in the sense of the democratic purpose of the greatest good to the greatest number. Surely this last aim, and the furtherance of a good and secure life for the whole people, (with all that this implies), is the reason for existence of government. Where resides the power to determine the living conditions, economic and social, of the people, there resides the real ruling power and the effective government.

This real government has passed to the <sup>great</sup> financial, industrial, and commercial interests of the nation. With <sup>g</sup>power goes responsibility. To face these facts, however unpleasant, and to seek remedial action, in the first instance, at the sources of actual power, would seem the practical course for attaining prompt and intelligent reforms in the present crisis.

There should be elected a national convention, chosen according to interest, not geography, with wide powers (from its electors) and elected by millions <sup>the votes of</sup> ~~of~~ citizens interested as capitalists and investors, as managers and clerical staff, as skilled and unskilled workers in the principal necessary industries (including of course agriculture), or as merchants et al, or as transporters interested in such industries; and this convention, with the help of the best experts, should undertake through long deliberation to produce a plan for modification of the current economic and social modes to forms more conformable with the interests of the nation.

Such a Convention would today have importance almost equal to that of the Convention of the Confederation or to that of the convention which wrote the Constitution. It would also have a keener realization



ization than either of  
~~life of the~~ those august assemblages (whose problem was the life of a few millions, mostly farmers) of the problems of 1931. Such a convention might save the situation of the moment. It might conceivably do much to bring America up to date in its economic procedure. It might even lead to a much needed revision of our fragile and archaic and cumbersome procedure upon political lines. Its first duty would be to face facts, untrammelled by an undue reverence for existing laws and even for the Constitution itself, which its framers evidently intended to be a protection against the then oppressions rather than a handicap to resistance against new ones they dreamt not of.

When our political institutions were adopted the problem was to protect a whole people from economic and social exploitation through political powers. The people were given the political power. Their democratic government was geared to protect the individual against political oppression as a means of economic and social oppression. Thus thwarted in one time-honored direction, human greed and lust for power found means through finance, the labor-saving machine, and vast corporations with the absentee ownership <sup>ip to regain</sup> ~~the~~ the real rule of the country, leaving the official government, ill-adapted to cope with the new situation, to engage in shadow-boxing on all real problems, while really interested in office holding, office bestowing, and the zealous representation in each constituency of the interest most conducive to the representative's reelection.

Even if a fiasco as to its great potentialities, such a Convention's <sup>should</sup> ~~deliberations~~ ~~would~~ have immeasurable value in awakening public opinion from its soda-water-tabloid-movie-base-ball transcendent to a realization that it has something to say, in a theoretical and legal democracy, about the life it is to lead. It should also mark the lines of cleavage for the much needed pe-creation of political parties that will represent



a sincere and above-board struggle of conflicting desires. Failing a miracle of wisdom and unselfishness by the proposed convention, the next step must be an American political party embracing all those gentlemen, farmers, laborers, Mechanics, artizans, professional people, "intelligenza", and decent people everywhere who have not sold out to the powers that be. Being the least moneyed class, although they comprise the best of the American people, their entrance into party politics in a leading role will be most difficult.

Both the above alternatives should be tried to the utmost. If both fail, there remains the alternative of general strike and then that of revolution, or of a further stultification of a nation that promised so much in real culture,--good taste, sympathy, real democracy and fine life. What shall the future be? Have the American People irrevocably sold their birth-right for a mess of pottage?

It is easy to propose a Convention, but harder to indicate the line upon which one might hope that it would advance. Gradual demobilization or else crash of the present economic ways is the glaring crux of the problem. All necessary industries can be treated as public utilities and their profits and prices can be controlled. A six hour day and a five hour week can be inaugurated. Evaluations of corporations to approximate the real money ever put into them, with restriction of dividends to a fair return on such amount, can be carried out. Longer contracts and a system of pension by employers for employees of many years' standing; stringent control of stock and bond issues, and of loans abroad; limitation of commissions on financial transactions; a curb on the ruthless handing on to the public of securities underwritten by quasi respectable banks who have really been actuated solely by profit without sense of responsibility to the investor.--These and many other matters should engage the attention of the proposed convention. They should sweep away the Sherman Law as it now so idiotically works for waste and ballyhoo. They would prob-



~~##at##~~ ably insist upon great amalgamations of certain industries like coal so that there should be a reasonable profit to all producer-owners instead of a fantastically high price for the best situated based on a bare return to the marginal mine.

If one could turn the clock back a hundred years and plan a national life for the United States, how splendid it might be! But "equality of opportunity" on top of the justifiable predatory outlook of the pioneer, plus the immigration of people whom economic oppression had imbued with the spirit of economic greed as the sole important thing in life, has made it a hard task indeed for any party to bring this nation back to sanity and a true sense of values. Witness the grotesque worship of material success. Even business men who have shown the greatest assiduity and ignorance on every subject except that of money-making (which Confucius declared the most universal and vulgar among mankind), are looked upon as oracles upon any subject. There is no parallel in any other country.

To a person really interested in these United States, who used to believe in the promise of American democracy, the present is quite the nastiest state the country has got in to. It is ruled by the financially successful. The criterions of success are largely cunning and ruthlessness. Therefore cunning and ruthlessness (not exactly the ideas one would wish to inculcate into people) are held up, with the dogma of success at any price) as mainspring of action. With such criteria accepted, and with financial success as the beatific goal, why should one be astonished at banditry and racketeering and the kindred embellishments of the national life? Wealth the God; many American families with the bar sinister of Sculduggery across their fortunes, power, and ~~responsibility~~ <sup>respectability</sup>; many fortunes just made or in the making over-paid functions of no proportionate value to society,--with all



this example from the ~~un~~worthy idols of the day, should one wonder that "get money by whatever means" should be the watchword. Violent bandits risk ~~##~~ their lives. The bandits who loot the national heritage, and care not what example they set their "inferiors" are ~~pre~~ttly safe.

It is the fine flower of "equality of opportunity", opportunity to rise through cunning and chicanery. It does not help a million men if one of their number rises to be president of a corporation,--or even of the United States. There is nothing more ruthless than "proletarians broken through to power. Much of the conservatism of today, which so far excell that of the "fathers", is accounted for by the fact that so many of our leading men have come up from nothing and cannot take the ~~de~~tached point of view of the well born, who have a different sense of values and cannot worship vulgar wealth. And there are enough people in the United States, if they were articulate, to reverse the trend of American civilization, and prevent it from ~~make###lee#~~ being so well epitomized in the parable of the swine into which the devil (of Greed) had entered and who barged over a precipice?

The question is.- Can America be recivilized, or is to relapse into a stultified population of rabots, a rich country but a poor people?