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Historical Development of Public Opinion*

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ABSTRACT

Public opinion, defined for purposes of this historical review as free and public communication from citizens to their government on matters of concern to the nation, is a phenomenon of middle-class civilization. Its attainment of political significance was accompanied and facilitated by certain changes in the economic and convivial institutions of society and by shifts in social stratification. In its early phase public opinion was preoccupied with domestic affairs, but during the French Revolutionary wars and after the Congress of Vienna the utilization of public opinion in international affairs became generally respectable among statesmen. Effective government by public opinion in the field of foreign affairs today is jeopardized by various specified characteristics of modern democratic civilization.

I

Public opinion is often regarded as opinion disclosed to others or at least noted by others, so that opinions which are hidden or concealed from other persons may be called either private or clandestine opinions. The criterion for distinguishing between private and public opinion thus appears to lie in the realm of communication. In expressions like "public good," "public ownership," "public law," however, our point of reference is not communication but rather a matter of general concern or, more precisely, *res publica.* This political meaning of the word is older than the meaning we customarily associate with the term "public opinion."

Thomas Hobbes, for example, distinguishing public worship from private worship, observed that public is the worship that a commonwealth performs "as one person."[1] According to this usage, the distinctive mark of private worship need not be secrecy; it might rather be heresy. Hobbes mentions indeed that private worship may be performed in "the sight of the multitude," which is an old-fashioned, if more concrete, way of saying "in public." Private worship performed in public he regarded as constrained either by the laws or by the "opinion of men." Correspondingly, in considering the nature of heresy, Hobbes remarked that it "signifies no more than private opinion."[2] If we follow the lead Hobbes gives us, we may arrive at an understanding of public opinion that makes political sense and is useful for the purposes of this historical review.

Let us understand by public opinion, for the purposes of this historical review, opinions on matters of concern to the nation freely and publicly expressed by men outside the government who claim a right that their opinions should influence or determine the actions, personnel, or structure of their government. In its most attenuated form this right asserts itself as the expectation that the government will publicly reveal and explain its decisions in order to enable people outside the government to think and talk about these decisions or, to put it in terms of democratic amenities, in order to assure "the success" of the government's policy.

Public opinion, so understood, is primarily a communication from the citizens to their government and only secondarily a communication among the citizens. Further, if a government effectively denies the claim that the opinion of the citizens on public matters be relevant, in one form or another, for policy-making or if it prevents the free and public expression of such opinions, public opinion does not exist. There is no public opinion in autocratic regimes; there can only be suppressed, clandestine opinion, no matter how ingenious or careful the government may be in permitting an organized semblance of its true nature for the sake of democratic appearances.[3] Finally, for public

[1] *Leviathan,* II, 31.

[2] *Ibid.,* I, 11.

[3] By way of illustration, no German public opinion existed in occupied Germany after the second World War under the rule of military governments, despite the speedy liberalization of press and

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opinion to function, there must be access to information on the issues with which public opinion is concerned. This means, above all, that the actions of the government must not be kept secret. Thus, Jeremy Bentham demanded full publicity for all official acts so that what he called "the tribunal of public opinion" could prevent misrule and suggest legislative reforms. Public communication of governmental acts (*Oeffentlichkeit*) was demanded by the political philosophers of enlightenment. The practice of submitting a budget to popular representatives, if not to the public at large, was established in England by the time of the revolution in 1688 and in France at the time of the French Revolution of 1789. The more democracy progresses and the more intensely public opinion is cherished as a safeguard of morality in politics, the louder become the demands for the abolition of secrecy in foreign policy as well. After the first World War such demands led to the so-called "new diplomacy." Under the system of the League international treaties had to be registered so as to prevent the inclusion of secret clauses.[4]

If public opinion be regarded primarily as a public communication from citizens *to* their government, it may be distinguished from policy counseling by policy advisers or governmental staff members, which is one of the processes of communication bearing on decision-making *within* the government (whether it is democratic or not). Public opinion is also distinguished from diplomacy, which may be regarded as communication *among* governments. Finally, one may speak of government information and propaganda activities as communications *from* a government to its own citizens, other government personnel, or foreign audiences in general.

Public opinion can of course also be studied with a view to what I have called its secondary communications process, i.e., with respect to the communications it involves *among* the citizens. In this context questions of the relations between opinion leaders and followers arise; so do problems of the size and anonymity of the public, the competence and representativeness of its organs, the direction and intensity of the interest taken in matters of public concern, the level and organization of public discussions, etc. On many of these aspects of public opinion our historical knowledge is limited. The absence of a history of public opinion, which combines descriptive detail with analytical clarity, makes it doubly necessary not to lose sight of the most conspicuous landmarks in this history, namely, the dates when governments ceased to censor the public expression of political dissent. In France free communication of thought and opinion was proclaimed as "one of the most valuable of the rights of men" during the Revolution of 1789. In England censorship in the form of licensing was abolished with less fanfare about a century earlier (1695).

II

Older discussions of our subject do not differ much from modern writings in estimating the influence popular opinions exert upon the actions of men; they differ in assessing the influence popular opinions have or should have upon the actions of statesmen and philosophers. It was common knowledge among older writers that opinions hold sway over the success, conduct, and morals of men. Shakespeare called opinion a mistress of success, and Pascal regarded it as the queen of the world. John Locke pointed out that men judge the rectitude of their actions according to three laws, namely, the divine law, the civil law, and the law of opinion or reputation, which he also called the law of passion or private censure. He attributed overwhelming power to the third

radio, especially in the American Zone, and despite the expression of many opinions in public, because the Germans were neither free to act politically according to their own decision, having been deprived of sovereignty, nor were they free to criticize the actions of the American Military Government or of the Allied Control Council.

[4] For a discussion of secrecy in international negotiations versus secrecy of international agreements see Harold Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (London: T. Butterworth, 1939) and *Peacemaking 1919* (new ed.; New York, 1939), pp. 123 ff.

law, the law of opinion, because man fears the inexorable operation of its sanctions. Dislike, "ill opinion," contempt, and disgrace, which violators of the law of censure must suffer, force men to conform. When Locke was attacked for his allegedly cynical view of morality, he defended himself by saying that he was not laying down any moral rules but was "enumerating the rules men make use of in moral relations, whether these rules are true or false." "I only report as a matter of fact what *others* call virtue and vice."[5]

Locke did not advance the view, however, that popular opinion should govern the actions of governments. Characteristically, he used the phrase "the law of *private* censure" as a synonym for "the law of opinion." Moreover, he described the law of opinion "to be nothing else but the consent of private men, *who have not authority enough to make a law.*"[6]

Locke did not say that he shared popular opinions about morality. He knew that independent minds examine such opinions, although they cannot lightheartedly provoke the censure of others in whose company they live by showing disregard for what others consider to be right and wrong; the philosophers would otherwise "commit the fault of stubbornness," as Montaigne charmingly put it.[7]

Sir William Temple's essay *On the Original and Nature of Government*, written in 1672, has often been cited as an early discussion of public opinion. Temple observed that it cannot be that "when vast numbers of men submit their lives and fortunes absolutely to the will of one, it should be want of heart, but must be force of custom, or opinion, the true ground and foundation of all government, and that which subjects power to authority." "Authority rises from the opinion of wisdom, goodness, and valour in the persons who possess it."[8]

But Temple did not speak of public opinion. He spoke of opinion or "general opinion." As a matter of fact, he used the term "vulgar opinion" when he wished to designate opinions critical of authority. "Nothing is so easily cheated," he said in his essay *Of Popular Discontents*, "nor so commonly mistaken, as vulgar opinion."[9] Temple's concern was with the nature and stability of government. He opposed the contractual theories of government, no matter whether they advanced a sociable or bellicose view of man in the state of nature. If men were like sheep, he once wrote, he did not know why they needed any government; if they were like wolves, how they could suffer it. Contending that political authority developed out of habits and feelings formed in relation to the father of the family, he regarded opinion as a conserving force which helped the few to govern the many. The word "public," however, he reserved for the common good or the common interest of the nation: the "heats of humours of vulgar minds" would do little harm if governments observed the public good and if they avoided "all councils or designs of innovation."[10] It was precisely such innovation with which public opinion was concerned when it came to be called "public opinion" in the eighteenth century.

Even Rousseau, who put public opinion in its modern political place, demanding that law should spring from the general will, still spoke of opinions also in the traditional, predemocratic way. In his *Nouvelle Héloïse* he equated "public opinion" with vain prejudices and contrasted them with the eternal truths of morality; and in his *Considerations about the Government of Poland* he said: "Whoever makes it his business to give laws to a people must know how

[5] John Locke, "The Epistle to the Reader," in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. A. C. Fraser (Oxford, 1894), I, 18. (The italics are Locke's.)

[6] *Ibid.*, Book II, chap. xxviii, sec. 12. (Our italics.)

[7] *Essays*, Book III, chap. 8.

[8] *The Works of Sir William Temple: A New Edition* (London, 1814), I, 6–7.

[9] *Ibid.*, III, 39.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

to sway opinions and through them govern the passions of men."[10a]

The discussions of popular opinions up to the eve of the French Revolution lay much stress upon the power of opinions as means of restricting freedom, upon their prejudicial character, their changeability as to both time and place; they also indicate that men of judgment, whether philosophers or statesmen, deal prudently with popular opinion, and especially during the eighteenth century there are discussions to the effect that governments should take account of popular opinion instead of merely imposing their laws on the people. Finally, in the traditional discussions popular opinion was seen in close relation to imagination and passions rather than to intelligence and knowledge. Jacques Necker, who was the first writer to popularize the notion and the term "public opinion" throughout Europe at the eve of the French Revolution, still spoke of "imagination and hope" as "the precious precursors of the opinions of men."[11]

It did not occur to older writers that the "multitude" should know more about government than a good ruler, an experienced counselor, or a political philosopher. Only when economic and social inequalities were reduced and the rising elements in the population became unwilling to put up with political inequality could the claim be advanced that the government should make concessions to public opinion. Public opinion is a phenomenon of middle-class civilization. At the end of the *ancien régime* in France, Count Vergennes, one of M. Necker's colleagues, wrote in a confidential report to the king: "If M. Necker's public opinion were to gain ascendancy, Your Majesty would have to be prepared to see those command who otherwise obey and to see those obey who otherwise command."[12] With reference to Locke's remark about "the law of opinion" one might say that Count Vergennes warned the king of public opinion, because the people who formed it had gained enough authority to make a law.

III

In his fierce criticism of Edmund Burke's ideas on the French Revolution, Thomas Paine remarked that "the mind of the nation had changed beforehand, and the new order of things has naturally followed the new order of thoughts."[13] The observation that the habits of Frenchmen had become republican while their institutions were still monarchical is well sustained by modern research, although it should be borne in mind that it was a numerically small class which had slowly changed its habits.

Lord Acton attributed the growing influence of public opinion in eighteenth-century France to the rise of national debts and the increasing importance of the public creditor.[14] It is curious that this important insight into the origin of public opinion has not led to more detailed research by the historians of public opinion. The history of public opinion has been written primarily with reference to channels of communication, e.g., the market place in ancient Greece; the theater in Imperial Rome; the sermons, letters, ballads, and travels in the Middle Ages; pamphlets, newspapers, books and lectures, telegraph, radio, and film in mod-

[10a] Rousseau regarded public opinion as "the standard of free society," but as questionable from a "transpolitical point of view." Cf. Leo Strauss, "On the Intention of Rousseau," *Social Research*, XIV (December, 1947), 473.

[11] *A Treatise on the Administration of the Finances of France* (3d ed.; London, 1787), I, xvii. The two best expositions of the treatment of "opinion" and "public opinion" by political theorists are Paul A. Palmer, "The Concept of Public Opinion in Political Theory," in *Essays in History and Political Theory in Honor of Charles H. McIlwain* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), and Hermann Oncken, "Politik, Geschichtsschreibung und öffentliche Meinung," in *Historisch-politische Aufsätze und Reden*, I (Berlin and Munich, 1914), 203–44.

[12] Cited from Soulavie's *Mémoires historique* in F. Tönnies, *Kritik der öffentlichen Meinung* (Berlin, 1922), p. 385.

[13] *Rights of Man* ("Modern Library" ed.), p. 141.

[14] "The Background of the French Revolution," reprinted in *Essays on Freedom and Power*, ed. Gertrude Himmelfarb (Boston, 1948), p. 267.

ern times. We know more about the history of literacy, the press, the law of sedition, and censorship than about the relationship between the struggle for budget control and the history of public opinion or about the emergence of social institutions other than the press which were instrumental in the political rise of public opinion.

In some older sources the close interconnection between public finance and public opinion is fully recognized. In the French *ancien régime* publicists and financiers no less than the middle classes at large condemned public loans. Bankruptcy was demanded by courts of justice and by political philosophers like Montesquieu. "It was a reaction against these proposals of bankruptcy that the French constitutions at the end of the eighteenth century proclaimed that the public debt was sacred."[15]

Jacques Necker had occasion to observe as minister of finance that his contemporaries were much concerned with his fiscal policies. He, in turn, regarded it as the "dear object" of his ambition to acquire the good opinion of the public. He contrasted the "extensive horizon" of the public with the court at Versailles, the place of ambition and intrigue, and made the interesting observation that the minister of finance could not consider the court as a "suitable theatre" for himself; Versailles, he said, was a place appropriate perhaps for ministers of war, the navy, and foreign affairs, "because all the ideas of military and political glory are more connected with the pageantry of magnificence and power."[16] By contrast, the minister of finance "stands most in need of the the good opinion of the people." Necker recommended that fiscal policies should be pursued in "frankness and publicity" and that the finance minister "associate the nation—as it were, in his plans, in his operations, and even in the obstacles that he must surmount."[17] Necker's great contribution to the history of public opinion was not so much what he wrote about its power but rather his important innovation of publishing fiscal statements (*compte rendu*) so that the merits and faults of government policy in this field could be appraised in public. He did so "to calm the public which began to distrust the administration of finances and feared that the income of the treasury would not offer any security to the capital and interests of its creditors."[18] Mme de Staël, Necker's daughter, regarded this innovation as an important means for pacifying public opinion. The government, she observed, was forced by its need for public credit not to neglect public opinion; but Necker did not yet hold the view that the general will of the public should take the place of the government. He represents a transitional phase between the predemocratic and the revolutionary-democratic views of public opinion.

The institutional changes which preceded the restriction of absolutist rule and contributed to the rise of public opinion can be stated in this historical sketch only in bare outline. Gains in economic power of the middle class and the gradual spread of literacy are merely two aspects of this process.

The first impetus toward increasing literacy was given by the Reformation, which created a broad reading public seeking edification without the mediation of priests in religious literature written in the vernacular.[19] During the eighteenth century popular religious literature was gradually replaced by secular reading materials. Content and style of fiction changed in the process. The novel of manners and the epistolary novel, both primarily addressed to women, made their appearance, and the moral concern of the readers was shared by their authors. It became possible for them to earn a liveli-

[15] Gaston Jeze, "Public Debt," in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, XII, 602. Cf. also Thomas Paine's remark: "The French nation, in effect, endeavored to render the late government insolvent for the purpose of taking government into its own hands: and it reserved its means for the support of the new government" (*op. cit.*, p. 175).

[16] *Op. cit.*, p. liv.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. lxxiii.

[18] August Wilhelm Rehberg, *Über die Staatsverwaltung deutscher Länder* (Hanover, 1809), p. 58.

[19] Herbert Schöffler, *Protestantismus und Literatur* (Leipzig, 1922).

hood by writing. The professionalization of writing was furthered by the breakdown of the patronage system and its replacement by the collective patronage of the anonymous public.[20]

Parallel with the formation of a broader literary public, the middle classes transformed musical life. Public concerts to which an anonymous audience paid admission fees took the place of concerts given by the personal orchestras at the courts of European rulers and in the luxurious residences of distinguished aristocrats.

The expansion of the reading public was accompanied by the development of related social institutions such as reading societies, reading clubs, circulating libraries, and secondhand book stores. The establishment of the first circulating library in London coincided with the publication of Richardson's *Pamela*. Secondhand book stores appeared in London during the last third of the eighteenth century. European reading societies were influenced by the model of the American subscription libraries, the earliest of which was founded by Franklin in Philadelphia in 1732. Thirty years later there were several *cabinets de lecture* in France, and the first German reading circle seems to have been established in 1772.[21] In addition to fiction—the favorite literature of the ladies—books on history, belles-lettres, natural history (i.e., science), and statistics were read in these circles. But the favorite reading matter was political journals and scholarly magazines. In fact, the reading societies of the eighteenth century must be considered as the collective patrons of the moral weeklies which contributed so much to the articulation of middle-class opinion on matters of moral concern.

In German social history one looks in vain for the social institutions which in England and France contributed powerfully to the formation of public opinion, the coffee-house and the salon, respectively. Germany's middle classes lacked the commercial strength that made the coffee-house so important in England. In Europe, coffee-houses date back to the middle of the seventeenth century; they became popular as centers of news-gathering and news dissemination, political debate, and literary criticism. In the early part of the eighteenth century, London is said to have had no fewer than two thousand coffee-houses. Addison wanted to have it said of him that he had brought philosophy out of closets and libraries "to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea tables and in coffee houses."[22] The English middle classes began to accomplish their own education in the coffee-houses.

Like the history of the coffee-house in England, that of the French salon goes back to the seventeenth century and even farther to the Italian courts of the Renaissance. In the history of public opinion the French eighteenth-century salons were important because they were the gathering places of intellectually distinguished men and women who cherished conversation, applauded critical sense, and did not regard free thought or irreverent ideas as shocking unless they were advanced pedantically. During the second half of the eighteenth century the salons governed opinion in Paris more effectively than the court. Men of letters were received regardless of their social origin and met on terms of equality with the most enlightened members of society. The salon, a place where talent could expect to outshine ancient titles, was an experiment in equality that assumed paradigmatic importance within a hierarchically organized society.[23]

[20] See Charlotte E. Morgan, *The Rise of the English Novel of Manners* (New York, 1911).

[21] Walter Götze, *Die Begründung der Volksbildung in der Aufklärungsbewegung* (Berlin-Leipzig, 1932), p. 64.

[22] On the history of coffee-houses in England see E. F. Robinson, *The Early History of Coffee Houses in England* (London, 1893); Ralph Nevill, *London Clubs: Their History and Treasures* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1911); Hermann Westerfrölke, *Englische Kaffeehäuser als Sammelpunkte der literarischen Welt im Zeitalter von Dryden und Addison* (Jena, 1924).

[23] Cf. Helen Clergue, *The Salon: A Story of French Society and Personalities in the Eighteenth Century* (New York and London, 1907); Erich Auerbach, *Das französische Publikum des XVII. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1933); Chauncey B. Tinker, *The Salon and*

As D'Alembert said in his *Essay upon the Alliance betwixt Learned Men and the Great,* "the man of quality, whose ancestors are his only merit, is of no more consequence in the eye of reason, than an old man returned to infancy, who once performed great things."[24]

In Germany the salon never exercised the influence on the dignity and the literary style of authors or on the manners and opinions of their public which it did in France. Germany was a poor, divided, and in part overmilitarized country; it had neither a Versailles nor a Paris. The social institutions which helped to pave the way toward the social recognition of the ideas of enlightenment in Germany were the predominantly aristocratic language orders of the seventeenth century and the stolid moral and patriotic societies of the eighteenth century in which civil servants played an important role. Both of them may be regarded as forerunners of the Masonic lodges in Germany. They practiced egalitarian rituals, opposed the conventional customs of the courtier, extolled merit and virtue as the new principles of prestige, read and discussed John Locke, and cultivated mutual confidence as a bulwark against the dangerous intrigues in politics.

These institutional changes in European society which led to the emergence of public opinion as a prominent factor in politics may be summed up without regard to national differences as follows. A closed and restricted public gradually developed into an open one, enlarging both its size and its social scope as illiteracy receded. This movement ran its full course only during the nineteenth century. It extended to the lower classes much later than the late eighteenth-century attempts to parade the Third Estate as the nation would make us believe. From the end of the eighteenth century we have glowing accounts of the widespread eagerness of people to read and to learn, but illiteracy was still widespread. It has been estimated that about 57 per cent of the men and 27 per cent of the women could read and write in France at the time.[25]

Geographically, the process of diffusion spread out from urban centers, with the United States, England, and Germany taking the lead over France, where printing presses as well as the socially influential circles were concentrated in Paris.

The economic and technical landmarks of this process of diffusion are reflected in the cost of mass communication to the poorer classes of society. Here again progress was made more rapidly during the nineteenth century than the eighteenth century. Taxes on newspapers and advertisements were fairly high until 1836 and partly until 1845; the poor could not afford to buy them. Even postal services was not readily available to them until 1839, when penny postage was introduced. Harriet Martineau said at the time that the poor now can "at last write to one another as if they were all M.P.'s."[26]

As regards the men of letters and the publicist, the prerequisite of their wider influence was the recognition of merit as a criterion of social status, so that authors could climb the social ladder regardless of origin merely on the strength of performance. It might be added that the rise of public opinion presupposed a redefinition of scholarship and a program of its missionary diffusion to laymen, a process in which "the world" took the place of "the school" and education became a technique for the establishment of a classless society.

One of the earliest and most radical in-

English Letters (New York, 1915); Conférences du Musée Carnavalet, *Les grands salons littéraires* (Paris, 1928).

[24] Jean d'Alembert, *Miscellaneous Pieces in Literature, History and Philosophy* (London, 1764), p. 149.

[25] As Aulard has pointed out, "it was by the political song, sung in the theatre, in the cafes and in the street, that the Royalists and Republicans succeeded, principally at Paris, in influencing the people," during the French Revolution (quoted by Cornwall B. Rogers, *The Spirit of Revolution in 1789* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1949], p. 26). Cornwall's book is a monographic study of the propagandistic importance of oral communication, especially lyrics, during the French Revolution.

[26] Quoted by Howard Robinson, *The British Post Office* (Princeton, 1948), p. 302.

stances illustrating this missionary zeal can be found in Christian Thomasius' ***Einleitung zur Vernunftlehre,*** published in 1691. Thomasius' believed that it was only due to differences in social status that not everybody arrived at wisdom; science ought to be the common property of all mankind. Everybody was capable of becoming learned, and the scholar should disseminate rather than attain knowledge.[27]

Thomasius' notion of scholarship is close to Condorcet's doctrine of education or Sieyès' views of public opinion. Condorcet's aim was to render it impossible through education to use the masses as "docile instruments in adroit hands" and to enable them to avoid the "philosophic errors" on which he believed "all errors in government and in society are based."[28] And Sieyès wrote: "Reason does not like secrets; it is effective only through expansion. Only if it hits everywhere, does it hit right, because only then will be formed that power of public opinion, to which one may perhaps ascribe most of the changes which are truly advantageous to mankind."[29]

[27] In chap. xiii Thomasius discussed the origin of error, distinguishing between the "prejudice of human authority" and "the prejudice of precipitation." (Cf. the reprint of this chapter as well as of the equally relevant chap. i of Thomasius' *Ausübung der Sittenlehre* [1696] in F. Brüggemann [ed.], *Aus der Frühzeit der deutschen Aufklärung* ["Deutsche Literatur, Sammlung literarischer Kunst und Kulturdenkmäeer, Reihe Aufklärung," Vol. I (Berlin and Leipzig, 1928)]). It has been said that Thomasius repeated "the Lutheran teaching of general priesthood in the secularized form of general scholarship" (Götze, *op. cit.*, p. 20). For the relation between prejudice and the demand for enlightening education, cf. also especially Thomas Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies (London, 1889): "The immediate cause . . . of indocibility is prejudice; and of prejudice, false opinion of our own knowledge" (I, 10, § 8); and *Leviathan*, chaps. xiii and xv.

[28] For a convenient summary of Condorcet's views on education, contained in his "Report on Education," presented to the Legislative Assembly on April 20–21, 1792, see Salwyn Schapiro, *Condorcet* (New York, 1934), chap. xi, pp. 196–214. On the educational views of leading writers in the eighteenth century see F. de la Fontainerie (ed.), *French Liberalism and Education in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1932).

[29] *The Third Estate*, chap. vi.

IV

The elimination of prejudice, ignorance, and arbitrary government which the advocates of enlightenment wrote upon their banner in order to base the commonwealth upon reason and civic virtue is frequently regarded as a rationalistic program in which no cognizance was taken of the so-called "irrational" factors of human ntaure. For this reason, propaganda has often been presented as the counterpart to the process of public opinion. It is erroneous, however, to believe that the advocates of enlightenment neglected or overlooked the emotional facets of life.

The advocates of enlightenment themselves proposed the equation of government with adult education. They proposed, for example, that the government should engage orators for political instruction as it paid priests for religious service (Weckherlin); that attendance of courses on the nature of society should be made obligatory for the acquisition of citizenship (Mercier de la Rivière); that the government should control and publish newspapers to increase loyalty to the sovereign (Quesnay); and that historical works should be written to increase patriotism and national pride (Voss).

Perhaps even more important than these suggestions of political indoctrination were the proposals for the organization of public spectacles and celebrations in order to evoke enthusiasm for common causes and enlist the sentiments of those who did not think. Dupont de Nemours in *Des Spectacles nationaux* developed a theory of national celebrations based on the idea that the desire for pleasure is the driving force of mankind. The people should be brought to develop their patriotic virtues by way of exaltation over public celebrations in which they were to participate—an idea, one might say, which was realized in both the institutionalized public celebrations of the French Revolution and in the Nuremberg festivals of the Nazis or in May Day celebrations. Other writers who pointed to the educational function of national festivals and public plays were Diderot, Condorcet, and Rousseau,

and, in Germany, among others, Stephani, Voss, and Zachariä.[30]

In view of these facts it cannot be maintained without qualification that the modern advocates and practitioners of totalitarian government propaganda have superseded the theory and practices of the reformers who helped public opinion on its way to political prominence. It would be more correct to say that the participation of large masses of the population in public affairs, characteristic of both government by public opinion and modern tyranny, is spurious in character under totalitarian regimes in that it is demonstrative rather than determinative of government action. It may also be said that in totalitarian regimes mass participation in politics is regarded by the intellectuals as a design to conceal the truth about power processes, whereas in the eighteenth century such participation was considered as a measure toward the ultimate elimination of the irksomeness of power, if not of power itself.

It was believed that man guided by reason and inspired by rectitude would reduce politics to a calculation in happiness and do away with war. Nevertheless, the French Revolution gave rise to war and to war propaganda. It created what William Pitt called "armed opinions" and Jomini "wars of opinion." Liberty, equality, and fraternity were not the aims of Frenchmen; they were held to be rights of man regardless of political and national affiliation. The French revolutionary armies did not wage war against other countries but for the liberation of man from old, oppressive governments.[31] Foreign exiles in sympathy with the new regime were admitted to the French clubs, the National Guard, and the public departments. They could even be found in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.[32] They were organized in foreign legions fighting the battle for France. The Girondists imagined that foreign nations in their desire to be delivered from the tyranny of their rulers and priests would rally in support of the revolutionary principles. Robespierre's program of April 24, 1793, envisaged a universal republic in which all citizens in all countries unite against the aristocrats and the tyrants.[33] As Burke pointed out, before the time of the French Revolution there had been no instance "of this spirit of general political factions, separated from religion, pervading several countries, and forming a principle of union between the partisans in each."[34]

Nor were the enemies of France capable of restricting the war to its former, military dimensions. They responded to the ideological challenge. In October, 1793, His Majesty's Government sent a declaration to the commanders of the British forces in which France was accused of attacks on "the fundamental principles by which mankind is united in the bond of civil society."[35] And William Pitt found the most eloquent expression for the ideological issue raised by the French Revolution. On June 7, 1799, he spoke in the House of Commons, moving that the sum of £825,000 be granted to His Majesty to enable him to fulfil his engagements with Russia. Pitt pointed out that this subsidy would be used for the deliverance of Europe. In reply Mr. Tierney contended that the funds were to be used against the power of France "not merely to repel her within her ancient limits, but to drive her back from her present to her ancient opinion." Mr. Pitt rose once more and said, among other things:

[30] Götze, *op. cit.*, pp. 97 ff.

[31] According to Alexis de Tocqueville, the Revolution, "a considéré le citoyen d'une façon abstraite, en dehors de toutes les sociétés particulières, de même que les religions considèrent l'homme en général indépendamment du pays et du temps" (*L'Ancien régime et la Révolution* [8th ed.; Paris, 1877], p. 18).

[32] Albert Mathiez, *The French Revolution* (New York, 1928), p. 217.

[33] Corneliu S. Blaga, *L'Évolution de la technique diplomatique au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris, 1937), p. 421.

[34] Edmund Burke, "Thoughts on French Affairs," in *Reflections on the French Revolution and Other Essays* ("Everyman's Library" ed.), p. 289.

[35] Quoted in W. Allison Hillet and Arthur H. Reede, *Neutrality*, Vol. II: *The Napoleonic Period* (New York, 1936), p. 8.

It is not so. We are not in arms against the opinions of the closet, nor the speculations of the school. We are at war with armed opinion; we are at war with those opinions which the thought of audacious, unprincipled and impious innovations seeks to propagate amidst the ruins of empires, the demolition of the altars of all religion, the destruction of every venerable, and good, and liberal institution, under whatever forms of policy they have been raised; and this, in spite of the dissenting reason of men, in contempt of that lawful authority which, in the settled order, superior talent and superior virtue attain, crying out to them not to enter on holy ground nor to pollute the stream of eternal justice;—admonishing them of their danger, whilst, like the genius of evil, they mimic their voice, and, having succeeded in drawing upon them the ridicule of the vulgar, close their day of wickedness and savage triumph with the massacre and waste of whatever is amiable, learned, and pious, in the districts they have overrun.[36]

V

After the Congress of Vienna the utilization of public opinion in international affairs became, as it were, respectable also among statesmen who did not pursue any revolutionary cause. Once the importance of public opinion was discovered as a new factor in international relations, it became tempting on moral as well as on expediential grounds to utilize it. Neither Canning, who believed that public opinion should be invoked in the pursuit of British foreign policy, nor Palmerston, who held that public opinion founded on truth and justice would prevail against the force of armies, realized that they were continuing to revolutionize European diplomacy by their actions. A diplomat of the old school like Metternich was appalled by Canning's enthusiasm and could see only preposterous folly in the Englishman's notion of public opinion as "a power more tremendous than was perhaps ever yet brought into action in the history of mankind."[37]

The art of arousing public opinion became nevertheless a valued skill during the nineteenth century even of statesmen like Bismarck, who failed to respect public opinion, remained indifferent to its moral claims, and made no attempt to raise its level of competence. Bismarck condemned policies inspired by sentiments or moods. He regarded public opinion as dependent, to a large extent, on mood and sentiment, incapable of the calm calculations that had to precede political decisions. Nor did he believe in the political insight of public opinion. "As a rule," he said, "public opinion realizes the mistakes that have been committed in foreign policy only when it is able to review in retrospect the history of a generation."[38] Given the political constitution of Prussia and the Reich, Bismarck could afford to make foreign policy against public opinion, if he regarded it as necessary and if he had the confidence of his monarch. Thus, in 1866 he waged war against the will of almost all Prussians, but he also refused to risk war against Russia by interfering in Bulgaria, a course rashly sponsored by the liberal press. Similarly, in the Boer War, Chancellor von Bülow disregarded German public opinion, which strongly favored interference, in the well-considered interest of the country.

The scope of governmental influence upon public opinion was limited throughout the nineteenth century and, if compared with recent activities in this regard, had an almost patrimonial character. In nineteenth-century Europe public opinion was a synonym of opinions expressed by the political representatives of the electorate, by newspapers and by prominent members or organizations of the middle class. In England their faith in the beneficial effects of discussion and the persuasiveness of liberal opinion upon the conduct of domestic affairs grew particularly under the influence of Bentham and his followers.[39] Toward the

[36] *British Historical and Political Orations from the 12th to the 20th Century* ("Everyman's Library" ed.), pp. 146–48.

[37] Nicolson, *Diplomacy*, p. 73.

[38] *Memoirs*, III, 157.

[39] The Benthamites did not share the belief in natural rights. Bentham had deplored the Declaration of Rights in France because he regarded them

end of the nineteenth century Lord Bryce pointed out that in England the landowners and "the higher walks of commerce" not only form the class which furnish the majority of members of both houses but also express what is called public opinion. He held that in Germany, Italy, and France as well public opinion was "substantially the opinion of the class which wears black coats and lives in good houses."[40] He contrasted these conditions with those prevailing in the United States, where he believed government by public opinion to exist, because "the wishes and views of the people prevail even before they have been conveyed through the regular law-appointed organs."[41]

Like De Tocqueville and other nineteenth-century writers,[42] Lord Bryce recognized the decisive importance of class distinctions in limiting participation in public opinion, although he failed to appreciate the limiting influence upon public opinion exercised by pressure groups in the United States. He also lacked the perspicacity of De Tocqueville, who detected the threats to freedom of thought which public opinion in conditions of social equality presents. Reactionaries, romantics, and Marxists attacked liberal convictions and threw doubt upon the morality, disinterestedness, and representativeness of middle-class opinions in the nineteenth century. They were not concerned, however, with freedom of thought; they contributed, in fact, to its modern decline. De Tocqueville, however, clearly saw that in "ages of equality" the liberation of the people from ignorance and prejudice by enlightenment may be purchased at the price of equalizing thought.

> There is, and I cannot repeat it too often, there is here matter for profound reflection to those who look upon freedom of thought as a holy thing and who hate not only the despot, but despotism. For myself, when I feel the hand of power lie heavy on my brow, I care but little to know who oppresses me; and I am not the more disposed to pass beneath the yoke be cause it is held out to me by the arms of millions of men.[43]

VI

In its early phase public opinion showed a marked preoccupation with domestic affairs, i.e., with issues of immediate concern to the life of the citizens. Foreign policy issues appeared less relevant, but they were expected to be ultimately relegated from the realm of power to that of discussion and agreement, as governments would become more enlightened. Power politics and professional diplomacy became designations of various evils, and war was expected to vanish, since only power-hungry governments uncontrolled by public opinion would embark upon them. If wars did occur, governments by public opinion would enter them in the conviction that the national interests they defended were the interests of enlightened mankind. While this picture is simplified, it remains basically true that, according to the theory of public opinion, it is the function of government in foreign affairs to make the world safe for the rule of public opinion.

The expectation that public opinion safeguards morality and promotes reasonableness in foreign affairs was nowhere entertained with greater optimism than in the United States. In 1909 President Taft said about the compulsory arbitration of international disputes: "After we have gotten the cases into court and decided, and the judgments embodied in a solid declaration of

as metaphysical and did not believe that political science was far enough advanced for such declarations (cf. A. V. Dicey, *Law and Opinion in England* [New York, 1930], p. 145, n. 1).

[40] Lord Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, II, 260.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 257.

[42] Thus Bluntschli in the *Staatswörterbuch* (1862) said of public opinion that "it is predominantly the opinion of the large middle class." This notion was predicated upon the conviction that public opinion was a matter of free judgment. "Without training of the reasoning power and the capacity to judge there is, therefore, no public opinion." For the same reason, Bluntschli observed that public opinion is possible in political matters but alien to religious piety (*Ergriffenheit*). Cf. Oncken, *op. cit.*, pp. 229 ff.

[43] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York, 1948), II, 11–12.

a court thus established, few nations will care to face the condemnation of international public opinion and disobey the judgment."[44] Above all, Woodrow Wilson stated the gospel of public opinion as a purifying force in world politics. Said he about the first World War:

> National purposes have fallen more and more into the background; and the common purpose of enlightened mankind has taken their place. The councils of plain men have become on all hands more simple and straightforward, and more unified than the councils of the more sophisticated men of affairs, who still retain the impression that they are playing a game of power and are playing for high stakes. That is why I have said that this is a people's war, not a statesman's. Statesmen must follow the clarified common thought or be broken.[45]

Since the end of the first World War, however, the faith in the power of public opinion to render world politics reasonable has been shaken. There are many events which contributed to this demoralization: the failure of the League of Nations; disillusionment concerning the lofty war aims of the Allies and the general distrust of propaganda which spread between the two world wars; the rise of fascism and national socialism in countries of old civilization and with no lack of liberal traditions; the absence of inspiring peace aims during the second World War; the sterility of the resistance movements in the realm of political ideas; the use of weapons of mass destruction in the attainment of victory; and the quick transformation of the wartime coalition into intense hostility between its main partners even before peace was formally established. Despite war crimes' trials, attempts to re-educate the conquered peoples and the insistence on world-wide freedom of information, the moral energy of the liberal faith in the moralization of foreign as well as domestic affairs by means of enlightenment appears to have been spent. The hope that public opinion will be able to solve the problems of international policy has waned. Do we still maintain the belief in the perfectability of man, faced, as we are, with the overwhelming experiences of the twentieth century, in man's manageability, and with the advances in both the technology of destruction and moral apathy?

In democratic countries, foreign policymakers continue to address public opinion in order to obtain ultimate approval of their actions and, on a deeper level, absolution from the qualms and moral uncertainty which public opinion demands of them until they do so. Public opinion does not permit the enjoyment of power, because it suspects that its enjoyment indicates its abuse. Public opinion, which appropriated to itself the moral standards to be applied to power, wants power to be a burden which it alone can lighten; but the complex structure of world politics in which the individual citizen finds himself involved, often beyond his understanding, does not permit an easy transfer of moral rules from the domain of his private concern to actions of larger consequence. Moreover, the reduction in moral energy which I have mentioned further emaciates the effective functioning of public opinion in foreign policy.

When governments attempt to unburden themselves on foreign policy matters to the people and its representatives, they find it trying and difficult to foster the formation of a responsible public opinion on issues demanding action or on actions that have been taken. There is first the need for secrecy which is felt to be a prerequisite of national security. I do not wish to question the urgency of this need, but, when information vital for intelligent and critical judgment on policy matters is kept from the public, it is not possible to have government by public opinion. Recently, Senator Brian MacMahon pointed out that informed policy decisions affecting our defense budget depend on information concerning our atomic stockpile, which is withheld from both Congress and

[44] Quoted from W. H. Taft's *The United States and Peace* in C. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–39* (New York, 1942), p. 32.

[45] Quoted from *Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, ed. C. Seymour, IV, 291, in Carr, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

the American people. He said, "When we debate the necessity of a 65,000 ton aircraft carrier or a 70 group air force or universal military training, I fear that we quite literally do not know what we are talking about."[46]

Less far-reaching in consequence than the safeguarding of vital secrets, but no less in conflict with the prerequisites of an intelligent public opinion, is the manner in which measures requiring sacrifices on the part of the people are presented and justified. It is easy and rewarding to engage public opinion in consideration of ultimal success or gains or of progress. It is difficult to have the public face the dangers to cherished forms of life in true perspective. It is even more difficult to present such dangers when they are not temporary but require continuous alertness because they are a permanent price to be paid for active participation in world politics. During war, patriotism and national self-interest can be more readily counted upon to support policies involving sacrifice. In times of peace, however, privations imposed by the government are easily unpopular or believed to be so. It is, therefore, tempting to policy-makers to justify minor sacrifices, which they deem necessary, in terms of major risks to national safety, in order to arouse and gain the support of public opinion.[47]

By the same token policy-makers are likely to present their actions in the field of foreign affairs to public opinion in short-range perspective, because the public responds to immediate issues most readily. Thus, the true time range of political action may be lost sight of by the public if not by policy-makers as well. The point in time to which the planning of foreign policy must extend differs, of course, from issue to issue. But it does not seem paradoxical to say that it lies characteristically between the two extremes with which public opinion seems most preoccupied, namely, the immediate and the remote. If it is true that moral apathy, secrecy, preoccupation with safety, and lack of an appropriate time perspective interfere with effective government by public opinion in the field of foreign affairs, public opinion cannot perform the function which its eighteenth-century advocates envisaged; but this situation should not be viewed as a verdict but as a challenge to seek and attain improvement as far as it can be attained.

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[46] *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists,* Vol. V, No. 3 (March, 1949).

[47] When Secretary of State Dean Acheson appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services committees to discuss the program of foreign military aid on August 8, 1949, the following discussion took place:

Senator H. Alexander Smith said that the administration's handling of the program had led "many people to think that there must be some crisis imminent that we don't know about."

"The state of the world," Mr. Acheson responded, "is not one to allow anyone to relax. There has never been a more hazardous world in peacetime."

"But you want no war scare?" asked Senator Smith.

"Nobody," replied the Secretary, "is attempting to give anybody a war scare. I repeat that the situation in the world is hazardous and unstable" (*New York Times,* August 9, 1949).