

PRESSURE POLITICS IN NEW YORK. By Belle Zeller. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1937. Pp. xi, 310.

"Under our existing constitutional and economic system, pressure groups are indispensable.\* \* \* the practical experience and knowledge of interest groups can well be and is utilized in making legislation workable—in pointing out the application of the law to stated cases. \* \* \* The origin of programs of social progress and retrogression are undoubtedly more the responsibility of organized minorities than of any other agency in our whole political, economic, and social structure."<sup>1</sup>

The members of legislatures are laymen. A very large number of the problems with which they deal are completely foreign to their own experience and direct knowledge. The expert spokesmen of the special interest groups, on the contrary, can speak with practical concreteness and authority. Furthermore, except in a few cities, the legislatures in the United States are nowhere adequately representative of the diverse elements which make up the modern industrial community. The numerous pressure groups with their special lobbies, consequently, supplement the geographic basis of legislative representation with an occupational basis. Inevitably, since this extra-legal representation is left to the initiative and control of the respective interest groups which desire it, neither the representation nor the organization and influence of the groups conform even remotely to the principles of proportion. Thus neither the legislature nor the lobby is based upon proportional representation.

Most ineffective of all have been the lobbies of the "consumers" and the "people." On the other hand, the various lobbies of the workers, the businessmen, and the farmers have reached a high degree of effective organization and influence. In between these extremes come the numerous professional, welfare, racial, religious, and other groups, varying widely in their organization, strength, methods, and influence. The author, concerned primarily with the practice rather than the principles and theories, mainly through letters, interviews, and observation over a period of five years, has collected a vast amount of factual data of great value in the understanding of the whole problem of the pressure-group. The material is clearly presented. The approach is scholarly and objective.

The author has placed suitable emphasis upon the new trends in the techniques of the pressure-groups. A lobby confined to the legislative chambers and the legislators is an institution of a past stage. The modern lobby is developed to cover a much vaster field. It must reach the people as a whole. Highly perfected, therefore, have been the techniques of propaganda. And no longer is pressure-politics a seasonal phenomenon. There is probably still an acceleration of the tempo during the period of a legislative session; but throughout the year the pressure goes on through propaganda distributed in the mails, released in varied forms in the schools, poured forth from the platform, and broadcast through the press and the radio, in a veritable babel of competing and conflicting warnings, demands, and programs.

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Each group exerts pressure on the basis of its own special interests, which may or may not be in accord with the common interests of all. The legislature is fundamentally, in theory at least, concerned with enactments based upon the needs and the opinions of all.

On the one hand, the legislature stands in need of much more efficient equipment—a permanent expert secretariat to facilitate the collection, analysis, and classification of facts, to do reference work, to draft bills and other documents, and to carry on other secretarial functions; a single unified committee system to replace the separate committees of the two chambers; a more effective system for conducting hearings; interim committees and commissions to function between legislative sessions for the gathering of data and the preparation of programs; possibly a split legislative session. Unicameral legislatures might to advantage be substituted for the bicameral plan.

On the other hand, the pressure-groups are equally in need of regulation and co-ordination. The lobby-laws up to now have been relatively ineffective. The pressure-groups in the United States perform the functions which in Republican Germany, Finland, and, to a small extent, France were for a time assigned to the Economic Councils. They supply criticism and advice by groups directly interested in pending legislation. To confine them to those basic functions is the objective of governmental regulation so as to eliminate the dictatorial pressures in all their ramifications and threats to democratic government.

Why not concentrate on the problem of establishing an adequate legislature, representative of every group in the constituency, equipped with an adequate expert secretariat, and organized with the techniques needed for efficient performance, and thus eliminate the causes which have given rise to the pressure-groups? Admittedly that is a generous order; but democracies will need to fill some sizable orders in the near future if they are to continue in the running.

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