

REFORMING THE MODERN STATE: THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE GROUP.

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THERE are in the revolutionary movement small groups of radicals who say that they hate the modern State and would destroy it root and branch. Argument would be wasted on these fanatics, most of whom are intellectually contemptible. The frank and honest enemy of the present State—Nicholas Lenin, for example—admits that what he seeks to destroy is the Capitalistic or Bourgeois State—the State which, as he asserts, is controlled and dominated by a relatively small plutocratic class. To a Proletarian State he has no objection, even when it is ruthless, tyrannical and autocratic. That Communism, unless wholly voluntary and based on the consent of all, implies the existence of a State, it is impossible to doubt. To abolish the State is to abolish compulsion and trust wholly to the better side of human nature for order, cooperation and equality of opportunities and rights. Perfect adaptation of mankind to social life, we are told by some Utopians, will render the State unnecessary. Perhaps, perhaps. But such faith or prophecy is utterly barren.

A very different case is presented by those who would refashion and reform the modern State in order to make it truly democratic, truly representative, as well as efficient and worthy of our support and respect. The shortcomings of the modern State all recognize. Their name is legion, and many of them are grave. But is the State worse than the average character of the citizens who compose it? Do we not see our own human faults and vices in the mirror formed by the State? Or are we much nobler and finer than the State, and is it possible to elevate and improve the State merely by a regrouping and reorganization of the many elements that enter into its make-up?

It has been affirmed by many writers that the ablest and most comprehensive exposition of the theory that the State can be thor-

oughly renovated, purified and reformed by means of certain structural and administrative changes, and without waiting for any improvement in average human nature, is found in a volume entitled *The New State*, the author of which, Miss M. P. Follett, is a new American figure in the arena of social and political controversy. According to certain reviewers, she has more clearly than any other writer pointed out and explained the crux of the political problem of democratic states and has made an inspiring and fruitful contribution to the philosophy and science of politics.

This is high praise indeed. The book, therefore, challenges serious attention, which, so far, it has hardly received. It should be analyzed, carefully studied in the light of history and contemporary experience, and candidly criticized where it is weak or superficial. It is easier to commend in general terms than to criticize with discrimination and honest frankness.

We have heard a great deal in recent years about the "great state" and the "efficient state." No one has told us how to achieve greatness or efficiency for our states. Usually the advocate of greatness or efficiency in the state has a pet theory or dogma of his own, and all that his plea or argument amount to is that, if the state will kindly consent to reorganize itself on the particular basis proposed by him, or her, it will shed all its faults and vices and become great and efficient. No evolutionist can take such pseudo-science seriously. It serves no useful purpose to talk vaguely about "the state." Reformers should consider and discuss voters, electors, average men and women, and the politicians, legislators and diplomats whom these men and women choose to act for and in the name of the state. "The state—it is I," said a tyrant. "The state—it is we, millions of men and women of all sorts and conditions," say democratic societies of our own day. To change the state, we must begin with the voters—or at least with a certain proportion of them—and induce them to seek and strive for greatness and efficiency in the state.

Now, the chief merit of Miss Follett's work is that it recognizes these basic truths and attempts to prove that the state *can* be vastly improved by organizing and using social groups, instead of non-descript and motley "crowds," as the foundations of the democratic body politic. In other words, we can get more and better results in politics without changing average human nature, simply by rearranging and regrouping the human materials and elements existent in the state. Let us form genuine groups; let us encourage them

to meet and think matters out collectively, to formulate their needs and expectations, and to send fit and faithful spokesmen to the local and general legislatures. When representatives represent genuine social, and not merely industrial or professional groups, or mixed crowds, we obtain something like a consensus of the competent and not lame and unsatisfactory compromises arrived at by log-rolling, lobbying, shifty and insecure attempts to placate all and avoid making enemies.

This, roughly, is the thesis of *The New State*. A few direct quotations may be given here to bring out more fully the author's quintessential contention:

"Democracy is not a sum in addition. Democracy is not brute numbers, it is genuine union of true individuals. The question before the American people today is—How is that genuine union to be attained? How is the true individual to be discovered? The party has always ignored him; it wants merely a crowd, a preponderance of votes. The early reform associations had the same aim. . . .

"We find the true man only through group organization. The potentialities of the individual remain potentialities until they are released by group life. . . . Group organization must be the new method of politics, because the modes by which the individual can be brought forth and made effective are the modes of practical politics." (P. 6.)

"The group organization movement means the substitution of intention for accident, of organized purpose for scattered desire. It rests on the solid assumption that this is a man-made, not a machine-made, world, that men and women are capable of constructing their own life, and that not upon socialism, or any rule, or any order, or any plan, or any Utopia, can we rest our hearts, but only on the force of a united and creative citizenship. (P. 8.)

"I go to a committee meeting in order that all together we may create a group idea, and idea which will be better than any one of our ideas alone; moreover, which will be better than all of our ideas added together. For this group idea will not be produced by any process of addition, but by the interpretation of us all. (P. 24.)

" . . . We must live the group life. This is the solution of our problems, national and international. Employers and employed cannot be exhorted to feel sympathy one for the other; true sympathy will come only by creating a community or group of employers and employed. Through the group you find the details, the filling-out of Kant's universal law. Kant's categorical imperative is general, is

empty; it is only a blank check. But through the life of the group we learn the content of universal law." (P. 47.)

"Not socialization of property, but socialization of the will is the true socialism. The main aim in the reconstruction of society must be to get all that every man has to give, to bring the submerged millions into light and activity." (P. 74.)

The first question that occurs to a critical, though sympathetic, reader of the book is: What is a group? Miss Follett, strangely enough, does not give us a satisfactory definition of this term. She is at some pains to explain that she does not overemphasize the value of "neighborhood" organizations for political and social purposes. Neighborhood organizations are useful, no doubt, but they do not and cannot supplant all other types of organization. Parents may profitably meet to discuss the trials and needs of their children in the schools of the neighborhood. Residents of a given precinct may profitably meet to discuss street cleaning, police and fire protection, and like subjects of common concern. But such meetings and conferences will not do away with differences of opinion and feeling in respect to broader and deeper municipal, state, national and international issues. The holding of neighborhood meetings until doomsday will not convert all those participating in them to Free Trade, or Government Ownership, or Compulsory Social Insurance, or Limitation of Armaments, or a League of Nations to Secure Peace.

Again, I may be a lawyer and a member of a Bar Association. Is that association a group? Yes and No. It is not a "creative" group within Miss Follett's definition. Nor is a College Faculty such a group. Nor is a Medical Association, nor a local trade union.

Where, then, do we find the "creative" group that is to make a new state by its subtle and ennobling influence on its units? It does not exist, as yet, and it is, therefore, necessary to create it. Miss Follett finds some encouraging evidence of group action in contemporary legislation and contemporary cooperation, but there is nothing really new in her illustrations. Men always have cooperated and always will cooperate in various ways, wholly outside of the sphere of state activity. Men cooperate to build and maintain churches, to support Art Institutes, to provide themselves with diversion and recreation. Men form associations to protect their economic interests and promote their collective welfare. All these institutions and factors have admittedly failed to produce the *new* state. If we desire a new state, argues Miss Follett, we must begin

by "living the group life," and thus develop the true individual while at the same time, though indirectly, socializing the individual will. Hitherto there has been neither a true individual nor a true society, or state. There have been particularist individuals, self-assertive, vain, aggressive individuals, and there have been parties, factions, crowds, artificial and mechanical devices for the maintenance of peace and order in the crude and clumsy state. New parties, new platforms, new movements, no matter how radical they may be, will beget the same results so long as we treat our human material in the old way. Let us abjure communism, syndicalism, guild socialism, single-tax-ism, what not, since none of them has been spontaneously developed by creative group-life. We are putting the cart before the horse. Programmes and platforms will follow in due course if we but change our modes and methods of political and social organization.

There is an important and vital truth in Miss Follett's philosophy. It is this—that much of the intolerance, arrogance, bigotry, prejudice, misunderstanding that obstruct the way to sound social policies is the fruit of intellectual and moral isolation, and that the most urgent need of modern society is mutual understanding and the sympathy that results from such understanding. Miss Follett's reference to employers and employed suggests a striking illustration of this truth. Employers and employes do not understand, respect or trust one another, and this is the fundamental difficulty. Friendly intercourse in shop councils or otherwise is the parent of many improvements. Good will is released, directed into the right channels. It was there in the first place, but dormant, unapplied. Group discussion removed inhibitions, cleared minds of suspicion and bias, and the path was made smooth and pleasant, not for grudging, reluctant compromises, but for rectifications and adjustments heartily approved by all.

It is indisputably true that we cannot have too many opportunities for group discussion, for neighborly and amicable conferences of men of divergent views and aims. The results of such matching of minds, of efforts to grasp other points of view, of seeking counsel and light, are always and everywhere beneficial. They not only make for justice and righteousness, but they make for these ends in the happiest way. Solutions of knotty problems reached by amicable and tolerant discussion leave no bitterness behind them. On the contrary, they bring pleasure and comfort. Men

who yield to others after friendly conferences and discussions are *glad* they yielded; they are better and finer for the experience.

Take another illustration. There are a good many Free Traders who despise Protectionists and regard them as fools. The arguments for Free Trade seem to them so convincing, so unanswerable, that none but ignoramuses and brainless persons can persist in entertaining Protectionist opinions. On the other hand, there are Protectionists who plume themselves on their strong common sense, their hold upon fact, their contempt for sentimentality, visionary schemes and bookish learning. But bring Free Traders and Protectionists together, induce them to endeavor to consider patiently one another's arguments, unfold all the major and minor issues involved in the controversy, and what happens? Neither side is converted to the position of the other—though individuals may be converted—but each appreciates the other's case, finds something in it, and respect takes the place of contempt. The discussion thenceforth is elevated to a worthier plane, and if legislation be necessary in the premises agreements are more easily reached and in a far better spirit than under the "crowd" or "party" method of log-rolling and recrimination and distasteful compromises.

Still, Miss Follett's argument is open to serious criticism along three main lines.

In the first place, humanity has not stood still, but has progressed, despite the lack of "group life." The democracy of crowds, parties, votes, particularist individuals and schools has *not* prevented broad and deep changes in political and social relations. Slavery *has* been abolished, the French Revolution *did* take place, the Inquisition is no more, and unjust privilege is retreating before the advance of the embattled and enfranchised masses. We have no Perfect or New State, but the state we know is vastly better than the states that preceded it. We shall continue to have progress even if we continue to live the party, faction, crowd and sectarian life—the life humanity has lived since the dawn of history. The group life is highly desirable, but it is not the *sine qua non* of further progress. It is desirable because it saves time, energy and temper: because it lessens friction.

In the second place, there is reason to fear that a deliberate, mechanical, artificial organization of "groups" would fail to yield the best results of spontaneous group life. One cannot always be sure the groups called into being for creative purposes will function creatively and find the true man or woman in each of its members.

There are groups which destroy the best in the individual instead of nursing it to full vigor. There are groups that tend to confirm the individuals in their preconceived ideas and their class prejudices. And there are individuals who have the fatal power of poisoning minds, of preventing agreement, of arousing passions and breaking up promising negotiations. The organization of groups will not of itself eliminate these individuals. Nor will group life make every individual tolerant, intellectually honest, reasonable and willing to profit by frank discussion and good tempered criticism. There are persons who cannot work with others. Egotism, vanity, impatience, tactlessness, pettiness of spirit, jealousy and envy are motives or factors of which no amount of laborious effort to organize group life will rid us. In rejecting the Utopias of dogmatic reformers we should not fall into the error of assuming that every individual can be purged and ennobled by group life. Human nature as we know it in action is bound to retreat on any contrivances devised to circumvent its unlovely and anti-social attributes.

Finally, group life alone will not create the new society or solve our problems for us. The need for programmes, platforms, definite plans and intellectual formulas will remain. Take the wage system. It is true that group life and group discussion between employers and employed will arouse sympathy where now there may be hostility. But it is also true that sympathy alone will never solve the problem of industrial relations. If, for example, cooperation be superior to the wage system, and industrial democracy be the ultimate remedy for the ills of the modern industrial order, sympathy alone will not bring about the change from the one to the other. The "socialization of the will" will not solve our industrial problem unless the socialized will leads the intellect to study, develop and use the cooperative system. Solutions are worked out by the intellect and the reason. The good will *facilitates* the working out of the solution and its application.

The new state or new society is coming, but it is coming because the men and women of the present state or society, particularist though they may be, are seeking solutions of apprehended and realized problems, remedies for serious evils, wrongs, conflicts that are causing us pain and anxiety. And this being true, the new state is like Rome—all ways lead to it. It is the conscious goal of many, but the unconscious goal of many more. The thoughtful or curious will endeavor to understand the events and developments in which they live and move, and group life undoubtedly promotes such

understanding. Yet it is extremely naive to suppose that the right interpretation of life is impossible to-day because we are not thoroughly organized on the group basis. Now, we have in fact what may be called group thinking and group discussion even though the external forms of the group life are lacking. We have books, scientific societies, trade unions, clubs, forums, periodicals and newspapers. What one man says to-day, another man criticizes and supplements to-morrow. What one man says or writes in London, many men read, discuss, modify in New York, Paris, Rome, Geneva, Moscow, Berlin. Debate, though not always direct and formal, is carried on all over the civilized world. We cannot bring the debaters together and force them into Procrustean groups. Groups are national and international, and not merely local. It is quite certain that the narrower group life will not lessen the value of the discussion that is carried on *across* boundaries and frontiers.

And, since opinions are formed in mysterious and subtle ways, the individual who is aware of his kinship with all sorts of groups and yet is independent of all; the individual who has found himself by associating with others, testing his views in the light of suggestions, corrections and qualifications by others, will insist on finally registering his opinion and casting his vote *as an individual*. In the last analysis his opinion will be an individual opinion. Personality is not swamped by group life, but accentuated. Differences are not rubbed and polished out of existence. They remain, and they must be reflected and represented in any political or social organization that undertakes to deal with matters of common concern. Where unanimity is impossible—and this is the typical rather than the exceptional case—decisions must be made by majorities or by minorities. Group life, therefore, will not scrap our parliamentary machinery, our ballot boxes, our referendums, our ingenious schemes of proportional representation, our constitutions and by-laws. There will be more freedom in the new state, more toleration, more voluntary co-operation, more justice, and much less brutal compulsion. The pillars of the new state will be Education, Opportunity, Discussion and Respect for Personality. We must fashion, construct and erect these pillars with such instruments, and from such materials, as we have at hand, and while both these essentials, instruments and materials, are themselves capable of improvement, we cannot fold our hands and remain idle simply because the instruments and materials now available fall far short of perfection. New states are not built in a decade, or a century. Each generation must contribute its mite to the new state.