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SHIFTING POLITICAL POWER IN THE UNITED STATES, IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURE. PAPER PRESENTED TO THE FEDERAL EXTENSION SERVICE ANNUAL STAFF CONFERENCE, JANUARY 10, 1967.

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THE RISE OF THE TWO PARTY SYSTEM IN THE SOUTH, REAPPORTIONMENT, AND POPULATION SHIFTS HAVE REMOVED THE SOUTH'S DOMINANCE IN AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS AND INCREASED THE POWER OF THE LARGER COMMERCIALIZED FARMS OF THE WEST. EXTENSION PROGRAMS FOR THE RURAL POOR, WHO ARE LARGELY IN THE SOUTH, WILL FIND LITTLE SUPPORT FROM THE TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURAL POWER STRUCTURE EITHER IN CONGRESS OR AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS. SUPPORT MUST BE SOUGHT FROM POLITICAL POWER EMERGING IN MIDDLE CLASS SUBURBAN AREAS, AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS, UNIVERSITIES, AND THE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY. HOWEVER, THE OLD AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTIONS SEEKING SUPPORT ARE LOSING CONTACT WITH THE UNIVERSITIES BECAUSE THERE HAS BEEN A LACK OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE AGRICULTURAL PART OF THE UNIVERSITIES AND THE UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONALS AND A LACK OF EXPLANATION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF APPLIED KNOWLEDGE ON THE ONE PART AND OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ON THE OTHER. RESEARCHERS AND EDUCATORS WORKING ON AGRICULTURAL PROBLEMS WOULD DO WELL TO LOOK FOR POLITICAL SUPPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITIES AND THE PROFESSIONALS EVEN IF IT MEANS LESSER TIES WITH THE TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURAL POLITICAL FORCES. (PT)

SHIFTING POLITICAL POWER IN THE UNITED STATES:

Implications for Education in Agriculture

By Dale E. Hathaway[1/]

In considering the subject of shifts in political power one can use a very broad or a relatively narrow focus. I have chosen the former, so that what I am going to discuss is broader than partisan politics. The discussion will cover the groups which organize to exert influence over decisions that are made in the public sphere, or having been organized for other purposes, find that they can exercise influence on public decisions. My primary focus will be on those decisions which affect the well-being of rural people, and it will concentrate largely upon the impacts of shifts at the national level.

To deal with the broad subject in a short time, I shall comment on the erosion of some of the old political power bases in agriculture. I shall also note some new centers of political power which are rising, and which conceivably might become bases of new political power for some groups. Finally, I shall speculate briefly upon some of the implications of these matters for the future of Cooperative Extension Work.

1/ Professor of Agricultural Economics, Michigan State University, East Lansing. Presented to the Federal Extension Service Annual Staff Conference, January 10, 1967. The author acknowledges the comments of T. K. Cowden, L. L. Boger, and A. A. Schmid.

Geographical Shifts

Not many years ago it would have been only a slight exaggeration to say that the South dominated Congressional action, and especially agricultural affairs, as a result of its' one-party structure and the institution of seniority in Congress. The Southern dominance in agricultural affairs was reinforced by Republicans from the rural Midwest. Slowly this structure has been eroded by reapportionment, population shifts, and the rise of two-party system in the South. This has been dramatically illustrated in agricultural affairs with the defeat of Mr. Cooley and the large turnover on the House Agricultural Committee in the 1966 election. The political power of the Southwest and West is rising nationally and in agricultural affairs as well. And, these geographic shifts in power appear to have important implications for agriculture.

One implication is for programs to serve the rural poor. However inadequate you may judge these programs that aid the low-income farmer to be, they have originated largely with representatives from the old South. This is to be expected since a vast majority of the rural poor were and are in the South. Programs of this type have never been a major concern to rural representatives from the Midwest, Great Plains, or West. Indeed, they and the farm organizations from these areas have often opposed such programs; perhaps viewing them as competitors for limited funds which might otherwise be used to improve the position of commercial farmers.

The current and future political support for federal programs in the poverty area is centered largely in the core of our largest metropolitan areas and are heavily oriented to nonwhites. The supporters of these programs indicate a deep interest in drastically altering local and national social and political structures.

This orientation poses a double problem for an organization like the Extension Service. First, if the Extension Service is to win political support from those who are now the main proponents of poverty programs, either in Congress or in the Executive, Extension must overcome the suspicions of urban liberals about the basic philosophy of income distribution and social programs in agriculture. Secondly, any agricultural institution that evidences major interests in rural poverty will find decreasing support in the agricultural committees of the Congress and from the farm organizations, all of which are increasingly oriented toward commercial agriculture.

To compound the problem, those programs dependent upon local support and cooperation--as most of our programs in agriculture are--simply cannot get that cooperation from the local power structure to carry out the only kind of programs urban liberals would believe effective in dealing with the poor.

If the foregoing analysis is correct, organizations interested in support for programs dealing with rural poverty are going to find little support from the traditional agricultural political structure at either the local, state, or national level. Instead, they are likely to find increasing resistance from the traditional supporters, and new political support must be found if such programs are to move forward.

National elections are no longer won or lost in rural areas. Neither, however, are they won or lost in the slum areas of central cities. The rising tide of political power geographically is in the middle-class suburbs which sprawl across the landscape of the Atlantic coast, through the East and Great Lakes region, and over the West Coast. Neither political party has yet begun to understand how to organize them cohesively

in the way the old ward heelers organized the cities and county court house crowd organized the rural areas, especially in the South. Since the residents of the urban society are not dependent directly on local politicians representing national parties for their immediate well-being, they are independent in a partisan sense; and, according to some commentators, more prone to electing personalities than parties.2/

While it is impossible to say exactly what will have political appeal to the middle-class suburbs, it is clear that some things will not. First, those in the suburbs are largely middle-income groups. They are either salaried workers or hourly workers with effective unions, high unemployment compensation, and long-term contracts. They face neither poverty nor great personal financial uncertainty. They are too sophisticated to buy the "Don't let them take it away" approach to economic affairs, and a high proportion of them are too young to remember the Great Depression when it was taken away.

The geographical and occupational shifts of the past two decades together with the higher birthrates have resulted in an urban nonfarm population that is young and growing younger. This is in contrast to the farm population which is old and growing older on the average.

These increasing differences in age, economic experiences, and life patterns make effective communication between farm and new nonfarm groups more difficult. It is already clear that references to the values and problems of the 1930's have no political appeal to this new generation.

2/ See Peter F. Drucker, "Notes on the New Politics," The Public Interest, No. 4, Summer 1966 for interesting comments on this and related items.

If farm leaders and those interested in agricultural education want political support from the representatives of the new suburbanites, they will have to put their appeals in new terms with new reference points. Reference to economical production and distribution of food or to rural recreation development is more likely to achieve support from this non-farm group than from appeals to the old economic and social arguments of agrarian fundamentalism.

Some of our politicians have interpreted the rural-urban shifts in population as providing the political base for a new kind of urban fundamentalism not unlike the agrarian fundamentalism of a century earlier. It is doubtful, however, if this new urban fundamentalism will take hold, for the majority of America do not live in the core areas of large cities. Indeed, the suburban dweller may have more in common with rural people, both in terms of values and economic interests, than with those who live in the main parts of our largest cities.3/

Farm Organizations and the Quest for Unity

My colleague, James Bonnen, has written incisively about the decline of the agricultural establishment and its loss of political power.4/ Some have argued that this loss of power by the traditional political powers in agriculture is the result of lack of unity among the farm

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3/ For support on this point see Daniel J. Edgar, "Are We a Nation of Cities," The Public Interest, No. 4, Summer 1966, pp. 42-58.

4/ James T. Bonnen, "Present and Prospective Policy Problems of U. S. Agriculture as Viewed by an Economist," Journal of Farm Economics, Dec. 1965, V. 47(5), pp. 1116-1130.

organizations. I doubt that as much real unity existed among agricultural political forces in the past as has been generally implied. One gets the appearance of unity from certain autocratic societies and families, also, but it is the unity of suppression not of purpose. I suspect that some of the past political unity in agriculture was largely due to the political dominance of some of the farm organizations and their Congressional allies, thereby forcing unity on the weaker members of the alliance.

This dominance is ended and it is not likely to be reestablished. In fact, the continued specialization in agriculture by farms and by regions, reduces the ability of general farm organizations to act as a dominant political force in agriculture. The production interests of the cash corn producer and the eastern feeder or dairyman do not coincide, and one cannot speak for both on very many specific subjects.

The purpose of political power is not to push issues upon which there is a concensus, for it there is a concensus no power is needed. The reason for the acquisition and application of political power in a democratic society is to gain control over the use of limited public resources. Persons who are interested in furthering publicly supported programs for agriculture--for price supports, trade policies, bargaining power, or agricultural research and education--are not likely to find it by preaching unity among the diverse groups that make up modern agriculture. It is more likely to be found by coalitions of convenience (or necessity?) with groups that are gaining political power in modern society. As we have seen in recent administrative and legislative actions in the farm labor field, even almost perfect unity among the traditional political forces in agriculture cannot stave off defeat by the welfare oriented intellectual forces.

As a result of trends I have outlined, old political alliances no longer will be effective; old political powers are no longer powerful. This is especially true for agriculture where political power has rested on the twin base of regional power in Congress of the rural South and the Midwest, and of special pressure groups--the general farm organizations and the coops. These two were interlocking, so that when the regional power in Congress shifted, the farm organizations lost most of their effectiveness as national political powers.

As the old structures weakened there has been a preceptible move by the farm organizations toward partisanship, with the National Grange and National Farmers Union supporting almost anything the Democratic party supported at the national policy level and the American Farm Bureau Federation opposing almost anything the Democrats put forth.

This is likely to be a temporary situation, however, because the national parties are finding their historic power bases as badly eroded as all other groups by the changes I have described. For instance, can the Democrats hold the coalition of the rural South and the northern minority groups in the central cities? Or can the Republican put together a working majority from the suburbs and the rural Midwest? I doubt it, so both parties will be anxiously seeking the support of groups which offer promise of a majority. In such a fluid situation well organized economic blocs or regional interests may find they have political power far beyond their absolute size. As yet agricultural leaders do not appear to have realized this or, if they have realized it, have been too committed to old ways of doing political business to make a change toward looking to newly rising and latent power elements.

Agri-Business

Much--too much-- has been written about the decline in political power among commercial farmers as their numbers decline. What is rarely mentioned is that the very forces that allow a decline in the number of farmers, creates new and perhaps more powerful political forces in agriculture. These forces are the large agricultural input producing and marketing industries which did not exist when our general farm organizations, Department of Agriculture, or Colleges of Agriculture were formed. These older institutions bemoan the reduction in the number of farmers as if farmers were the only ones with economic interests and political power in modern commercial agriculture.

I can assure you it was not political pressure from a group of small family farmers that precipatated the "chicken war" of the not too recent past. It was a small group of large integrated broiler producers. Nor is the main public push for our current "feed the world" enthusiasm coming primarily from county farm organizations. It is coming largely from the nonfarm producers of chemicals, fertilizers, and owners of storage and shipping facilities.

It is doubtful if the biggest political problem of commercial farmers, now or in the future, lies in the shortage of potential effective political allies. These agri-business complexes can and will be major political forces in the future, but not necessarily always in the interests of the farm producers. Part of the political problem of farm producers is to clearly define their own political objectives and then to develop strategies to gather support from the new political powers.

There is hardly an area of commercial food and fiber policy which does not involve the interests of these agri-business groups--including research and education. Some observers have suggested that the rise of these large agri-business industries will reduce the need for research and education in agriculture. While the development of these new business organizations should cause us all to reevaluate the contribution that these organizations will be more dependent upon knowledge rather than less. The question then is likely to be--which institution will provide the educational services, and thus get the political support of the agri-business complex.

Professionalism and Higher Education

People have repeatedly searched for signs of an "establishment" in American politics. I submit that higher education and its products are rapidly becoming that "establishment." There are far more successful Ph.D. candidates in policy-making positions in government now than unsuccessful political candidates. Even Congress is following the trend; for instance, two holders of PH.D.'s faced each other in the last Congressional election in Michigan.

This new political force, which is neither geographical or partisan, arises from two sources. The first is what I call the professionalization of the policy-making positions in the Federal government. The second is the rising political influence of the institutions that produce these professionals, provide them employment for much of their careers, and which have become as institutions heavily involved in the direct formulation and execution of many government policies.

On the first point I quote a recent article by Irving Kristal in the periodical The Public Interest.[3]

"Whatever the eventual terms and conditions of their roles, it is quite clear that the intellectuals are in American politics to stay.

None of the major programs of the Great Society are workable without their participation. The economists in the Council of Economic Advisors, the scientists and social scientists in the Pentagon, the sociologists and psychologists in the Office of Economic Opportunity, the city planners in the new Department of Urban Affairs--these are very much signs of the times. Indeed, those government departments which have not intellectualized themselves--such as Commerce and Agriculture--are finding their political power dwindling, and their very existence being quietly questioned."

I would not call most economists, sociologists, and city planners that I know intellectuals in the traditional sense of the word. But, they are professionals and well-educated ones as well, and increasingly they have replaced the professional politicians and lawyers as the key policy makers in government.

In light of the final sentence of the Kristal quotation, it is well to point out that the United States Department of Agriculture led in by professionalization of government bureaucracy. Economists and sociologists on leave from universities were developing and administering action programs in agriculture at a time when other Federal departments were largely run by old-line politicians, and the top foreign service positions were largely a reward for large party donations. Nor has the trend changed in the USDA. At the Assistant Secretary level or above, only the Secretary of Agriculture has held elective public office. Most

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4/ Vol. 2, Winter 1966, p. 5.

of the rest come from university backgrounds and were professionals in other than politics and law. Three Presidential commissions relating to agriculture have been appointed in the past two years, and the chairman of one and the executive director of all three held Ph.D.'s in agricultural economics--not law degrees. I doubt that any of them have ever run for public office or are ever likely to; nor do they have ties with the traditional agricultural organizations.

One of the keys to political power is access to decision makers and influence with them. Institutions of higher education have a considerable amount of both with the new professionals. First, since they are products of the universities, not of party machines, these professionals tend to speak the language of their backgrounds. Moreover, the mobility of professionals today between government, universities, and foundations is so high that is it not always clear that they know or care who is paying them at a particular time. And, because of these and other factors, the government professionals increasingly call upon the universities and their personnel to plan and execute complex programs.

These university-governmental relationships are major in the areas of foreign aid, science and technology, health, education, and labor. They are significant in defense, foreign affairs, monetary and fiscal policy, and agriculture. Much has been written about the growing dependence of universities upon Federal monies for research. Not much attention has been given to the political power that has been gathered by the universities and the professional community in the development of these relationships. I believe, however, that the experience last year of the USDA's attempt to change the method of allocation of certain funds attests to the fact that the universities do have some political power.

It is ironic, somehow, that at the very time that agriculture groups are looking for new political alliances to offset their declining numbers, the old agricultural institutions seeking such support are losing contact with the universities, a potential new source of political influence. Our major farm organizations, the Cooperative movement, and many of our federal action programs in agriculture largely were outgrowths of the university-professional group. Yet, these farm groups seem to have somehow failed to grasp the nature of the changes in the universities and appear to no longer feel that the professionals' goals completely coincide with theirs. The old political forces in agriculture have become cool, if not downright antagonistic, toward the rapidly growing professional community and in some cases even to their old friends in the agricultural colleges. Only the labor unions--who were also products of the intellectuals--have done a more thorough job of isolating themselves from these new political powers, and thus, from the potential benefits of new alliances which might be developed with them.

The Cooperative Extension Service and to some extent the Colleges of Agriculture have found themselves pulled in two directions. On the one hand they are a part of these educational institutions, but often not sufficiently a part to receive the full support of the larger university community in the same way that scientific research has. But as part of the university, the College of Agriculture and Cooperative Extension Service have shifted enough to alienate many of the traditional agricultural supporters of their activities. It is not much fun to be a "kissing cousin"--related to everybody but not truly loved by any. Yet increasingly this is the position in which the professionals in agriculture find themselves.

One result has been a struggle in many states between supporters of agricultural extension and the concept of general university extension. Whoever wins, agricultural extension programs may be the loser. If the separatist forces win, then the larger university regards agricultural extension as a competing program and withholds political support; if the general extension concept wins, then the agricultural organizations are likely to doubt its purposes and withdraw their political support.

Much of the difficulty that agricultural colleges and extension has is of their own making, or at least due to their own omissions. First, the agricultural part of universities in many cases has failed to really engage with and comprehend their non-agricultural colleagues. More importantly they have failed to bother to explain to their non-agricultural colleagues how apply knowledge to real problems can be both respectable and gratifying. Second, those responsible for interpreting the university to farm political groups have failed completely to educate rural leaders as to the nature and purpose of higher education in its broadest sense.

Where I have used Colleges of Agriculture and State Extension Services, I think you can substitute the United States Department of Agriculture and the Federal Extension Service. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that most of the new professionals in Washington look upon the Department of Agriculture and its agencies as a united group of pleaders for the special interests of commercial farmers. Conversely, many farm groups look upon the Department as steadily marching toward the group of liberal intellectuals that they believe run Washington.

Somehow it seems odd that researchers and educators working on agricultural problems seem to have trouble finding political support at the very time when the professionals in other departments are steadily gaining political power and influence. The wave of the future would seem to lie in closer association and ties with the universities and the professionals, even if it means lesser ties with the traditional agricultural political forces. It is these new forces not the old that promise to provide political support for imaginative new programs. Agricultural educators have had more experience in dealing with real problems than almost any of their newly activist colleagues in other fields. This experience, harnessed together with the rising political power of university professionals should put higher education in the forefront for support.

By way of substantiation of this hope, I would point out that in the field of foreign development this has already occurred. If it can be achieved here, I see no reason why it cannot be similarily achieved for domestic programs affecting rural people.

Implications in the Winds of Change

Cooperative Extension work has more than 50 years of distinguished service to rural people. Its programs were largely built under a set of political relationships that are no longer there. Without this stable political support, Extension has often appeared uncertain, working on first one program proposal and then another and hoping to gain support by doing so.

I doubt that trying to do all things for all people will win the Cooperative Extension Service the desired support. They would be better off to have the vigourous political support of one of the groups that have

some political power than to have the placid but unenthusiastic support of all groups. As society grows more complex, the role of the specialist becomes more crucial and the likelihood of his gaining some effective support increases.

But it is not, fortunately, my task to determine where Extension should seek its support and the programs necessary to achieve it. I hope I have contributed somewhat by suggesting some of the new trends you must consider in your quest.
