



Summer 1971

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### Recommended Citation

Norman Wengert, *Political and Social Accommodation: The Political Process and Environmental Preservation*, 11 Nat. Resources J. 437 (1971).

Available at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nrj/vol11/iss3/6>

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# POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ACCOMMODATION: THE POLITICAL PROCESS AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION†

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Accommodation, in the minds of many, has a negative connotation, suggesting compromise, and watering down what is thought to be right, proper, correct, and just. To compromise what has been determined by "rational" processes appears to encourage the non-rational; to make accommodations altering the efficient implies that a wasteful alternative has been developed. To accommodate the interest, views, and positions of others seems to be departing from concepts of professional integrity and violating professional ethics.

Yet, the political process as we know it in America rests strongly on the recognition of the plural values, the differing perceptions, and the multitude of goals of the population generally, and of the groups into which it is organized. It rests, also on the recognition that most programs and policies are never fully "right" or completely "true." Our most effective stance has usually been one of pragmatic modesty which accepts the tentativeness of much of life and the problematic character of societal action.

In part we are trapped by our own terminology and are victims of our own rhetoric. But to understand, and perhaps to maintain a viable system, we need to dispel stereotypes with respect to accommodation as a social process, emphasizing the dynamics of synthesizing programs from many values, and suggesting a more reasonable approach to "rationality."

The mental set which involves hostility to accommodation and compromise, (frequently found among highly specialized technicians) clearly rests on assumptions with respect to the validity and correctness of particular positions. It tends to demand a single correct solution to each problem. There is much in our educational experience that supports the view that information generated by "rational" processes is absolutely valid and unquestionable. At the same time, much in present-day social science stresses the complexity of the goal or value structure, and emphasizes the contextual as well as the pragmatic relationships between ends and means. It also emphasizes the tentative and partial nature of much knowledge. Plan-

†Parts of this article were delivered at a conference in September 1969, sponsored by the Political Science Department of Colorado State University and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

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ning represents a kind of rationality in relating ends to means, but in this frame of reference the stress is on instrumental rationality and not on absolute sets of principles or conclusions.

More attention should be directed to questions of *what* ends are being sought, *whose* ends, *how* have these ends been determined.

Such a focus, in turn, often has the effect of requiring ends (goals) to be spelled out in more specific terms. It also directs attention to consequences and effects flowing from the pursuit of particular ends—costs and benefits to whomsoever they accrue in the broad terms of the original language of the 1936 Flood Control Act.<sup>1</sup>

A part of the problem, however, is that too often societal ends are short-range and limited in scope especially when dealing with resources and the environment. We pay lip service to the importance of long-range points of view, but our crystal balls are clouded, and we need to keep reminding ourselves that we are dealing with a tremendous number of variables and that the simplistic structure of analytical models may be far from reality. We need also to be reminded of our limited ability to analyze and predict future consequences.

By definition, the processes of deciding for the future (planning) and the techniques of program analysis require ignoring some variables and emphasizing others. The selective process goes on constantly as we look at data, trying to determine which are the relevant data that should be included, which weights to give, and so on. For those of us immersed in environmental planning these choices are often so automatic that we forget that we are making them. Moreover, it is very easy to develop habitual ways of approaching problems so that we become insensitive to the need to innovate in our approaches to a particular range of problems.

Let me illustrate how conventions with respect to data may restrict our understanding and interpretations of that data. Most of us have become accustomed to thinking about population problems of the world and of our nation in terms of birth rates. We have, therefore, been relieved to note that in the last three years or so, the number of births per year in the United States has been declining. We hope that the problem in the U.S. is taking care of itself. But is it really? Birth rates may not be the significant measure. More important and obviously of determining significance is *not* birth rate but the number of offspring per female. In other words, the present decline may simply be a short term effect, an effect that will be lost in the long pull, if American women continue to have three plus children during their entire child-bearing years. Clearly the ultimate

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1. 33 U.S.C. § 701a-f, 701n (1964).

effect on total population is the same if a woman has four children in five years, or four children in twenty years. Spacing of children may be desirable; it might have important consequences for society as well as for the individual mother. But the effect on total population is identical.

To take another example, the market place model in economics is obviously useful in analyzing resource problems, although it may often be mistaken for reality. It is useful just because it eliminates or holds constant most of the operative variables of real life (where would economic analysis be without "ceteris paribus").

Thus, the analyst may use an extremely rational decision-making model for resources allocation, in which demands, supply and price are the chief variables operating in an assumed context of complete information.

If rationality is a difficult concept, *motivation* is even more difficult in relation to both individual and to organizational decisions. In the process of building alliances and alignments, and mobilizing support for programs or plans, which are all necessary characteristics of the way in which our political system functions, we may easily lose sight of what we had presumed to be "rationally" determined goals, substituting success in manipulating the system for success in achieving program goals and social purposes. Or alternately, achievement of program goals and social purposes as we define them takes on a higher value than relating them to public desire and more broadly defined integrative values.

Multiple or plural motives are usually involved, and the political system does not always provide for effective reconciliation and coordination of these pluralistic motives. Those involved in achieving particular program goals often overlook two facts: (1) that among those favoring a program is a range of intensity of support; and (2) that the reasons for support for a particular program or project will not necessarily be the same in the case of each supporter.

This may be difficult for those who are deeply involved in a particular program to accept. It is not easy to recognize that John Q. Public or particular officials may not have a burning interest in the environment, that their hierarchy of values may be different and in some cases, even though some may support a program to protect the environment, the reasons for which they do so may be different from ours. Depending upon how a program is defined, motives for support will generally include a mix, ranging from highly idealistic, goal-oriented support to support based simply on personal or political advantage.

Many of us respond most clearly to economic stimuli. To

illustrate—one of the most significant population movements in history occurred in World War II when we were able to mobilize and move people all over this country in the interest of war production. We did it, not the way the Russians did by loading workers in box-cars with their machines and shipping men and machines across the Urals. We did it by making it financially attractive to become mobile and to move to the far reaches of the country. Our system worked effectively by using economic incentives (individual, group and community) as stimuli to action, and this is, in a sense, “buying support.”

The point to stress is that people support a program for their own reasons which may have no direct relationship to program objectives. A good example is the lawyer who runs for the school board not because he has a burning interest in education (in fact he may not have thought much about education) but in order to advertise himself. The legal code of ethics is very rigid in prohibiting advertising by lawyers, so the only way a lawyer can advertise is to get involved in other activities which give him visibility, running for the school board, serving on a local water board, etc. His interests in the primary program, education, water or what have you, may not be high. His initial concern is how he can get his name before the public. To be sure, the lawyer may not be highly deliberate in setting forth his reasons for behaving as he does. Many of his decisions are made by small, incremental bits and pieces, and in the process he reationalizes that what he is doing is socially significant and useful.

A little history may usefully illustrate how rather crass political goals may merge with socially desirable goals in creating programs having long-range constructive benefits. The decisions to enact the Homestead Act,<sup>2</sup> the Land Grant College Act,<sup>3</sup> and the Act creating the U.S. Department of Agriculture (all passed in 1862)<sup>4</sup> were essentially political, and in fact these statutes were not passed until the Southern Democrats had left Congress, giving the Republicans a clear majority. None would doubt that these laws resulted in much substantive good, but they also contributed to Republican dominance of national politics for four decades after the Civil War.

To the politicians these national enactments may well have been regarded primarily as devices to continue the Republican party in power, and they did have this effect especially through the vehicle of the electoral college, in that the creation of new states where these legislative programs had particular appeal regularly gave Republican

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2. Act of May 20, 1862, ch. 75, 12 Stat. 392.

3. 7 U.S.C. § 301-305 (1964).

4. An Act to Establish a Dep't of Agriculture, 5 U.S.C. § 511 (1964).

candidates support. In terms of the popular election returns, Republican successes were often by close margins. In one election, they won because of the negotiated settlement of the Hayes-Tilden deadlock, and in another situation they actually had a minority of the popular vote but carried the electoral vote. The deciding factor often was the electoral votes in the new (and less populous) states, many of which were admitted to statehood in 1889 and 1890. That the Republican program for agriculture enacted in 1862<sup>5</sup> appealed to the people of the new states and contributed to their settlement is clear, and the new states tended to vote Republican in most Presidential elections (the depression of 1891-93 represented a temporary shift to the Democratic-Populist cause, but by 1896 most of the electoral votes of the new states were back in the Republican column).

This is not to suggest that the only basis for support of the Homestead program, the Land Grant College program, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture was political advantage. The record is clear that many Americans supported these programs on their merits, but political motivation cannot be overlooked.

A motive often present in political decisions is "being good to the home folks." This emphasis on local constituency is important to many political decisions, and is a vital aspect of American democratic processes. Today many speak of "participatory democracy" although the meaning of this term is not always clear. Political philosophers, academics and planners have not yet incorporated these values effectively in their thinking about public policy processes. The emphasis in recent years on national economic growth has, in fact, seemed to challenge the ethical validity of an emphasis upon locality and constituency. Application of "efficiency" as a test for the national consequences of public policies and programs has created the impression that failure to meet the efficiency test means the program or project is wasteful and represents a misapplication of government funds. ("Pork barrel" is not simply an epithet; its evil aspects are now presumably supported by sophisticated economic analysis.) Thus, the advocates of local programs have been put on the defensive, although to the elected official the local constituency remains of primary importance.

Clearly, the problem of reconciling local, regional and national interests remains a continuing one.

Redistribution of wealth, although not often mentioned explicitly

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5. An Act to Establish a Dep't of Agriculture, 5 U.S.C. § 511 (1964); An Act Donating Public Lands to the Several States and Territories Which May Provide Colleges for the Benefit of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts, 7 U.S.C. § § 301-05 (1964); Act of May 20, 1862, ch. 75, 12 Stat 392.

by political leaders, is certainly another important social value at the root of many current program proposals. Taking from the rich and giving to the poor has political appeal (if one is not rich). A more viable and less inflammatory concept is the once popular term of taxing on the basis of *ability to pay*, which of course means redistributing the wealth, or shifting costs and benefits. This is a frequent consequence of many public programs, but the decision to so design public programs is often made not in terms of standards of equity and justice, but rather in terms of support and even group and personal enrichment. At the same time, how burdens will be distributed is not made explicit.

Another area of motivational analysis focuses on the benefits that may be considered *side-effects* of program decisions. I deliberately used the word side-effects rather than secondary benefits or other terms (externalities, spillover) which are associated with economic analysis, because I think we have to develop a new language since it may be too hard to give new meaning to old words. The rejection of secondary benefits by economists as a basis for project justification is sound only so long as the goal is national economic growth. In any case, however, secondary benefits are often very important sources of individual and community enrichment. Decisions on airport locations may disregard secondary economic benefits when made in Washington, but to the man who owns the land next to the proposed airport, secondary benefits are of crucial, if not sole importance. A great deal of local politics in the resource field is concerned with the distribution of secondary benefits. If politics is defined as "who gets what, when where and how," it must deal with secondary as well as with primary benefits. In many cases, local politicians could probably care less what effects particular programs or actions may have on the national economy. They may have neither the intellectual equipment nor the time to be concerned with what to them are remote issues, when they are dealing with pressing day-to-day problems right at their doors.

Another recent line of analysis which suggests the extent to which our dominant analytical structures (models) to a large extent determine the kinds of questions we ask, the kinds of problems we seek to solve, and the kinds of data we collect, has been proposed a few years ago by Bertram Gross in connection with proposals to develop a system of "social indicators" as a basis for assessing the impact of public programs. Commenting on current development concepts, Gross pointed out that most approaches were like single entry book-keeping, and he suggested that better policy decisions might result from a system (double entry in character) in which negative con-

sequences might be offset against alleged benefits from particular programs. As an example, he used the development of the New Jersey meadows for industrial purposes. Such developments have usually been measured simply in terms of benefits to the economy, such as increased employment, greater productivity, etc. But these gains are not usually compared to what society might be giving up in abandoning a portion of this still relatively wild area on the doorstep of Manhattan. Nor does present social accounting permit an assessment of the costs of highway and living congestion, air pollution, etc. which may result from development.

Moving to another perspective, it is clear that a critical problem for all planning in the United States is how to relate what planners do to theories, concepts and values of democracy. There are many facets to this problem—majority rule, consensus, participation, groups, social power, influentials, representation, time spans, and others.

Space permits me to deal only superficially with a few. But my purpose is not simply to raise interesting philosophical questions, but rather to suggest how theories and concepts vis-a-vis democracy may vitally affect the way in which we make environmental decisions.

It is not hard to accept the idea of majority rule in selecting a legislator, a mayor, a governor, or even a President. We take majority rule for granted in the functioning of legislative bodies and associations. And at one time, the referendum was regarded as the most democratic method for making public decisions. But today, given our deep concern for minority rights, we shy away from following simple majority decisions with respect to public programs. We like to stress that our system is based upon representation, but concepts of representation have also come up for re-examination. The basic problem is how to mirror public desires and wishes effectively in the decisional process; or in somewhat less grandiose terms, how can government be effectively related to the public. But this statement merely shifts the problem, for we have to deal with the issue of what we mean by "The Public," and we must confront the difficult problem of "apathy" and non-participation. These issues have many facets, on that is often overlooked being the *time dimension*, i.e., the public today, the public tomorrow, or twenty years from now.

One of the really important contributions which professionals can make involves the introduction of longer range time perspectives into public decision processes. And this comment serves to identify the fact that an important structuring factor, affecting motivations, and determining the data we collect as well as setting the framework for decisions, may be our professional commitments as biologists, engi-



neers, planners, economists, and lawyers. Such questions as where and how we get our values and what determines our outlook on the world, including our expectations and images of the good life are not irrelevant.

We can agree that man cannot live by bread alone, but unfortunately we do not have much research which seeks to identify the positive and negative behavioral consequences of environmental quality. We like to think that living in a pleasant community contributes to a positive mental outlook, but we do not know that this is the case. It seems plausible that physical environment is a factor in socialization, but we really do not know that it is. In any case, one of the real challenges in dealing with the problems of the core cities lies in learning more about how core city residents get their values and exploring how these factors may be influenced constructively.

The immigrant groups of an earlier period, who came primarily from Europe, brought with them well-developed value systems, including attitudes toward family, toward work and often toward resources. For example, in both Tennessee and northern Wisconsin small Polish settlements followed soil conservation and land use practices that put to shame those of so-called "native American farmers." As peasants, these immigrants had learned to conserve resources and to work hard. As a result, they were often successful, where others were not. The values these people brought with them significantly affected their behavior. By analogy, there is evidence that poverty stricken residents in our large cities, many of whom have been migrants from the rural South, have not brought with them values that make the adjustment to urban living easy.

Environmental quality tends at present to be a concern of the middle and upper classes, and environmental programs (e.g. Wilderness Preservation) tend too often to serve the interests of the well-to-do. I would argue, however, that environmental protection can be important to the poor as well as to the rich. But unless we find some way of arousing concern for environmental quality among large numbers of lower income groups, we may not be able to solve some of our most crucial problems in this policy area. Part of building a viable society involves developing a pride in the community (i.e., not being alienated). To illustrate—a critical problem in most large cities is trash removal, but in many cases trash removal policies are not effectively related to goals of environmental quality, but rather reflect managerial and administrative considerations.

The problems of goals in American politics is indeed a difficult one. We lack institutions charged with responsibilities for formu-

lating and crystallizing public goals or articulating them, behaving responsively and responsibly with respect to their implementation. Hence in our concern for the environment we must recognize that our goal-choosing machinery is primitive. Together with many political scientists, I am led to believe that the political parties in England, which are programmatic and issue oriented, provide a much more effective focus for articulation of public programs and goals.

But it is idle to wish that we had a more programmatic party system. We do, however, need to recognize at least two consequences which flow from our situation in this regard. The *first* is that building majority support (or simply acceptance) for a particular course of action is very difficult. Where authoritative decisions seem called for, we tend to get pluralistic pseudo-decisions. Where forthright policy statements are required, we often get deliberate obfuscation and rationalization. Where positive social goals and purposes need to be expressed, we often resort to the rhetoric of fear and the polemic of doom! Sad to say, conservationists, environmentalists, and ecologists have often been loudest in shouting doom and in exploiting fear. What the consequences for the system and for democratic policy processes may be remains to be seen. But one wonders whether such tactics may not in their social consequences be similar to those experienced because those applying technology have not explored implications and consequences of their actions deeply enough. Not only nature, but society and the political system are fragile structures, and being consequent may require more attention to how societal goals are to be achieved.

The *second* consequence of our weak policy and goal setting institutions is the fact that planners and other bureaucrats are thrust into positions of playing substantial roles in program development and policy formation, and in making choices as to what is good for society. Yet, it is undeniable that in many respects the bureaucracy may be unresponsive and irresponsible. The bureaucracy, of course, is not a single, unified entity. It mirrors our pluralistic society; it represents a complex web of professional, clientele, and interest group relationships. And we have enough evidence to give credence to the belief that self-preservation is among the strongest bureaucratic motivations. As a result, building support and securing legitimization are often prime strategic considerations, rather than detached realization of public policies.

For many reasons, most program authorizing statutes give agencies no clear and unequivocal mandates, and their very general provisions tend to preclude criticism. At the same time, as program substance

develops through a host of informal means, including practice and experiment, many citizen group demands and concern for the public interest are slighted.

The role of bureaucracy in the development of governmental goals is more important in this country than in many other democratic countries. It is unique because in one sense it is separate from the political process and in another sense it is deeply involved in guiding political choices because it is the only source of information for political decision-makers. And here organizational, professional, and individual values may be significant. For example, the industrial engineer, an economist, a sanitarian, a recreationist, a fisherman would probably give different answers to questions seeking to define environmental standards applicable to particular streams. Viewpoints and values may differ because of one's technological training, because of one's organizational responsibility or role, because of friendships and associations.

We must concede that until we can secure some agreement, or perhaps better, some decisions, as to what is a productive, pleasant, beautiful environment, and policies and programs formulated in such terms, action to protect the environment will often encounter great difficulties. Present popularity of the concern may be misleading. To paraphrase Madison, until angels govern men, the task of politics will continue to be choosing from among alternate goals, and varied programs. But it is the failure or inability of our system to choose deliberately, that would seem to be its greatest vulnerability. We must somehow seek to develop institutions which can more effectively make hard choices, as well as identify program alternatives. Even though we cannot often be sure that particular choices are right in any absolute sense and even though we recognize the many independent variables or those which we have excluded or ignored may upset our predictions, we must somehow move towards a system which more clearly identifies social value premises, and is willing to utilize social controls as devices to achieve defined societal goals. But clearly such courses of action must be researched just as thoroughly as the ecological and environmental factors. Unfortunately, the complexities of modern life cannot be dealt with by simple formulas, or desperate nostrums. Even less will glib preachments, including this one, preserve the environment or improve the quality of life, unless accompanied by careful research, and analysis, as a basis for action.