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Changes in Rural America and Their Worldwide Implications

Abstract

As a layman speaking to professionals, I propose to use the topic assigned to me as a take-off from which to raise some serious questions relating to changes that may be imminent in the years ahead.

*Changes in Rural America and Their Worldwide Implications**

MRS. DOROTHY JACOBSON

AS A LAYMAN speaking to professionals, I propose to use the topic assigned to me as a take-off from which to raise some serious questions relating to changes that may be imminent in the years ahead. Conditions that prevail today—and decisions that will be made tomorrow—will profoundly affect the direction in which our Nation and our world will move in the years ahead. Critical choices face the people of the United States. They will make these choices and arrive at their decisions—not necessarily on the basis of fact—but on the basis of what they believe, and what they feel. And their beliefs, their feelings, their attitudes, and their actions result in a large measure from the impact made by today's modern communications media. The power of the press¹ thus conditions our future, and you represent the power of the press.

There are many changes in rural America that have significant worldwide implications. The changes in agricultural science and technology have revolutionized agriculture at home and are helping to transform it in the newly developing countries abroad.

These and related developments have created abundance in America and provide a foundation for our affluent society. As they are being introduced and adapted to the newly developing

* This is a condensation of the talk presented by Mrs. Jacobson at the 1968 AAACE meeting.

¹ "Press" is used here in the broad, modern sense, as indicated in a 1966 dictionary which defines "press" as: "(1) any medium or agency, as newspapers, periodicals, broadcasting, etc., whose function is to collect and disseminate news, (2) the people, as reporters, editors, broadcasters, etc., who gather or disseminate such news."

nations of the world they offer hope for escape from hunger and poverty. And they are being introduced, with help from the United States and from other highly developed nations. Their worldwide implications are beginning to be felt. As the hungry developing nations begin to give greater attention and allocate more resources to the agricultural sectors of their economies, as they adopt policies that assure greater incentives to agricultural producers, as they begin to build the infrastructure and the institutions called for, the fear of famine fades and the rate of overall economic growth is accelerated.

Many Changes Interrelated

The changes in rural America that have been brought about by the phenomenal advance of agricultural science and technology are closely related to other changes that are social, economic, and political in their nature. The explosion of knowledge that characterizes our generation has made it physically, technologically, and scientifically within reach to produce adequate food, clothing and shelter—the basic physical needs of life—for every man, woman and child on earth. This is truly something new in this world.

In all of past history, up to this generation, men lived in a world of scarcity. Our social, economic, and political institutions have evolved in that world of scarcity. It is because these institutions have not yet been adapted to the new conditions that we still have poverty in the midst of a potential for abundance.

Social, political, and economic changes and the problems they create in rural America have many worldwide implications, all of which highlight one overwhelmingly important characteristic of today's world—the immense degree of interdependence that prevails. No sector of our Nation can hope to remain secure and prosperous and free as long as pockets of poverty remain. And whether they are in rural or urban areas, each affects the other. Likewise, our world cannot hope for security and progress if the two-thirds of its population that now live in poor and hungry nations cannot achieve accelerated economic growth and higher levels of living.

Our hopes for greater security in the world depend in a large measure on the degree of stability in the newly developing world. These hopes reinforce our humanitarian motives in providing as-

sistance for development. Those who would argue that we should hold back on our programs of foreign assistance until we have first solved all of the problem of poverty and hunger in our own American communities forget that—in a world around which a man-made satellite can orbit in a little more than an hour—we can afford to think of our community in no smaller terms than the earth itself.

These three characteristics of today's world, even as they are reflected in rural America, offer a tremendous challenge. There is the potential for abundance that science and technology have put within reach. There is the lag in social, political, and economic development that holds us back from achieving that potential. There is the tremendous and increasing degree of interdependence within our Nation and in the world.

The future will depend upon how we meet this challenge, upon how we solve the social, political, and economic problems that change has thrust upon us. There are no easy answers to these problems. But I believe that there are attitudes and approaches that will help us to find the answers. I would like to suggest a few.

One is a recognition that the goals we seek are worth paying for. No one likes taxes. But none of us would be willing to live in a country that had no taxes, because it is literally true that taxes are the price we pay for civilization.

Walter Heller, in a recent article, noted that we can afford to pay for an all-out war on domestic ills. He pointed out that total taxes in the United States today are far below those of France, Sweden, and West Germany, and considerably below those of Italy and Great Britain, in terms of percentage of gross national product.

Another approach that is essential is a **clear recognition of the difference between principles that must be upheld and institutions that call for change.** Small units of local government can no longer cope with the problems of megalopolis. Freedom to pollute the air and the water is no longer consistent with an acceptable environment. The right to bear arms must no longer be interpreted to prevent control of the sale of guns.

We especially need an approach **that fortifies freedom with responsibility.** In no area is this of more crucial importance than in the field of communications. Television, movies, the press, and radio today have an immeasurable effect on public opinion, pub-

lic attitudes, and public behavior. By their selection of materials to be presented to the public they exercise tremendous power to influence what people believe to be true, and thus to determine the way people vote and act.

Freedom of information is an essential component of the American ideal. Outside restrictions that jeopardize that freedom are unacceptable. The communications media themselves must therefore develop a high sense of responsibility and self-control that is commensurate with their power.

Finally, I would like to emphasize one approach to our problems of today that I believe is of utmost importance—a positive attitude that **recognizes what is right with America** while it seeks to correct what is wrong.

Downgrading Damages Nation

I am deeply concerned about the effect that a constant downgrading of this Nation's programs and policies is having on our own faith in ourselves—on our own belief in the ideals and principles that have done so much to make this Nation great. And therefore I would like to suggest a few basic things that are right with America today.

I am as disturbed as any American at race riots in our cities. But I believe they are not so much a product of something wrong in America during the last few years as they are a product of what was wrong with this Nation more than a century ago—both before and after the Civil War—and what continued to be wrong until the past few years.

More progress has been made in the past few years toward racial equality, toward ending discrimination, toward offering more opportunities to disadvantaged groups, and toward righting the wrongs of two centuries than ever before in American history. This is a part of what's right with America.

What is right with America? The way we have, in the last few years, put real meaning and purpose into a great American principle that holds that the good things of life, whether they are in the realm of economic opportunity or educational and cultural advantages, should be made available to all Americans everywhere.

... We have seen the greatest advance in history in aid to education at all levels.

- ... We have launched new programs to preserve our resources for the future, to restore purity to our water and air, and to restore beauty to our countryside.
- ... We have developed new ways of extending opportunity—Head Start, Vista, the Job Corps, a new emphasis on rural renewal.

Poverty is wrong, and our efforts to combat it should be intensified. But last year's census reports showed a decline of nearly 25 per cent, since 1959, in the number of Americans living in poverty. And this is a part of what's right with America.

I would like to note just one more of the things that are right with America. We have accepted the responsibilities and fulfilled the commitments that fell upon us as the greatest and strongest leader of the free world.

Millions of people are free today because the United States offered protection against aggression. Millions of people have greater opportunities for economic development because the United States led the rich nations in providing assistance to help them to help themselves out of the depths of hunger and poverty. Our years of leadership in seeking international controls of nuclear weapons have begun to have results. This is a part of what's right with America.

Nation's Image Not Bad

Our "image" is not as bad today as critics would have you believe. Not long ago the *U.S. News and World Report* pointed out that, "If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, the world is banding the U.S. some sort of record." It noted further:

"The modern industrial society developed in the U.S. has become a model for nations everywhere.

"The U.S. is often criticized, sometimes hated; but it is envied and imitated.

"As social and economic progress continues, Americanization — a process unique in the history of the world — seems certain to intensify."

But our image could worsen. Last summer in Rome, where I was representing the United States at a meeting of the Council of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, along with delegates from some 30 other nations, I sat at my seat before the opening of the meeting one morning reading the latest

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paper from home. On its front page was a picture of people picketing the White House.

The delegate from Poland looked at the picture over my shoulder. His eyes lit on two men and a girl, in one corner of the picture. They were obviously in need of clean clothes and the services of a barber. The Polish delegate looked at me with a twinkle in his eye and said, mournfully, "Look, they don't even have shoes." Knowing that this university professor from Poland had lived in the United States, and that he was sophisticated enough to know better, I merely replied that it was pretty hot in Washington in the summer.

But the delegate who sat on the other side of me, representing one of the newly independent African nations, looked alarmed as he read about the picketing. He turned to me, with eyes full of sympathy and a voice full of concern, to ask whether I thought I would be able to stay until the meetings were over at the end of the week! He really feared that an overthrow of the U.S. Government was imminent (as it would have been in his country if that many people had dared to picket a government building), and feared that surely I would suffer some immediate consequences from the overthrow.

There are only a few nations in the world where the freedom to picket and to criticize is as great as it is here in the United States. And this is one of the things that is right about America. But it is important that those who exercise this right understand how people in most of the world, where our kind of freedom of speech and press is unknown, can misinterpret what is happening here.

Constructive Criticism Needed

We need criticism, but we need criticism that is constructive and responsible. If we would remedy our weaknesses we need confidence in our strength.

The power of the press—for good or ill—has been tremendously augmented by modern technology. Communication by the printed word used to be limited by literacy, and communication by the spoken word used to be limited by the strength of a man's voice. Radio and television have changed all that. If the pen was mightier than the sword when that expression was first used, then today the power of the press is mightier than all the power that nuclear energy can generate.

We seek to control the use of nuclear power. But we cannot seek outside control of communications media and keep faith with our ideals of freedom. If our society is to remain free, its free press must develop the kind of responsibility that is commensurate with its power. It must develop professional standards that include the exercise of self-discipline—even, at times, at the cost of profits. It must assume responsibility for a positive presentation of affirmative goals for America, and an honest and competent discussion of problems to be solved in reaching such goals.

I believe that the overwhelming majority of Americans are in agreement on the goals we seek. Among them are:

- ... the realization of abundance, shared by all,
- ... law and order within the framework of democracy and justice,
- ... equal and expanding opportunity for education, employment, and enjoyment of leisure, with a true spirit of equality among races and peoples, and
- ... an international order in which peace and progress can prevail.

I believe that we can solve the problems that stand in the way of achieving these goals, but we can do this only if we have faith in our ideals and confidence in ourselves, only if our determination to correct what is wrong is strengthened by our recognition of what is right with America.