

Key?

PUBLIC OPINION AND STATESMANSHIP

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Of all the mystery stories maybe one of the most exciting, and assuredly one of the most elevating, is that of the victory of the great statesman over a narrowly recalcitrant public opinion. Historiography knows of no nobler subject. At the same time there are but few contemporary events concerning which the polster can draw more readily on otherwise unprocureable fact than this one. For the peripeties of public opinion connected with the triumph of true statesmanship over common-run politics play precisely in that area of opinion formation where his technique can claim precedence over all others. And so in all seriousness the question arises whether public opinion surveying should not shoulder the task of providing the future historian with a clue to some of those unexpected changes of opinion which have made history? Or, to dramatize the subject as it is the historian's privilege, what can the polster contribute to their unveiling of the secret of heroic statesmanship?

The question, however, appears ambiguous. The historian deals with history as a definite event that occurred at a definite time and place. His statesman is a concrete figure, and what the historian wishes to ascertain is how this man solved his problem. The typical fact, on the other hand, belongs not so much to the historian as to the realm of the sociologist of history. It is for him to say how statesmanship is possible. What had the career of those men in common whom posterity ranked in this special class of eminence? Although the sociologist in this case seems merely to generalize the historian's data, the raw material of his generalizations is not restricted to the records of the historians. The sociology of history need not reflect

merely the results of the comparative study of actual history. The historian may be limited to the recording and explaining of the memorable events. Not so the sociologist of history, whose subject comprises both live-born and still-born events, both those which lived in the memory of contemporaries and those which never achieved the dignity of historicity, while otherwise being no less factual than their more fortunate sisters rescued by the pen of Klio from the gray doom of forgottenness. The sociology of war and peace, revolution and evolution, order and anarchy, leadership and disarray, as that of success and failure of statesmanship, deals with the laws of society in general and yet never quite loses touch with the warm glamor which attaches to that special case which men call by the fateful name of history.

Before we define more closely the sociological problem of statesmanship, as we understand that problem here, let us recall the illuminated plates of the chronicle in which his picture is drawn by the sympathetic historian. It is this flamboyant portrait which inflames the imagination of the young, which sustains the endeavors of the mature and ultimately sets a meaning upon the featureless account of the ages. It is against this background of life and meaning that the bare skeleton of the sociological problem should be viewed.

The historian's figure of the statesman stands out in almost superhuman proportions. Here's the man who, towering above the crowd of run-of-the-day politicians, serves his country's true and permanent interests at a crucial moment. His reward is the gratitude of a nation, maybe a tragic prize which he hardly lives to grasp. The means of achieving the grand purpose are superior courage and superior insight. Nations great and small have their Solons, Themistocles, and Aristides; their Churchills, Lenins and Weizmans, their Deuts, Gandhis, and Abraham Lincolns. Each of these was a

politician - and remained a politician - yet, eventually, owing to his moral courage and superior wisdom attained to be a statesman, whose name, resplendent of victory, is enshrined in the hearts of a whole people. And the formula of the victory, too, is familiar - long, arduous and seemingly hopeless struggle against public opinion, until unexpectedly the miracle of success intervenes.

The bare bones of the problem are this. The statesman started as a politician. He rose to power by the favor of public opinion. This fact necessarily limited his effectiveness to conditions set by the climate of opinion which made his rise possible. Yet eventually we see him achieving a political feat that assumes an entirely different climate, in which public opinion seems to have veered round 180 degrees. However, the one thing which on our assumption a politician cannot attain is to change the climate of opinion itself to which he owes his success. So what made in this case the politically impossible happen? That is the question.

The key to this sociological problem is not far to seek. Public opinion, which we here take to mean the surface pattern of beliefs and emotions, in which the mass is organized, is always ambivalent, i.e. its reaction to any psychological stimulus may be either positive or negative. A political ~~stimulus~~ stimulus such as a sharp warning, a passionate exhortation, an immediate threat, a sudden easing of the outlook or its aggravation, practically everything within the range of a politician's activities, may have in principle two different and contrary effects on opinion. Which of these opposites will occur must ultimately depend on objective circumstances, which structure the situation. As long as the circumstances are what they are, the superficial field of opinion will continue to react in one and the same direction. In the one instance, almost any stimulus will have a more or less positive effect; In the other, a negative effect. By positive we mean here <sup>the direction</sup>

in which the statesman himself happens to seek the ultimate solution; by negative, we mean the opposite direction.

The middle term, by the help of which the superficial structure of public opinion is related to the objective circumstances which structure the situation, is that deeper layer which we will call the climate of opinion. The sociology of the climate of opinion must provide us with the ~~link~~ postulated link between the ambivalent surface opinion and the objectively structured situation. What distinguishes the statesman from the mere politician is that he is aiming not at a success on the scene of superficial opinion but at success on the level of the underlying climate of opinion itself. And that which ~~makes~~ sets the measure of his greatness is the extent to which ~~he~~ he is able to relate himself to the actual objective situation. We must assume no change in the climate of opinion can ever occur or at least not more than temporarily.

The key to success lies, therefore, in our hero's insight into the precise nature of the underlying objective situation, and his clever use of purely political means - no others are at his disposal - to change the climate of opinion and eventually the objective situation itself. Theoretically, this is impossible since on our assumptions by way of the climate of opinion the objective situation determines the positive or negative valence of superficial opinion reaction.

Yet precisely that which is theoretically impossible~~is~~ is in practice the only possible way. First, because if the statesman's guess was right the objective circumstances are, even if slowly, changing in his favor anyway; secondly, because it is ~~his~~ <sup>his</sup> special business to speed up that change even if only to an almost imperceptible degree. And so by art and craft, our statesman politician gets hold of some weakly defended but strategic point, maybe just

sufficiently to alter the psychological field and give to the political stimuli the opposite effects, thus swinging over the objective situation still further and eventually releasing the pent-up flood of positive reactions.

Examples? I will take them from Greek antiquity. They may sound old-fashioned, though perhaps not altogether so. Some of the most ancient cases might remind many of you of fairly recent ones in ~~you~~ this country. Solon, Themistocles and Aristides rank amongst the greatest statesman-politicians of Athenian democracy. Aristotle and Plutarch have drawn the outlines of their achievements. You will see for yourselves how ~~near~~ closely Solon's memorable archontage is mindful of the outlines of Franklin D. Roosevelt's first term.

Solon, a man of aristocratic extraction but of middle-class ways, was elected, at the height of an unprecedented total crisis of the politics and economics of the Athenian city-state, to the position of the highest executive. Civil war was rampant. A free population was literally sinking into debt-bondage and slavery. Bloody strife was on the move, threatening to engulf the community. On the one hand, the threat of mob rule and the expropriation of all landed classes; on the other hand, the immediate threat of a bloody massacre of the people under a regime of white terror. In either case, the ruin of the state. Solon, himself a great orator, set his political program in verse and introduced it with the words:<sup>X</sup>

Lo, even now there cometh upon the whole city a plague  
which none may escape. The people have come quickly  
into degrading bondage; bondage rouseth from their  
sleep war and civil strife; and war destroyeth many  
in the beauty of their youth. As if she were the prey  
of foreign foes, our beloved city is rapidly wasted and  
consumed. . . Thus public calamity cometh to the house  
of every individual, and a man is no longer safe within  
the gates of his own court. . .

(From a poem of Solon, quoted by Demosthenes)

Aristotle makes it clear that the chief trouble was psychological and moral: the mass of the people, being sunken into shameful debt bondage, were afraid to stand up for their constitutional rights. Solon, called in as an arbitrator and omnipotent legislator, first stopped famine conditions through an embargo on the export of corn; secondly, he proclaimed a disburdening of private and public debts, which were anyway hardly enforceable. With these relief measures, he restored the popular forces physically and morally. Eventually this made it possible for him to steer a middle course of reform to change the constitution only to an extent which was still tolerable to the propertied classes, so that they resigned themselves to their loss of privilege while they retained their property. Then only, in a non-contentious atmosphere, did Solon proceed to those reconstruction policies in regard to the currency, the change in weights and measures, which objectively improved the long-run balance of the country and - after a generation of transition - put Athens on a new and sound foundation.

Another instance, a hundred years later: Themistocles, in spite of the brilliant victory won by the Greeks over the Persians at Marathon in 490 B.C., was full of apprehensions for the military safety of the country. Plutarch has this to say:

Now the rest of his countrymen thought that the defeat of the Barbarians at Marathon was the end of the war; but Themistocles thought it to be only the beginning of greater contests, and for these he anointed himself, as it were, to be the champion of all Hellas, and put his city into training, because, while it was yet afar off, he expected the evil that was to come.

And so, in the first place, whereas the Athenians were wont to divide up among themselves the revenue coming from the silver mines at Laureium, he, and he alone, dared to come before the people with a motion that this division be given up, and that with these moneys triremes be constructed for the war against Aegina. This was the fiercest war then troubling Hellas, and the islanders controlled the sea, owing to the number of their ships.

Wherefore all the more easily did Themistocles carry his point, not by trying to terrify the citizens with dreadful pictures of Darius or the Persians - these were too far away and inspired no very serious fear of their coming, but by making opportune use of the bitter jealousy which they cherished toward Aegina in order to secure the armament he desired. The result was that with those moneys they built a hundred triremes, with which they actually fought at Salamis against Xerxes.

According to another version, Themistocles tried to sell his plans in still another way. He suggested that the sums be entrusted to the wealthiest citizens - dollar-a-year men - who would safely return it unless they used it within a year to a satisfactory public purpose. All this happened in 481 B.C. Meanwhile the international situation became more and more acute, the "wealthiest" had the fleet built which at Salamis saved Western Civilization in 480 B.C., i.e. only one year later.

Another year later, ~~Aristides~~ in 479 B.C., Aristides, Themistocles' and a thoroughly conservative politician (a kind of Southern Democrat), great rival in statesmanship, came out with a no less far-sighted but intrinsically even more unpopular plan: namely that the people should quit the country districts and settle in the city. His purpose was to provide against a second Persian revanche attempt which would sooner or later overwhelm Athens. At Marathon and at Salamis and at ~~Plataeae~~ Plataeae, she had got away by the skin of her teeth. How often could the performance be repeated? But the idea of a voluntary synoecism - a move into town - was detestable to the farmers. The whole plan was therefore presented to them and to the rest of the poorer population as a scheme of public maintenance at government expense, while the wealthy were induced to agree by the tempting prospect of booty and command. Yet the substance of the matter was that the minute city-state of Attica could not undertake the dominance of the seas unless every free citizen actually participated in defense and in administration. The plan was of immense daring. Perhaps the most surprising thing about it was that this superlative bid for

empire was actually put into effect. Aristotle describes the details of the scheme as follows:

He pointed out to them that all would be able to gain a living there, some by service in the army, others in the garrisons, others by taking a part in public affairs; and in this way they would secure the leadership. This advice was taken.

They also secured an ample maintenance for the mass of the population in the way which Aristides had pointed out to them. Out of the proceeds of the tributes and the taxes and the contributions of the allies more than twenty thousand persons were maintained. There were 6,000 jurymen, 1600 bowmen, 1200 Knights, 500 members of the Council, 500 guards of the dockyards, besides fifty guards in the city. There were some 700 magistrates at home, and some 700 abroad. Further, when they subsequently went to war, there were in addition 2500 heavy armed troops, twenty guard-ships, and other ships which collected the tributes, with crews amounting to 2000 men, selected by lot; and besides these there were the persons maintained at the Prytanon, and orphans, and gaolers, since all these ~~if~~ were supported by the state.

If ~~if~~ Themistocles trapped the Athenian people into an enormous armament effort which very soon proved to be their salvation, Aristides laid the foundations of an empire which under his guidance was a genuine federation of all Hellenes for defense.



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The problem of the politician-statesmen, which is touched upon in the following remarks is brought in to illustrate the manner in which public opinion research may be employed very usefully, even if indirectly, in the service of the historian. Indirectly, since the assistance would be rendered primarily not so much to the historian, than rather to his collaborator, the sociologist of history.

Of all adventure stories one of the most exciting, and assuredly one of the most stirring, is that of the victory of the great statesman over a narrow and recalcitrant public opinion. Historiography knows of no nobler subject. At the same time there are but few contemporary events concerning which the pollster can more readily draw on otherwise unprocurable facts. For the peripeties of public opinion connected with the triumph of true statesmanship over common-run politics play precisely in that area of opinion formation where his research technique can claim precedence over all others. And so in all seriousness the question may arise as to whether public opinion surveying should not shoulder the task of attempting to provide the future historian with a clue to some of those unexpected changes of opinion which have made history. Or, to dramatize the subject as it is the historian's privilege to do, what can the pollster contribute to the unveiling of the secret of heroic statesmanship?

Now, the historian deals with history as a definite event that occurred at a definite time and place. His statesman is a singular, concrete figure and what he wishes to ascertain is how this man solved his problem. Theories about the nature of statesmanship - whether produced by others or even by himself - are for him no more than accessories. For the hub of his interest remains the singular case. In sharp contrast to this, the typical figure of the statesman belongs in the realm of the sociologist of history. For him it is to investigate the conditions which in a society make great statesmanship possible. And to inquire into the objective criteria of the success stories of those statesmen-politicians whom posterity ranked in this special class of eminence. Yet the sociologist's generalizations are not restricted to draw from the historian's data. His field encompasses the live-born and the still-born events, those which lived in the consciousness of the contemporaries and those which never achieved the dignity of historicity, no less factual though they were than those rescued from limbo by Klio's pen. The sociology of statesmanship, similarly to the sociology of war and peace, of revolution and evolution, deals essentially with the laws of society. Eventually, the sociology of history never loses touch with past actuality and thus with the human interest which attaches to history, it is nevertheless not by itself an historical, but a sociological discipline.

Before we define more closely the sociological problem of statesmanship, as we understand it here let us briefly recall the illuminated plates of the chronicle in which the statesman's picture is drawn by the sympathetic historian. It is this flamboyant

portrait which inspires the imagination of the young, which sustains the endeavors of the mature and ultimately sets a meaning upon the featureless account of the ages. It is against this background of life and meaning that the bare skeleton of the sociological problem will here eventually be viewed.

The historian's figure of the statesman stands out in almost superhuman proportions. Here is the man who, towering above the crowd of run-of-the-day politicians, serves his country's true and permanent interests at a crucial moment. His reward is the gratitude of a nation, maybe a tragic prize which he hardly lives to grasp. The means of achieving the grand purpose are superior courage and superior insight. Nations great and small have their Solons, Themistocles, and Aristides; their Churchills, Lenins and Weitzmans, their Smuts, Gandhis, and Abraham Lincolns. Each of these was a politician - and remained a politician - yet, eventually, owing to his moral courage and political wisdom attained to be a statesman whose name, resplendent of victory, is enshrined in the hearts of a whole people. And the formula of the victory, too, is familiar: long, arduous and seemingly hopeless struggle against public opinion, until unexpectedly the miracle of success intervenes.

The bare bones of the problem are here displayed. The statesman started as a politician. He rose to power by the favor of public opinion. This fact limited his effectiveness to conditions set by the climate of opinion which made his rise possible. Yet eventually we see him achieving a political feat that assumes an entirely different climate, in which public opinion seems to have veered round by hundred and eighty degrees. However, the one thing which on our

assumption a politician could not attain was to change the climate of opinion itself to which he owed his success. We are left with the question: What made the politically impossible historically possible? And what was the sociological mechanism of this piece of white magic? Clearly, we are facing here a scientific problem of public opinion research.

The answer is to be sought in the total structure of opinion: public opinion in the narrower sense together with that much less changeable underlying phenomenon, the climate of opinion. Public opinion proper, by which we usually mean the surface pattern of beliefs and emotions in which the mass is organized, is always ambivalent, i.e. its reaction to any stimulus may be either positive or negative. By positive we mean here the direction in which the statesman himself happens to seek the ultimate solution; by negative we mean the opposite direction. A psychological stimulus such as a sensational warning, a passionate exhortation, an immediate threat, a sudden easing of the outlook or its aggravation - practically everything within the range of a politician's activities - may have in principle two different and contrary effects on opinion. Even deliberate propaganda has sometimes the opposite to the intended effect. Which of the opposites will occur must ultimately depend on objective circumstances, which structure the situation. As long as the circumstances are what they are, the superficial field of opinion will continue to react in one and the same direction. In the one instance, almost any stimulus will have a more or less positive effect; in the other, a negative effect.

The element by which the superficial pattern of public opinion is related to the objective circumstances which structure the situation

is that deeper layer which has been called the climate of opinion. The sociology of the climate of opinion must provide us with the postulated link between the ambivalent surface opinion and the objectively structured situation.

What distinguishes the statesman from the mere politician is his superior understanding of the objective situation, and thereby also of the climate of opinion. While both he and the politician are limited in their fight to the sphere of surface opinion, the statesman consciously acts on surface opinion for the purpose of changing the situation, not only to maintain himself in power (as every politician must), but for aims which transcend the political scene. Briefly, he attempts to use his power partly to organize the public for the interim period until conditions change, partly if at all possible, to bring about himself some favorable change in the conditions. Small though the change may be, it may just suffice to shift the climate of opinion, and thus give to the political stimuli the opposite effects, eventually releasing the pent-up flood of positive reactions.

As to examples, I will take them from Greek antiquity. Solon, Themistocles and Aristides rank amongst the greatest politician-statesmen of Athenian democracy. You will readily see how like the basic laws of social action are affected by the lapse of time. Franklin Roosevelt at his height bears a close resemblance to Solon in his memorable archonhage.

Solon, a man of aristocratic extraction but of middle-class ways, was elected at the height of an unprecedented total crisis of the politics and economics of the Athenian city-state to the position of chief executive, as an arbitrator vested with dictatorial

powers. A free population was literally sinking into debt bondage and enslavement. Bloody strife was on the move, threatening to engulf the community: on the one hand, the threat of mob rule and the expropriation of all landed classes; on the other, the immediate threat of a massacre of the common people under a regime of white terror. In either case, the ruin of the state. Solon, with his genius for publicity, put his political program in verse, and introduced it by the words, as reported by Demosthenes:

Lo, even now there cometh upon the whole city a plague which none may escape. The people have come quickly into degrading bondage; bondage rouseth from their sleep war and civil strife; and war destroyeth many in the beauty of their youth. As if she were the prey of foreign foes, our beloved city is rapidly wasted and consumed. . . . Thus public calamity cometh to the house of every individual, and a man is no longer safe within the gates of his own court. . . .

Aristotle's account of the events makes it clear that the chief trouble was psychological and moral: The mass of the people, sunken into shameful debt bondage, were afraid to stand up for their constitutional rights. Solon first stopped famine conditions through an embargo on the export of corn; secondly, he proclaimed a disburdening of private and public debts, which were anyway hardly enforceable. With these measures, he restored the popular forces physically and morally. Eventually it was these relief measures which made it possible for him to steer a middle course of reform to change the constitution only to an extent which was still tolerable to the

propertied classes, so that they resigned themselves to their loss of privilege while they retained their property. Then only, in a less partisan atmosphere created by the great political compromise did Solon proceed to those reconstruction policies in regard to the currency, a change in weights and measures, which objectively improved the long-run balance of the country and - after a generation of transition - put Athens on a new foundation.

A hundred years later, Themistocles, in spite of the brilliant victory won by the Greeks over the Persians at Marathon in 490 B.C., foreseeing a Persian revanche was full of apprehensions for the military safety of the country. Plutarch relates:

Now the rest of his countrymen thought that the defeat of the Barbarians at Marathon was the end of the war; but Themistocles thought it to be only the beginning of greater contests, and for these he anointed himself, as it were, to be the champion of all Hellas, and put his city into training, because, while it was yet afar off, he expected the evil that was to come.

And so, in the first place, whereas the Athenians were wont to divide up among themselves the revenue coming from the silver mines at Laureium, he, and he alone, dared to come before the people with a motion that this division be given up, and that with these moneys triremes be constructed for the war against (the neighbouring island of) Aegina. This was the fiercest war then

troubling Hellas, and the islanders controlled the sea, owing to the number of their ships. Wherefore all the more easily did Themistocles carry his point, not by trying to terrify the citizens with dreadful pictures of Darius or the Persians - these were too far away and inspired no very serious fear of their coming, but by making opportune use of the bitter jealousy which they cherished toward Aegina in order to secure the armament he desired. The result was that with those moneys they built a hundred triremes, with which they actually fought at Salamis against Xerxes.

According to one version, Themistocles tried to sell his plans in still another way. He suggested that the windfall silver be entrusted to the "wealthiest" citizens - dollar-a-year men - who would safely return it to the people unless they had used it within a year to a satisfactory public purpose. Meanwhile the international situation became more and more acute, the climate of opinion changed; the fleet was built which at Salamis saved Athens, only one year later.

Lastly. Only one year after Salamis Aristides, Themistocles' great rival in statesmanship, a conservative politician came out with a no less far-sighted but intrinsically even more unpopular plan: namely, that a large part of the people should quit the country districts and settle in the city. His purpose was to guard against a second Persian revanche attempt which would sooner or



later overwhelm Athens by force of arms or starvation. And as a means to this end: to set up, organize and administer a defensive naval empire which would provide the ships and the money contributions required to secure the importation of corn and to deny the sea to the Persians and their large Phoenician fleet. At Marathon and at Salamis, Athens had got away by the skin of her teeth. How often could the performance be repeated? But the idea of a voluntary synoecism - a moving into town - was naturally most unpopular with the farmers. The whole plan was therefore presented by him to the poor as a scheme of public maintenance at government expense, while the wealthy were induced to agree by the tempting prospect of booty and command. Yet the substance of the matter was that the minute city-state of Attica with its 30,000 to 40,000 families could not undertake the dominance of the seas unless every free citizen personally participated in the organization of administration and defence. The plan was of immense daring. Perhaps the most surprising thing about it was that this supreme bid for a defensive empire was actually put into effect. Aristotle describes the details of the scheme as follows:

He (Aristides) pointed out to them that all would be able to gain a living there (in Athens), some by service in the army, others in the garrisons, others by taking a part in public affairs; and in this way they would secure the leadership. This advice was taken.

They also secured an ample maintenance for the mass of the population in the way <sup>which</sup> Aristides

had pointed out to them. Out of the proceeds of the tributes and the taxes and the contributions of the allies more than twenty thousand persons were maintained. There were 6,000 jurymen, 1600 bowmen, 1200 Knights, 500 members of the Council, 500 guards of the dockyards, besides fifty guards in the city. There were some 700 magistrates at home, and some 700 abroad. Further, when they subsequently went to war, there were in addition 2500 heavy armed troops, twenty guard-ships, (each carrying 200 marines) and other ships which collected the tributes, with crews amounting to 2000 men, selected by lot; and besides these there were the persons maintained at the Prytaneum, and orphans, and gaolers, since all these were supported by the state.

If Themistocles 'trapped' the Athenian people into an armament effort which very soon proved to be their salvation, Aristides laid the foundations of an empire which under his guidance was a genuine federation of Hellenic states for defense. It was not his fault that under his successors the grand alliance turned almost into a rule of Athens over her allies, thus eventually causing her downfall in the Peloponnesian War.

I need not, I suppose add many words in order to bring my account of the politician-statesman of 2500 years ago up-to-date. How, on American soil, in the early 1930ies, to stem the general

panic caused by economic disorganization, and avoid a social catastrophe; how, again, in the late 1930ies to prepare an isolationist public for internationalist tasks through clever manoeuvring and wise judgment that much discounted miracle happened, the transfiguration of the party politician into Franklin Roosevelt the statesman.

Yet the mechanism is at all times the same. In some deeper layer of public opinion there is an essentially correct appraisal of the objective situation: of the present danger and of the oncoming dangers of the future. The statesman senses the coming change; or, if the calamity is on, he discerns the possibilities of overcoming the crisis. His superlative achievement is to employ the weak forces of politics as a lever in shifting the objective situation, until the danger is met.

When all is said, in his day's work he remains a politician whose profession is to handle public opinion, though in the depth of opinion slumber the forces of history. There is, as we have seen, a weighty content to the question what enables the statesman to transcend the mere politician?

I believe that in regard to problems of this type the historian will draw on the work of the sociologically minded pollster.

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