

worldview

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OUR PUBLIC GOALS

Great nations are not the mere sum of individual parts, nor are they contained in the achievements of a moment. They must have a public as well as a private character, and a vision — along with the will to attain it. A number of Americans have complained for some years, however, that this nation lacks a strong dedication to the public good, so intent are its citizens upon the pursuit of their private pleasures. And they have feared that ours was a complacent society, with no idea where it, as a society, wanted to go. Walter Lippmann has compared the apparent aimlessness of America during the fifties with the driving purpose of the Soviet Union and has asked which society, in such competition, had the best hope of triumph. His answer was obvious and discomfiting.

Perhaps it was in recognition of such concerns that President Eisenhower last February established his Commission on National Goals, whose purpose was to develop a "broad outline of national objectives and programs for the next decade and longer." The Commission's report, issued early this month, does "in broad outline" indicate the kind of society we must work for in the years ahead. It is a general call to Americans to return to a dedicated *public* vision.

The report, in parts, speaks in ringing tones. "Man has never been an island unto himself," it reminds us. "The shores of his concern have expanded from his neighborhood to his nation, and from his nation to the world. Free men have always known the necessity for responsibility. A basic goal for each American is to achieve a sense of responsibility as broad as his worldwide concerns and as compelling as the dangers and opportunities he confronts."

Specific areas of concern are charted through the report's pages. Religious prejudice and racial discrimination in our society are both "economically wasteful" and "dangerous"; correction of them requires action on all levels — municipal, state, and federal. Action on all levels is also re-

quired in the fields of social welfare, education, the arts and sciences, and agriculture.

Abroad, the report insists, "our principles and ideals impel us to aid the new nations." We must support the United Nations and international economic organizations; we must both strengthen our defenses and limit and control nuclear armament. We must take "effective counter measures" against the threat of world Communism.

Now, these goals, when cited, seem little enough. The report speaks of the United States as a "spiritually based" society, and affirms "the right of every individual to seek God and the well-springs of truth, each in his own way;" but it does not specify beyond the level of generalities and what the more sophisticated might consider platitudes. The *New York Times*, indeed, when the report was issued, complained that this mountain had labored and brought forth a mouse.

We wonder if such criticism—such disappointment—is justified. The fact that a Commission on National Goals was appointed in the first place and that its work sets even a general vision before our society seems both significant and hopeful. Because the recommendations of any such Commission are necessarily broad; details of execution must be left to government-on-all-levels, to private agencies, and to the will of the people.

The point here seems to be that, until very recently, the American people did tend to think of themselves as "an island." "The shores of their concern" were limited indeed. It was not until the thirties that the American people, on the whole, accepted the theory that the domestic public welfare was a legitimate government concern. It was not until the forties and fifties that isolationism was finally defeated and they accepted (however cautiously) the theory that the international common good was the concern of their government. The very notion of "public goals" for the American people, especially abroad, is thus a relatively new notion and, whatever its shortcomings, the Report on Public Goals must be seen as a historic step forward.

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