

TOO TIMID TO LIVE?

I think that there is, to a substantial extent, a spirit of defeatism and apathy pervading Nebraska. It is a kind of negative sickness that leads to a search for scapegoats and demagogues. It prompts a desire to hide the head in the sand, a refusal to face tough facts. It doesn't promote a patient, solid, constructive program of improvement.

Driveling Inanities

It is demonstrated by political leaders who spend their energies decrying socialism and communism. Example: On Monday, March 12, 1962, at Kearney, the Republican state chairman is reported to have given a rousing speech urging county party leaders to walk the streets of their towns warning the voters about the dangers of the socialistic trend of government. (19) Now why, pray tell, was not the chairman viewing with alarm some of the facts about Nebraska that you and I know? Examine the speeches of the gubernatorial candidates of both parties. With one exception, Mrs. Ralph Brooks, we have an exchange of driveling inanities.

Dr. Fred Schwarz was overwhelmed by the turnout at his Omaha lecture on the perils of communism, so overwhelmed that he will come back and conduct a school in Omaha on the subject. On April 6 and 7 we were favored in Omaha with a very high level study of communism at the Joslyn Memorial entitled "Cold War Strategy Seminar" sponsored by the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, the Nebraska Bar Association and others. Don't misunderstand me. I'm as frightened of Nikita and Mao as the next red-blooded patriot. But of the really relevant, pressing problems facing Nebraska at this instant, socialism and communism are so far down the list they're on another page. We understand this. It's easier to be more certain of what you are against than to espouse what you are for. Maybe if we ignore the problems of the state requiring affirmative action and concentrate on fighting communism the state problems will go away!

Yes, this is a kind of negative sickness. The negative sickness evidences itself in anti-intellectualism. 'Twas ever thus. Somehow the clever ones, the eggheads, are to blame for all of this. For the past few weeks, the focus of the anti-intellectual attack has been the University of Nebraska. The extension service of the University has been conducting local seminars and discussions throughout the state on systems of state taxation. These have been praised as quite objective. Surely this IS a relevant topic in Nebraska. Yet, on February 21 we had the attack on the western flank by legislative candidate Terry "The Terrible" Carpenter. He openly threatened the University's budget if it didn't shut up. (20) At the center, Grand Island, we had the sniping of the group known as the "think and act" committee. On the Eastern flank, on February 17, the Omaha World Herald

"Association of Nebraska Taxpayers, Inc." to fight the broadening of Nebraska's tax base. (23) I do not intend to imply guilt by association by suggesting that the seven other highly placed Omaha citizens subscribe to Mr. Scott's intemperance. But I DO assert that all of this is a revival of the old know-nothing political party, anti-intellectualism and that it is a symptom of negative sickness rampant in Nebraska.

My point is made. We are not poor. We are lagging behind our neighbors in many fields, neighbors whose economies are not too unlike our own. We have a spirit that is destructive rather than constructive.

Why is it so for us? It is true that we are an agricultural state, that the farmers have substantial problems, that there are less farmsteads and fewer people employed in agriculture each year. But, is this not likewise true for Iowa, Kansas and South Dakota?

Well, what is there that is so peculiar and unique about Nebraska that it is unable to keep pace? Our state is rich in soil, water, scenic beauty, covered by a net of electric power. Our political atmosphere is remarkably free of corruption. Our people are the tough, hardy, sons and grandsons of Old Jules — the settlers, the pioneers. They lived in soddies, fought grasshoppers, drought, blizzards and made a noble and rich birthright for us. They produced some great ones: Roscoe Pound, William Jennings Bryan and dozens more that you know as well as I. There is in our breeding strength, courage, shrewdness, toughness.

What is it that makes us different? Look at the unique governmental structure. We are the only state having a non-partisan, unicameral legislative body. If we were to focus on the most dominant reason for our difference, it would be here. The unicameral, rather than bicameral, feature seems all too good. But the nonpartisanship of the body means that there is no way to focus on state-wide responsibility or cohesiveness. Each senator is excessively parochial in his legislative approach. New groupings form in each legislative session based often on personality. There is no party policy or position on matters of important state-wide concern. Our situation is that of the French Chamber of Deputies with 43 one-man political parties.

Key to Inefficiency

The key to the ineffectiveness of inefficiency of the legislature is simple: power without responsibility. Without state-wide responsibility, state-wide policy is really non-existent. Without responsibility, there is no clear institutional vehicle for subordinating the excessively parochial outlook to the state-wide outlook as there is in other states. For all practical purposes the labels Republican and Democrat as relating to state government in Nebraska are devoid of meaning. Yet, we carry on as though the parties had significance in this area.

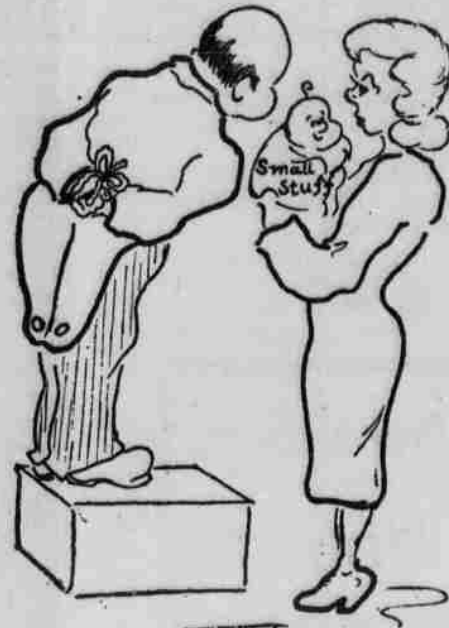
Hugo Srb, chief clerk of the Nebraska Legislature, in a story dated April 5 carried in the World Herald, purported to criticize this view. He said that I obviously didn't know much about the Nebraska Legislature. This I will concede. I ask only in return that my friend Hugo concede that he obviously didn't know much about my thesis. We are entirely harmonious. Mr. Srb says that the senators are totally responsible to the constituents in their legislative districts and that there is no group commanding any loyalty or any party standing between those electors and their elected senators. Exactly so, Mr. Srb. Unfortunately so, Mr. Srb. If there is any difference between us it is one of emphasis. You are more certain in your expressed conviction than I that the senators are almost totally parochial and that there is almost no state-wide core of responsibility on the part of the senators.

But what I am saying here is well known to you. This debate has been going on since the mid-thirties when the non-partisan legislature was started. Both parties have taken a position supporting a return to a partisan legislature. It may take a constitutional convention to bring it about. It doesn't seem likely that the Nebraska Senate can muster the leadership or responsibility to put the question to the voters by way of constitutional amendment. It may, in fact, take action by an aroused non-partisan or bi-partisan citizens' action group to accomplish the task.

Then let us look at the governor of Nebraska — that nice gentleman who ranks below the football coach in salary status. He gives speeches, cuts ribbons, attends conferences of governors, bestows admiral commissions in the Nebraska Navy, blesses new churches. In general he performs all the functions of an emasculated monarch. Gubernatorial campaigns are reduced to the level of pap because they are for a title and office largely honorary in nature. True, we believe that the governor has responsibility. But he has no power! Here we have the converse of the state senator: responsibility without power. The governor is like a general without an army. Whom does he lead?

To sum up this point: in my opinion, the prime reason for the failure of Nebraska to keep up with neighboring states is that we have a legislature that has power without responsibility and a governor who has responsibility without power.

In this situation of mild chaos where each candidate for senator or governor, or person elected to those offices, is simply a distinct personality, the press has strong veto power. Candidates and office



Governor: Responsibility, but no power . . .

holders are apt to suffer from recurrent World Heralditis — a Nebraska disease that causes a mild weakening of the spine among political aspirants and office holders. Before speaking out on an issue one must think carefully about whether or not the Herald is for or against it and water down an expression or tailor it to fit the Herald's known proclivities.

In many respects the Omaha World Herald is an excellent newspaper. It is our most truly statewide newspaper. This places it in a position of power, a power which becomes an awesome responsibility in a state where campaigns for senator or governor are personality-beauty contests rather than a forum for issues.

You may have heard this cartoon quip: "Are you here with the solution or are you part of the problem?" I think we may ask the World Herald this question in all seriousness. I'm afraid it's part of the problem because its editorial policy is incredibly naive. It rails against the federal monster. It denounces the Washington dragon. Yet it favors Hill-Burton federal funds to build the magnificent medical center in Omaha. It is pleased with federal interstate highway monies to help solve a part of Omaha's arterial traffic problems. It voices no objection to the fact that Nebraska is 23rd in its dependence on federal aid to education and 49th in state aid to education. Do you have any recollection of an editorial stand taken by the Herald opposed to the spending of federal monies in the Omaha area? Did the Herald fight the new Omaha post office? Location of Strategic Air Command headquarters at Offutt? Is it now stridently opposing federal funds for Omaha urban redevelopment?

Moment of Truth

On April 4, the lead editorial in the Herald was devoted to what it apparently thought was a defense to this indictment which I first delivered on April 1 from the pulpit of the Omaha Unitarian Church. In a full column the Herald pleaded what in law practice is known as a confession and avoidance to the charge. That is, it admitted the charge was true and then sought to justify, excuse or rationalize its conduct. We are, said the Herald editor, against these federal spending programs on principle. On principle, we fight the enactment by the Congress of federal spending laws such as, for example, Hill-Burton hospital funds. However, if the Congress is so unwise as to pass such destructive legislation, then says the Herald editor, Omaha must, MUST get its rightful share of those funds. In other words, principles are all very well unless there is real money involved. This is what the editor was saying without being fully aware of it. When the price is right, our principles can be bought. The Herald is to be congratulated on its candor. This moment of truth is refreshing.



Those Federal Handouts . . .

I must not create a false aura of sanctimony in my exposition. I was opposed, for example, on principle of Iowa's adoption of a law giving a bonus to veterans of World War II. Yet, as an Iowa veteran, I stepped right up to the treasurer and collected my bonus along with the rest of the vets, principled and unprincipled.

You see, the Herald and I and most of you are practicing pragmatists. We stand revealed and embarrassed as confessed hypocrites at this moment. So let us henceforth proceed, Mr. World Herald Editor, from this exquisite instant of agony to call a spade by its proper name and know that you are much closer in your philosophy, to the Potomac than you are to the Platte or to the Missouri.

The World Herald opposes a broadened tax base for the state of Nebraska with a near paranoid frenzy. As a substitute it calls for better enforcement of the property tax laws. Yet, where stands the Herald on the property tax-exempt status of the Aksarben race track and betting parlor — a flagrant abuse of constitutional exemption privilege? No, not an abuse, really, a blatant violation that few people in this state outside the sanctuary of a Unitarian pulpit would have the temerity to mention. The local gods strike down those who milk the sacred cows.

There are deeper and more disturbing implications to this that transcend my momentary provocation at the patent hypocrisy of the Herald and all that group of well-meaning but misguided Nebraskans it either leads, follows, or both. The implication is just this: it would appear that our prime urban center, Omaha, is tending to place evermore reliance upon a closer and closer tie with the federal government while at the same time its reliance upon state governmental solutions and services is lessening. Perhaps this is a trend, nationally, with regard to urban centers. Perhaps Tocqueville spoke truly in 1835 when he stated that the older a democratic community is, the more centralized will its government become. (24)

The Negative Sickness

Yes, it may all be part of an inevitable senescence of state governments. Perhaps what you hear this morning is the moan of an old fashioned conservative sighing for the good old days when a state was a state with a strength and flavor of its own, run by local folks, interpreting local needs. It may just be that by its more pronounced abdication of responsibility in the areas of service I reviewed for you, Nebraska, rather than lagging behind, is in the forefront of a trend toward total federal reliance. And, the World Herald, rather than being the reactionary journal you think it is, in reality is crypto-socialist or crypto-federalist, hastening us toward the vortex of the federal whirlpool. What irony!

I wish it were not so. But until we can cure the negative sickness, until we are able by some means to find or create true leadership, until we can rid ourselves of the non-partisan legislature, until we can coordinate power and responsibility, we shall continue to be a state too timid to live.

Documentation

1. National Education Association, Research Report, 1962-R1, Table 37—Per Capita Personal Income, 1960, p. 34.
2. Op. cit., Table 40—Personal Income (1960) Per Pupil Enrolled in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools in 1960, p. 35.
3. Op. cit., Table 23—Percent of Elementary School Teachers with at Least Four Years of College Preparation, 1960-61, p. 24.
4. Op. cit., Table 24—Estimated Average Salaries of Classroom Teachers in Public Schools, 1961-62, p. 24.
5. Lincoln State Journal, July 13, 1961.
6. Ibid.
7. National Education Association, Research Report, 1962-R1, Table 56—Estimated Revenue from State Sources per pupil in ADA, 1961-62, p. 45; Table 61—Estimated Percent of Revenue for Public Elementary and Secondary Schools Received from Federal Government, 1961-62, p. 46.
8. Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1961, Expenditures by States on Public Parks, p. 192.
9. Telephone interview with Gregg Smith, State Game Commission, Capitol Building, Lincoln, Nebraska, March 14, 1962, at 1:50 p.m.
10. Ibid.
11. Lincoln State Journal, July 24, 1960.
12. Lincoln State Journal, February 17, 1962.
13. Interview Governor Frank Morrison, Lincoln State Journal, April 2, 1962, p. 1.
14. Nebraska R.R.S. 1943, 21-201.01; Lincoln State Journal, March 16, 1962.
15. Comment by Freeman Decker, State Superintendent of Education, reported Lincoln State Journal, July 13, 1961.
16. "Business in Nebraska," University of Nebraska News, No. 206, May, 1961.
17. "Business in Nebraska," University of Nebraska News, No. 206, Nov., 1961.
18. National Education Association, Research Report, 1962-R1, Table 8, population 65 years of age and older as percent of total population, 1960, p. 12.
19. Lincoln Star, March 13, 1962.
20. Lincoln State Journal, February 22, 1962.
21. Omaha World Herald, "Public Pulse," February 8, 1962.
22. Lincoln State Journal, April 9, 1962.
23. Nebraska Farmer, June 17, 1961.
24. DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA by Alexis De Tocqueville, The Great Books Foundation, 1955, Chicago 2, Illinois, p. 91.



Act then think???

published a cartoon showing a cap and gown scholar labeled "University of Nebraska" with two bearded hill-billies labeled "Sales Tax" and "Income Tax" riding on his trailing gown. It bore the caption: "Better keep his skirts clean." As you can see, it was a thinly veiled threat rather similar to Terry's. A week earlier, on February 8, the World Herald carried a letter signed by one Wray M. Scott accusing the University of immorality, unethical conduct, stooping to the gutter and being a prostitute in hiring a football coach and carrying on tax education throughout the state. (21) On Monday, April 9, in a press release supplied by an Omaha advertising firm, this same Mr. Scott announced the appointment of a Dr. Burkhardt as executive director of the Association of Nebraska Taxpayers, Inc. with these words: "Although he has a Ph.D., Dr. Burkhardt knows the meaning of hard work." (22) Who is this Mr. Wray M. Scott? Why, he was one of a group of highly respected, highly placed Omaha citizens who in 1961 incorporated this

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HEAR
ROGER DICKESON
SPEAK ON
"Would a Partisan Legislature
Cure Nebraska's Sickness"
NEXT THURSDAY
NEBRASKA UNION