

Outer Government Entrenched at Washington

Organizations Which Encircle the Capitol Dome and Influence Legislation for the Special Classes and Interests They Represent



The Capitol Illuminated.

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FROM afar the dome of the Capitol announces Washington. To the average citizen visiting the capital the monumental building under the dome, where Congress meets, represents the Government. From none of the porticos overlooking the city is he able to discern the circle of extragovernmental organizations which, in the many-sided influences they bring to bear on Congress, might be termed the "Outer Government."

But if the visitor goes to Washington on a special mission, and that special interest is represented by one of the organizations in the circle, then his first approach to the Government is almost certain to be through a doorway of the "Outer Government." If the mission be difficult and success attend it, the dominance of the dome shrinks somewhat in the mind of the visitor, and the power and prestige of his own particular organization is heightened. Later, if he finds that a piece of legislation which his organization advocated has been passed by Congress or that its claims have been recognized in the making of a new law, the importance of having a central office in Washington is more deeply impressed on the member.

In the outer circle of extragovernmental organizations are no less than seventy-five national bodies of one kind or another. They are of many classes; each represents a special or limited viewpoint; each exerts some influence on Congress and on other Government departments at Washington; but the strength of each influence varies greatly. Five of the organizations are recognized as possessing much power, and two of them have to their credit the chief part in recent laws making fundamental changes in the Government. Another has had a part in shaping every piece of legislation in the last fifteen years that bore on the class it represents. If a proposed measure is held to be injurious to the interests of that class, representatives of its organization are on the ground ready to act; its agents get busy, both in personal appeals to members of Congress and in the introduction of witnesses who will present its side of the case to the Congressional Committee holding hearings on the bill. This, it may be said, is the method followed by practically all the organizations.

First, let it be said, these organizations, taken all in all, are legitimate. They are directed by earnest, able, and conscientious men who apparently see it as their duty to press to the fullest the claims of the class or interest or cause

they represent, and their energy is not decreased by the fact that most of the organizations have the incentive of some merit. Certain advantages recognized by all have resulted from the growth of this system. Where the proposed law affects an industry, an organization is at hand to call in experts, if they are not already attached to the Washington headquarters, to lay data before the Congressional Committee.

Thus, if the dairy interest is to be affected, the National Board of Farm Organizations, which has lately bought a home of its own in the capital, will telegraph its dairy authority in the Middle West to be in Washington on a certain day to testify. Referenda are taken by some of the organizations, and the opinions of the members learned on proposed legislation of national importance. This has been named as another advantage—that the more organizations representing the varied interests of the country there are in Washington, the more comprehensive and immediate does Congress's contact with the country's needs become. In this view "Outer Government" is a circular ganglion of nerves reacting between Congress and the country.

But there are defects in the system, two especially worth noting. The first is that when one side of a case is represented only, the reaction is likely to be one-sided. This situation, from the first, has been the great magnet in bringing new national organizations to Washington. What the other side was accomplishing at Washington was the best of object lessons, and national organizations have been built in order that a class or a cause might make its voice heard at Washington.

This movement began more than twenty years ago, when lobbying was becoming a national scandal, and has grown to its present proportion almost unnoticed by the country. In order that its side of any proposed legislation might be legitimately represented, one organization after another made Washington its headquarters. Their other activities (and most of these bodies have important functions besides that of watching Congress) could be as well conducted in Washington as in New York City or Chicago. One of the comparatively early arrivals was the American Federation of Labor, which now occupies a handsome Washington office building of its own. A little later came the United States Chamber of Commerce, the largest organization in Washington representing the nation's business interest; recently

it bought a plot of ground facing Lafayette Square on the opposite side from the White House, where a building of credit to Washington is to be erected.

Among comparative new arrivals of prominence are: The Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico, the Friends of Irish Freedom, and the Plumb Plan League, which recently opened a large suite of offices in the Munsey Building.

What the farmers found, according to a representative of one of their organizations, opened their eyes.

"On important committees which had to pass on subjects of importance," said this representative in Washington the other day, "we found, frequently, that there was no member actually engaged in farming. We found the organizations representing the business man and that of labor active in seeing that their side got a fair deal, and that between these two forces and others we were being shoved aside. We had to come to Washington. It was made clear that we could not present our side at long distance.

"We saw, for instance, why 'jokers' affecting us had crept into legislation in the past.

"One illustration is the Clayton anti-trust law. The same exemption was promised to us as was given to labor—that the law would exclude farmers' co-operative selling organizations, just as it did labor organizations. After the bill became a law we found from experience that while it had been ostensibly granted, an added provision made it of little or no value. This was to the effect that only those farmers' co-operative selling organizations which had no capital stock and which declared no profits would be exempted. Manifestly this placed a rigid limit on farmers' organizations and stood directly in the way of the development of sales direct from the farmer to the consumer. If we had been here in Washington at the time, we think we could have shown that we were entitled to an exemption as full as labor's. We are trying now to have this part of the law repealed."

The National Board of Farm Organizations, the National Grange and the National Farm Council have central offices in Washington.

Organizations with political or social aims in most cases open offices in Washington almost as soon as launched. The Anti-Saloon League established itself in the capital twenty years ago. From that time there was an increasing concentration of effort on Congress, direct-

ed from the country at large, until the prohibition amendment was adopted. In the framing of the enforcement law recently passed by Congress the league was the chief adviser outside of Congress, and the bill as it finally came through represented fairly well the ideas originally presented to the committees.

At the same time the liquor forces, both the distillers and the brewers, were represented at the capital, but they were able to make little headway against the energy of the prohibitionists' campaign. So, with the suffragists and the anti-suffragists. Both have been represented in Washington by active organizations.

When, in a measure of importance, one side is represented in Washington by a special organization, the opposite side is likely soon to be represented. Both sides of the League of Nations have been so championed during that fight in Washington. But, even if every special national interest of weight could be represented, there would still be absent from the circle of organizations the interest of the greatest importance to the country—that of the general public, for the sum of the special interests, it is asserted, cannot result in a total equivalent to the general public. No way is seen to bring the general public to Washington, and the special organizations in the capital are there to stay, as standing for a legitimate purpose, and numerous others are now preparing to move thither.

But one organization at Washington might represent all the public. That is Congress. In the past, critics say, Congress has placed too much dependence on the circle of extragovernmental organizations, but now, while continuing to profit by the information and aid these bodies provide, Congress is being urged to look over the circle and keep steadily in mind the nation as a whole. In the last session, toward the end, there were signs of this new attitude. It was made evident in the growing sentiment that the general public must have first consideration. When it was first proposed, in the railroad legislation, that some form of limitation in the interest of all the people be placed on the general strike, there were not many who would consider the proposal, but, as the danger that faced the country pressed itself home, it was deemed an encouraging sign that 108 members of the House voted against the Anderson amendment, which took all the teeth out of the Esch bill, leaving arbitration purely voluntary. Will more Congressmen look over and beyond to the general public in the present session?