Outer Government Entrenched at Washington: Organizations Which Encircle the Capitol Dome and Influence Legislation for the Special Classes and Interests They Represent

From after the dome of the Capitol was completed. Washington, the average citizen visiting the capital, the monumental building under the dome, appears indescribable, as if it were the very image of the Government. From none of the portals overlooking the city is it possible to get a glimpse of 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 trip to Washington is likely to be a visit to one of the organization offices or to some limited viewpoint; each exerts some influence on Congress and on other Government departments at Washington, but the strength of such influences cannot be easily estimated.

In the outer circle of extragovernmental organizations are no less than 250 special national bodies of one kind or another. They are of many classes; each represents a special interest or limited viewpoint; each exerts some influence on Congress and on other Government departments at Washington, but the strength of such influences cannot be easily estimated. Many of the organizations are represented as possessing a certain degree of power, and it is likely that those interests or classes of people have to their credit the fact that they are represented by organizations that have exerted themselves to the best of their ability to influence Congress and the Executive.

But there are defects in the system. One of the most important is the lack of representation of the general public. It is not the case that every interest is represented, but there is a tendency to represent the special interests more than the general public.

The National Board of Farm Organization (the Farm Bureau) has largely developed an interest in the affairs of 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 Plum Plan League, which recently opened a large suite of offices in the bureau building.

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

"An important committee which had to pass on subjects of importance," said this representative, "was found to be active in Washington the other day, and 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 and it was made clear that we could not present our side at all costs.

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

"One illustration is the Clayton anti-trust law. The same exemption was promised to us as was given to labor—"

The law would exclude farmers' cooperative selling organizations, just as it did labor organizations. After the bill became a law we found from experience that while it had been ostensibly created, the demand provision made it of little or no value. This was the effect that only the farmers' cooperative 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 that 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 official offices in Washington.

But at the same time the liquor forces, the drys, the farmers, and the brewers, were represented at the capital, but they were not able to make 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 number of instances, 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 too shamed during that fight in Washington. But even if every special national interest of weight could be represented, there would still be in the circle of organizations the interests of many who would not be represented even if the public voted, for the general public, for the sum of the special interests, it is asserted, cannot result in a total equilibrium in the market, for there are still, 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 urged to look over the circle and keep steadily in mind the national 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 arguments that this would be a handicap to the farmers, but, as the danger that faced the country seemed worse, it was deemed an encouraging sign that all members of the House voted against the Anderson amendment, which took all the teeth out of the rail bill, leaving arbitration very poorly. Will more Congressmen look over and beyond the general public in the present session?