

CENTRALIZATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITY¹

DISCUSSION: FIRST SESSION

MR. HENRY P. KENDALL:² Centralization, the topic of this paper, is a very broad, very intangible subject and one not easily defined. The entire session of this Society has been devoted to the war in its various phases and aspects. We all feel the seriousness of the war. We all feel that we have got to win the war, but it is by no means a foregone conclusion that we are going to win. More and more every day, as I talk with or hear from those who have come from the front or from the inner councils of Great Britain and France, and with men in the places of responsibility in the administration of this country, I realize that there is a growing conviction among a large number of people throughout the country—and I confess that I am one of them—that it is an open question whether we are going to win or not. But as I said before, we have got to win. Upon what does our winning hinge? Obviously, it hinges upon the maximum production of the country, production of what is wanted, in the quantities wanted, and at the time wanted, and this maximum can be obtained by a completely organized war machine, and this can be brought about in time only by a definite plan and centralized authority in bringing it to pass.

The United States is an example of a great democracy which has grown at a tremendous rate of speed. This growth has come through a gradual evolution of confederated states, and towns, and it has had some advantages. It has produced a spirit, a method of thought, a freedom of individual action, but this spirit has yet to be fused into a national idea, a national personality, a truly American individuality. Our form of government has been characterized by lack of a strong national consciousness. While democracy has hitherto served its purposes and has created the component elements which when fused and welded will constitute a national consciousness, it has not, prior to this war, been put to the test as an organization, as a nation, and has not had the stimulus necessary for fusing and welding. For three years, warnings were sounded from over-seas, but went unheeded by our peace-loving people. Then suddenly, our great democratic country with its hundred million people practically totally unprepared, entered upon a struggle unparalleled in the world's history. The American spirit, or at least the Amer-

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ican political spirit, has not developed a complete organization; and thus unprepared, we stand face to face with a foe which has for generations had such an organization and whose leading men entrusted with the strategy of the war have with but few exceptions had from thirty to forty years of experience in the thorough, all-embracing, highly-efficient organization represented by the German Government. The vast problem, then, which confronts this people is to utilize the spirit of democracy, which as it exists could not be finer, in combination with the spirit of science, in developing the best organization possible, equal or superior to that which an autocracy could conceive.

The discussion this afternoon seems to me not to define clearly any issue or any difference of opinion as to procedure, but to drift rather readily into the abstract. Now, at the risk of being shot at sunrise I want to state the problem as I see it, not in the abstract, but more in the concrete; and I believe that the idea which burns within me will not be understood until I do so. I realize, however, the obvious danger of being misunderstood and considered unappreciative and unpatriotic. But one of the responsibilities that a man feels in democracy is that this is his government and his country, and, conversely, that he belongs to it.

We have at present an organization, it is true. We have men with a perfect understanding of their particular jobs, men who are doing unusual work, well organized departments that are performing effective service. We have a remarkable *esprit de corps*, that factor so essential to the success of any organization. You cannot generalize about the efficiency or the excellence of the United States Government any more than you can generalize on the subject, say, of labor unions. There are departments in our Government from which every industry in the country without exception could learn to its great advantage, and when the men from these departments return to private life, newly equipped with the training received in those departments, they are going to contribute to their industries something of immense value which they could not have contributed otherwise. In other words, there are departments of the United States Government which can be very well said to lead in their basic principles of industrial management and industrial efficiency. There are other departments, however, which have not been put to the test of competition, of real work, or of war problems, and if their methods of management were applied to an industry, that industry could not endure one year. Such departments are at the other extreme of effi-

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ciency and you will find departments of the Government running through the entire gamut within the limits of these two extremes.

We have not, it is obvious, the comprehensive plan, the scheme of centralized control and definitive organization which is needed. Responsibility is not clearly defined, is not sufficiently delegated, and is not accompanied by the authority which it requires if it is to be successfully assumed. The achievement of such an organization, it seems to me, is the question we are discussing to-day and it is a question not of principle, but of ways and means. If you have seen charts of organization of the United States Government and compared them with charts of organization of the French Government, the British Government and the German Government, you will realize that the war organization of the United States as it exists at present is satisfying neither the people nor the administration that it is the most effective means of winning the war. Incidentally, the changes in the British charts from the beginning of the war until the present stage are most significant because Great Britain, too, started as a democracy, and one more hampered by traditions than ours, and it has paid a terrible price for some of its lessons which it should have learned from observation just as we should have already learned them from observation over-seas. I think we can safely take this dissatisfaction with the present form of organization as a premise, because, as you all know, the President and his Cabinet, and the Council of National Defense, are constantly changing the general scheme of organization and are groping constantly for the one best way of doing things which they know exists and which they hope to find.

If we can accept that as a minor premise, should not the discussion center about what constitutes the best form of organization toward which we should aim and the rapidity with which it can be brought about without lessening the efficiency of what we have? The size of the problem is such that it seems to me unwise to confuse the issue by examples of great efficiency and inefficiency, of wonderful pieces of fine work or of blunders. We ought to consider at once the fundamental underlying principles of organization.

I advocate a logical, progressive coordination of departments and functions, with departmental control and functional management, and with everything tied in at the top. The President is, of course, the very top with the second in command virtually the Secretary of War. To them more than to anyone else is entrusted the responsibility of winning the war. When I speak of centralized authority, I do not want to be interpreted as advocating that there shall be one

desk across which everything shall pass. You have all probably seen what is known as the one-man concern where everything comes to the desk of one man who is tremendously efficient and is recognized as doing two or more men's work. Such a concern is, however, very inefficient and is about as unsafe and unstable in the long run as anything could be. I do not advocate such a one-man control in our war organization. What I think we must secure is the standardization of units, making each self-sufficient and efficient, with its responsibility and authority clearly defined, and with its relations standardized and working along together without duplication of objects or functions and without omissions in desired accomplishment because of misunderstanding as to which department is responsible for such accomplishment. These departments should be subject to a central control, should all be combined in one scheme, a single big machine. There are at least two features to such a super-control, that dealing with interdepartmental relations and that dealing with the auxiliary departments which are common to all.

With disrespect to no one and with great admiration for the splendid work that has been done, I nevertheless believe that the weakness to-day in our system, which is in competition with the almost perfect mechanism of our antagonists, is that the different departments of the Army, of the Navy, of the Government, of the volunteer civil committees, boards and commissions, are working independently. They do not know what they can do and what they cannot do. To my knowledge, there are half a dozen different organizations that have organized departments to secure common information which they will need and which should be given to them, and they are all wasting time and handicapping themselves to get it.

Every department ought to be organized, from the bottom up, as perfectly as is possible under functional management, built into a general scheme of things where there is no duplication, no overlapping, where responsibility is defined and backed up by authority, where men must make good or be removed quickly, where there are staff organizations and boards for advisory purposes; for while we know that an effective administrator is a man, we recognize also that an effective advisor is a board. It seems to me that the time is getting terrifyingly short, days and hours and minutes count tremendously, and there is nothing better which this Society or the people at large can do than to force the recognition and the importance of the fact that we are at war, and that in a state of war the standards of the past will not meet the test, and that while the best that the country has produced in men and organization and accomplishment