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THE FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION

JOAN C. DAVIS*

The complexity and multiplicity of foreign policy questions facing the United States today places a premium on intelligent understanding of the issues by the widest possible cross-section of our citizens. I believe that all efforts to increase public understanding of the factors involved in these decisions should be encouraged, and I am particularly impressed with the approach which the Foreign Policy Association has taken toward the problem.

—John F. Kennedy¹

THE OCTOBER 15TH PEACE MORATORIUM, foreign policy as an issue in local elections, the increasingly activist role of Wall Street and business leaders across the country in international affairs—all these developments reflect a growing involvement by more Americans in foreign policy. It was not too long ago that political leaders felt their constituents were not concerned about matters outside their immediate neighborhood. A few sociologists talked about the tendency of many voters to regard foreign policy as so remote and so complicated that decisions were best left in the hands of the elite few who were specialists in the field. But the world has come to our doorsteps.

At the same time, the average American is perplexed by the issues. There is no lack of information; radio, press and TV overwhelm us with daily barrages. What is needed, many people feel, are well-planned educational programs for adults who want to become better informed about world affairs.

Accordingly, the Editor of the Catholic Lawyer has asked me to inform readers of the history and goals of the Foreign Policy Associa-

* Director, New York Regional Office, Foreign Policy Association.

¹ Letter from John F. Kennedy to John W. Nason, Sept. 1, 1960.

tion, an organization established to provide such programs for the inquiring mind.

Since 1918, the Foreign Policy Association has devoted itself to informing the American public about critical issues of foreign policy and fostering citizen responsibility in shaping decisions on these issues.

By-laws of the Association state:

The Association shall take no position on any specific issue of United States foreign policy. It shall present, so far as practicable, all relevant aspects of any issue and shall urge individual decision based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy.²

Great care is taken to preserve the non-partisan character of the educational activities.

The original 141 members of the Association included such distinguished persons as Charles A. and Mary Beard, John R. Commons, Walter Damrosch, Felix Frankfurter, Learned Hand and E. R. A. Seligman. They organized themselves on the eve of the armistice in November, 1918, sharing the concern expressed by Paul U. Kellogg, editor of *Survey* magazine and a prime leader in the organizing efforts:

[T]he outlook (is) that we should have the best-informed delegation at the Peace Conference, but the least-informed body of citizens behind them.³

Events proved the ominous truth of this prediction as the American people recoiled

from the fourteen points advanced by President Wilson, rejected the League of Nations and withdrew into a period of seeking to remove themselves from the turmoil loosed in the world.

During the 1920's, the Foreign Policy Association assigned a priority to research and publications. There also were Saturday luncheon-discussion programs at the Astor Hotel. These discussions were carried by radio, along with a fifteen-minute weekly series on the NBC network called *The World Today*. So successful were the activities that FPA chapters were established to conduct similar programs in Albany, Boston, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Columbus, Hartford, Philadelphia, Providence, Minneapolis, Richmond and St. Louis. These chapters brought authorities on international issues into the communities for lectures, panel discussions and radio broadcasts.

By the time of its twentieth anniversary in 1938, FPA had a membership of 17,000; chapters flourished in major cities and the list of publications included many original works of scholarship by distinguished authorities.

World War II plunged the American people into a new age of complex relationships on the world scene. There was a clear need to reach the millions who were bewildered by the end to former isolationist patterns. No longer was it sufficient for the writers, professors and diplomats to talk among themselves; the housewives and students, businessmen and farmers were anxious about how events across the world were affecting their daily lives. If all these citizens were to play their role in the dem-

² Foreign Policy Association By-laws, art. II, ¶ 2, at 1.

³ Mr. Kellogg's statement can be found in the archives of the Foreign Policy Association.

ocratic process, they would need a better understanding of international events.

The Foreign Policy Association broadened its activities. Regional offices were opened (these are located now in Atlanta, Boulder, Berkeley, Chicago and New York). In cooperation with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, there was established in New York a World Affairs Center which offered a bookstore, meetings for the leaders of voluntary organizations and briefings for groups coming to New York for visits to the UN. A grant from the Danforth Foundation made it possible to launch a School Services Department which develops curriculum materials for the elementary and secondary schools, arranges teachers' conferences and provides consultation to school systems. In its commitment to reach ever larger segments of the American public, FPA abandoned membership and became a national service organization, ready to work with corporations, religious denominations, educational institutions, professional societies—a wide range of organizations growing more concerned about foreign policy issues.

Last year, the Foreign Policy Association celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. Rather than look back upon a half century, it looked ahead: *Towards the Year 2018* was the theme for a series of special programs and publications.

Today, the Association works with commercial and educational TV networks, in addition to radio and newspapers. Publications have been reduced in number as universities, foreign correspondents and research organizations supply a wealth of material. Community and junior colleges—

the fastest growing segment of higher education—receive special attention from the regional offices. There are no longer any FPA chapters, but many of the original ones have been reconstituted as autonomous community organizations, usually called world affairs councils, and there are close relationships between these councils and FPA. Corporations such as IBM, World Trade and Western Electric call upon FPA to organize seminars for their management personnel moving into responsibility for international aspects of business. As a joint project with the United States Mission to the United Nations, there are one-day programs in New York for professional people, officials of community organizations and other leaders who are interested in becoming better informed themselves in order to influence their home communities in the direction of more responsible citizen participation in foreign policy.

The FPA is governed by a board of 75 directors representing a wide range of viewpoints in business, education and the other professions. Among its members are Dean Rusk (former Secretary of State), Eustace Seligman, Esq. (Sullivan & Cromwell), Andrew Cordier (President of Columbia University), Harding Bancroft (Executive Vice-President of the New York Times), Karl Bendetsen (Chairman, U.S. Plywood-Champion Papers) and George Percy (Vice-President, Standard Oil of N.J.).

The largest single program is Great Decisions, the annual study-discussion series on foreign policy issues. This is conducted across the country during February and March. 1970 will mark the sixteenth

year when small groups of eight to fifteen persons gather in homes, libraries and other neighborhood centers to exchange ideas on major issues of foreign policy facing the American people. These groups use a program booklet prepared by FPA. A highlight of the eight-week series is the tabulation of opinions on each issue, with the results being forwarded to congressmen, senators and the State Department.

At this time when groups are being formed in over one thousand communities for Great Decisions 1970, it is significant to ask about Catholic participation. Studies have shown that such participation falls below Catholic percentages in the population. For instance, Alfred O. Hero writes in his *Studies in Citizen Participation in International Relations*:

A study of organizational behavior in San Francisco found that Catholics, even when of similar incomes, were less inclined than Protestants to belong to organizations. Moreover, these religious group differences become accentuated with participation in formal groups where world affairs or other non-bread-and-butter subjects are discussed in an analytical way—Protestants are considerably more likely to take part in such organizations than are Catholics and still more apt to become officers of such bodies. For illustration, Catholics comprised only 17 percent of the male and ten percent of the female respondents to questionnaires sent to participants in Great Decisions in Greater Boston, whereas they made up over half of the population of that metropolis. Since certain factors may have resulted in a lower proportion of returns from Catholic than from other participants, these figures may lead to an underestimate of actual Catholic involvement. However, in Minnesota and Wisconsin, Catholics ap-

peared among participants in a diversity of serious programs on world issues only one-fourth as frequently as they appeared in the general population of these two states; Protestants were found twice as often in that sample as in the general population and Jews six times as often.⁴

This high percentage of Jewish involvement also is reflected in the Boston study where Mr. Hero concludes: "The average Jew would be some fifteen times more likely to participate as the average Catholic."⁵ Though these studies were completed some years ago (the Boston study in 1959-60), no recent findings have raised serious questions about basic changes in the patterns.

But perhaps changes are on the way. More and more Catholics are becoming concerned about world affairs; adult education is beginning to gain a foothold in Catholic education, formerly absorbed with the elementary and secondary school years; the presidency of John F. Kennedy laid to rest earlier prejudices against Catholic participation at the highest levels of our American political system.

For individual Catholic lawyers or local guilds of Catholic lawyers eager to see greater citizen participation in world affairs, there are many programs available. The Foreign Policy Association is one organization which stands ready to cooperate with community groups in launching such programs.

⁴ A. HERO, *STUDIES IN CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS* 78 (1960).

⁵ *Id.*



THE CATHOLIC LAWYER

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