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Remarks by VADM H. G. Rickover, USN
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INTELLECT IN A DEMOCRACY: A HOUSE DIVIDED?

Let me start by making my position clear: I see no antithesis between "Intellect" and "Democracy" unless democracy is misunderstood in theory or misapplied in practice. As its name indicates, democracy means the people (demos) rule (kratein). It is based squarely on faith in the intelligence of normal people; unless we consider them to be intelligent enough to decide who is to govern them and how they are to be governed, we can have no belief in democracy as a viable system of government.

The question we are to discuss, I take it, does not refer to average but to superior intellect. We are asked, "Is Superior Intellect in a Democracy a House Divided"; in theory no, but in practice two tendencies create a hostility toward superior intellect which has a divisive effect upon our democratic society: The first arises out of a popular tendency to look upon democracy as being more than a political system in which every citizen is equal before the law, has an equal vote, and is equal in his

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relations with government. The second is a consequence of today's increased bureaucratization of life.

Political equality is often confused with general equality; hence anything irrevocably setting one type of man or group of men against the majority is held undemocratic, and so unacceptable. It cannot be denied that superior intellect makes for the most intractable kind of inequality. Intellect goes to the whole of a man's personality and for this reason differs from special talents, such as athletics, music, the arts, which are often found in men of average intellect. Nothing is inherently so aristocratic as superior intelligence, the more so when it has been sharpened by a rigorous education. No amount of legislating can democratize, that is, universalize high intelligence.

Before I. Q. tests were invented, believers in democracy deprecated the intellectual gulf between people that was manifest to the naked eye, and attributed it solely to artificial barriers preventing the poor from acquiring the education available to the rich. Discovery that the I.Q. of normal citizens ranges from 90 to 200 was perhaps the greatest disappointment ever suffered by sincere believers in democracy.

So potentially dangerous to the democratic process is this gap in intelligence that we can do nothing more important to strengthen democracy than put concentrated thought and effort into a search for ways to narrow it. Obviously, handing out unmerited academic diplomas or herding all students into the same

classroom will not bring this about, it merely camouflages the gap. There is only one way to narrow it and that is to motivate the less intelligent to greater effort.

All of us have unused inner resources--intellectual no less than moral and physical--with which we could vastly surpass our normal achievements. Men have proved this time and again in emergencies. Today, we live in a continuous state of emergency where our fate depends on the ability of average citizens to think clearly and act wisely. To do this, they must be convinced of the necessity of making greater mental effort. Average citizens need more application to learning than the above-average to absorb sufficient knowledge and wisdom to govern this nation; they must be better instructed in the subjects basic to a good education. To shunt them into vocational subjects or life-adjustment courses, as happens too often in our schools, is to aggravate intellectual inequality. Other Western democracies--notably Switzerland and the Scandinavias--have done much better in raising the scholastic standard of their less intelligent children. In these countries not only the talented, but also the average and below average youth, achieve higher scholastic levels than here.

"Life-adjustment education" is mainly responsible for mediocre schooling. It fails to stimulate the less able to make the extra effort to catch up with the rest; it nourishes in them a false sense of intellectual equality; it prevents them from realizing how rare is high intellect, how hard the road that must be taken

to bring it to fruition, how enormously beneficial the contributions it makes to the individual, to community, to nation. By carefully protecting the average, the dullard, the lazybones against intellectual competition from children with better minds and stronger motivation, we foster in the less able a blindness to excellence; they never realize it is the work of superior minds that has created the high material standard of living all Americans enjoy today. They have been taught to believe our enormous industrial productivity, our widespread high standard of living, is the work of men who push buttons; they forget the enormous contributions of those who conceived, designed and built the whole intricate machinery which reduces man's labor to simple manipulation and floods the market with consumer goods.

Keeping all children together in one classroom is said to develop the virtues of democratic citizenship; this is hardly borne out by our present political behavior compared to earlier periods of our history. What it does develop in less able children is a disrespect for--a hostility to--high intellect. How could it be otherwise?

Conditioned by schooling that never challenges me and never lets me fail; bombarded by flattery from those who desire my custom or my vote, what is my reaction going to be when I discover I have a modest and poorly developed mind, you have a towering intellect sharpened by mental exertion? Obviously my sense of equality leads me to look upon this as an undemocratic abomination,

and so I will proceed to pull you down to my own level. At the very least I will consider you a freak--not to be trusted with practical affairs.

Increasing bureaucratization of life--inescapable in a populous modern industrial nation--reinforces latent hostility to superior intellect. Bureaucracies are hierarchical in structure, routine in operation. In course of time they tend to put the survival and smooth functioning of the organization above its intended purpose. They elevate to leadership men who are adapted to work in circumscribed conditions, who readily accept direction from above, even in matters where they are more competent than their administrative superiors. Men of high intellect and professional expertise cannot easily accept organizational routines and leader-follower relationships based on rank, not competence. To the "organization man" they are disruptive, divisive. Yet without their contributions, organizations stagnate. All progress comes through individual creativity by Superior Intellect. How to fit it into our over-organized life is of greatest importance.

Our admiration for so-called "practical" men and dislike for "eggheads" lead us to overvalue the manipulator of men, money and words--the administrator; and to undervalue the man of superior intellect, the creative innovator--the professional man. Whatever the original purpose of an organization, be it private or public, be it commercial, spiritual, cultural or educational, it inevitably becomes a bureaucracy unless we clearly define the activities of those who administer and those who create and produce. Progress

is hampered by unintelligent administrative meddling, by insistence on routine. Clear definition is most important when an organization must combine routine activities alongside novel developmental projects.

The military is such an organization. Its main activity is operational and emergency in nature, requiring clear channels of command and spelled-out routines. But to carry out its operational task, the military must also be capable of continuous innovation in weapons and in ways to use these weapons effectively. Such innovations do not flow from command channels or routines. They are brought forth through the efforts of men of superior intellect and professional competence. Technology is relentlessly shifting the criterion of military strength from the operational to the materiel side; the best military qualities avail naught unless equipment is up-to-date.

This change is not yet reflected in our military structure. We still operate on the principle that officers are interchangeable men; that they can perform any task assigned them. Included among such "military" tasks is direction of complex technical projects for new weapons systems. Here the actual productive work is performed by qualified technical experts but the direction is by officers who rarely possess the necessary technical knowledge to understand the work. Moreover they are rotated in and out of assignments for short periods of duty, usually two to three years. Officers thus exercise management control without having the

requisite technical competence which today can only be acquired by a long and arduous professional education. Their term of office is so brief they do not have time to become familiar with the work they direct. We could not have devised a more ineffectual system had we deliberately set out to do so.

The military establishment is our national life insurance. Respect for tradition must yield where the country's survival is involved. We must not continue practices resulting in ever longer leadtimes while the Russians keep on cutting theirs. Were I asked to pinpoint the principal cause of this dangerous state of affairs, I should unhesitatingly give it as the unwillingness of the military to make room for the men who can produce new weapons--the technical professionals. We shall continue to lose the few capable men of this kind we now have, and certainly fail to attract others, unless we reverse present practices which hamstring them and render them unproductive.

In this country large-scale developmental projects of military significance--such as missiles, space vehicles, nuclear propulsion--all suffer grievously from over-administration. Technically unqualified officers do not hesitate to decide complex scientific and engineering problems; to overrule their technical subordinates; to meddle in their day-to-day activities. In my own group, at least two-thirds of my own time and that of the top scientists and engineers is wasted by administrative fiat. Time and again they must stop their regular work, and exhaust their energies in

combatting administrative errors. Thousands of hours are lost dealing with the avalanche of memoranda descending from higher administrative levels. A short while ago, every senior technical man was doing paperwork ordered from above; we had difficulty releasing one of them from his writing chores to deal with an urgent technical problem. We were scribbling instead of building ships; the Russians were forging ahead with new weapons, widening the leadtimes between the two countries.

Russia carries complicated technical projects through more efficiently than we, chiefly because she does not subscribe to our quaint notion that top-management of projects is a part-time chore for technical amateurs! Her long-range developmental projects proceed on schedule, ours flounder in a tangle of red tape produced by legions of committees and layers of supervisory administrators--all with great power but little personal responsibility for ultimate success of the work. Even when we ostensibly vest responsibility in a "Czar," he will long since have moved on to a new assignment by the time the smoke screen of organizational "public relations" has been dissipated and the truth about his performance has become public.

To speed military technology and reduce leadtimes I suggest the following simple reforms; in order of importance:

First: Make power coincide with competence; recognize that "pure" administrative ability alone does not fit a man to direct complex technical work performed by highly trained professionals;

that even a technically trained manager needs time to familiarize himself with the work; short assignments must therefore be avoided.

Second: Make power coincide with responsibility; hold men all along the line responsible for the directions they give; keep managers of technical projects in office long enough so they can be judged by their success or failure.

Third: Recognize that routines do not give rise to new ideas and technical developments; therefore creative workers should be freed from unnecessary routines; recognize that such freedom is essential if they are to do their work and does not constitute a pampering of eggheads.

Fourth: Change the administrative structure to permit technical experts the right to their own professional judgment; unless this professional right is preserved, such men are degraded to the status of mere technicians and technicians will not win us the race with the Russians.

Above all, in this period of great danger to our country, let not devotion to the "ways of the organization" hold back capable professional men with creative ability. Superior intellect is essential to all organizations, indeed to the entire house of democracy.