

Correspondence – American Sociological Association

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Fayerweather Hall

August 10, 1974

The Honorable Jimmy Carter
Governor of Georgia
1974 Campaign Chairman:
Democratic National Committee
P. O. Box 1524
Atlanta, Georgia 30301

My dear Governor Carter:

I must apologize for not answering sooner your letter to Otto Larsen of July 17, 1974, which he forwarded to me for answering but which arrived here while I was on a vacation abroad.

Your invitation to the American Sociological Association to help identify issues of great social concern for the Democratic candidates poses a welcome challenge. Sociologists have studied many of the serious social problems in our country, such as the alienation of many people from their society and government, inequality in education, poverty, ethnic and racial conflict and discrimination, ecology, and crime--to name a few. I shall put your invitation on the agenda of the next council meeting of our Association at the end of August and ask experts in various fields to communicate to you directly their concerns with issues about which they have specialized knowledge.

In the meantime let me mention one issue I consider of particular importance. Much of the alienation you speak about has its basic source, in my opinion, in the growing size and power of complex organizations in modern society. The Watergate scandal has brought this issue to public attention, but the corruption and disregard for law and civil liberties of high officials that have been revealed are merely the symptom of an underlying cause, which is the tremendous power over people and financial resources that large organizations concentrate in the hands of the men who govern them. Huge conglomerates and the Pentagon are good examples. Although the efficiency of large organizations is essential for our high standard of living and, indeed, for large-scale democracy, the tremendous concentration of power these organizations effect are a serious threat to the

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checks and balances on which the sovereignty of the people in a democracy rests.

I am convinced that we must change our laws and learn to control large organizations democratically and curb their power. Our democratic institutions have been formed at a time when tyrants were the main threat to the liberty of people, but today organizations have become the main threat. I am the last to excuse Nixon and his assistants for their illegal acts, but what made these acts possible is the great power we have permitted to become concentrated in the organization of the White House. We must pass laws to implement our democratic institutions by effectively restraining the power of organizations. Clearly this is not the case now. Even activities of corporations and their executives that are already illegal, such as illicit campaign contributions, are penalized by puny sanctions that cannot serve as effective deterrents. To pass effective laws to this end requires an educational campaign to convince people that it is both just and necessary to limit the power of organizations and to make organizations that violate legal restraints on their power subject to serious penalties that interfere with their functioning, just as we do with persons who violate laws by incarcerating them.

If you are interested in my further thoughts on this issue, I shall be glad to elaborate more fully.

Yours sincerely,



Peter M. Blau
President, American Sociological
Association

PMB:jl