

SW1 - SWB

Introduction to Handbook  
Council For Democracy

RAYMOND GRAM SWING

*Key point  
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The danger to democracy is real in the world of today, and the sentiments that pour from almost all Americans in loyalty to democracy are real. But somewhere in the equation, between danger and loyal sentiments, is something which confuses the issue. Many of the loyal sentiments, as they flood into expression, are not quite solid and not quite persuasive. There always is a minority listening to the praise of democracy with suspicion and skepticism. Many Americans look at their country and find it full of defects. To many the door of opportunity is closed. To not a few the civil equalities are denied. They see that even some defenders of democracy are silent about the inadequacies of phases of American life. They say: "Democracy has failed to bring a good life to a substantial section of society. It is time to try something else."

The misunderstanding here is as to the nature of democracy. Democracy is not the sum of social relationships that have been created by the democratic process. Democracy is not the end-product, but the means of providing the end-product. The end-product in the United States, which some call democracy, is indeed imperfect and incomplete, though much in it is superb. But it is not democracy itself. It is what the citizens in a democracy have made out of their freedom. One can call the social order in the United States democratic, in that it came into being through democratic processes, but it is not democracy. This social order might pass away through democratic action, just as it came into being through it, yet the United States could still be a democracy. What is good or what is adequate in the United States is not democracy, and democracy should not be judged by them. It is what Americans have done with their political freedom.

In the world crisis, the freedom itself is in danger. If the freedom is lost, the opportunity is lost to improve the social order. If the freedom is lost, the nation of individuals will not be able to try, and to succeed or fail according to their wisdom. A social order will be imposed upon them which they cannot change. They will have to accept what they get. It will also be imperfect, since it will be man-made. It will be far more unjust, since the power to impose it will be in the hands of a few.

But if democracy, the freedom to create a good social order, is to have the defense of all, the social order must be improved. That is obvious. One cannot expect individuals who are deprived of the privileges bestowed upon others to defend freedom which they know to have been poorly used. So the defense of democracy is not only against a danger which confronts it from without, but also from its internal weakness.

Many Americans have recognized this dual nature of the democratic crisis. But it leaves them depressed and helpless. As individuals they feel unable to meet the world peril. As individuals they also are all too aware that their strength is unable to rebuild the social structure, to cure unemployment, to raise the standard of living for millions, to extend civil liberties for those deprived of them, to overcome racial prejudice, and to silence intolerance. They would gladly pay a high price to effect any of these changes. But they feel that their own powers are not enough. America is too big for them.

This is an illusion, understandably one, but an illusion all the same. The possibility of action is present to every citizen. If one doubts it, let him re-read his life of Benjamin Franklin, who as a young printer, organized a society of twelve men who met weekly, discussed the latest news of politics and science, and also the problems of the community.

Similar Societies were formed, and Franklin even saw the vision of bringing into being a new world order, inspired by intelligence and consideration for the common good. The Junta, as Franklin called his organization, functioned for many years, and most of Philadelphia's municipal progress grew out of its activities. This is in the best American tradition, the impulse to meet, to discuss, to act. It has not become more difficult because the community is larger, for with its growth has come a corresponding improvement in the means of communication. The nation is the sum of its parts, and in each part the individual can have scope and influence. In every community each individual has his range of power if he will only exercise it. And it is folly in a democracy for individuals to wait for leadership, without supplying the personal initiative in their own range. In township, village, town and city, problems are crying for attention and intelligence. These are America. In each unit are Americans who are not capable defenders of democracy because that unit has been less intelligently governed than it could be. In each unit is a problem that requires study and the collective action of individuals. It is just as true today as that Philadelphia required the ardent interest of a single printer named Benjamin Franklin.

This booklet is an attempt to catalogue some of the actions open to Americans who care about the improvement of their society through the democratic process. It is compiled in the sense that an American who makes a contribution to his neighborhood makes it to the nation. This is the only internal defense which democracy can be given. It is stronger than sentiments, however loyal. It is stronger than weapons. Participation is the life of democracy. Without it, it dies.

ORTSGRUPPE BASEL  
DER  
SWISS-AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS

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Basle, December 18th, 1947

Mrs. Eleonor Roosevelt  
Apartment 15-A  
29 Washington Square, West  
New York 11, N. Y.

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

By these lines I wish to extend to you in the name of our Society our heartiest wishes for good health and your welfare at the occasion of the coming year end.

With great regret we have taken note that owing to your unusual occupation you were unable to address this Society and we still harbour the hope that in the course of 1948 on one of your coming stays in Europe you will honour us by visiting Basle and speak to a public which is anxious to hear your views.

I hope that our efforts of the last weeks to make arrangements of your visit to Basle have not been resented by you and considered as an imposition.

We were simply prompted to act, as we did, by the enthusiastic reception which the perspective of your address has aroused among our members and many other inhabitants of this city who are friends of the United States.

With best personal wishes for 1948 and highest esteem, I remain, dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

Yours very sincerely

SWISS-AMERICAN SOCIETY  
FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS

President:

*Handwritten signature: Rudolf Trey*

*Heartily with best wishes  
to you and your family*

ORIGINAL RETIRED FOR PRESERVATION

~~Robert Swink~~

Swink, F.

Frank Swink Jr  
221 West Fayette St  
Connellsville Pa

Dear Mrs Roosevelt  
I am writing to see if you will help me out I am about to lose my home I am not working and they are pushing me for my payment I am a single man I bought that home for my mother and dad I want them to have a place to live in while they are in this world my mother is 82 years old and my dad is 86 years old I don't want no money just try to explain to the company that I owed I have not been working good for the last two years I am a coal miner I have been rich I got work now but the miner are out on strike I am back on my payment I will send you the letter



Librarian

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Aliquippa, pa.

RFD#1 Box 385  
Sept. 22, 1947

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt,  
% Hyde park,  
New York.

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt;

shortly after your husband's death while I was living in Burbank, California I composed a poem in honor of him, for in my estimation, no greater man ever lived. I wrote it and simply put it away among my papers, forgetting about it. I write poems and short stories and am now writing a novel which I hope some day that a publisher will accept. I have great ambitions and do not give up too easily.

I am sending you my poem, a "Tribute to Franklin Delano Roosevelt". I hope you will enjoy reading it for I felt that you were the one person who would get the most satisfaction out of reading it.

yours truly,

Frances Swiontek  
frances swiontek



Tribute to Franklin Delano Roosevelt

The nation bows its head in sorrow;  
We mourn for so fine a man-  
He lives now with the angels around him,  
In his beautiful home o'er head.

Bear Franklin Delano Roosevelt-  
Your name shall ever live.  
You gave your life for your country;  
So that millions of others might live.

We place your name before us;  
It's written with Life's golden pen,  
Dear Franklin Delano Roosevelt-  
Your name shall ever live with men.

"My friends", you used to call us;  
We long to hear that familiar phrase,  
You live in heaven above us-  
While your memory with us forever stays.

Written by Frances Swinton  
in 1945 shortly after the  
president's death.