

CIVIL RIGHTS MEAN GOOD BUSINESS

BY CHARLES LUCKMAN

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BUSINESS was once a simple, uncomplicated affair governed merely by the age-old principle of supply and demand. If you made something that people wanted, you were bound to succeed.

It is different today, and nothing so emphasizes that difference as the 175-page report made by the President's Committee on Civil Rights last October. There were fifteen of us on that committee and we worked ten months on our report.

In the process of investigating abuses of civil liberties we found that wherever such abuses were rampant, standards of living were lowest, property yielded a smaller return in taxes, and businessmen usually ended up in bankruptcy courts. Salesmen for national concerns avoided such territories as though they were plague spots. Yet the people in such areas wanted the commodities we manufactured. Their loss of civil liberties had been invariably followed by poverty, ignorance and ill health—three scourges which kept them from being good customers.

Big Business has a tremendous stake in securing civil liberties for every man, woman and child in the United States. Big Business, in short, should, in its own interest, come out of its shell and emerge as a fighting leader in the most liberal of all democratic causes—the preservation of our Bill of Rights. The report should not be filed away in the archives. It should be considered and acted upon by every business organization which has any vision or any desire to expand.

Civil liberties are as good for business as rain is for wheat. If such

liberties are restricted and ignored, not only the individuals will suffer; business, too, will suffer. I am not talking as an impractical visionary who has never had to meet a pay roll, nor am I talking in terms of abstract theories. I'm a practical businessman and I'm talking practical economics. I'm president of a company that makes soap, dentifrices and cosmetics.

Why am I so concerned with civil liberties, with human rights?

First, I'm concerned as an American. I realize that any American businessman who starts talking ideals is usually labeled as a phony. But the fact is that I do believe fervently in our Bill of Rights, as I believe in God.

However, let's consider civil liberties on some other basis; for instance, in terms of business. It is my firm conviction that free enterprise is doomed in a country where civil liberties are ignored or forgot or legislated against. Democracy is good for business. In the perfect democratic state every citizen is able to maintain a high standard of living; every citizen, in short, is a customer eager and able to buy not only the basic necessities but the luxury products produced by industry. As a businessman I realize that no such country exists.

We have about 143,000,000 people living in this country of ours. Every one of them (even the child who arrived five minutes ago) is a potential customer. Our country is rich in soils and minerals. We have the technological knowledge and equipment to make virtually any variety of goods needed and wanted by those 143,000,000. But millions of them do not have the earning capacity to buy our products. That's why these millions are potential rather than actual customers. However, there is no basic

reason why most of them should not eventually become actual customers.

It is the inescapable conclusion reached by the fifteen members of the President's Committee on Civil Rights after ten months of earnest effort, that bad Americanism is also bad business.

I've been trying to sell this idea for many years. I started life as an architect, but in the early 1930s, when I had finished my education, nobody was building anything. We were in the throes of the depression. I got myself a job as a salesman. My territory was the Negro section of Chicago. These people wanted the soap I was selling, but for the most part they couldn't afford it. I got to know the underprivileged, and some of the things I say now stem from my experience with them.

There are in this country millions like those I saw, who are members of minority groups. In their hopelessness, they may look for a panacea to improve their lot. Some turn to Fascism. Others to Communism. Many think that Communism will give them rights as individuals which they do not enjoy today. A cursory study of Communism should disabuse them of that false hope.

Communism is based on the concept of the supremacy of society over the individual. According to this theory the means of production and the fruits of production belong to the state, and the individual must look to the state for his share of the collective wealth. To establish a justification for this concept, Communists resort to Darwin's theory that the only inviolable law applicable to man is the law of Nature. From this the Communists conclude that the democratic theory of man's inalienable right to life, liberty, property and happiness, not being the outgrowth of the materialistic law of evolution, is nothing but a mere abstraction. Human rights, in short, under Communism do not exist.

Democracy says that we were born with these rights. No state gave us these rights. It was only when certain groups began to interfere with these rights that society recognized them as inalienable by incorporating them in our Constitution. The Communist doctrine, which denies the existence of natural rights and which looks upon man as merely a tiny cell in a large organism, cannot offer hope to a discouraged individual.

In the past we businessmen have been guilty of many sins. We declared war on collective bargaining. We actually opposed increased taxes for education. We fought health and safety ordinances. We frothed at the mouth and yelled bloody murder against minimum wage laws. The record proves that we actively battled child-labor legislation. We fought against unemployment insurance. We derided Social Security and currently we are kicking the hell out of proposals to provide universal sickness and accident insurance.

We did all these things without making constructive suggestions which would demonstrate our desire to achieve the same results for the people on a more businesslike and less political basis.

Some of my business colleagues will be shaking their heads at this point and saying, "This guy ought to get a soapbox."

I don't mind getting on a soapbox. To begin with, I sell soap, and the more soapboxes I see around the happier I am.

I believe in higher wages, shorter hours, bigger pensions and every possible form of health and life insurance a company can give its employees. I believe in these things not only as an American whose bible is the Bill of Rights, but as a hardheaded businessman.

Business leaders often write off men and women over sixty-five as customers. Men usually retire at that

An American businessman suggests a simple way to increase the buying power of millions of customers

age, and in the past they retired with either nothing or just enough to maintain life. There are a great many large companies which give a pension to men who retire. We give them a pension based on a substantial average of earnings current at time of retirement.

This, plus Social Security benefits, keeps the older man as a customer for you and for me.

The greatest barrier to progressive business leadership today is a table; that long, heavy, shiny-topped mahogany table in the board of directors' room. Members of the board, decent human beings who are friendly with their neighbors and who give generously to Community Chest drives, too often change as soon as they sit down at the table.

What do they talk about at board meetings? They talk figures: production costs, advertising costs, salaries and the value of the common stock. They forget that the table is not held up by four mahogany legs;

it's held up by people. But they seldom talk about people at such meetings. They seldom talk about Joe Doakes or the members of minority groups. They never ask themselves or one another, "Why aren't *all* of those millions of people able to buy our product? What can we do to put them in an economic position where they will be able to buy from us?"

The answer lies in universal education, Social Security, fair employment practices, decent housing and health programs.

Give Joe Doakes and all of his sisters and brothers these things; give them the good will of their neighbors; give them the civil liberties which are their heritage; remove the artificial social barriers which man has erected; give them an increasingly better standard of living—and it'll all add up to the best stroke of business you ever pulled. And you'll be helping America to realize more fully the democratic ideal.

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