

EARL RAAB

## Candid Comments

### An Elected School Board?

1-15-71

As elections draw close, the familiar cry of "will-of-the-people" rises from the fevered lips of political partisans—on both sides of all issues. A prime example is Proposition "S" which asks San Franciscans whether they want an elected school board.

Democracy, American style, might be defined as the majority of the people getting what they want — eventually. "Eventually" is the critical word. Hesitation is built into our democratic system. The idea is that some orderly procedure should intervene between the passions of the moment and government action. Lynch law is the classic example of majority-rule without hesitation.



Raab

**One of the reasons for an intervention between the popular mood of the moment and government action is the fact that the "will of the people" is often a hoax and an illusion: Suppose 375,000 San Franciscans want one thing, and 325,000 want something else? Is the will of the 325,000 (or 200,000 or 100,000) to be written off? If there's no alternative, of course, majority rules, whatever the consequences. But our political system tries to find an alternative, so that the will of the people under those circumstances can have more meaning.**

That is why our system emphasizes representation rather than referendum. Our legislators are usually elected by a coalition of different "publics" and have to pay some attention to their composite desires. Otherwise, in our crazy-quilt society, the whole structure would collapse from bitter fragmentation on every issue.

And it is especially important that an already specialized Board of Education reflect some composite of the "will of the people," rather than a single majority view on a single issue. A city-wide election of the Board—as in Proposition S,—at a time when school affairs are so dominated by a single issue, would surely not result in such composite representation. Elected mayors would be more likely to appoint people in some fashion representative of the various publics. The "will of the people" thus might be better served that way in the long -and important-run.

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