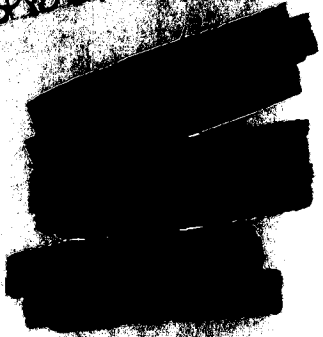


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Editor: FISHBACH
 Editor: FISHBACH
Common Cause
Catching On

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
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By Haynes Johnson
 Washington Post Staff Writer

The message went out — engraved letterhead, good Washington address, carefully typed, signed with a flourish — and back came a handwritten reply from a man in Massachusetts. "I am probably very reform," he wrote, "but who the hell is John Gardner? Let me know who else is supporting the Common Cause. I am interested in the plans as projected, but I am not giving \$15 of my hard-earned money to an 'unknown' in my book. You don't even know how to fold a business letter."

The idea behind Common Cause is hardly revolutionary, even though its potential promises just that. It is a citizens' lobby, formed to bring pressure through the political process to reform and redesign government. Its agenda includes everything from ending the war in Vietnam on a scheduled timetable, to the problem of poverty, race, housing, education, consumer protection, the environment and the institutions of government at an reverse.

Others seeking to create a new national movement aimed at reforming the democratic processes might have been discouraged, but not John Gardner. He is the embodiment of cool. He knew when he undertook his new venture that he was sailing in uncertain waters and that he didn't have to go that way.

As one key Common Cause aide said, "We've kind of taken on the world." Then he added: "I'm fearful we may run into problems because the expectations of our members may be too high for us to fulfill."

When he left government service two years ago as HEW secretary, Gardner already had completed a career as university professor, author, foundation president and had earned a reputation as a scholarly organization man valued in the board rooms and centers of power.

There's one obvious problem: another is more subtle, and perhaps more pervasive, doubt. Throughout the 1960s Washington and the nation saw the formation of a number of organizations, public and private, bearing high-sounding names and espousing noble purposes. They, too, would reform America. They did not.

His opportunities were many: About 30 university presidency offers, the chance to serve on about two dozen boards of directors, one or two corporate presidencies, and, after Robert Kennedy was assassinated, the choice proffered by Gov. Nelson Rockefeller to take Mr. Kennedy's Senate seat. He turned them all down to become chairman of the National Urban Coalition and the guiding force of the Urban Coalition Action Council. The Action Council, operating under a board made up of 100 wealthy group members, business, labor and religious leaders, played a major role in a number of key legislative victories in Washington. Common Cause is an outgrowth of it.

It's fair to say that Gardner's Common Cause was greeted with a certain amount of cynicism in the Capital, partly because of doubt about its prospects, partly because of Gardner's personality.

- The Washington Post Times Herald _____ -1
- The Washington Daily News _____
- The Evening Star (Washington) _____
- The Sunday Star (Washington) _____
- Daily News (New York) _____
- Sunday News (New York) _____
- New York Post _____
- The New York Times _____
- The Sun (Baltimore) _____
- The Daily World _____
- The New Leader _____
- The Wall Street Journal _____
- The National Observer _____
- People's World _____
- Examiner (Washington) _____

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Qando Questioning

...and the Common Cause effort is a sense of career and conscientiousness. ...domestic ... members take ... efforts as an ... tired with many ...

Gardner himself speaks of other citizens' operations as often being amateurish, hit-and-run affairs, staffed by "people who think they don't have to do their homework because their hearts are pure."

One of Gardner's lobbyists, John Lagomarcino, speaks in much the same vein about his efforts. "We're operating through a combination of the old ingredients, and some new ones," he says. "First of all, you have to know your case and your legislation. You must present a well-stated case, reasonable, but expressed with conviction. And it's absolutely essential that you level with him—that you let him know what problems he might encounter if he supports you. In other words, you have to let him know you're aware of

what he has to face, and that you're ready to help him face it."

As for power, Lagomarcino says Common Cause has no illusions that it can muster the kind of overwhelming pressure mounted by such organizations as the AFL-CIO or the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. But he has no doubt either that Common Cause can play a vital role.

Gardner puts it more specifically.

"A great many people," he says, "don't know the history of citizens' action in America."

...warfare ... movement alone is as hard a political force as the oil lobby. People don't always understand this.

"People who go into our political institutions are imprisoned by them. Citizens' action is one way to get a little change for the good. I see it as a part of the political process. It's engaged in the political process, and that means there's an interplay between people inside and outside government."

"The book on public interest lobbying hasn't been written yet—but I can sure as hell tell you it's going to be written."

Gardner also recognizes that talk, however eloquent or wise, isn't going to make Common Cause a success. It must demonstrate that it has influenced key issues, and participated in major victories.

At this stage, Common Cause is beginning to attempt to organize its members in action. The idea is not to form chapters in local communities as such, but to bring together various citizen groups to apply pressure from the grass-roots level and on to Washington. A regional organizer has been hired, and is now at work in California. Others will follow for different sections.

One of the clear hazards in any undertaking like Common Cause is the inclination to do too much, and thus dissipate the effort. Gardner says he doesn't intend to see that happen. "We're going to have to shoot with a rifle," he says, "pick out an issue and aim directly at it. You have to focus."

...spending ... remains a major target.

Now, Common Cause is gearing up for an even bigger battle—the sacred and congressional seniority system.

In January, for the first time ever, the seniority issue will be debated by the two parties in the House of Representatives (but not the Senate). Congressmen will meet shortly before the new Congress convenes next month and consider whether—and if so, how—to change the seniority system.

Common Cause is taking an aggressive role on the side of change. It is already distributing a fact sheet spelling out its position on why change is needed.

"No other parliamentary body in the free world employs the seniority system," it argues, "no legislature in the 50 states employs it. The system places overwhelming power in the hands of aging men, and makes it virtually impossible for younger men to play significant roles of leadership. In the early 1800s, Henry Clay served brilliantly as Speaker of the House, beginning at the age of 33. Contrast that with the situation today in which the Speaker is retiring at the age of 79 and the median age of House chairmen is 69 compared with 53 for all members of the House."

TRUE COPY

Dear FBI -

This sounds good. Is it on the level? If it is, we would like to support it.

Please - after you have O.K. ed it as a good organization in our country, for our country, let us know. Is it subversive?

We await your endorsement. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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DATE 9-9-86 BY SP8 BTJ/cal

[Redacted signature]

Enclosed please find stamped self addressed envelop for reply.

C

The Federal Bureau of Investigation
9th St. & Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D. C.

CONFIDENTIAL

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J.P.C.



Common Cause

1100 W. NORTH AVE. WASHINGTON, D.C. 20037

JOHN H. COHEN, PRESIDENT

Dear Friend:

I would like to ask you to join me in forming a new, independent, nonpartisan organization to help in rebuilding this nation. It will be known as Common Cause. It will not be a third party but a third force in American life, deriving its strength from a common desire to solve the nation's problems and revitalize its institutions of government.

There is so much that needs to be done. There are so few who are properly organized to do it. We must end the war. We must bring about a drastic change in national priorities. We must renew our attack on poverty and discrimination. And we must keep at it until we build a new America.

I know many of you share my concern and my deep sense of urgency. We must act now. We must demand more of ourselves and much, much more of our leaders. We must shake up and renew outworn institutions.

Common Cause offers you the opportunity.

Many people today recognize that national priorities must be changed, but they don't know how to go about it. They are shocked by the facts of poverty and pollution and inadequate housing, but they don't know what to do.

The first thing Common Cause will do is to assist you to speak and act in behalf of legislation designed to solve the nation's problems. We are going to build a true "citizens' lobby" -- concerned not with the advancement of special interests but with the well-being of the nation. We will keep you up-to-date on crucial issues before Congress. We will suggest when and where to bring pressure to bear.

One of our aims will be to revitalize politics and government. The need is great. State governments are mostly feeble. City government is archaic. The Congress of the United States is in grave need of overhaul. The parties are virtually useless as instruments of the popular will. We can no longer accept such obsolescence.

- 2 -

...the system is broken, broken to the point where it is no longer capable of responding to the needs of the people. They are so ill-equipped for the job that they waste money, waste lives, and waste the good people and the good ideas who enter the system.

The solutions are not mysterious. Any capable city councilman, state legislator, party official, or Member of Congress can tell you highly practical steps that might be taken tomorrow to make the system more responsive. But there has been no active, powerful, hard-hitting constituency to fight for such steps. We can provide that kind of constituency.

Skeptics say "But you can't really change such things." The Congress of the United States has changed in dramatic ways since its founding. Why should we assume it has lost the capacity to change further?

The political parties have changed even more dramatically since the birth of the Republic. They can change again.

Common Cause is an outgrowth of the Urban Coalition Action Council. Operating under a governing board of extraordinary diversity (mayors, minority group leaders, and leaders from business, labor and the major religious groups), the Action Council proved to be astonishingly effective. The Council has worked with a variety of allies in the civil rights organizations, the labor movement, the business community, and other groups. It has participated in major legislative victories, including extension of the Voting Rights Act, passage of the Welfare Reform Bill in the House, and defeat of a measure that would have virtually ended nonpartisan voter registration programs.

In short, we know from first hand experience that citizen action can be effective. We ask you to join us in making it even more so.

I shall not attempt to list here all the issues with which Common Cause will be concerned. We believe there is great urgency in ending the Vietnam War on a scheduled timetable. We believe there must be a major reordering of national priorities. We believe the problems of poverty and race must be among our first concerns. We will call for new solutions in housing, employment, education, health, consumer protection, environment, family planning, law enforcement and the administration of justice.

As our membership grows, we will ask members to help in identifying priority issues.

We do not expect every member to agree with every detail of our agenda. But our governing body has learned in many years of experience that it is possible to arrive at significant proposals that will be agreed on by Americans of widely differing backgrounds.

We take the phrase "Common Cause" seriously. The things that unite us as a people are more important than the things that divide us. No particular interest group can prosper for long if the nation is disintegrating. Every group must have an overriding interest in the well-being of the whole society. It follows that our agenda must be an agenda for all Americans -- for the poor, the comfortable and those in between, for old and young, for black and white, for city dweller and farmer, for men and women.

Many of you who will receive this letter share my anger at institutions and individuals that have behaved irresponsibly. But, if we're going to focus our anger, a good place to begin is with ourselves.

We have not behaved like a great people. We are not being the people we set out to be. We have not lived by the values we profess to honor.

America is not the nation it set out to be. And we will never get back on course until we take some tough, realistic steps to revitalize our institutions. That won't be easy or comfortable. Institutions don't enjoy the process of renewal. But we had better get on with it.

In recent years we have seen altogether too much complacency, narrow self-interest, meanness of mind and spirit, irrational hatred and fear. But as I travel around the country, I see something else. I see great remaining strength in this nation. I see deeper reserves of devotion and community concern than are being tapped by present leadership. I see many, many Americans who would like to help rebuild this nation but don't know where to begin.

I invite you to be among the first to join us in Common Cause.

We cannot and should not depend on big contributors. The money to support our work must come from the members themselves.

We therefore ask you to enclose a check for \$15 with your membership application. Or, if you prefer, we will bill you later for that amount.

If you can afford more, we would appreciate an additional contribution - any amount.

With a large and active membership we can begin to remake America.

Sincerely yours,

John W. Gardner

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DATE 9-9-86 BY SP8BTJAL

Dear F B I -

This sounds good. Is it on the level? If it is, we would like to support it.

Please - after you have O.K.'ed it as a good organization in our country, for our country, let us know. Is it subversive?

We await your endorsement. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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Inclosed please find stamped self addressed envelop for reply.

am/est

December 12, 1970

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BT EX



ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
DATE 9-9-86 BY SP8BTJ/CAL

Dear [Redacted]

Your letter, with enclosure, was received on December 9th. In reply to your inquiry, this Bureau is strictly an investigative agency of the Federal Government and, as such, neither makes evaluations nor draws conclusions as to the character or integrity of any organization, publication or individual. I regret that we cannot be of assistance to you.

Sincerely yours,

J. Edgar Hoover

John Edgar Hoover
Director

MAILED 6
DEC 11 1970
COMM-FBI

NOTE: Correspondent is not identifiable in Bufiles. Her enclosures are an advertisement for the organization named Common Cause and a stamped, self-addressed envelope. John W. Gardner, the Chairman of the Common Cause, is the former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare and the former Chairman of the Urban Coalition. This organization is set up as a citizens' lobbying group with the aim of revitalizing politics and government by the use of citizen action to influence Congress. Correspondent's self-addressed envelope is being utilized for this reply.

- Tolson _____
- Sullivan _____
- Mohr _____
- Bishop _____
- Brennan, C.D. _____
- Callahan _____
- Casper _____
- Conrad _____
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