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It's the Third, Not the Fourth Estate

John Knox Jessup, chief architect of our editorial page since 1944, retires this week. Over the past 25 years, he has endorsed seven presidential candidates, assessed the issues in three wars and innumerable rebellions, and has enlightened us many times with his penetrating comments on fads, foibles and follies. Now he has left with us a farewell statement, which he describes as "an editorial about magazines for those of us who make them."

"Journalists are wrongly called the Fourth Estate. We have no reason so to separate ourselves from the Third Estate, to which we originally belonged and to which, if we understand its definition, we belong still. The Abbé Sieyès, who was the Tom Paine of the French Revolution, defined the Third Estate to include everybody but nobles and clerics. That meant 99% of the French people at the time. The Third Estate was what the French Revolution was all about. It was what the American Revolution and modern democracy were also all about. The Third Estate is the only social class in history whose title deeds include a standing invitation that anybody and everybody, including peasants and journalists and even clerics and nobles willing to renounce their special privileges, may join.



JOHN KNOX JESSUP

"But the Third Estate has other title deeds also, and these have made democratic self-government possible. They are the title deeds of what Harry Luce called the Great Liberal Tradition, and their names are liberty, reason and conscience. The maintenance of the tradition, and therefore of self-government, depends on the plentiful exercise of these three attributes of modern man, his liberty, his reason, and his conscience. If there were any limits to the tolerant hospitality of the Third Estate, it would have to exclude anyone who denies liberty, who refuses to be reasonable, or who ignores his own conscience. A magazine that wishes to uphold the Great Liberal Tradition will also not be too foolishly hospitable to the enemies of liberty, reason and conscience.

"To update the concept of the Third Estate, I will quote a remark of the late, great philosopher Morris R. Cohen. He said that the lower classes like to refer to themselves as The People, the middle classes as The Public, and the upper classes as The Country. LIFE of course, addresses itself to all three and I hope we continue to. But it is with the public, I believe, that the true heirs of the Third Estate and the Great Liberal Tradition live. The opinions of the public—or public opinion—are a good place for the masses and the elite to place their bets. The public sector is where liberty, conscience and reason are most active and alive. If we have to have classes, the public is the one most open to all enemies of tyrants and special privilege, it is the class to which most Americans like to think they belong. It is where journalists of all ages can feel most at home and do the most good."

George P. Hunt
GEORGE P. HUNT,
Managing Editor

FREE

See in the lively arts
**HOW FAR IS
FAAR
ENOUGH?**



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