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Quotes by Lippmann, Walter

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What we call a democratic society might be defined for certain purposes as one in which the majority is always prepared to put down a revolutionary minority.

- Lippmann, Walter

This is one of the paradoxes of the democratic movement -- that it loves a crowd and fears the individuals who compose it -- that the religion of humanity should have no faith in human beings.

- Lippmann, Walter

Unless democracy is to commit suicide by consenting to its own destruction, it will have to find some formidable answer to those who come to it saying: I demand from you in the name of your principles the rights which I shall deny to you later in the name of my principles.

- Lippmann, Walter

Ignore what a man desires and you ignore the very source of his power

- Lippmann, Walter

In really hard times the rules of the game are altered. The inchoate mass begins to stir. It becomes potent, and when it strikes, it strikes with incredible emphasis. Those are the rare occasions when a national will emerges from the scattered, specialized, or indifferent blocs of voters who ordinarily elect the politicians. Those are for good or evil the great occasions in a nation's history.

- Lippmann, Walter

No amount of charters, direct primaries, or short ballots will make a democracy out of an illiterate people.

- Lippmann, Walter

Football strategy does not originate in a scrimmage: it is useless to expect solutions in a political campaign.

- Lippmann, Walter

There is no arguing with the pretenders to a divine knowledge and to a divine mission. They are possessed with the sin of pride, they have yielded to the perennial temptation.

- Lippmann, Walter

A useful definition of liberty is obtained only by seeking the principle of liberty in the main business of human life, that is to say, in the process by which men educate their responses and learn to control their environment.

- Lippmann, Walter

An alliance is like a chain. It is not made stronger by adding weak links to it. A great power like the United States gains no advantage and it loses prestige by offering, indeed peddling, its alliances to all and sundry. An alliance should be hard diplomatic currency, valuable and hard to get, and not inflationary paper from the mimeograph machine in the State Department.

- Lippmann, Walter

It is perfectly true that that government is best which governs least. It is equally true that that government is best which provides most.

- Lippmann, Walter

When men can no longer be theists, they must, if they are civilized, become humanists.

- Lippmann, Walter

The decay of decency in the modern age, the rebellion against law and good faith, the treatment of human beings as things, as the mere instruments of power and ambition, is without a doubt the consequence of the decay of the belief in man as something more than an animal animated by highly conditioned reflexes and chemical reactions. For, unless man is something more than that, he has no rights that anyone is bound to respect, and there are no limitations upon his conduct which he is bound to obey.

- Lippmann, Walter

The great social adventure of America is no longer the conquest of the wilderness but the absorption of fifty different peoples.

- Lippmann, Walter

A country survives its legislation. That truth should not comfort the conservative nor depress the radical. For it means that public policy can enlarge its scope and increase its audacity, can try big experiments without trembling too much over the result. This nation could enter upon the most radical experiments and could afford to fail in them.

- Lippmann, Walter

The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him in other men the conviction and the will to carry on. The genius of a good leader is to leave behind him a situation which common sense, without the grace of genius, can deal with successfully.

- Lippmann, Walter

The principle of majority rule is the mildest form in which the force of numbers can be exercised. It is a pacific substitute for civil war in which the opposing armies are counted and the victory is awarded to the larger before any blood is shed. Except in the sacred tests of democracy and in the incantations of the orators, we hardly take the trouble to pretend that the rule of the majority is not at bottom a rule of force.

- Lippmann, Walter

When distant and unfamiliar and complex things are communicated to great masses of people, the truth suffers a considerable and often a radical distortion. The complex is made over into the simple, the hypothetical into the dogmatic, and the relative into an absolute.

- Lippmann, Walter

The press is no substitute for institutions. It is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision. Men cannot do the work of the world by this light alone. They cannot govern society by episodes, incidents, and eruptions. It is only when they work by a steady light of their own, that the press, when it is turned upon them, reveals a situation intelligible enough for a popular decision.

- Lippmann, Walter

In making the great experiment of governing people by consent rather than by coercion, it is not sufficient that the party in power should have a majority. It is just as necessary that the party in power should never outrage the minority.

- Lippmann, Walter

The study of error is not only in the highest degree prophylactic, but it serves as a stimulating introduction to the study of truth.

- Lippmann, Walter

The disesteem into which moralists have fallen is due at bottom to their failure to see that in an age like this one the function of the moralist is not to exhort men to be good but to elucidate what the good is. The problem of sanctions is secondary.

- Lippmann, Walter

There is nothing so bad but it can masquerade as moral.

- Lippmann, Walter

The opposition is indispensable. A good statesman, like any other sensible human being, always learns more from his opponents than from his fervent supporters. For his supporters will push him to disaster unless his opponents show him where the dangers are. So if he is wise he will often pray to be delivered from his friends, because they will ruin him. But though it hurts, he ought also to pray never to be left without opponents; for they keep him on the path of reason and good sense.

- Lippmann, Walter

If all power is in the people, if there is no higher law than their will, and if by counting their votes, their will may be ascertained -- then the people may entrust all their power to anyone, and the power of the pretender and the usurper is then legitimate. It is not to be challenged since it came originally from the sovereign people.

- Lippmann, Walter

When philosophers try to be politicians they generally cease to be philosophers.

- Lippmann, Walter

The ordinary politician has a very low estimate of human nature. In his daily life he comes into contact chiefly with persons who want to get something or to avoid something.

Beyond this circle of seekers after privileges, individuals and organized minorities, he is aware of a large unorganized, indifferent mass of citizens who ask nothing in particular

and rarely complain. The politician comes after a while to think that the art of politics is to satisfy the seekers after favors and to mollify the inchoate mass with noble sentiments and patriotic phrases.

- Lippmann, Walter

Successful democratic politicians are insecure and intimidated men. They advance politically only as they placate, appease, bribe, seduce, bamboozle, or otherwise manage to manipulate the demanding and threatening elements in their constituencies. The decisive consideration is not whether the proposition is good but whether it is popular -- not whether it will work well and prove itself but whether the active talking constituents like it immediately. Politicians rationalize this servitude by saying that in a democracy public men are the servants of the people.

- Lippmann, Walter

The chief element in the art of statesmanship under modern conditions is the ability to elucidate the confused and clamorous interests which converge upon the seat of government. It is an ability to penetrate from the naive self-interest of each group to its permanent and real interest. Statesmanship consists in giving the people not what they want but what they will learn to want.

- Lippmann, Walter

The man who will follow precedent, but never create one, is merely an obvious example of the routinier. You find him desperately numerous in the civil service, in the official bureaus. To him government is something given as unconditionally, as absolutely as ocean or hill. He goes on winding the tape that he finds. His imagination has rarely

extricated itself from under the administrative machine to gain any sense of what a human, temporary contraption the whole affair is. What he thinks is the heavens above him is nothing but the roof.

- Lippmann, Walter

The tendency of the casual mind is to pick out or stumble upon a sample which supports or defies its prejudices, and then to make it the representative of a whole class.

- Lippmann, Walter

Private property was the original source of freedom. It still is its main ballpark.

- Lippmann, Walter

Ages when custom is unsettled are necessarily ages of prophecy. The moralist cannot teach what is revealed; he must reveal what can be taught. He has to seek insight rather than to preach.

- Lippmann, Walter

In government offices which are sensitive to the vehemence and passion of mass sentiment public men have no sure tenure. They are in effect perpetual office seekers, always on trial for their political lives, always required to court their restless constituents.

- Lippmann, Walter

Where mass opinion dominates the government, there is a morbid derangement of the true functions of power. The derangement brings about the enfeeblement, verging on

paralysis, of the capacity to govern. This breakdown in the constitutional order is the cause of the precipitate and catastrophic decline of Western society. It may, if it cannot be arrested and reversed, bring about the fall of the West.

- Lippmann, Walter

The private citizen, beset by partisan appeals for the loan of his Public Opinion, will soon see, perhaps, that these appeals are not a compliment to his intelligence, but an imposition on his good nature and an insult to his sense of evidence.

- Lippmann, Walter

Only the consciousness of a purpose that is mightier than any man and worthy of all men can fortify and inspire and compose the souls of men.

- Lippmann, Walter

People that are orthodox when they are young are in danger of being middle-aged all their lives.

- Lippmann, Walter

We forge gradually our greatest instrument for understanding the world -- introspection. We discover that humanity may resemble us very considerably -- that the best way of knowing the inwardness of our neighbors is to know ourselves.

- Lippmann, Walter

The principles of the good society call for a concern with an order of being -- which cannot

be proved existentially to the sense organs -- where it matters supremely that the human person is inviolable, that reason shall regulate the will, that truth shall prevail over error.

- Lippmann, Walter

Social movements are at once the symptoms and the instruments of progress. Ignore them and statesmanship is irrelevant; fail to use them and it is weak.

- Lippmann, Walter

In a free society the state does not administer the affairs of men. It administers justice among men who conduct their own affairs.

- Lippmann, Walter

We are all captives of the picture in our head -- our belief that the world we have experienced is the world that really exists.

- Lippmann, Walter

Many a time I have wanted to stop talking and find out what I really believed.

- Lippmann, Walter

The simple opposition between the people and big business has disappeared because the people themselves have become so deeply involved in big business.

- Lippmann, Walter

Between ourselves and our real natures we interpose that wax figure of idealizations and selections which we call our character.

- Lippmann, Walter

Where all men think alike, no one thinks very much.

- Lippmann, Walter

Unless the reformer can invent something which substitutes attractive virtues for attractive vices, he will fail.

- Lippmann, Walter

The effort to calculate exactly what the voters want at each particular moment leaves out of account the fact that when they are troubled the thing the voters most want is to be told what to want.

- Lippmann, Walter

Our conscience is not the vessel of eternal verities. It grows with our social life, and a new social condition means a radical change in conscience.

- Lippmann, Walter

Almost always tradition is nothing but a record and a machine-made imitation of the habits that our ancestors created. The average conservative is a slave to the most incidental and trivial part of his forefathers glory -- to the archaic formula which happened to express their genius or the eighteenth-century contrivance by which for a time it was served.

- Lippmann, Walter

The first principle of a civilized state is that the power is legitimate only when it is under contract.

- Lippmann, Walter

The best servants of the people, like the best valets, must whisper unpleasant truths in the master's ear. It is the court fool, not the foolish courtier, whom the king can least afford to lose.

- Lippmann, Walter

Corrupt, stupid grasping functionaries will make at least as big a muddle of socialism as stupid, selfish and acquisitive employers can make of capitalism.

- Lippmann, Walter

Let a human being throw the energies of his soul into the making of something, and the instinct of workmanship will take care of his honesty.

- Lippmann, Walter

Culture is the name for what people are interested in, their thoughts, their models, the books they read and the speeches they hear, their table-talk, gossip, controversies, historical sense and scientific training, the values they appreciate, the quality of life they admire. All communities have a culture. It is the climate of their civilization.

- Lippmann, Walter

Yet this corporate being, though so insubstantial to our senses, binds, in Burkes words, a man to his country with ties which though light as air, are as strong as links of iron. That is why young men die in battle for their countrys sake and why old men plant trees they will never sit under.

- Lippmann, Walter

For in the absence of debate unrestricted utterance leads to the degradation of opinion. By a kind of Greshams law the more rational is overcome by the less rational, and the opinions that will prevail will be those which are held most ardently by those with the most passionate will. For that reason the freedom to speak can never be maintained merely by objecting to interference with the liberty of the press, of printing, of broadcasting, of the screen. It can be maintained only by promoting debate.

- Lippmann, Walter

If the estimate of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs is correct, then Russia has lost the cold war in western Europe.

- Lippmann, Walter

The central drama of our age is how the Western nations and the Asian peoples are to find a tolerable basis of co-existence.

- Lippmann, Walter

Upon the standard to which the wise and honest will now repair it is written: You have

lived the easy way; henceforth, you will live the hard way. You came into a great heritage made by the insight and the sweat and the blood of inspired and devoted and courageous men; thoughtlessly and in utmost self-indulgence you have all but squandered this inheritance. Now only by the heroic virtues which made this inheritance can you restore it again. You took the good things for granted. Now you must earn them again. For every right that you cherish, you have a duty which you must fulfill. For every hope that you entertain, you have a task that you must perform. For every good that you wish to preserve, you will have to sacrifice your comfort and your ease. There is nothing for nothing any longer.

- Lippmann, Walter

In government offices which are sensitive to the vehemence and passion of mass sentiment public men have no sure tenure. They are in effect perpetual office seekers, always on trial for their political lives, always required to court their restless constituents. They are deprived of their independence. Democratic politicians rarely feel they can afford the luxury of telling the whole truth to the people. And since not telling it, though prudent, is uncomfortable, they find it easier if they themselves do not have to hear too often too much of the sour truth. The men under them who report and collect the news come to realize in their turn that it is safer to be wrong before it has become fashionable to be right.

- Lippmann, Walter

Franklin D. Roosevelt is no crusader. He is no tribune of the people. He is no enemy of entrenched privilege. He is a pleasant man who, without any important qualifications for the office, would very much like to be President.

- Lippmann, Walter

I generalized rashly: That is what kills political writing, this absurd pretence that you are delivering a great utterance. You never do. You are just a puzzled man making notes about what you think. You are not building the Pantheon, then why act like a graven image? You are drawing sketches in the sand which the sea will wash away.

- Lippmann, Walter

For the newspaper is in all literalness the bible of democracy, the book out of which a people determines its conduct. It is the only serious book most people read. It is the only book they read every day.

- Lippmann, Walter



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