

Representative Government Eroding

THE older generation was taught in school that the United States of America is a representative form of government.

President Abraham Lincoln declared that the War Between the States was fought in order "that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

The founding fathers of this nation did not intend that decisions would be made for them by professional politicians in a distant capital, without them having a voice in the outcome.

Of course, it was not possible for every citizen to vote on all issues. So, Congress was created to represent the people, voting as if the majority of the citizens were present in person.

The extent to which representative government has been eroded was emphasized when the U.S. Senate approved the first of two treaties regarding the Panama Canal, even though they apparently had little support in Oklahoma or else-

where. Sen. Henry Bellmon, R-Okla., voted to ratify the first treaty proposed by President Carter.

Legislative practice seems to be for a member to vote "according to the obvious will of the people," if he finds it to his liking. Otherwise, he votes "as my conscience dictates," even though he might have been persuaded in his conscience by lobbyists, by the president or by pressure groups.

The will of the "representative" prevails in such cases, rather than the will of the people. So it has ever been with tyrants, dictators or monarchs. Many examples might be cited.

Surveys show that three-fourths of the people favor development of coal and nuclear power as energy sources, but Congress allows itself to be blocked by pressure groups.

Although public opinion polls are incomplete, whenever a strong trend exists, they have proved to be reliable.

Nearly all congressmen make

opinion surveys of their own. Some use computers to maintain broad coverage and timeliness. In addition, many surveys by institutions are available.

Congressmen appear to insulate themselves from letter campaigns by constituents trying to communicate their opinions. Some have said they ignore such efforts, while most letter writers receive bland, non-committal responses from staff members. Campaign fund contributors might possibly receive more attention.

Congressmen now are demanding public funds to finance their campaigns. This would further insulate them from voter influences by giving additional advantages over challengers.

How to make and keep congressmen and legislators responsive to the will of the people who elect them is one of many critical issues facing the American people. When legislative actions contradict the majority, our freedom is in danger.