

## “ROSIE” AND THE OLD, OLD DEAL

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I DO not know exactly how many fish there are in the sea, but I do know that the number is legion. I also imagine that not only the number of fish, but also the kinds and characteristics and colours of the creatures of the deep are myriad. However, in spite of the infinite variety, all have one function in common; *they survive because they can swim*. A similar statement can be made about politicians. There are preachers, gamblers, barbers, undertakers, high-school teachers, professors, elevator boys, university men, illiterates, gentlemen and thugs in urban politics; but regardless of the diversity of the training, character and ability of these individuals, all have one function in common—*they serve their people*. And wherever one finds a powerful party organization in a great metropolitan centre, he will find that a great part of its strength is due to this personal service which it renders its constituents—service which pricks the attention of the voter amid the buzzing confusion of life in a city. What the service is, depends finally upon the wants of a people in a given area.

The party organization is strongest where the needs of the voter are most compelling. This explains why the most thoroughly controlled districts in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, or any other large city are likely to be those districts in which there is most unemployment, most conflict with law, most difficulty in paying rent, buying food, and obtaining other necessities of life; and these areas are more often than not districts in which live a preponderant number of foreign-born or coloured people.

Fundamentally the work of the party organization revolves around these simplest fellow-creature wants: jobs—though the political party is more than an employment agency; food—although neither a political party nor a voter can live by bread alone; justice—tempered with mercy or favoritism; taxes—since the power to tax involves the power to destroy. The councilmen that levy the tax, the real estate assessors, and the members of the board of revision of taxes are leaders in the party organization, not students of taxation. A friend at court in this field may be, and often is, worth dollars and cents to the voter—not only the small home owner, but the manufacturer and the utility operator as well.

## THE DALHOUSIE REVIEW

What the division leader does for his voter is not, essentially, something anti-social; it is sometimes that, but more often it is an act of genuine social value. Philadelphia is a metropolis of 128 square miles and 2,000,000 people. The citizens elect 73 public officials from the city at large and 6,000 other officials in wards and districts in a cycle of four years—the citizen registering every two years, as well as voting once a year in primary and election. The public servants who constitute the official government are, for many citizens, part of the unseen environment of the great society in which they live. It is an environment often impersonal, remote and meaningless to the people themselves, until a wide-awake division leader appears before them in the flesh. He is an individual who speaks their own language and knows their wants. He often makes warm and personal that which had been cold and distant. He “knows everybody” at City Hall, or he knows someone that does. He bridges the gap between the unseen outer world and the inadequate citizen. About this service, Graham Wallas wrote: “It represents the most vigorous attempt which has been made to adapt the form of our political institutions to the actual facts of human nature.”

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In order to describe the party process in action in a metropolitan area, I shall present Rosie Popovits—one of the party's ambassadors to His Majesty, the Voter.

Rosie is the successful leader of a division in one of the river wards of Philadelphia, and so effective a politician is she that her ward leader once said she was the best man on his ward committee. A knowing attorney in her ward commented: “She does very well in politics—even handling cases in the courts. Sometimes Rosie can do things that men can't”. Thirty-three years ago she was born in Austria; ten years later her family abandoned Europe for a greater life in America: they came directly to the river ward in Philadelphia where they now live. At that time she could speak German, Polish, Yiddish, and Russian, and she can speak three of these languages to-day, as well as English; this is one source of her strength in the “League of Nations” bailiwick that she claims as her own.

She is a cheery person to see—of medium height and fine stocky figure; there are curves where curves should be. Her face is a broad oval; her nose is Roman, and her forehead is not high; an abundance of chestnut hair is long and well cared for; her eyes are wide open and alert. Her mouth is generous in size,

and were it not for one gold tooth in front, it would be entirely prepossessing. As it is, her smile and her zest strike one first—and last. And if she can carry her division of 658 voters in her vanity case, it is because she chooses to carry a man-sized load of neighbourhood troubles on her back. She won her division in 1932 against Roosevelt, in 1933 against a nebulous spectre called the N.R.A., and in 1934 against an increasingly popular Roosevelt, because she serves her people.

"I got into politics just on account of Mr. Shelden; also I like the work and am interested in helping the people—this is a poor neighborhood you know". (This simple explanation accounts for the presence of the great majority of organization leaders in politics. A friend wants them to help on some single occasion, and those that remain in politics after this initial venture keep on "helping" as long as life lasts).

Rosie's first taste of it was in 1922. Mr. Shelden was then the leader of the division. Mr. Paunock, his partner on the ward committee, lacked tact and energy, and gave much of his time to the management of his trucking business. This left the burden of the political work on Mr. Shelden. He was a personal friend of Rosie's father. He often dropped in for a friendly talk. The father is a laboring man not interested in politics, but he liked Mr. Shelden. Rosie's imagination was excited by the leader's endless fund of political folk lore and his friendly attitude. In one of these innumerable talks he explained that his work at City Hall took so much of his time that he could not take care of the people. Rosie quickly volunteered to help. She explains thus:

He was a good friend of ours, and I thought a lot of Mr. Shelden, and said I would be more than glad to help him out. I went out among the neighbours and worked at the polls. Whatever he asked me to do I did: never took any money for it; always did it for Mr. Shelden and Mr. Griffiths (the ward leader), because he does a lot of good down here. Mr. Shelden told me, "Rosie, anything that happens you take care of it." Through them I had the preference of doing anything down here. I really do all the work down here. I got in between Mr. Shelden and Mr. Paunock. That was ten years ago, in 1922. I am only 32 now; was 22 then. It was right after I cast my first vote.

Mr. Shelden died a few years ago, and Rosie was recognized by the ward leader, ("Five years ago I never would have thought it possible," he said) as his successor. Later she was officially elected to the ward committee at the primary. She has never held a position as an election official. "I just didn't want to be obligated; the assessor is Mr. Paunock's wife and I wouldn't want

that job taken away from her. Neither did I want to be a watcher, for then I would have to be inside, and I have to be on the outside and bring the voters in”.

Rosie married a dark and dapper Serb of 21 when she was 19. One can easily imagine her husband as an officer in the King's Guards in some such exotic setting as is not infrequently provided by our Cecil De Milles. He looks the part, and enjoys the favor his appearance brings. They have a son of twelve and a daughter of seven. The children are unusually well-mannered and handsome. One time I offered the little girl a nickel for ice cream; she smiled, and refused the money until her mother nodded in approval.

This second child was born on the heels of an exciting election, but Rosie campaigned just the same. “I was never out of politics because of baby—worked at the polls in November—December I had my baby. People never knew that I had a baby; big surprise to all of them. My mother lives across the street, and she helped take care of my Anna when she was very young. I always take care of my home”. (My several visits to her home support this statement. The home is small, comfortably furnished, and so far as a male could see, well cared for). “I am getting up at all hours of the night—whenever someone comes for me—and I get up in the morning at seven or eight. Probably a hearing (at a police station) in the morning. I get my kids breakfast before that. I cook, wash my dishes, do everything myself in the house except wash. We can't afford to take someone in and keep them steady. We couldn't get along that way. We get along. We're happy. This is a pretty nice house”. Later, in speaking on this phase of her life, she added, “And I am never behind at home. I work hard, but I like it. The people—the people—magistrate courts—City Hall. If I didn't enjoy every minute of the day, I couldn't put up with it”.

When I asked what there was to look forward to in politics, Rosie spoke from the heart. “What it is that keeps me; the truth is, when I married, my husband didn't make a very nice living—only a taxi-cab driver. I wanted him to get something better, and I thought I could get him in something better. I did. He is a police officer now. When I asked Mr. Sheldon and Mr. Griffiths to do that, I told them I wouldn't forget them. I feel it is my duty now”.

The ward committee meets about eight times a year, but Rosie goes to only the most important meetings—those on the eve of an election. She does not want to be away when people call on her, and every evening someone is sure to come. However, she sees her leader nearly every day, and she skilfully manages

to get along with him. She excels her partner on the ward committee in this respect. The day following the 1932 primary, for example, I was talking to the ward leader, Griffiths, in his office at City Hall. As we talked, Mr. Paunock came in. I greeted him with the query "How did you make out"? He smilingly answered, "I put up bail and walked out the other door". "Shut up, you fool", the ward leader exclaimed, "he means how did you do at the primary". Mr. Griffiths has strong points, but tact is not one of them. In 1930 Paunock dropped in at his leader's office and held out his hand. The leader abruptly pointed to one of the other men in his office, and said, "Give it" (the hand-shake) "to him; he saves them". This ungracious remark caused Paunock to oppose the organization in the Pinchot-Hemphill election of that year. Paunock was able to bring Pinchot 11 votes; Rosie got the rest for the Democrat Hemphill.

Rosie takes care of her people as some mothers look after their children. One pleasant evening in June, 1932, I asked her to enumerate the demands that had been made on her during the last 24 hours. Each day is different, but the following record is descriptive of many days—not only in the life of Rosie, but in the life of the organization. (Not only the type, of course, but the degree of service in 1,280 divisions will vary as the cultural and economic planes of the people in the divisions vary. In this particular division, for example, the leader is 10 or 100 times as active as are certain leaders in more independent wards and divisions. The word "independent" means not only independent in politics, but independent economically, legally, intellectually, and with no language or tradition handicap:

I had one case this morning at 8 o'clock. A man had an automobile accident with an officer. I had to go against my husband's brother—he is a policeman. The officer had him arrested, which he shouldn't have done. He should have just taken his number and have him report. He brought him up to the station house, and had him arrested, and about a half an hour later he went back to the cell and let him out. Magistrate X is a very fine fellow. He discharged the case and called down the officer. Just because he is an officer doesn't mean he has the right to lock everybody up.

There was another case about 11.30; boy arrested by bicycle accident—held for court under \$300 bail. It was another boy that hit a boy in my division. The boy's mother is satisfied now that the boy has been taught a lesson.

At the primary Rosie's partner, Mr. Paunock, was arrested for assisting his wife (that is, marking her ballot). Rosie was "on this case" about five hours the preceding day, and to-day it

came up in grand jury Room 675. "It wasn't discharged before the magistrate because this magistrate isn't with us". (A magistrate appointed by Governor Pinchot, not elected by the organization!) The fact that the case was discharged by the grand jury is descriptive of Rosie's influence rather than Paunock's. Later that day Rosie called up the Lloyd Committee (welfare relief) to ask them to help a family in distress. "I have an engagement to take these people up. Miss X will take care of them for me. For three months they have had their application in and nothing has been done. I am going to find out why".

About 75% of Rosie's work is concerned with magistrate cases. A voter is arrested—Mrs. Popovits speaks for the voter in trouble. All 28 of the magistrates are politicians, and nearly all of them are either ward or division leaders. Their interest in a vote may be the same as that of a politician on the outside. There are exceptions, but this is the rule. She does not use attorneys. Many division leaders take cases to lawyers and in return receive 50% of the fee. "I never send a voter to any attorney. You never know how it will turn out. They'll say you made some money on it. If anything afterward should happen, they can't say anything to me. I can't annoy Mr. Griffiths for every little thing either".

The other 25% of her time is devoted to social service or Salvation Army work of one sort or another, and providing information concerning various taxes, licenses and other governmental matters. Possibly the public importance of this work is so meaningful to these citizens of Philadelphia that Rosie should be placed on the public payroll without any make-believe job at City Hall.

In the 1932 primary the principal contest was between Pinchot's candidate, General Butler, and Vare's candidate, Senator Davis—the great Moose. The primary came on a Jewish holiday; only 350 people voted instead of the usual 425 to 530. A disgruntled Republican worked for Butler in the division, and the General received 41 votes. Rosie and Vare's candidate got the rest. She explained, "I wouldn't have had no argument here if I did like they wanted. The Butler people wanted me to give them 75 votes so that they could make a showing. I wouldn't do it. We had ten watchers (party workers) at \$5. I had no women among the watchers. I could hire men and women, but this time only men. It was sort of a hard fight, and I thought I would do better that way. Two or three women came out anyway—just to give me a hand".

However, Rosie herself was a casualty in this senatorial campaign. One of Pinchot's workers, standing in the polling place,

said that she assisted her husband in voting. Just as Mr. Popovits stepped into the polling place—Rosie spoke to him; told him, she says, to turn the fire down under the stew at home. "This fellow particularly was out to try to hurt us, for he was a candidate for my place on the ward committee. He can't get it, and he can't hurt me because I have no job; but a month ago he said he would get my husband's job. I fought the case out myself, and Magistrate X discharged it. They were trying hard to get me to sign papers that I'll keep away from politics. I said I work very hard in this division, and I wouldn't care if it cost my husband's job, I wouldn't get out". And she hasn't got out. Mr. Shelden's last words to her were, "If I ever die, don't step out; being a woman, go through with it".

Before I saw Mrs. Popovits again (nearly a year later), Mr. Paunock died. Rosie viewed the matter realistically, and selected as her partner Frank Ricchino, a man of about thirty who enjoyed the distinction of being both a high-school graduate and a former professional heavy-weight boxer. After working with him a while, she said that the leadership in her bailiwick was stronger than ever, and that "Frank is there whenever I need a strong right arm, and his left is plenty good too".

One day I was in a station house, observing a magistrate deal with cases brought before him. The room was packed with loungers, spectators, friends of the accused and those who had been summoned, as well as those in custody, officers, attorneys, politicians, clerks, and the magistrate. His Honor gave one, two, three, or four minutes to a case, and more defendants were disposed of in two than in four minutes. Instead of peaceful quiet or judicial calm, the atmosphere was one of rush, excitement and hustle. Rosie walked into this room like an old trooper. She crawled under the rope—it is stretched across one end of the room to keep the idle public away from the prisoners—and straightway walked to a man acquaintance—spoke into his ear for a minute, he nodded, she smiled, thanked him and turned away. I joined her on the outside, and we boarded a trolley car going in the direction of City Hall. She explained that she had had a more compelling case at another station house, and she had asked the man to whom she had spoken, a division leader, to take care of her client at this court. I found later that he had done as she had directed, and all had been decided in her favor.

Although she said, "I got wonderful hopes in the organization: it can't be beat: it does too much good for the people", she too found September, 1933, a most trying time. For example, a man

in her division who was working for the city as an auto mechanic had recently been reduced to a driver. "He makes a crack; if Mr. Sheldon had lived, he would not have let them do that to me". Then there was the disloyalty of one of her watchers. "His family was starving last winter. I bought groceries out of my own pocket-book, then got them a welfare order of \$6.50 a week. Got the order at once too; now he is working against me". But the case that best revealed the ingratitude in man or the change in the temper of the people was one in which a man was arrested for selling liquor in a soda-water store. The place was padlocked as un-sanitary. The proprietor broke into it and removed the equipment. He was arrested and held for a court trial. "I went his bail. I stayed in court and stood up as a character witness for him. I pleaded for a break. The judge gave it to him; six months parole was all he got. Now he is a Democratic watcher and gives me trouble. Argues everything that I do. That is the experience we go through".

Several months later I asked Rosie if she as a ward politician were confronted with any special disadvantages because of her sex. She said that there were certain difficulties on this score. Three lesser and rival politicians in the division tried to start a whispering campaign against her. The point of the argument was "I am a married woman, having two children, and my place was at home, and not at the polls". But though her enemies might say this about her, her constituents rather, in the words of Omar, "take the cash and let the credit go". So long as she measurably satisfies their wants, they call Rosie "Leader" and let her manage her own family affairs. She says herself, "You see, that this so-called 'feminine charm' does not mean a thing in politics, and jealousy is the chief obstacle in a woman's path to success". Later she made an exception to this statement. "Sometimes when I appear before a magistrate with a 'copy of the charge', he grants my request and frees the prisoner although he has never seen me before. This does not happen often, and when it does happen, the judge is a gentleman, and he wants to extend a courtesy to a lady".

Mrs. Popovits was particularly active in the primary and election periods of the year 1933. The American voter invariably follows the rule formulated in the *Book of Ecclesiastes*: "In the day of prosperity be joyful; and in the day of adversity consider". Rosie's voters were considering, and she and the most powerful of the other 2,559 ward committeemen were answering these considerations, not with words, but with services. But in certain



wards, including Rosie's, Democracy is handicapped by the astigmatism of the voters. This is an advantage to the active division leader, for he comes right down where the voter lives, and he trades a concrete favor or a smile for a vote. One of the more intelligent of Rosie's people said, "We are too poor to enjoy the luxury of a protest vote. The vote to me is like a pay check. I get something for it".

Rosie's attitude is the authentic attitude of those Americans who say—"May my country ever be right, but right or wrong, my country," my party, and here—my voter. Rosie and the great majority of party workers in Philadelphia think of themselves as "good people", as angels of mercy, and as emissaries of the Lord as well as of Vare. In situations of the sort that shock the sensibilities of a gentle person, Rosie's full attention is fixed on her voter in distress: the city of Philadelphia is not even a phantom figure on the rim of her mind. Truth and justice may be as strong as 1,000 men in some places, but not at the polls. The party worker is thinking of majorities. So long as there are neighborhoods where helping a transgressor of the law is a popular act, the professional politician will help him.

Down in these nerve cells,—i.e. divisions—of the city the politician that survives year after year is a prototype of his people. The Republican party is not only a different thing to different men, but it is one thing in one ward and something different in another type of ward area even in the same city. Furthermore, the *G. O. P.* in Pennsylvania is not the *G. O. P.* in Wisconsin. And in Philadelphia a vote-winning act in the tenth ward on the part of a division leader might lead to social and political ostracism in the independent Germantown sector of the 22d ward. It is because Americans generally and in normal times are not as much interested in ideas and intangible values as they are in goods and services that Vare's organization and Tammany Hall continue—with rare exceptions like 1933—to win victories, and that men that rely on logic in a campaign are usually defeated. I can count on the fingers of one hand those politicians, out of the several hundred to whom I have talked, who have been bothered by their conscience. If they think about the matter at all, they probably say with Bates in King Henry's army: "We know enough if we know we are the king's subject; if his cause be wrong, our obedience to the king wipes the crime of it out of us".

Once while talking to Mrs. Popovits at her home, I asked if she didn't often find herself at odds with her husband because of his work as an officer of the law. She replied, "My husband is in another neighbourhood. He does not bother about my affairs

and I never ask him about his. Whatever he does is all right with me, and what I do is all right with him. We are very broad-minded."

A few minutes later, the dapper Mr. Popovits came home. He contributed to the story:

When we got married, she didn't know anything about politics. Mr. Sheldon asked me if my wife could give him a lift now and then. She got 100 more votes than Paunock. Everyone knew her up at the Hall. She worked a long time before she got on the ward committee. Griffiths wanted her. But there is a strong prejudice against women. I am friendly with everybody on the beat. I arrested Spiffy. Told him, "Now I suppose you must get your committeeman." He said, "I ain't got no committeeman, I got a committeewoman." "Who is she?" "Rosie Popovits." Was I surprised? But politics ain't no good. Christmas and New Year we have the house full of baskets. No one pays for it, only me.

At this Rosie said, "Now Mr. Popovits, you pay attention to your own affairs and leave politics to me". But he took a last fling, "Since we have been in politics, we owe \$1,000—all politics".

After the 1933 election Rosie said, "It was a tough day for me, but I was rewarded. I carried my division. Mr. Griffiths carried the ward, but the battle in many of the other wards was lost. But I have already started working for a victory in 1934". (I have already indicated that she won this year).

A drop of blood under a microscope may reveal the state of the patient's blood stream. Similarly, a close examination of one ward politician in action might be descriptive of ward politics generally. In either case, the evidence is entirely meaningful only when other factors are taken into consideration. As for the patient, was he at rest or in action; was he in health or in illness; was the blood freely given or taken by force? As for Rosie, I can say that she knew me before I knew her, and that she talked freely and with spontaneity. She thinks that the work she is doing is important, and she is pleased that a professor thinks so too. She is a woman in politics, and her life on the ward committee is based on the fact that she is *regular*, not *independent*, and effectively serves her people. The fact of her sex is significant in some relationships certainly, but it is dwarfed by other factors in politics. What she is and what she does depends less on sex than on her own attitude and the social, economic and cultural conditions under which she lives. And this I think is largely true of all people in politics whether they be men or women.

And finally, this "service motif" is not limited to ward politics, but it goes all the way through our political life, from the smallest

office in the division to the most far-reaching in national or international affairs. The importance of the Rivers and Harbors Committee in Congress, for example, is an expression of the same principle as it applies to a group or constituency instead of a single person. Just as half a ton of coal or a discharge from a magistrate's court will swing the individual voter into line, so also can an entire constituency be captured by an appropriation for building a new post-office or excavating a harbor or working on a canal. The Hennepin County Canal may never see a ship, but the man who got the appropriation for the county was none the less able to see Congress.

Even a cursory examination of the men at the Peace Conference at Versailles reveals that not one, with the possible exception of Woodrow Wilson, was concerned with the problems of the *common* good, the world problem, the canons of abstract justice, but that each of these delegates, whether it was Clemenceau of France, Lloyd George of England, or Orlando of Italy, Saionji of Japan or Paderewski of Poland, was thinking in terms of the advantages for his own national group. Each participant concerned himself almost exclusively with what he could do for his own state. Humanity as a whole had no spokesman, with the exception of President Wilson. And because Wilson centered his attention on the greater good and neglected factional interests at home, he was, although universally acclaimed, defeated on his return to the United States. Well might either the ward politician or the national leader observe, "What does it profit a man to gain the approval of the whole world and lose that of his own bailiwick?"