
CURRENT MAGAZINES

ROOSEVELT OR DEWEY?

Issues of the Coming Election—Mr. Alvin Johnson, in the *Yale Review*.

The Liberals After Chicago—Mr. Bruce Bliven, in the *New Republic*.

Polls, Propaganda and Politics—Editorial in the Nation.

Tension in America—Editorial, in the *Round Table*.

Next month the United States electors will choose a President. So far as their choice can be expected to affect the fortunes of the whole world, it is not intrusive for the outside onlooker to comment upon what seems to be at stake.

People are now, happily, less sensitive to such "foreign meddling", or at least less given to violent reaction against it, than some of their predecessors were. In other respects, perhaps more important, we may all have changed for the worse, but in habits of patient mutual tolerance, especially tolerance of criticism, British-American and Canadian-American relations have improved. It is hard for this generation to realize that *No Truck or Trade with the Yankees* was once a slogan in our country. And it is no less hard to reconstruct imaginatively the atmosphere at Washington of fifty years ago, when a British ambassador was handed his passports because he had written a private letter, to an American voter who had asked his advice, indicating which candidate for the Presidency he thought the more disposed to cordial cooperation with Britain. A great deal was lost by such mood of constant national irritability. Every nation needs the occasional outspoken candour of one observing it from without: the foreign analyst can often discern abuses in domestic management to which self-interest, or perhaps mere custom, has blinded both those who commit and those who suffer them. A glance at the great newspapers or magazines, British and American, will show how the temper of international sympathy has of late been found quite compatible with an unsparing critical edge. Tendencies not merely compatible, but even mutually stimulating! In this respect the war has had a good result. Allies in battle, fighting together for all that each holds precious, soon learn that nations, like individuals, once a mere acquaintance has developed into genuine friendship, become on that account all the quicker to say just what they think. They develop the virtue which St. Paul enjoined in the phrase "able to admonish one another".

I

At first sight it seems exceedingly regrettable that the United States in the very crisis of war-effort should be distracted by the excitement of a presidential contest. Inevitable, no doubt, but surely regrettable.

The excitement corresponding to this in Great Britain is that of a general election to decide which party shall be returned to power, and not for nearly nine years has Great Britain had a general election. Parliament there has risked the odium of extending its own life as, on the whole, better than stirring up in war-time the discords and passions inseparable from a campaign for votes. There are grave objections, indeed, to such postponement—especially to such repeated postponement. Each time it is done, there is less ground than before for confidence that the government policy continues to express the mind of the nation, and only a Fascist (or a semi-Fascist) will regard this as unimportant. The passage of nine years makes a notable difference in the personnel of the electorate; and even if it did not, who can be sure that after nine years, strewn with such events as those between 1935 and 1944, the same electors have not profoundly changed their minds? Among the men of Great Britain now between the ages of twenty and forty—the very flower, that is, of the British armed forces by land, on sea or in the air—not one has ever had a chance to vote in a general election on the national policy. How long it will be possible to proceed without any such genuine “renewal of mandate” is a question that becomes ever more urgent. But such reflections serve to show how serious must be the disadvantages of the alternative, to which this—with all its faults—is held to be preferable. In the United States the alternative is being faced.

Mr. Roosevelt, in his “acceptance speech”, said he would conduct no campaign of the usual sort for votes, because it would be indecent in the present circumstances of the country, and because, even if it were fitting, it would occupy far too much of the time he needed for national work. In a like spirit Mr. Dewey indicated that he would keep in mind the limitations which the national situation should impose upon partisan controversy. But such self-denying ordinance is much easier to acknowledge than to remember, especially for candidates with the talent of incisive speech. Before long, indeed only a few minutes after he had promised unusual self-restraint, Mr. Roosevelt was recounting with unmistakable relish the follies and blunders of the regime

from which the New Deal had provided deliverance. One noted, too, the pungent paragraph in which Mr. Dewey compared his own fight against the author of the New Deal at home to the fight of the American armed forces against dictatorship abroad, and the enthusiastic applause of the Republican Convention at the announcement that the Republican Party alone was true to "Americanism"! One should not complain of such vigor in indictment; it is of the very essence of our free institutions, and no country has surpassed the United States in combining the habits of party invective with the readiness—as Miss Dorothy Thompson puts it—"to fly together at a crisis". It remains true, however, that party disputes in time of war involve wastage of the national energy, like strikes in a munition plant or a walk-out by railway men when transport is so urgent.

In a memorable passage, James Anthony Froude once asked his countrymen to consider how strange was the assumption involved in the two-party system which they thought the crown and glory of their own political development; the assumption that there are two lines of thought on public affairs, one of which every public man must adopt, but in no case will adopt both:

It assumes, again, that the leading representatives of these opposing principles shall be men, if not of equal ability, yet of ability of a first-class order. There must be on either side accomplished men of business, men who can manage the finances of the State, who can administer the army and the navy, who can take the reins of the imperial foreign policy, who can fill the highest offices of the law not only without discredit, but with honour to themselves and advantage to the nation and to the great profession to which they belong; yet all the while it must be the business of their antagonists to persuade the country that the party on the Government benches misunderstand the public interests, are incapable of their duties, are misled by prejudice, tradition or particular interest or ambition. Whether the charges against them be true or not, their rivals must so represent them, must endeavour in season and out of season, in parliament and on platform, in pamphlet and leading article, from the day they enter upon office, to undermine their stability, and destroy the respect of their countrymen for them.

One feels that a time of war, when national unity is so imperative, is a time most unfortunate for the dialectical exercise which Froude has here so vividly described. It is a time when we have special need of his warning to remember the two eyes with which Nature has supplied us, and not to extinguish either of them, deliberately, in matters of State.

What alternative have we to this method of two-party government? There is the method of Nazi or Fascist dictatorship. There is the method of multiple parties, which the Republic of France so developed in its last decade before collapse. Thought of these may well drive us back to the system whose faults Froude so convincingly set forth. The United States, with strict written constitution whose checks and balances it would need a long and difficult process to alter, could not postpone a presidential contest with the ease of a decision of the British parliament to extend its own life, and there are specific advantages in the rigid as there are others in the flexible order. While change from the two-party system might well be a leap from the frying-pan into the fire, it is reasonable to ask that the normal discomforts of this particular frying-pan be abated, so far as possible, at a time of general hardships. Both Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Dewey, let us hope, will manage, these next few weeks, to keep such thought of national relief in mind. For there is undoubtedly at the moment strained attention in Berlin, for every sign—even the slightest and most doubtful—of a chance for enemy profit from internal dispute in a country of the Allies.

Very decisive warning has been given by the American presidential candidates, that so far as the war is concerned the only rivalry between them is in vigor for its prosecution to a triumphant close, and that if they differ at all about this, it is in their estimate of the most effective method by which the Nazi power may be altogether destroyed. Dr. Goebbels has accepted that account of the situation, and airily declares that to Germany the outcome of America's presidential contest this year is of no importance whatever. Apart from the natural presumption that it must be important if Dr. Goebbels declares it is not, one can see quite serious differences that may be made by a change at the White House—not for the war but for the coming peace terms, and still more for the post-war schemes to ensure permanence for the peace. Suppose, for example, that one deeply indebted to Col. McCormick and the isolationists of the *Chicago Tribune* for electoral support were to be installed as President? Would that make no difference to United States participation in a project of collective security?

II.

Ever since Montesquieu published *Persian Letters*, it has been a popular exercise of the imagination to consider how a visitor from far away (perhaps even from another planet), knowing nothing of our political institutions, would construe what he saw and heard here at a time of party conflict. Suppose such an enquirer began his study of American public affairs just now by attendance at Mr. Dewey's meetings, and by attention to articles in the Republican press. From such sources he would quickly derive a conception of the present plight of the American people which it may be suggestive for my argument here to set forth.

The picture would have in its foreground a President who chanced to be in office at a time of tremendous national effort, and who constantly tried to monopolize credit for successes which his personal interference—so far from promoting—had served to delay or to reduce. It would exhibit military leaders who have been (in Mr. Dewey's own language) "superb," but who have had to show their quality often by skilful obviating of the worst consequences of presidential misdirection. The visitor would marvel at a spectacle of executive arrogance producing incessant irritation in Congress, in labor organizations, in the circles of high industrial leadership, so that when harmony was most needed, it was least certain, and the energies vital to the nation's fight abroad were spent upon internal strife: a spectacle not of strength economized by avoidance of needless friction, but of friction multiplied in quarters previously harmonious, so that strength was everywhere wasted. Our supposed visitor would note how the initial pledge to eschew the recrimination usual in a peace-time contest has been progressively forgotten, and would find it hard to guess how party chiefs must have arraigned each other in the past if Mr. Dewey's present tone (and still more Mr. Bricker's) is one of exceptional restraint. He would learn from Mr. Dewey how the American people have been afflicted for more than ten years with a bungling and incompetent egotist, who has now the effrontery to pose as "indispensable"; how under this despot the integrity of Congress has been undermined, the elemental rights of American citizens have been subjected to bureaucratic caprice, the war effort itself has been constantly hampered by delays which served the partisan interests of the Administration; in a word, how there has been forced upon Americans a battle

against domestic dictatorship fundamentally similar to the battle against Nazism and Fascism in Europe.

Mr. Bricker's eloquence, if not more picturesque in its imagery than Mr. Dewey's, would seem to the enquiring visitor to include charges still more grave against the war technique. A Vice-President of the United States, as the *New York Times* lately told us, holds an office in some respects more attractive than the Presidency, because since there is so little he can do, he has the wider irresponsible latitude of speech. As vice-presidential candidate, Mr. Bricker has availed himself of this to the full. Mr. Dewey dwells much on President Roosevelt's multiplication of bureaucratic boards; on his injudicious diplomacy with Labor, increasing the likelihood of strikes; on his taking the national ship adrift without a course, without a chart, without even a compass. Such language does not seem to transgress, though it may sometimes seem to reach, the common limits of a candidate's rhetoric. But our supposed foreign observer would have a shock indeed, remembering the preliminary ordinance of self-denial, when he heard from Mr. Bricker that the Pearl Harbor affair had been disgraceful to Americans as well as to Japanese; that the Administration's mismanagement had there taken a fearful toll of American lives; that the culprit officers, whose court-martial was long overdue, were being protected by a President whose chief concern was for his own fourth term at the White House; and that the real facts of that naval catastrophe—facts which the American people had a right to know—were being concealed solely because their revelation would injure Mr. Roosevelt's chances in his present personal campaign.

So far the visitor would have been impressed at least with the vigor of Republican attack. What is the line of Democratic reply?

III.

No reasonable advocate of a Fourth Term for Mr. Roosevelt tries to refute all the charges which have been made against his administration of American affairs in more than eleven years of difficulty and peril. Everyone grants that even a Third Term, still more a Fourth, at the White House is, in normal circumstances, contrary to the wise rule of constitutional practice. No intelligent observer will minimize the evil of such discord as has for some time existed between the domestic policies of the

President and those of Congress. The "New Deal" bore severely on values which Americans cherish, and it is no mere peevishness—it is rather a wholesome spirit of personal independence—that has made them often restive under officials whom Mr. Dewey calls "bureaucrats" installed by White House action. The withdrawal, after discouraging experiment, of so much in the early programme of the New Deal was itself an acknowledgment of mistake. Successive judgments of the Supreme Court bore out the justice of complaint by private citizens that "the American way of life" was being less honored in the President's office practice than in his radio eloquence. From Berlin or Rome came many a mocking reference to the trans-Atlantic brand of "authoritarianism", supposedly at the service of a democratic crusade—like a casting out of other devils by invocation of Beelzebub! While the sneer was easily repelled by emphasis upon the transient, revocable character of the President's special war-time powers, it was among the unfortunate necessities of the hour that in a fight against dictatorship abroad it was so often needful—for speed and efficiency—to launch an "executive decree" immune from interference by either the Legislature or the Courts. Perhaps, too, Mr. Roosevelt's recent account of his candidature for a Fourth Term as just a soldier's response to his country's call in time of war lent itself to the mordant wit of the Republican press. The President is, *ex officio*, Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces of the United States. But it requires a party zeal intense indeed to identify the call from a Democratic Convention for a struggle at the polls with a summons by the nation to remain in charge of its war destinies. Who can say, from the proceedings last summer at Chicago, whether it is Mr. Roosevelt or Mr. Dewey that the American people desire to trust as Commander-in-Chief from a certain date in January next?

But questions about either the New Deal at home or the war measures abroad are very superficially treated in a speech or an article taken up altogether with hardships, inconsistencies, mistakes. It is Mr. Roosevelt's contention that just as extraordinary methods of government, which Americans would properly resent in time of peace, had to be adopted in the crisis of war, so in 1933—when his administration began—there was an internal crisis of such intensity as the normal administrative technique could not meet. By "New Deal" was meant the resolve to apply fundamentally new measures for recovery where the old routine had brought the nation to the brink of the abyss.

Memories are short, and at least for the younger voters, who eleven years ago were still hardly leaving school, it is important to recall the horror which, as Mr. Roosevelt puts it, "the Republicans deposited on our lap." The legacy, in short, of "Hooverism"! Just as Mr. Roosevelt was preparing to be installed, our newspapers announced that the Government of the State of Michigan had proclaimed a bank holiday "in order to save the banks of Detroit". Next, that this had driven the Detroit employers to meet the demand of their infuriated workers with cheques on their accounts in Cleveland or Chicago, and that such action had forced the Governments of Illinois and Ohio to save the banks in their States by proclaiming a moratorium on payments like that of Michigan. When this had happened, it needed no seer to predict a rush on banks all over the United States, with furious depositors standing in line before doors were opened. Within little more than two weeks after the Michigan episode, the whole banking system of the country was in chaos. Recall the mood of Americans on that March 4, 1933, when the new President delivered his first official radio address: it was to millions of listeners who feared that every cent of their savings was lost, to commercial travellers marooned where they chanced to be because they could not cash a cheque even for expenses, to housekeepers who could get no provisions at the store because they had no ready cash and storekeepers had suspended credit. The Republican theory was that such difficulties had arisen before, and would cure themselves: Mr. Roosevelt's answer, in accents which thrilled his listeners by that time desperate, was that it was slander on America to say such things had happened before, that this situation was indeed unique, that not any further manipulation of the old hand but a "new deal" of the cards was required. And he asked for special powers, to act quickly. Such was the origin of "N.R.A."

Sharp, but effective, measures were taken. The wild financial piracy which, under previous administrations from the days of "Teapot Dome", had made the richest land in the world such a spectacle of social injustice, was reduced for the first time under stern discipline, despite the shriek from large interests apprehensive of "how far this sort of interference with private enterprise will go". An immediate saving of \$500,000,000 was effected by reduction of ex-service men's pensions, and it was borne without a murmur—so different from the mood with which Service men had heard of President Hoover's "sending for the police" when their deputation arrived. Millions of unemployed had

work found for them on schemes of regional planning beyond any ever undertaken before outside Soviet Russia. Vast numbers of farmers were rescued from imminent foreclosures of mortgages on their farms. It is true that some great corporations suffered a terrific loss in their profits, and those whose incomes had been dependent on the immunity of such profits from government regulation made the welkin ring with lament about "departure from the American way of life". It is also true that in reducing inordinate profits the machinery bore hard at times on those whose profits were far from inordinate. But the long forgotten man was remembered. It was a sight indeed when the clerks in banks all over the United States could scarcely cope with the rush of customers so soon eager to re-deposit what they had frantically withdrawn.

When they pass from domestic to foreign affairs, the eloquence of the Democratic spokesmen acquires a still sharper edge. Quite naturally, Mr. Roosevelt does not accept his opponent's proposal to argue on internal policies alone. On home administration indeed he has no reluctance to argue, but—like a good strategist in the war—he will not concede to the enemy the right to choose just where he will fight. Mr. Dewey's reason for excluding matters of foreign policy is Mr. Roosevelt's reason for dwelling upon them.

Here he presents to the American people a terse and challenging question. They are at war, for purposes they believe supremely important. Are they prepared to hand over the guidance of that struggle in its concluding phases to the party which exerted itself to the utmost in ridicule and abuse of the spirit which led the nation into war; the party which interposed every constitutional obstacle and every vexatious delay it could devise to frustrate the needful preparations for it; the party which at the present hour has its nominee passionately supported by declared enemies of the national policy? In a word, do Col. McCormick and the *Chicago Tribune* know what they are doing when they work so hard for Mr. Dewey? And if they do, how clear mentally are those who argue that Mr. Dewey's election would make no difference to the line America will follow the next few years in foreign affairs?

Someone at a very early stage in this campaign launched the reproach against Mr. Roosevelt that he is now too old for presidential responsibilities. It elicited a rejoinder which recalled to me the fate of a similarly unchivalrous—and

incautious—attack on Edmund Burke. Had Mr. Roosevelt, I wonder, read Burke's immortal reply, entitled *Letter to a Noble Lord*? His own satire is not unfit for even the blazing light of that comparison. Younger men, he said, might be equal to defending a project of collective security in such manner as not to lose a single isolationist vote or a single isolationist campaign subscription. But such dialectical acrobatics were beyond his ageing powers.

An international Council, an international Court, an international Force to make the decisions of Court and Council effective—such is Mr. Roosevelt's plan for ensuring world peace. And what is Mr. Dewey's? He finds, apparently, mere conference of any kind unobjectionable, but objects to "an international police". Is not this, the Democrats ask, to propose playing *Hamlet*, but without the Prince of Denmark?

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To this American scene there is a parallel from Great Britain which comes readily to mind.

Just twenty-two years ago, Mr. Lloyd George was the object of resolute and concerted attack by the British Conservatives. Like Mr. Roosevelt, he had been his country's war leader, architect of victory, organizer of national enthusiasm. Like him too, Mr. Lloyd George had departed often and far from traditional technique: he had taken many a short-cut where immemorial usage had prescribed the long way round, because he felt that there was not time for such long way, and that where constitutional precedent obstructed public necessities, it was fitting to disregard not the necessities but the precedent. His unforgettable "Too Late" speech was the manifesto of what he had in mind, once he got the chance of direction, to do. He had shocked people of an older school by such an institution as his Cabinet Secretariat, by his manipulation each year of the Honors List, by his abrupt ways with men whose prestige had not before been ignored and his pushing of men previously unknown into sudden power. He had ventured on other novelties compared with which these were trivial. Such tangles as it had been the office of earlier British statesmanship slowly and patiently to unravel, this chief had treated as Alexander did a famous knot: since unravelling would take too long, he cut it! How many swathings of "red tape" Mr. Lloyd George thus cut, we can but guess. He chose this novel method not from any particular dislike for what H. H. Asquith called "the forms of our ancient realm",

and not because he had any revolutionary purpose to make permanent transformations, but because he had a task which could not wait for such delays as those constant "conferences" so dear to democratic practice. Like the Hebrew leader who on a similar occasion took his own way, he was doing a great work, so that he could not "come down"—not even for a Conference. A day would no doubt dawn again for the more staid and conventional method, but it had not, he thought, dawned yet. A war had to be won, and with all respect, even envy, for those whose rôle would yet lie in *Platonis republica*, he had to adjust himself to immediate requirements in *Romuli faece*.

About all this, little was said by way of reproach, almost nothing indeed publicly, whatever might be whispered in the recesses of Conservative club-rooms while Mr. Lloyd George's hand seemed to be that of the magician in contriving the most effective war combinations, and his voice incomparably beyond all other voices together could reanimate the despondent multitude of his countrymen at each dark hour. He was indeed held to be "the indispensable man", and the British "D.O.R.A." was as freely at his disposal for autocratic use as "N.R.A." for the alleged despotism of Mr. Roosevelt. But by the summer of 1922 things were different. Four years had passed since the time of peril. Amid the leisureliness of a safe life won for them by the victory his genius had achieved, there was time for his detractors to analyze his faults, to construct an argument that the same result might have been effected with fewer infractions of national usage, and that once more they had been beguiled into allowing a despot to pose as champion of liberty. True, he had ridden the whirlwind and directed the storm, none venturing to disturb him while the tempest raged. But at length the storm and the whirlwind were over and—was it not time for a change in leadership?

I refrain from pointing the suggestiveness of the analogy further. But let me add this. The fall of Lloyd George meant the rise of Stanley Baldwin. *Absit omen.*

H.L.S.