

The American MERCURY

January 1925

THE MASTER MINDS

BY FRANK R. KENT

IN this country the hopeful idea of those who established our political system and laid down the rules for the game was that there would emerge from it, as a governing class, the men best qualified by intellect and character to govern. Constant journalistic analysis of Congress, plus the frequency with which congressmen make public exhibitions of themselves, long ago destroyed popular belief in that theory, and has, in fact, implanted a pretty general conviction that it works the other way.

However, there are two great political delusions to which the American people and the American press still cling with apparently unshakable persistence. One is to the effect that politicians and political leaders are very smart fellows. The other is that in a presidential campaign the national headquarters are manned by astute and able men, whose main idea is to elect the ticket, and who are inspired by the utmost devotion to the cause and the candidate. The plain fact as to the first of these notions is that politicians are really no smarter than other men, but only somewhat more greedy. As to the second, no candid person who has had an opportunity to see things from the inside will deny that the absorbing thought of the great bulk of those at a national headquarters is simply to get on the payroll as early as

possible, to stay there as long as possible, to do as little as possible, and to grab just as much as possible. The triumph of the ticket is, of course, considered desirable, but not vital. In the hour of defeat the hearts that are broken at headquarters are those that had planned a personal transfer from the party payroll to the public payroll. They do not suffer save for purely selfish reasons.

There is in these observations no desire to disparage the few genuinely fine and unselfish men who figure in every campaign and not only get nothing out of it for themselves, but make very real sacrifices in time and money. Nor is it intended to reflect upon the few paid but highly competent fellows who have their hearts in their jobs, and earn a lot more than they get. There are always some of these, but they are so few they do not even impart a flavor to the rest. Allowing everything for the notable exceptions in the ranks and conceding competency at the head, a national political headquarters remains the very finest example of inefficiency, the greatest conglomeration of bluff, bluster, buncombe, bribery, backbiting and blackmail that we have in the United States. That description applies to both parties and to all campaigns. It makes no difference whether they have much money or not much. The more money

there is on tap and the larger and more elaborate the organization, the more accurate the description.

Presidential candidates are elected in spite of their campaign management, not because of it. In any campaign, if both national headquarters were closed down in the middle of the fight or, better still, if they were never opened at all, the candidates would not lose votes, but gain them. They would profit by the mistakes avoided and the money saved. For every person on the payroll who functions, there are twenty who merely draw their pay and clutter up the place. For every dollar effectively spent, a thousand are thrown to the birds. For every vote gained, two are lost.

These may seem extreme statements. Actually, they are not so at all. Any man who has seen this game from the inside will agree it is not an exaggeration to say that the pinnacle of petty pilfering is reached at a national headquarters. Instead of being directed by the able and astute, the place is packed with the stupid and greedy. Instead of helping the candidate and the cause, headquarters probably hurts and handicaps both in a hundred ways. At least, that is the logic of it. Actually, however—such are the illogicalities of politics—there is some reason to think that the squandering, plundering and blundering hurt no more—perhaps less—than would a rigidly honest, highly efficient organization, run under civil service rules. In politics, perhaps, it is extravagant to be economical and foolish to be wise.

All this does not mean that the chairman of the national committee and the directing heads of the campaign are necessarily bad men, or weak men, or foolish men. Sometimes, as in the last campaign, both chairmen are able, honest, highly respectable, personally efficient, and completely devoted to the interests of the heads of their tickets, and sometimes they work as hard as men can ever work under circumstances that violate all their notions of logic, reason and right. It does mean,

however, that able and devoted chairmen are the exception and not the rule, and it further means that, even when you concede them ability, integrity and loyalty, the basic facts are not altered. No matter how big the chairman may be, the system into which he is thrown is bigger. He can neither make it over, change it, nor abandon it. He has to play the game as it always has been played, and there is no rule, save those which do not matter, that he can alter. It is easier for a bird to fly with a broken wing than it would be to run a national campaign with "business efficiency." The chairman may try to do it, but if he is sufficiently inexperienced to make the attempt seriously, he will certainly emerge with a bruised spirit. The whole thing is headed in just the opposite direction, and there is no way to turn it around.

II

The reason the public still cherishes the delusion that there are master minds in politics and that the men on the inside at headquarters are adroit, resourceful fellows, who work and scheme and plan and are full of secrets, subtleties, oily tricks and subterranean guile, is because it does not know the facts. The newspapers have never had time, opportunity, or incentive to pull the covers off headquarters management the way they have been pulled off a lot of other things—Congress for instance. During the campaign, everybody, including the newspapers, is lined up on one side or the other. The game then is to spread poison about the opposition candidate and party, and to vaccinate against the poison spread by the other side. No one has time to discuss the vast and sordid bluff put up at headquarters. Nine-tenths of the management of a presidential campaign consists in the swift and nervous collection of a great sum of money and the even more rapid and panicky distribution of the same. It requires, perhaps, a certain talent for stealth to do this successfully, but certainly no high order of intellect. The

other tenth, which covers the bureaux, the boards, the strategy committees, the conclaves and conferences, is relatively unimportant.

Few outside observers ever get behind the portentous chairman and the paid publicity agents. They never know that the only real secret these men have is the very important one as to who is on the payroll and where the money goes—much darker data than those which show from where the money comes. There is no way and no reason to get at these things during the campaign, and, as soon as the election is over the payroll disappears. It vanishes into air. Everybody wants to forget it. No record of it is kept. The hundreds of big and little fellows who were on it have unostentatiously dropped off, and the roll itself has sunk out of sight, not to be revived for four more years. It is as completely hidden as are the exact amounts sent into the various States the week before election, and to whom. These are the real secrets of national politics—and the only ones.

A little reflection is enough to make clear the reasons why the national headquarters in a presidential campaign not only never function efficiently but are invariably centers of an indescribable chaos and bewilderment. The curious thing is that, if they were more efficient from the business point of view, they would probably be less efficient politically. The whole game is rigged to attract the greedy. The celerity with which the millions are collected and the equal speed with which they must be distributed draw the practical politicians as honey draws flies. They come running in from all parts of the country, their hands out in front of them. The collecting begins in July, and the total sum gathered in ranges from one to ten million dollars, according to the skill and daring of the collectors. It goes out just as quickly as it comes in, and when the campaign closes not a dollar, as a rule, is left over. To have a surplus might be efficient from the business point of view, but

it would be horribly inefficient from the political.

If there were no other reasons, the swift and haphazard way in which the headquarters organization is formed, and the exceedingly temporary nature of its existence, would, in themselves, be sufficient to account for its inept and doddering nature. It is absurd to expect skill and force from a human machine that has to be assembled in four weeks and dies in four months. The brevity of the service makes it impossible to draw into it any but unattached persons, men and women without permanent places, or those whose permanent places are of so small moment they do not mind leaving them for the temporary excitement, high pay and glorious ease of campaign work. There are, of course, volunteers who come in because of their real devotion to candidate or cause, and there are also efficient and experienced holders of public office, seasoned by many campaigns, who come in as a matter of party duty, but the rank and file are invariably composed either of those who have no regular avocation, or those whose work and prospects are not sufficiently important to induce them to hold on to them.

Enough has been said to indicate the material from which the organization must be recruited. If that were all, it would be handicap enough. But the selection of the force must be determined, further, by purely political considerations—it not only is touched by politics, it is saturated with and steeped in politics, through and through. Few appointments to even the most insignificant places are made without a political recommendation. The party chairman has almost no freedom of choice whatever. He is unable to pick the most available material with which to build his human machine, even when the transient nature of his machine very greatly limits that material. If he is a Republican chairman, it would be fatal to have a Democrat appear on the payroll, no matter in what capacity. Equally deadly would

it be to have a Republican on the Democratic roll.

This is the system, and it has been the system since presidential campaigns were first conducted from a central headquarters. It will continue to be the system so long as campaign funds are collected. There is no way to change it. There is a class of politicians which literally lives on campaign funds. The presidential years offer them their biggest opportunities, but the gap between one presidential campaign and another is bridged over by the local and State campaigns, in which there are also, and always will be, campaign funds. No election in this country, whether for President or for county clerk, is ever held without the raising and spending of a campaign fund. It is true that a certain amount of money is legitimately needed to reach the voters, but the amount needed is always an insignificant proportion of the amount raised. The great bulk of that amount in every campaign, whether it be for President or sheriff, is wasted. The great bulk of it never gets down into the precincts for which it was intended. The great bulk of it is grafted.

The idea of such campaign funds, of course, originated with the practical politicians. The habit of providing them is simply the business man's method of discharging his political obligations. There are two reasons why it is always possible for the politicians to raise them. One is that it somehow satisfies the political conscience of the business man to give money to the cause or candidate he favors, even if, as often happens, he gives it furtively and in defiance of the law. The second is that, regardless of whether they possess political consciences or not, most large givers to campaign funds, whether in national or State elections, cherish the belief that such gifts secure for them the good will of the political bosses and that, in proportion to their contributions, they achieve protection against attack. That the money raised is largely wasted or stolen means nothing to them.

III

In the course of generations, a belief in the necessity of campaign funds has become a settled conviction among the American people. This belief is now and always will be promoted by the politicians for their own purposes. An elaborate and expensive system of campaigning has been built up. Ways of spending money more or less legitimately, if uselessly, have been devised. Either through lack of reasoning power or because their interests dull their intelligence, the politicians who profit most from such funds are, themselves, sincerely convinced of their necessity. No one stops long enough to see clearly the complete humbug of the game. Many honest party leaders—and there are such—seriously contend that, unless enough money is provided, an efficient campaign cannot be made; that unless there are sample ballots, literature, slogans, advertisements, bureaux, and money to get the voters to the polls on election day, it is not possible to make a successful fight.

That is not true—or rather, it is true only because both sides do it. If both sides cut down their campaign activities and campaign funds nine-tenths, the voters would be better informed because less bewildered, just as many would come out, and the candidates would be better off. As I have said, most of the money collected goes into the pockets of the politicians and their friends, in one form or another; not one dollar in a hundred actually gets down into the local precincts for the purposes intended. Large campaign funds will be necessary only so long as they are permitted. The real sufferers from their abolition would be the State political machines, which obtain from them the bulk of their nourishment.

While campaign funds sometimes reach enormous proportions in mayoralty, gubernatorial and senatorial contests, the climax comes in the presidential campaigns. Then the money is reckoned by the millions, not by the thousands. From the moment it

starts rolling in until the last dollar rolls out, the practical politicians in forty-eight States concentrate on the idea of getting their share. There are two ways in which they succeed, both considered entirely legitimate and essential to party success. One is by convincing the man who holds the purse strings that, in order to carry their particular State, it is necessary to put in their hands a definite (and usually large) sum. The second is by getting places on the party payroll for the four months of the campaign for as many of their political followers, friends and dependents as possible. From the day of his selection until the fight is over, the pressure is persistent and unrelenting on the unfortunate chairman. Most of his time is taken up in talking with men whose sole purpose is to get as much money as possible for their States, and whose game is to convince him that his ideas of what is necessary are entirely inadequate.

That is why he usually knows so little about the real situation, and why his judgment is generally so bad. He never gets anything but "dope." It is possible for him to compromise with some of these practical men, but in the end he must satisfy them. He can neither reject their judgment as to the necessity of putting money into their respective States, nor refuse to make places on the party payroll for those for whom they make personal demands. He may temporize and cut down, but he is bound to yield in the end. He cannot afford to offend such men, for they are the keys to the party machines in their States. If they "lie down" he may lose their States. More than any one of them, he is concerned primarily with the party's success. He can take no chances. He must make no influential enemies in his own house; he has enough to fight in the other. So he has to yield, and he does.

In the last campaign, a more or less distinguished statesman, about to start out on a three months' stumping tour, said to his party chairman words to this effect: "Of course, I don't want to be

paid for speaking for my party. That would be repugnant to my whole nature. Naturally, you will pay my expenses, but I want nothing beyond that. However, in order to make this trip for you, I have had to cancel all my Chautauqua engagements. I had intended to make ten speeches, at \$150 each, during these three weeks. I know you don't want me to lose any money, and I won't let you pay me a cent more than I would have made from those Chautauqua lectures." And the chairman, though extremely skeptical about the Chautauqua lectures, gave the statesman \$1,000 for his expenses and \$1,500 to cover his "losses."

Another party leader, about to start on a speaking tour, said to the chairman, after he had drawn his expense money: "You understand, I am not being paid for making this trip, and I really am making a considerable sacrifice in time and money. I don't want any money, but here is a little list of people in my State who are always taken care of around headquarters in a campaign. I will appreciate it if you will find places for them." And the chairman had to do it. How could he refuse? It might have meant that the State leader would get sore and lie down. Leaders have been known to do that sort of thing. On this particular gentleman's little list were his sister-in-law, the editor of a county paper in his State, his stenographer, and a couple of impecunious local politicians. They went on at salaries ranging from \$30 a week up to \$100.

There was another case of an important State leader who put a woman on the payroll at \$150 a week and "expenses." The first week her expenses ran to \$300. No one wanted her around. She was not needed, but it was impossible to deny the request of this leader that she be employed. He was too important. She did no real work, but she stayed. Still another instance: an influential politician had installed, at a large salary, the head of a bureau, because of the supposedly great influence wielded by this person with a certain class of voters.

The pay was \$250 a week and expenses. A secretary was provided. There was no real work to do. The appointment was made solely to placate an element that seemed slightly off the reservation. It was merely another case of the customary political blackmail, the ordinary hold-up. After a few weeks, the head of this bureau discovered that the head of another bureau had a messenger. An immediate demand for one was made on the chairman. The chairman pointed out that a messenger was entirely unnecessary and asked why one was wanted. The reply, in effect, was this: "You have a messenger. She has a messenger. I want a messenger, and unless I get one I will quit, and tell our people just how you treat us here at headquarters." The messenger was granted.

Henry Simpkins was put on the payroll at \$135 a month. One week later, a note came down to the chairman from the bureau head: "I have promoted Henry Simpkins from messenger at \$135 a month to file clerk at \$250 a month." And the chairman had to stand for it. He swore, but there was nothing for him to do. He could not take the chance of offending a person so influential with so large a class of voters,—particularly as this particular person would have very probably transferred himself promptly to the other party payroll.

IV

These are not isolated instances; they are typical. As I have said, there are, of course, a number of earnest, capable, devoted people at headquarters beside the chairman,—men and women of his own personal selection, and without whom he could not stand the strain of four months' collecting and distributing. But the great majority of them are simply boll weevils,—machine hangers-on and political incompetents. One exasperated man, in the middle of the last campaign, burst out with, "They load us up with the riff-raff in their districts and then go out and wonder why the committee doesn't func-

tion." It is an actual fact that, in that campaign, one political leader,—and he an ex-chairman, too,—gave no less than three hundred letters of recommendation to persons seeking to land on the payroll. Not many got on through these form letters, and he knew they would not, but their presentation certainly helped make life unpleasant for the chairman.

The salaries paid range all the way from \$30 a week to \$300 and "expenses." Not infrequently the "expenses" amount to much more than the salary. They include living in suites at the best hotels, giving dinners and parties, and enjoying life generally. Party payrolls in national campaigns have sometimes gone as high as \$80,000 a week, and not often has there been one that went below \$15,000. No one ever sees the payroll save the treasurer and the chairman. It is the most deeply hidden of all headquarters secrets, and after the election it is destroyed. Everybody is interested, of course, in seeing that it is—those who are on it as well as those who put them on. It is never produced before investigating committees. It is never asked for. It would be almost as interesting,—perhaps more so,—than the list of contributors. It would certainly be instructive to the contributors to see who gets the money they give.

Naturally and inevitably, this method of choosing the men who are to man headquarters means waste of a lavish sort inside. Probably the prize example of what can be done in this respect is the story told by a man, unquestionably in a position to know, of \$4,000 paid for a marching song composed in honor of a certain presidential candidate. The money for the march, it is declared, was actually paid, but if anyone ever heard the march during the campaign he has not yet been found. It is also vouched for that, in one campaign,—not the last one,—the long distance telephone bill for a single day at headquarters exceeded \$1,000. This is not hard to believe, for in the last campaign persons employed in the publicity depart-

ment in one headquarters in Chicago called up friends in the opposing party headquarters in New York, and conversed for half hour periods, largely on the topic of where they could get a supply of liquor for a little reunion to be held when the campaign ended.

There is no way for the chairman to stop these things,—even if he wanted to. If he tried, he would have a far worse mess than he has now. Actually, the party treasury leaks like a sieve. And why not? The whole idea of collecting a great fund is to spread it around. The purpose is not to invest the money, but to spend it—and the time in which it must be spent is short. It may be a hard job to collect seven or eight million dollars in four months, but it would be far harder to spend it wisely. Obviously, it would be the height of folly for the chairman not to spend all of it. Suppose he held back part, and then lost the election? He would be buried under an avalanche of blame. There is no reason for him to be saving. The money is given to be spent in the one campaign, and the people who give it do not care a straw who gets it or what is done with it. No return is expected or required. No accounting is made. To spend it all, much of it has to be wasted and much given to incompetent and unworthy persons.

The interesting thing is that all this waste and inefficiency are really not as wasteful and inefficient, at bottom, as they look. If campaigns were commercial enterprises it would, of course, be heart-breaking, but, since they are political enterprises, waste and inefficiency are natural to them, and get results. That seems a paradox, but it is not far from the truth. It is certainly true that any national chairman who attempted to enforce business methods and economy straight down the line would score a most tremendous failure. He probably would not last, indeed, through the campaign. For, aside from the publicity and propaganda output, the one function of campaign management is to secure coöperation from the party machines

in the different States, and you can't do this by making them live up to business standards. You can do it only by conducting the campaign in the same old way, by letting them participate in the spending of the millions, by utilizing the money to take care of those who, while useless and incompetent enough about headquarters, are useful and competent in the local precincts, or who have friends who are.

Business inefficiency is thus political efficiency. If campaigns were organized on any other basis, the practical politicians would take no interest in them. If men had to be appointed on their merits and earn what they get, headquarters would be largely deserted. Moreover, no such men are available for a four months' job. If there were no chance to reward camp-followers with well-paid posts requiring no work, if there were no chance to participate in the distribution of the spoils, if there were no opportunity to hand out favors, contracts, advertising, and money to the Muldoons, the political machines in the several States would be undernourished and enfeebled and the workers disheartened and discouraged. Eliminate the easy money and you take the heart out of the organization. Through generations of campaigns, both sides have got so used to easy and profitable participation in the loot that any chairman who refused to put more people on the payroll than were needed to do the work, or who picked his men because they could and would work, or who refused to put into a State more than the sum which, in his judgment, could be effectively used,—any such chairman as this,—and there has never been one yet,—would unquestionably kill his candidate. He would make such bitter and powerful enemies within his own party that they would do him infinitely more damage than those in the other party. No surer way of "souring" the party machines could be devised. And in the long run it is always these State and city machines that have to get the party vote to the polls. If they lie down you are lost.

Probably the thing that would hurt more than anything else would be to cut down the money put into the hands of the State bosses to the bare amount necessary to satisfy immediate machine cravings, thus giving the leaders no opportunity to hold out a slice for use in the following local fight, in which they have a closer and more personal interest.

V

It is a system,—this under which campaign funds are expended,—nearly a century old. It is next to impossible to alter it, though it is nine-tenths bluff, bluster, and humbug. If neither party had any money or management, neither country, candidates nor cause would suffer. The most that can be legitimately and efficiently spent is about one-tenth as much as is actually spent. That much, perhaps, is necessary in order to keep the party organization alive. More is necessary to

any party only when the other party has more.

As the years go by the system strengthens instead of weakens. Campaigns become more and more elaborate. New ways of spending money are found—for example, on moving pictures and the radio. More money and more men are needed. The scale is thus larger, but the basic idea behind the campaign funds remains unchanged through the years. The waste cannot be helped. There is no way out of it. It is politics. If it were efficient, it would not be politics. If it were pure it would not be politics. If politicians spent all they get, instead of salting it down, if there were no petty plundering, it would not be politics; it would be something else. Politics is run now just as it was in the days of A. P. Gorman and Mark Hanna. Progress has been made in everything else, but not in political management. Not a new trick has been learned in a quarter of a century.

THE WORTHLESS WOMAN TRIUMPHS

BY R. LE CLERC PHILLIPS

A STRIKING aspect of Dr. Gina Lombroso's anti-feminist work, "The Soul of Woman," is her calm and insistent assumption of the preference of men for worthless and inferior women. There is no bitterness whatever in her attitude in relation to this alleged preference; no vituperation, no sarcasm; nothing except a little regret. "Man's blindness to woman's real merit," she writes, "is one of the things that prevent intelligent and good women from having as much influence on men as vulgar and coarse women. It is one of the reasons why the woman whose self-control is as great as her intelligence . . . remains practically undiscoverable, or rather unseen by men. This is because she does not exert the perverse power of fascination of the common woman, who displays her charm to one and all, who paints her character as she paints her face." And in the same unruffled spirit she continues: "Men will admire, even as a woman would, the young girl who throws herself into the water to save her little brother; they will give great praise to one who has sacrificed everything to devote herself to her sick father; they will take an interest in the great literary problems raised by a woman; they will admire, if it be the case, her artistic talent; but none of them will feel his heart beat for one of these heroines; not one will feel himself urged to commit any folly for her, as he would do for some marvellous beauty who has been described to him, or for some simple film actress." And then, a little sadly, she concludes: "No thinking person can help regretting man's fondness for the least desirable type of woman."

I fancy that ten thousand denials would not move Dr. Lombroso from her attitude of calm assurance; and should her opponents challenge her to produce her evidence, she would probably ask them to consult their history books. Were she a little malicious—which she obviously is not—she would also possibly request the men among her opponents to search their own hearts to find out whether or not she is wrong.

The men might lie—and probably would; but history remains; and the Aspasia's, Cleopatras, Bianca Capellos, Mary Stuarts, Ninon de l'Enclos, Emma Hamiltons, and Lady Blessingtons of life have formed such monstrous regiments of women who were well loved of men that Dr. Lombroso would apparently find little need to retreat from her position. For these women, who were a few at the head of enormous numbers who have flourished (and still do) in the utmost profusion in all places and at all times, were not merely heroines of romance, sought after by men and beloved by them; they were something very much more than this. They were successful women. That is to say that, judged by the standards of the modern young and ambitious woman, they succeeded in obtaining from life all that she is determined to obtain for herself if she has any luck whatever.

I do not mean, of course, that, judged historically, the careers of Cleopatra or the Queen of Scots were successful. They were extremely unsuccessful. But as women they were successful, for they and all the others mentioned were able at the zenith of their power to obtain from life all that the young and the romantic (and perhaps the