

THE ELEPHANT AND THE DONKEY

BY HOWARD LEE McBAIN

THE perpetually amazing thing about democracy is that though it so frequently defies all rational explanation of its workings it nevertheless works. It is almost as mysterious as creation itself. Certainly it is one of the things that collective men and women operate with little or no understanding of what individuals do or why. There is not a person living who can give anything like a complete explanation of why Mr. Hoover was elected and Mr. Smith defeated in the last election, though no doubt thousands—perhaps millions—have answered that question to their own complacent satisfaction. Of the more than twenty-one millions who voted for Mr. Hoover nobody knows how many voted for him because of his personality or his history or his stand on one or another of the nominal issues of the campaign, or merely because he was the Republican candidate. And especially does nobody know how many of his votes were votes not for him at all but against Smith, though that number must have been very considerable.

One thing alone is certain: that these twenty-odd millions have no solidarity of interest or of creed or of programme. They are a *bloc*—a *bloc* of unorganized and amorphous groups—and not even Mr. Hoover knows their relative strength in his impressive majority. Of course every minority pressure group that contributed toward his election is claiming chief credit for the result and is demanding its pound of flesh. But the election was in fact a clear mandate for just nothing at all in constructive politics, with the possible exception of farm relief of some unknown variety; and it

now appears from the figures that even his promise in that regard of an immediate session of Congress was probably wholly unnecessary. Mr. Hoover himself, intelligent as he is said to be, has not the slightest idea what the whole people who elected him really want him to do, and for the quite ungilded reason that the great conglomerate mass of people who figuratively met one another at the polls and who actually went through the identical motion of casting ballots for him have as a whole little or nothing in common.

There is a huge hiatus between the theory and the practice of political parties. The theory, briefly put, is that persons of generally like beliefs in matters political unite and organize for the purpose of electing candidates of their choice who will further governmental policies which the members of the party approve. But every observing person knows that, in the United States at least, this theory is largely awry with the facts. The more important cohering elements that hold our two major parties together cannot be struck off in a few words. But certainly opposing common creeds and programmes are not the sole elements—nor even the principal of such elements. Strictly party votes on measures in either house of Congress are almost as rare as Juvenal's white raven. Practically, the parties are always bifurcated on legislative proposals. Their platforms are very nearly identical—at length even in respect of that historic bone of contention, the tariff. At least there is no difference to get very excited about. Major issues they nearly always straddle or evade.

II

The question is often asked, especially by interested foreigners, why we do not develop a truly conservative and a truly liberal party, with genuine differences of creed and of programme. Certainly our two major parties are not such today, though, generally speaking, the Republican party is probably a pale shade more conservative than the Democratic.

Well, there are several answers to that question. But no doubt the foremost cause is the fact of our geographic sectionalism. Both parties are in effect loose federations of sectional parties. The erstwhile solid South in the Democratic ranks is the most notorious instance of such sectionalism. The South has and will continue to have an issue of its own—the issue of white supremacy. But the Democracy of the rest of the nation is not in the least interested in that issue. Indeed, it is difficult to see what the people of the South have in common, either spiritually or economically, with the foreign stock elements that are the strength of the Democracy in Northern and Western cities. Tradition, however, has kept them in this unholy and illogical alliance because they have had nowhere else to go except into a party that was founded in anti-slavery agitation and has, at least theoretically, been opposed to white supremacy.

But the elements that strangely mingle in the Democratic party are no more oil and water than are certain elements in the Republican party. What possible affinity can there be, for example, between the Republicanism of Pennsylvania and that of La Follette's Wisconsin or the now waning state socialism of the North Dakota Non-Partisan League? One can easily understand how the non-slave holding farmers of the North and West were in the eighteen fifties and sixties lured into the Republican party by moral and economic indignation against slavery and by the promise and gift of free lands. But one cannot understand their remaining in those

ranks through the recent second granger movement except upon the theory that they had no more satisfactory affiliation to choose. Certainly the Democratic party was quite as uncongenial to them as the Republican. So tradition held.

I say tradition. But it is more than that. It is tradition that is made almost inevitable by our own peculiar political institutions. Once in four years we put up for election candidates for national leadership. They may or may not be actual leaders of their parties when we put them up. They rarely are, except in the case of one who is already President and is seeking reelection. He is usually his party's leader; but he is leader solely because of the fact that he is President and not because of anything else. Beyond question neither Mr. Hoover nor Governor Smith was *the* leader of his disjointed and inharmonious party before his nomination, although it may be that Governor Smith was in his party the most available candidate, as the phrase runs.

Now, this scheme of choosing the leader necessitates a nation-wide party. A sectional party would have no chance at all. Moreover, the President has political largess to distribute, which rightly or wrongly is thought to be of importance. For the disaffected, therefore, it pays to stay sufficiently in step and sufficiently under the nominal party banner to be sure of being able to feed, from the presidential trough, one's supporters in the far off home State. If we were operating under a parliamentary system of government it is reasonably certain that our two parties would rapidly disintegrate, so that we'd soon have the *bloc* or coalition system with which European countries are familiar. But our presidential system would utterly collapse under such an arrangement. We therefore wisely even though unconsciously maintain our *blocs* within the two major parties.

This is one of the reasons, perhaps the chief reason, why there are no out-and-out conservative and liberal parties in the United States. Sectional alignments make such a party alignment almost impossible.

III

It has been suggested that, now that a rift has been made in the solid South, the way is open for the Democratic party, rid of a section that has been at once its chief asset and an incubus, to grow into a genuine party of liberalism. Manifestly, that was impossible so long as the South remained in the party, for, by and large, the people of the South are essentially conservative, the history of populism to the contrary notwithstanding. Manifestly also, the South is indispensable to the Democratic party unless that party can make compensatory gains elsewhere in the country. Why might it not steal from the Republican ranks by way of fair exchange at least the uncongenial more or less radical States of the Middle and North-West?

Such an eventuality is not wholly impossible. But there are at least three high hurdles to leap. In the first place it is by no means certain that the Southern rift is permanent. If those who think that it was the growing industrialization of the South that swelled the recent Republican vote in that region will examine the figures, they will find that it was not so much the urban as the backwoods rural South that voted the Republican ticket. That seems to imply, as doubtless most people will concede, that many if not most of the new Republican votes south of Mason and Dixon's line were cast not for Mr. Hoover but against Governor Smith and for one reason at least that was unique to this election. Even so, the actual break, whatever its cause, may have far-reaching psychological effects. If the South sees that a State may with impunity go Republican without any jeopardy to white supremacy, it may well be that we shall witness a new emancipation in that region. It may be that the new industrial South will in whole or in part cross over to the Republican party for reasons other than liquor or religion. Emancipation indeed!

A second high hurdle is the matter of leadership. There is no major country on

earth in which the problem of developing a national party leadership is more difficult than in the United States. This is due in part to the sectionalism already mentioned, in part to our federalism, in which State party machines may, and often do, enjoy considerable independence of national machines, in part to our mere geographical size, and in no small part to the decentralized and chaotic methods by which the business of Congress is carried on. Apart from the President himself, there is seldom, if ever, any one recognized national leader of either party. But the creation of a new liberal party or the metamorphosis of either of the existing parties would require national leadership of a rare order. Where is the man for the job?

A third hurdle to be leaped is the utter lack in the United States of an adequate philosophy of liberalism. No party of any vital power was ever born in any country without a philosophy. A party of mere protest is usually a party of temporary and inefficacious emotions. Such was the Progressive party of 1912. It rallied vociferously around a histrionic leader; but—to misquote Burns—it was, like a snowflake on a river, a moment seen, then gone forever. It had no gripping philosophy. It is one thing to hold an established party together without a philosophy. It is quite another thing to create a new or rehabilitate an old party without such an indispensability.

Proof of the latter was demonstrated in the swift débâcle of the Progressive party. Proof of the former, if proof be needed, was furnished by Mr. Hoover in the recent campaign. The philosophy he proclaimed was that of "rugged individualism." Yet Mr. Hoover knows that every trend of our times, regrettably or not, is away from individualism. However wildly and patriotically we may wave the good old flag of the vanished pioneers, we actually live in an age of rapidly intensifying collectivism. If by rugged individualism he means that we still enjoy individually the right to speculate on a highly collective Stock

Exchange—which in these days requires some ruggedness, to be sure—or the right to compete for position and profit in large and ever larger collective corporate enterprises, his phrase is justified. But that is a curious conception of rugged individualism. It would be much more appropriate to speak about our rugged collectivism. For truth to tell, we are so completely abandoned to corporate organization of business and the courts have told us for so long that corporations are persons, that most of us believe without question this combination of legal truth and of factual folly.

Of course, there are many small business men who are still rolling their own. But everybody knows what a relatively insignificant rôle they play in the telling economic life of the nation. When in economic affairs we speak today of individualism we really mean corporatism. And the step from giant corporatism and giant trade unionism to state socialism is not so great a leap as some of us actual and not merely imaginary individuals may think. Which is not to imply that we are on the eve of any large cataclysm. The only certain cataclysm would be the result of another great war. As surely as a World War recurs, whatever is left of Western civilization will just as surely go bolshevist or something of the kind in the aftermath. Let individualism and capitalism and imperialism make no mistake about that. It behooves these isms to boast and bluster less and to ponder and pray more. They are not eternal. They may be very finite.

In the relatively near future, even under conservative leadership, England may go socialistic to an extent that would shock our present-day American conceptions. Of course it will not be called socialism. No achieved socialism ever is so called. But nobody in America, with the possible exception of voters, will be fooled all the time by rhetorical reference to the rugged individualism of the Interstate Commerce Commission or the Federal Trade Commission or the Federal Reserve Board and

such like organizations, created for the express purpose of subjecting to control not merely individuals but Gargantuan aggregations of individuals assembled in corporations whose corpus they remotely touch through stock brokers who are often as ignorant of company affairs as are the individuals themselves.

IV

But I was discussing philosophies—the need of a philosophy for a party of liberalism. What is liberalism? We bandy this word “liberal” freely and frequently. Deliberately or casually many of us clip upon men liberal or conservative labels of our own making and remorselessly file them away in our mental pigeonholes. But few of us have constructed these pigeonholes with much reflection. Especially is our liberal pigeonhole a compartment of highly uncertain dimensions. Nor is the fault wholly our own. Some of it derives from the inherent difficulty of defining abstractions and some of it from the fact that even if a definition could be agreed upon human beings are not always 100% liberal or 100% conservative. To attempt to lay down a precise definition of liberalism would be an impossible task. But it may be helpful to glance briefly at the evolution of the concept.

In origin the term was unquestionably identified with individualism—that is to say with anti-authoritarianism of every variety, whether in the realm of things mental or moral or material. In England Herbert Spencer was its high priest from the publication of his “Social Statics” in 1850 to his “Man Versus the State” in 1885; and he sneered at the liberals of his day as being “only Tories of a new type.” John Stuart Mill was only a little less unconditional than was Spencer. “Whatever crushes individuality,” he declared, “is despotism, by whatever name it may be called.”

Now it is undeniable that in the realm of things mental liberalism is still instinct

with individualism. It yet echoes the thunder of Thomas Jefferson when he said: "I have sworn upon the altar of the living God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." Strictly speaking, there can of course be no tyranny over the mind of man. A thought cannot be captured or coerced. That is probably the largest single compensation of life. We are at least completely free to think what we choose, right or wrong, sagacious or silly, helpful or hurtful to ourselves or to others. Science has not yet invented, and pray God never will invent, a machine that will record the processes of individual thoughts. If science ever does achieve that end—which is by no means altogether impossible—the major portion of our population will probably be clapped into insane asylums, unless, forsooth, we can put the machine under control of those who are themselves relatively insane and who in consequence would fear the personal result of their temerarious judgments.

No, thoughts cannot be tamed. But the expression of them can be. It can be severely curbed by authoritarianism. We know that because it has been and is being done. Every reasonable person recognizes that freedom of speech and of the press cannot be put wholly outside the pale of legal redress. That would be intolerable, despite the innumerable petty libelous lies that go in our daily intercourse without being pushed to redress, and despite the fact that the law of libel is not infrequently threatened or invoked to shield actual but unprovable guilt.

Every reasonable person also knows that the government must in rare emergencies protect itself—or rather what it presumably represents, the amorphous public—against unlimited freedom of utterance. In time of peace and quiet this is not of great importance. The government is so firmly screened that it can afford to be quiescent or indifferent toward the occasional beetles who dash their hostile wings upon the embattled windows of entrenched power. But in time of stress, when the question is of

far greater moment, it is quite otherwise. No genuinely liberal party could have written the Espionage Act of 1917-18—at least as it was interpreted and applied by the courts—nor the criminal syndicalism statutes that now disgrace the books of many of our States. No genuinely liberal party would tolerate the high-handed fashion in which freedom of assembly and discussion is sometimes ruthlessly suppressed in some of our local communities with or without express legal authority.

In the field of protective morality your authentic liberal is likewise an individualist. He will concede that there must be some restraint in the interest of public morals and decency. But he will fight for a minimal amount of it, putting a heavy burden of proof upon the Comstocks and the Sumners. He will prefer the risk of an occasional corrupted youth to that of a hamstrung literature or art. He will believe that men cannot be made good by law. He will in consequence be wholly out of sympathy with the spirit of blue laws. It is difficult to see how a liberal can believe in the wisdom of national Prohibition, especially since it has been so hypocritically tried and found wanting in such huge measure. But apparently, on this one great subject of nation-wide contention, some otherwise liberal persons are closely joined with the most ardent authoritarians.

Again, your unalloyed liberal will not view without alarm certain dangerous tendencies in modern procedural law. He will not believe that the motor car of an innocent owner should be subject to confiscation because a guest in the car happens to have upon his person a flask of intoxicating liquor upon which no tax has been paid to a government that makes it impossible to pay the tax. He will not follow with conviction the argument that such a car is vested with a mystical personality and is properly chargeable with complicity in violating the law. He will not think that a theatre in which a vulgar play has been produced may be justifiably padlocked for six months or a year under an

injunctive order issued by a single judge sitting in a civil action without a jury. He will stand shoulder to shoulder with Mr. Justice Brandeis in his courageous and not wholly lost struggle to preserve something of the substance of the constitutional guarantee against unreasonable searches and seizures.

In the field of education the liberal is also an individualist, with the exception that he probably will subscribe to the principle of compulsory school attendance. The term "liberal education" as commonly used is of course an absurd misnomer. It has no kinship with liberalism. It refers rather to education of a general, cultural sort as distinguished from technical or professional education, but it carries no necessary connotation either of enlightened methods of instruction or of an aim to inculcate freedom and breadth and tolerance of views. Whatever else it may imply, liberalism in education certainly means stern opposition to the increasing tendency of American State Legislatures to prescribe by statute what shall and shall not be taught in State-supported schools. This is undoubtedly within their legal but unfortunately beyond their intellectual competence. Despite the length, technicality, ephemerality, and dullness of most State constitutions, fourteen States require that these documents shall be taught to the immature. Instruction in the evil effects of alcohol and narcotics upon the human system is required in most States and tobacco is added in a few of them. Indeed, judged by the universality and scope of these enactments, this appears to be our most important subject of learning. Courses in thrift must be given in four States. In Ohio thirty precious minutes weekly must be given to this subject from the kindergarten to the last year of high-school. In eight States the Bible must be read daily; in many others this is merely permissive—the Bible is simply not to be banned.

But the last word in this sort of legislative dictation is supplied by the anti-evolution laws of Tennessee and Arkansas.

As a crowning act of folly there remains only the chance that some even more omniscient State Legislature may by definite statute substitute the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis for all courses in astronomy and biology.

Apart from these last mentioned laws the point is not so much what Legislatures have actually done to school curricula as that they have done anything. The making of curricula is a technical job. It may be admitted that our educational experts are none too expert in fact. But they are the best we have; and many of them are frankly experimenting and earnestly groping toward an educational offering that is more adequate in scope and more effective in method than that which we have. They should not be impeded by mandates from ignorant laymen lawmakers.

V

It seems clear, then, that in the realm of mind and of morals liberalism is still largely identified with individualism. But not so in the realm of politico-economics. He who would today settle all questions of public economic policy by the rule of "the less government the better" is neither a liberal nor a conservative. He is, rather, a dolt. Even your most hidebound conservative wants his protective tariff and governmental protection for his foreign investments, however inherently precarious his ventures.

The plain fact is that under the rule of *laissez faire* technological industry proceeded of its own accord to stifle individualism by an ever-increasing concentration of capital and control. Of course, these organizations want to be let alone except where the government can offer them positive assistance. But manifestly in such a régime the only possible salvation for individualism was and is government interference in behalf of the individual. That such interference has often been pathetically inadequate does not prove that affairs would have been better without it.

In things economic your true liberal need be nothing more than open-mindedly fearless of change. He need not believe in government ownership and operation as a matter of principle, but also he will not be frightened into hysteria by the bugaboo of state socialism or the so-called "rationalization" of industries that are competitively out of joint. Naturally, he will be for all sensible measures that look to the amelioration of industrial and social ills. In foreign relations he will favor every reasonable plan for the preservation of peace, will not be supersensitive about his country's national honor, and will oppose any national action which, taken without consultation with other nations concerned, may be likely to stir up bitterness of feeling or a sense of injustice done.

The liberalism thus briefly and partially sketched is obviously many-sided. A person may be liberal in this, illiberal in that. Now, the one essential element in a philosophy of liberalism as a premise of a robust

political party is liberality toward the dissenting views of one's fellow liberals. And this element is precisely what many, if not most, liberals conspicuously lack. They are as dogmatic as are conservatives. Indeed, being crusaders rather than defenders, they are often more so. In place of a philosophy they would substitute a fundamentalist creed that would lead to the excommunication of him who dissented from the thirteenth or the thirty-ninth article.

The probable fact is that there are not enough people in the United States of a sufficiently generous and tolerant turn of mind to form a genuinely liberal party that would in a contest give adequate exercise to a conservative opponent. And so my prophecy—which is only a guess—is that for some time to come, as for some time gone, we shall continue to muddle along with these strangely formed and strangely trained animals, the elephant and the donkey—with the elephant on the stage most of the time.

FOOD AND DRINK

BY LOUIS UNTERMEYER

WHY has our poetry eschewed
The rapture and response of food?
What hymns are sung, what praises said
For home-made miracles of bread?
Since what we love has always found
Expression in enduring sound,
Music and verse should be competing
To match the transient joy of eating.
There should be present in our songs
As many tastes as there are tongues;
There should be humbly celebrated
One passion that is never sated.
Let us begin it with the first
Distinction of a conscious thirst
When the collusion of the vine
Uplifted water into wine.
Let us give thanks before we turn
To other things of less concern
For all the poetry of the table:
Clams that parade their silent fable;
Lobsters that have a rock for stable;
Red-faced tomatoes ample as
A countryman's full-bosomed lass;
Plain-spoken turnips; honest beets;
The carnal gusto of red meats;
The insipidity of lamb;
The wood-fire pungence of smoked ham;
Young veal that's smooth as natural silk;
The lavish motherliness of milk;
Parsley and lemon-butter that add
Spring sweetness unto river shad;
Thin flakes of halibut and cod,
Pickerel, flounder, snapper, scrod,
And every fish whose veins may be
Charged with the secrets of the sea;
Sweet-sour carp, beloved by Jews;
Pot-luck simplicity of stews;
Crabs, juiciest of Nature's jokes;
The deep reserve of artichokes;
Mushrooms, whose taste is texture, loath