

These "United" States

by **WILLIAM B. MUNRO**

THE FRENCH statesman, Jules Ferry, once suggested that in order to stay united a great nation should try to keep disunited. His paradox points to a truth which is too often overlooked by the prophets of nationalism, namely, that any volatile mass, when it grows large enough, will get out of hand unless there are forces operating from different directions to keep it stabilized. This law of counterpoise does not restrict itself to the universe of nature alone. It holds for the social structure as well.

Hence the diversity of interests and opinion which one finds within the four corners of the United States is not a source of national weakness, but of strength. It prefigures the principle of checks and balances pushed down into the minds of the people — which is the place where its operations give the maximum security. Division of power at the top is not nearly so effective, from the standpoint of public stability, as diversity of popular opinion at the bottom.

A hundred and twenty million Americans call themselves "one nation indivisible," but as a matter of fact they encompass more internal divisions than can be found in any other nation the world over. Most happily, however, these divisions cut across one another from different directions. They parcel the country into a bewildering network which defies the genius of anyone to untangle. An "opinion map" of the United States, if it were a possibility, would be an amazing affair, with all the colors of a spectrum constantly shifting like bits of glass in a kaleidoscope. Some of the cleavages run broad and deep. They are the manifestations of diversity in race, in religion, in regional environment, and in economic interest. Others are merely related to some public issue which will presently pass off the stage and be replaced by others which give rise to new alignments.

Thus we have, in addition to the juxtaposi-

tion of native born and foreign born, Catholic and Protestant, Jew and Gentile, white and black, North and South, East and West, employers and employed, industrialists and agriculturalists, rural and urban — in addition to these we have the more superficial but not less intense rivalry of wets and dries, pro-Leaguers and anti-Leaguers, militarists and pacifists, progressives and standpatters, fundamentalists and modernists, socialists and individualists, high tariff and low tariff partisans, debt-cancellers and seekers for their full pound of flesh, with a hundred other conflicts of attitude on questions such as public ownership, the recognition of Soviet Russia, adhesion to the World Court, the disposition of Muscle Shoals, old age pensions, higher surtaxes, and all the rest. Assuredly the United States is a house divided against itself, but so badly divided that it can hardly fall in any one direction.

The first and most fundamental basis of internal division is geographic. The architects of the universe made sectionalism inevitable in the United States by differentiating the land into great regions which are wholly unlike in their natural resources and hence in their economic capacity. The Atlantic seaboard, even in the earliest days of the Union, developed interests and aspirations which were different from those of the hinterland, and it has retained these ever since. The Southeast does not think as the Northwest does and there is no reason why it should.

Points of view are closely related to economic interest. Insurgency comes out of the West when the price of wheat skids low. Wall Street always roots for the administration when the stock market is buoyant. Corn is called a "Republican crop" while cotton is designated, with very good reason, as a "Democratic crop." Most legislators have home-district reservations hitched to all their fundamental principles. Senator Hiram Johnson believes in

tariff revision downward — but not on citrus fruits. Senator Walsh of Massachusetts feels just the same way about shoes and textiles. Hancock was hardly right when he called the tariff “a local issue.” It is a national issue built out of sectional ambitions. In other words the Congress of the United States, although its members are assumed to represent the states and the people, is in reality an assemblage of sectional ambassadors. It is a great economic council whose primary solicitude is to see that no part of the country gets any business advantage over any other part. The student of American politics should keep one eye on the map. He should remember that not people alone, but land and people, constitute these United States.

One need only follow the course of a tariff bill on its hectic journey through the Capitol to realize that the principle of a fair sectional split is the first law of Congressional economics. Even the staunchest party allegiance gives way when sectional interests are at stake. The crossing of party lines in the Senate and the House is more often related to such home-district demands than to any divergence in political philosophy. Europeans often fail to understand the sinuosities of American politics because they overlook this fact. They think of New York and Kansas in the same terms because both are under the same flag, obey (more or less) the same Constitution, and speak (more or less) the same language. But these are about the only things that they have in common, while a hundred deep-reaching features of social and economic differentiation hold them apart.

II

THEN THERE are the racial and religious divisions. One need only look at the schedule of national origins, on which the immigration quotas are now based, to realize what an amazing ethnic polyglot goes under the caption of the American people. Within the great category of foreign born, however, there are innumerable subdivisions, and most fortunately so, for it would be a serious menace to the stability of the American nation if all or nearly all persons of foreign extraction were enrolled in a single political party or professed a single religious affiliation. Political controversies always develop intense bitterness when party

lines coincide with racial and religious divisions. It has been the good fortune of the United States to have avoided this identity of alignment although there are now a few signs that we are moving closer to it. In some of the larger cities the existing party divisions represent racial cleavage and little else.

Men and women often go to the polls as they go to church. In thousands of American communities they are primed from the pulpit on the Sunday before the election. Some racial strains are inclining more and more to political solidity; nevertheless a good deal of cross-division remains. Voters of Irish birth or descent in the cities of New England and in New York are almost unanimously affiliated with the Democratic party. But in Pennsylvania, on the other hand, and in the cities of the Middle West, there is a large Irish-Republican element. Among voters of German descent the tendency is to Republicanism, although it is not strongly so. Citizens of Polish ancestry drift mostly into the Democratic ranks, while Scandinavians incline heavily to the other side and often to the insurgent branch of it. The Italians, as a race, have not gone into either of the major political parties, but are well distributed, and the same is true of the Jews.

The desirability of maintaining this dispersion is self-evident. If anyone has doubts on this score, let him go to the countries of Central Europe and note what the identification of racial with political lines has accomplished there. The politician who strives to bring all his co-religionists into one political party is merely doing what he can to break down one of the chief props to American national security by substituting historic hatred for rational disagreement as the basis of party organization.

The political history of the South during the past half century should provide us with a lesson in this field. The measurably close identity of color and politics has bedeviled public life in the great region south of Mason and Dixon's line during the whole of this period. If there had been some way whereby the newly enfranchised Negroes could have been steered into both the major parties, instead of being concentrated into one of them, it would have changed the whole temper of southern politics and would have made this galaxy of states a far more constructive force in the

public life of the nation than it has been during the past half century. The South will be more influential in American national politics when it ceases to be solid, if it ever does. The two issues which have caused the most bitterness in our political life during the past hundred years are neither the tariff, nor free silver, nor farm relief, but slavery and the freedom of Ireland. Both had a racial basis.

Then there is the division between capital and labor, employer and employed, classes and masses. Many attempts have been made in the United States to gather all the industrial workers into a single political group and set them up against "the interests"; but so far without much success. The labor vote has never been captured in its entirety by either of the major party organizations; on the contrary it is fairly well divided between them, if one surveys the country as a whole. The same is true of the men who till the soil. In the years immediately following the close of the World War it was hoped in some quarters that a powerful Farmer-Labor party could be created and that by drawing into its fold the two largest occupational elements in the American electorate this new party could make itself dominant at the polls. But the movement proved to be a flop. Neither group was willing to cast its old allegiance aside.

It is quite true, no doubt, that if the farmers and industrial workers of the United States could be welded into a single organization there would not be much chance for the rest of us; but such a permanent combination is virtually inconceivable, because the immediate interests of the two groups are diametrically opposed at almost every point. The farmer's ambition is to keep the price of food stuffs up and the price of manufactured products down. The industrial worker wants this program turned end for end. The farmer wants transportation rates lowered, with a corresponding reduction in the wages of railroad labor. The four big brotherhoods are not likely to be thrilled by that program. Thus the two numerically strongest pressure groups in the United States, farmers and workers, are set in straight juxtaposition by their diverging economic interests and this precludes any lasting political alliance between them.

People often speak of capitalism as a unified factor in American life. The business interests

are assumed to be thoroughly solid by those who seek to hold them up as a political ogre. But the split in their ranks is as great as anywhere else. There are the independent banks, for example, and the chain banks — with no love lost between the two. They have carried their battle to the floor of Congress. The chain stores, as everyone knows, have split the mercantile interest in twain and by reason of the antagonism which they have created are now facing an attempt to curb them through the process of discriminatory taxation. Big and little oil companies, shoe factories, power plants, and all the rest are in the strongest kind of rivalry. Far from being integrated, the so-called "interests" are perhaps the most hopelessly divided grouping that we have. Their apparent inability to get together on any kind of constructive program in the present emergency is proof of it.

III

THEN WE HAVE the set-off of the rural areas against the large urban centers, a *vis-à-vis* which is born of mutual suspicion and distrust. It crops out at every legislative session with the arraying of upstate against downstate, or of the big cities against the rest of the commonwealth. The rural voter mistrusts the city, its motives, its methods, and its mayors. It is not a mere accident that the political complexion of the larger cities is so often different from that of the states in which they are located. It is because the rural voter and the small town voter believe their interests to be different from those of the electorate in the leviathan communities. So trammels demanded by the *âme rigide*, the bucolic conscience, are written into the city charters.

Slouch-hatted Solons from the cow counties insist on putting the metropolitan communities under bonds for good behavior. Even when the cities have grown to equal or outrank the rest of the state in point of population they often manage to do this because of discriminatory provisions which are anchored in the State Constitution. Baltimore, for example, has half the population of Maryland, but elects only one-fifth of the Senators in that state. Rhode Island allows Providence only one Senator; on a population basis it would be entitled to sixteen. In New York State the provision that each county, irrespective of population, shall

have at least one assemblyman is the device used for preserving the lower house from the clutches of the metropolis. No one can understand our state politics unless he keeps constantly in mind this conflict of urban and rural which often overshadows the party rivalry.

On a larger scale, and hardly less intense, is the mistrust with which New York City is regarded by the rest of the country. Americans of the hinterland look upon this throbbing wen of humanity as a place apart. Thousands of them go to it, from time to time, as to foreign soil, with the thrill of getting something new, bizarre, different, and indeed un-American. In the imagination of the country at large, New York is a place with a boundless ambition to rule and to dominate the whole country's politics, finance, opinion, and morals. The rest of the land is not minded to let it do anything of the sort.

A candidate for the Presidency, if he comes from New York City, has something to live down. In the great domain of Yokeldom it is the fashion to hold Wall Street responsible for most of the nation's grief — especially in these days when book values are sometimes written off at the rate of a billion a day. The regionalized structure of the Federal Reserve bank system, as Congress has devised it, is a monument to the distrust with which the rest of the country regards a place which in any other nation would be assigned its financial hegemony without question.

Macaulay once said that all men are divided by temperament into two classes, and only two, that is, conservatives and liberals. Every country has these two elements, no matter by what names they may be disguised. In the United States the congenital conservatives and liberals are probably not widely apart in their numerical strength; but they are rather unevenly distributed in the existing political organizations and in the territorial regions. Liberalism in virtually all its phases has its least strength in the South and its greatest in the Far West. This seems to be true in politics, religion, education, and social relations. If we were to have a reorganization of our major political parties on lines which Professor John Dewey and others have proposed it is by no means certain that the Liberals would do otherwise than replace the Democrats as the party which is habitually out of power.

Overlapping all these fundamental divisions, which are more or less permanent, we have an even longer number which come into being when issues arise and then fade out when the controversies are closed. The free silver question, back in the nineties, inspired groupings which have now disappeared. Prohibition has taken its place to-day as the chief destroyer of well-built political fences. But the present division of the American people into wet and dry camps is very different from anything that we have ever had before. It does not strictly follow regional lines, or vocational, or racial, much less is it a matter of social status. There are dissensions on this issue even in the same family. No other question of public policy since slavery days has made such strange bed-fellows as this one — with society leaders and even clergymen sometimes pleading the cause of publicans and sinners, while bootlegging interests are contributing funds for the protection of the Eighteenth Amendment. Whatever may be said of prohibition as a moral issue, its enforcement has at any rate drawn more brains and money into the business of violating the law than any other piece of legislation has ever done in the history of mankind.

IV

SO WE HAVE a union without unity of ideals, interests, attitude, or opinion. On scarcely anything is there a consensus among our people. This is because of our relatively brief history as a nation, our sectional differentiation, and our racial admixture. We have no common background in which the whole people can take pride. All this makes leadership difficult and fosters the acceptance of national policies which are largely the product of compromise. No movement can proceed very far in the United States without encountering an adverse current which slackens its progress or stalls it altogether. Not alone the Constitution, but the country is full of checks and balances.

Yet as a nation we hold together amazingly. In their spirit of nationalism the people of the United States are not outmatched by any other. This is in part because of our physical isolation, on a huge island between the world's two largest oceans, far removed from all the other powerful nations of the earth. This isolation has developed nationalism at the expense of internationalism in America. For most of our

people the horizon stops at the water's edge.

Something may also be attributed to the fact that we are, in an economic sense, virtually self-sufficient and independent. There are no necessities of life, and few luxuries, which the United States cannot produce within her own borders. Raw materials are found, manufactured, marketed, and consumed — all within one jurisdiction. This brings home to us a certain larger sense of unity in economic interest, despite the lesser internal divisions, and we protect it by a towering tariff wall. As a corollary all parts of the nation are commercially interdependent. The free flow of trade within continental United States, from Atlantic to Pacific and from the Canadian border to the Gulf, is the most powerful unifying force we have. A larger volume of trade passes back and

forth through this area than in all the countries of Europe put together. In that sense we are the primate among free-trade nations, although commonly regarded as the world's foremost exponent of protectionist policy.

E pluribus unum. The accent is on the *pluribus*. Let us hope that it will stay there. Nothing could be more detrimental to the national stability than that every American should become a "hundred per cent American," as some of our super-patriots would have it. For this would mean that people have ceased to differ, and when they have ceased to differ they have ceased to think. A continued vigorous development of group-distinctiveness is our most dependable safeguard against mass action dictated by mob psychology. To stay united, let us endeavor to keep disunited.

The Same Boat



Drawings by John Alan Maxwell

by **FRANCES M. FROST**

I

JUDITH WANTED to dance. When she was a little girl in Camden, she had wanted to. It was something in her — a madness, a fire, a gladness. . . .

They had lived next door to a music teacher, whose music room windows opened on the lawn between the two houses. On Wednesday nights,

Miss Wilson's mandolin club used to practice in the music room. Judith, when Mother wasn't looking, would run outdoors and dance on the lawn that had grown shadowy with the shadowy evening. She smiled now, remembering herself, a short child in a gingham dress, with a big bow on her Dutch cut, dancing