

# Walter Lippmann's Logic

*Contrasting his pre-election with his post-election comments, not to mention the facts, reveals a new flexibility in an already willowy mind*

By A. B. Magil

YOU may recall that as the great night which descended on Landon settled thicker over what had been the dream of Hearst, a small still voice arose to dispel the darkness.

It was Lippmann—yes, Walter, the *Herald Tribune*. The same who had once been a Socialist, who had contributed to the old *Masses*, rubbed elbows with John Reed, and helped found the *New Republic*. And who had in the course of years attained the ripe wisdom that permitted him to swallow Landon raw, skin, bones, and all, and still retain that look of owl-like innocence and the knack of floating on the surface of every political idea like oil upon water. For example:

The character of the returns disposes of the idea that the President's victory is due to a sectional or a class alignment in American politics. The cities voted for him, but so did the countryside, the industrial centers, where the more recent immigrants predominate, the agricultural communities, peopled by the older American stock. [In fact, almost everybody except the Morgans, du Ponts, Hearsts, *et al.* and those seduced by their loyal Lippmanns—A. B. M.] . . . Though a certain amount of class-consciousness was felt on both sides, I am inclined to believe that it was no greater than in the election of 1928, when Al Smith was running. There was some bitterness, but not more bitterness than in 1916, in 1920, and in 1928.

"There was some bitterness. . . ." Really, Walter, how could you?

The election, in short [said Lippmann] may be called a normal American landslide in which the victor polled the votes of all sorts of people in every part of the country. The results call for no subtle interpretation, for no attempt, as the French say, to find twelve o'clock at quarter past two.

In short, everything is normal—including the Lippmann casuistry. There was an election; one man won, the other lost. So what?

Thus Lippmann applies his intellectual mustard plaster to the choleric chests of the Liberty Leaguers which but yesterday were choked with hoarse cries of "Communism," "collectivism," "dictatorship."

Only shortly before the election, he wrote:

Nothing could be worse for Mr. Roosevelt or the Democratic Party, or for the country, than another Democratic landslide. For Mr. Roosevelt it would be another personal triumph which in human nature generally, and in his nature peculiarly, does not make for judgment or magnanimity. For the Democratic Party, a landslide would give a great impetus to its transformation from a national to a sectional and class organization.

Came the landslide. But with a few whisks of the Lippmannian wand, what on October 20 had been visualized as a major disaster—"nothing could be worse"—became on November 5 only a routine phenomenon.

And the swirling class and sectional implications which the *Herald Tribune* crystal-gazer had foreseen on October 20 subsided on November 20 to not even a ripple on the calm waters of American life.

One might be tempted to say that this is Lippmann sober overriding Lippmann drunk, or vice versa. But there is always a vast sobriety in Lippmann, always the sage and circumspect air, the bound-in-calfskin patriotism, the spurious plausibility. Lippmann's thinking is always tailored to fit the occasion.

What this tory mandarin has done is to substitute arithmetic for politics. He counts votes and discounts history. He pretends that nothing has happened since 1928: no economic crisis which has shaken the foundations of capitalism and stirred millions into political activity; no rise of reaction and fascism to threaten democratic liberties in all capitalist countries, including our own; no unprecedented concentration of reactionary big business forces around the Republican candidate; no equally unprecedented rallying of the trade unions around the Democratic candidate; no movement of large numbers of voters toward independent political action and a farmer-labor party. It is just another Harding landslide.

Lippmann's fellow-columnist, Dorothy Thompson—whose contributions in the *Herald Tribune* are an amazing farrago of reactionary and progressive ideas—is also good at arithmetic.

"It is impossible to describe as a 'class vote' anything so overwhelming," she wrote after the election. "Every voter on relief, and every voter who is a member of any trade union could be eliminated, and still Mr. Roosevelt would have been reelected."

It is literally true that every voter on relief and every trade-union vote could be subtracted from the Roosevelt total and still leave him with enough to win. That's the arithmetic of it. But it is not true that without the support of the organized workers and those on relief Roosevelt could have swung all or even most of the other voters. John L. Lewis hit the nail on the head when he said after the election: "Unorganized labor has followed the leadership of organized labor."

What Lippmann and Miss Thompson chose to ignore is that for the first time the organized workers acted as a compact unit in the support of a presidential candidate. They thereby assumed leadership not only over the unorganized workers, but over the non-proletarian masses as well, and played the decisive role in the Roosevelt landslide.

There are broader implications of the election which the two columnists likewise ignore. In the first place, the vote constituted a virtual uprising of millions of the common people against the forces of big-business reaction ("The feeling seems to be bitter—almost dangerously so," wrote a spokesman for the right wing of the New Deal, General Hugh S. Johnson, on the eve of the election after a trip through four states). Secondly, in the minds of these millions the vote represented a mandate to Roosevelt to carry out a program of concrete social reforms. And in the third place, apart from the election successes of the farmer-labor movement in several states, the very nature of the hopes which millions have placed in Roosevelt will lead them to independent political action as the only way of converting these hopes into reality.

Hearst may don sheep's clothing, the National Association of Manufacturers may talk "era of good feeling" for public consumption, and the Walter Lippmanns may chatter about "normal landslides," but the responsible circles of Wall Street are gauging the election returns with something more than an adding machine. On the day after the election Thomas F. Woodlock wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*:

Today we have a new main cleavage of political opinion which, whether for good or ill, will be with us as far as we can see into the future. The first thing to note in that cleavage is that it is deeper than any heretofore experienced since the Civil War. It is a cleavage of opinion touching the fundamentals of our economic life. Finally, it is a cleavage upon lines largely of economic class divisions, more extensive than any similar cleavage in our experience in the past.

This is one Wall Street man speaking to his Wall Street brethren. Lippmann, writing for a wider public, cannot afford to be so forthright. And so we find him, only a few weeks after his valiant attempt to cover up the significance of the election, declaiming with characteristic sophistry against "the dictatorship of the majority"—in the name of democracy of course. Lippmann has been many things in his day: radical, faint-hearted liberal, and tory. Evidently he is still on the move. After Alf Landon, will it be Adolf Hitler?

Lippmann once sneered at John Reed. Reed is dead and Lippmann is alive; but in this case all the life is on the side of the dead. The words of Jack Reed will be meat and drink for the hearts and minds of free men in generations to come when the name of Walter Lippmann is not even a whisper in the wind.

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## Once More the "Nation"

THE *Nation* has at last referred to our editorial analyzing its attitude toward the Moscow trial. It has used, however, a type of discussion which tends to obscure the facts involved, so these had better be stated first. A treasonable organization existed and functioned in the Soviet Union, directed by Kamenev and Zinoviev. This organization attempted to kill Stalin, Voroshilov, and other Soviet officials. It actually did kill Kirov. The leaders of the conspiracy were caught. They confessed. They were tried openly. They confessed again. All the men tried implicated Leon Trotsky as a leader in the conspiracy. They were convicted and executed in accordance with Soviet law. Foreign observers present at the trial reported that it was fair in every respect. This was the testimony of all the American correspondents who witnessed it; this was also the opinion of D. N. Pritt, a leading British lawyer, not a Communist. Trotsky called the trial a frame-up.

On October 10, the *Nation* published an editorial which ignored the killing of Kirov and the attempt to kill other Soviet leaders. It propounded the theory—shattered by Kamenev, Zinoviev, and the other conspirators on the witness stand—that an underground opposition exists in the Soviet Union. The *Nation* emphasized "the mystery that veils the motives and conduct of the Moscow trials." It said these were "strange trials." It then misstated the obvious facts by saying that the accused seemed to "revel" in confessions of guilt. It attacked the *Izvestia* report of the trial as "the official record" of the court proceedings, arguing this newspaper report summarized parts of the testimony "in terms not usually to be met with in the records of a court of law." The *Nation* described the conduct of the Soviet press before the trial as "particularly shocking." It accused the Soviet press of acting upon "an overwhelming presumption of guilt," ignoring the fact that the accused had confessed their guilt *before* the trial. From this alleged presumption, the *Nation* concluded that "it is at least a question whether these proceedings could be in any true sense a trial." In short, the *Nation*, for all practical purposes, supported Trotsky's self-defense that the Moscow trial was a frame-up.

Subsequently, Trotskyite headquarters in Room 1010 at 100 Fifth Avenue issued an appeal by a so-called "Provisional American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky." This document was trickily worded to cast the most serious doubts upon the Moscow trial. It was signed by two editors of the *Nation*, and was accompanied by a reprint of the *Nation* editorial of October 10.

Thereupon we published an editorial which attempted to show that the trial was fair and valid, and that the *Nation* was hardly in a position to question the detailed confessions of Kamenev, Zinoviev, and their accomplices. In conclusion, we asked the following questions:

Are the Trotskyites circulating the editorial of October 10 with or without the consent of the *Nation*? If without consent, will the *Nation* protest the use of its name in the defense of the conspirators? And if the *Nation* granted the Trotskyites permission to use that editorial, does it not owe some explanation to the public?

We then added that if the *Nation* wants to support Trotsky's criminal activities, let it no longer pose as an organ of liberal opinion, let it openly and frankly declare itself a Trotskyite mouthpiece; let the public know that it is the organ of a band of counter-revolutionary conspirators and assassins. We did not accuse the *Nation* of being such an organ; we asked it to say whether or not it was.

For several weeks the *Nation* ignored our editorial. On December 5 it finally published a reference to it. This reference was neither a discussion nor an explanation of its position. Cutely, the *Nation* compared itself to the Light Brigade and took refuge in the fancy that cannon were trained upon it from the Right and from the Left. Its argument was specious enough: the NEW MASSES criticizes the *Nation* for its stand on the Moscow trial; the *New Leader* attacks it for its editorial on Joseph Shaplen's reporting of the C.I.O. Ergo, both are wrong and the *Nation* is right in both instances.

This is at once poor logic and a dodge unworthy of the *Nation*. There is no connection whatever between Mr. Shaplen's reporting of the C.I.O. and the Moscow trial. The *Nation* is right in criticizing Mr. Shaplen, but that hardly justifies its anti-Soviet editorial. The *Nation* was apparently aware of the dilemma it had unnecessarily created. Its issue of December 5 ignored both the Moscow trial and its editorial on that subject. Neither metaphors about the Light Brigade nor Mr. Shaplen's hatred for progressive labor can obscure the fact that the *Nation* has by implication made serious charges against the Soviet government. It has encouraged the serious libel that the Moscow trial was not genuine. Given an opportunity to clarify its position and to withdraw its anti-Soviet innuendoes, it has failed to do so. It has refused to shed any light on the circulation of its October 10 editorial by the Trotskyites in their propaganda against the Soviet Union. It seems to us now more than ever that the *Nation* should explain.

## Murdering a Myth

THE advertising agency handling the Chesterfield cigarette account has murdered Santa Claus. His sleigh has probably been towed to Henry Ford's museum; his reindeer sent to Seattle hotels as caribou steaks. Advertising's maid of all work, the pretty girl, stepping out of a plane in form-fitting furs, has taken over Santa's job. This is certainly a risk for Big Business to take. Can capitalism's long-legged, slim-waisted pet be put over as the great giver when her time-honored place is on the receiving end? If sex-appeal had to be there, what was the matter with Miss America, in negligee, leaning from an *art-moderne* divan and winking up the chimney? It seems rather dangerous, this playing around with myths. Excuse the masses from belief in one, and they might feel free to drop the others. Gentlemen of Big Business, be careful!