

The Case of the People vs. Politics

An Interview with
U. S. Senator George Wharton Pepper

By STANLEY FROST

I CAUGHT Senator Pepper at a trying time. He had recently returned from delivering the speech in Maine in which he had frankly admitted mistakes and blunders in the Republican Administration. Daugherty and other old-line Republicans had attacked him in the press, and Democrats had gloated on the Senate floor. He had been reminded sharply how low a value contemporary politicians put on honesty and fairness. He was unshaken, but he was roused.

"It has got to be done," he exclaimed. "There have been blunders and mistakes, and we had better admit it. We can't get anywhere without honesty with this party in this campaign. We can't play the old, close-to-your-belt game of claiming a hundred per cent of everything. The people know it isn't so, and we'd only discredit ourselves some more, when restored credit is the thing we've got to have."

The discerning reader will observe at once that Senator Pepper is not a politician in the usual sense. Such doctrines are anathema to politicians; heresy, treason, and folly combined. "A babe in arms at this game," was the way he was first described to me, and from the point of view of the hard-boiled manipulator who made the remark it is quite true. The Senator is new to politics; he has never "been through the mill," he does not know how to dispense pettifog and flapdoodle, he has never learned to move crabwise—if at all!—nor to believe that the science of politics lies in fooling all the people you can as long as you can. Wherefore he is no politician.

In fact, he could not be. He has spent nearly thirty years in a law practice where success depended on having the goods and using them effectively, fooling no one. It has not been a "corporation practice," by the way, and he is one of the few lawyers who have made reputation and money without serving "big business." His most successful case was in attacking the Standard Oil and recovering millions from H. H. Rogers and J. Edward Addicks for the Bay State Gas Company. He was counsel against Ballinger, is counsel for the National Baseball League, has been a professor of

law. So he has acquired the kind of mind which puts its trust in careful thought, based on all the information available, instead of on oratorical buncombe or emotional suds.

An instance of the working and the effect of his mind was recently given in the case of some of the men imprisoned for sedition during the war. Agitation to get them out has been noisy and constant. Roger Baldwin and his friends wept publicly for years over the invasion of free speech and personal liberty. They got nowhere. Senator Borah took the matter up and argued that their imprisonment was unconstitutional. He got nowhere. Senator Pepper was finally called on. He promised to look into it. For the first time in all the hullabaloo he used the evidence! He separated the wheat from the chaff, the war hysteria from the crime, and got facts. With these he wrote a forty-page memorandum for the President, who was led to investigate and presently pardoned the men.

Rara Avis

THIS type of mind is rare in politics, and is becoming rarer as the art of organization improves and ward heelers and local bosses are more and more promoted to the top. Quite naturally, since they do not understand it, they view such a mind with distrust and alarm, which is increased because it is proving so disconcertingly effective. For, though he has been in the Senate only a bit over two years, Mr. Pepper is already recognized as one of its leaders. This is remarkable, even though the days have gone when tradition kept new men powerless for years, and allowed stuffed shirts to snub such proved men as Root and Knox, Underwood and John Sharp Williams. The Senate still values seniority far above brains, and, if it can help it, will not let a new member be noticed or have influence.

Moreover, in spite of newness and political babyhood, Senator Pepper is more and more being considered the spokesman and public defender of the President. He denies flatly that this is so. But when most Republicans were sitting dumb or replying flabbily to attacks on the Administration Mr. Pepper

took the floor. There is no question that he is in frequent consultation with the President, nor that his advice is often taken. So, even though he is not entitled to any reflected glory, the fact of his fast-growing leadership cannot be disputed.

Because of his habit of sincerity, which would have been a handicap until recently, and still seems so to most politicians, the reasons for this leadership deserve some study. Perhaps they cannot be determined precisely, but certainly one of them is the changing attitude of the public toward politics. There is a growing belief here in Washington, among outside observers more than among politicians, that the old bluffing, buncoing, close-corporation type of politics is in its last days. If this is true, if the time has come when the public would rather have facts than fluff, and reason than resentment, then Senator Pepper's type of mind springs into natural leadership.

It may not be true. There is no doubt that the proportion of voters who want sincerity is increasing, but they may still be too few to win. It may be that the old rules are still sound; that a political platform is useful only for the enticement of voters, that intelligent people, seeing through it, will nevertheless support the party for reasons of their own; that there are so few intelligent folk that success can be won by the party offering the best blue-sky prospectus. For this reason the future career of Mr. Pepper will to a great extent measure the change in the intelligence America applies to its politics.

There are many signs that the time for such a change is at hand. The basis for political success makes rather sudden shifts, though at long intervals, and only after some considerable popular revolt against old methods forces politicians to new ones. For a long time, for example, democratic institutions—this was in England, of course—functioned through fear and reprisal, and a beaten politician died suddenly. This was finally stopped, and Walpole, Pitt, and their successors governed by means of corruption of the legislators. We had such a period in this country when Senators and Representatives were more or less openly for sale to



Wide World Photos

Senator Pepper and Mrs. Pepper

big interests, and the heritage of that time breaks out even yet. But it, too, is mostly over, and we have been in a period of rule by machines which were themselves—though less impudently—for sale. They have kept power through organization, supplemented by careful misleading and vitiation of opinion, recently reduced to the science of propaganda.

Now there is revolt against this. The next step in political morality will naturally be toward destroying these two methods of exploiting democracy, and of the two by far the more deadly is the debasing and corrupting of opinion. Senator Pepper, above all others, has become the leader in fighting this evil, though Senator Bruce, on the Democratic side, is taking a similar if less active stand. This is not, I believe, so much due to any nice calculation on Senator Pepper's part as because of the nature of the man. He happens to be honest; not merely financially, but mentally and in every other way.

The Place of Danger

HIS is a dangerous leadership, for if the public mind has not ripened so much as some of us hope he will suffer the fate of other men who have seen visions but have spoken before their time. But his leadership and the success it has had so far are among the most encouraging developments of the present crisis. The principles on which it works may quite likely forecast the next progress in political art and ethics.

Their fundamental assumption, obviously, is that there really is a widespread and justified public distrust of the Federal Administration, of both political parties, and of the politicians who control all three. I asked the Senator what he believed to be the reasons for this, apart from the temporary excitement of the scandals. I suppose I rather expected a blast against corruption and chicanery, for the question gave this opportunity. But he proved again that he is no politician. He stuck to facts.

"There seem to be two chief causes,"

he said, slowly. "The first justifies criticism, though not distrust. It is that the Government is inefficient; very inefficient as compared to any private business. It cannot be otherwise with our present system. It is too big, too poorly organized, and particularly it lacks the loyalty and morale which a successful executive must instill into a private business.

"The secret of good executive work is to delegate authority and to instill loyalty and teach method so that each subordinate, in his own place, will really be in a way a part of the chief himself. That can't be done here. A man can't pick his subordinates to suit himself; he cannot train them, and except in very rare instances their loyalty is not to him, but to a party, or to some other man, or to some outside interest. Often it is even against their superior. Often enough it is to nobody but themselves and to nothing but holding their jobs. In such circumstances, work cannot possibly be well done."

The Problem of Loyalty

I REPEATED a recent story of a politician who had urged the appointment to a rather high place of a man who was obviously a poor executive. The politician admitted this. "But he's the man needed now," he explained. "That office is full of Democrats who are doing their best to make a poor showing and hurt the Administration. This man will get them out. Then we can get one who'll run the office right."

"Yes, that is fairly typical," the Senator conceded. "It is partly justified, too. The first thing in any office is to get loyalty. There is more than mere place-grabbing in the constant attempt to have the offices filled with people who will be loyal to the party in power."

"Haven't the politicians kept it that way?" I asked. "Wouldn't they rather have an excuse for place-grabbing? And wouldn't they rather have an inefficient Administration, which will always be more or less at their mercy?"

He seemed doubtful about that. "Possibly, in some cases," he admitted after a bit. "But more likely it has just grown up that way."

"Isn't it at least the fault of politicians that this hasn't been corrected?" I persisted.

"Well, you can't get much enthusiasm for more efficient government," he smiled. "People are not much interested in it. It isn't dramatic. There's been no political profit in it. And it is not an easy job, anyway. The Civil Service is the best solution we have found, and it is an attempt to solve just this problem. At least it gives us subordinates who are not hostile, even if they are not

loyal. The Budget is a move toward a solution, too. But on the whole the problem remains. Once in a while we find a leader like Roosevelt who manages to inspire the key men all down the line, but—well, men like Roosevelt come only once in a generation. It is one of the big jobs for constructive statesmanship."

"You mentioned a second reason for distrust?" I suggested.

"Yes. It is that men here are under observation all the time. Every least thing they do can be seen, misunderstood, misinterpreted, and misrepresented. I am not referring now to needed criticism, of course. Every one makes mistakes, and should be checked on them, though in every other business a man is allowed a certain number of mistakes without losing his place or his reputation.

"Not here. Here every man is in the limelight, or can be put there at any minute. He can't 'get away' with anything, not even the most honest error in judgment. It is made worse because the higher officials cannot possibly know even a small part of what goes on under them. Secretary Mellon, for instance, has 65,000 subordinates, and he's held responsible for every one of them whenever any one wants to make trouble.

"There are always men whose business it is to make trouble, and do it easily because of the limelight. Behind all the criticism is the self-interest of the men who are making it. It is not as if they had to prove their cases. All they have to do is to spring them on the public. If they can get them across, their purpose is accomplished. They can, and naturally will, impute false motives, fan unjust suspicions, make every action seem as bad as they can.

"The result is to intensify the condition I mentioned before. In such a situation the whole service is undermined. You can't get loyalty. You can't even get action. When we have one of these orgies of investigation, the whole Government is paralyzed. No one knows at what moment his most innocent action will be attacked and made to look bad. His only safety is in doing nothing; for weeks now every official has spent his time passing the buck from himself to some one else, and finding excuses for delaying decisions.

"Conditions and attacks like this have done more to undermine confidence than anything else. They make the Government worse than it needs to be, and they make it appear much worse than it is. Either party by making such an attack may succeed in gaining a temporary advantage, but the total effect of this warfare over a long period is now seen. It

has made people lose faith—and without sufficient cause."

"Then it has been just politics?" I suggested.

"Yes. Just politics. For the sake of a little gain here and there politicians have befouled their whole profession and themselves. Don't think I'm talking about exposure of real wrong-doing, whether corruption or just inefficiency,"

Week by week

Stanley Frost

is telling the story of political developments at the National Capitol. His correspondence cannot be ignored by those who are looking for authoritative interpretations of one of the most complex political situations of recent years.

he hastened to add. "That ought to be exposed, no matter how much it destroys confidence. But there is comparatively little of that, and the damage has been done mostly by exposures of things that can merely be made to look bad. In the game they have been playing these politicians have shot at one another, and hit also themselves and the country."

"And what has destroyed the faith in the politicians?"

"Obviously, a growing understanding that they have been running this kind of a government and playing this kind of politics," he answered. "Then, because they have been under this kind of attack. Each side has accused the other, not for having different opinions or even unsound ones, but on the charge of being corrupt in those opinions. They have said this of each other so often and so violently that the people now believe them both.

"Another cause of distrust is that politicians and parties have made so many promises that they couldn't keep; sometimes that they didn't intend to keep. Many of them have been made in honest ignorance, and their authors, when elected, have either found that it was impossible to carry them out or have learned that it would be folly. Often, too, they have done what they promised, but the effect was not what they promised. The surtax, some of the unwise attacks on business (there must be strict regulation of business, of course, but it should not destroy prosperity along with crime, as some laws have

done), and some attempts at farm and labor relief are in this class. They fail, and cause more distrust.

"Finally, there are the shameless promises made for campaign purposes. They have come to be a stock joke, but they are no joke. They have been deliberate attempts to fool the public. They are still going on. They do infinite harm.

"All these broken promises make it seem that the politicians and parties have lied. Each side tells the people that this is true of the other. As with the charges of corruption, both get to be believed. So political honesty has become a by-word.

"The same thing runs through all other political action. Each party accuses the other of running the Government in the interests of certain classes, especially in the interests of 'money.' Each accuses the other of putting over 'jokers' in legislation. Each charges the other with spending Government funds for purely political purposes; we have got so there is hardly an important measure that is not branded by the beaten side as a 'bid for votes,' and it is the habit to deny any patriotism or decent motives in either party or any public men.

"There is much truth, of course, in all these accusations. Often they have been true enough to deserve every disgrace. But even more often they are not true at all. They are easy to put over, however. Any man who has not succeeded well is glad of an excuse for himself, and ready to take the politician's word that the Government has cheated him. It is not hard to convince many people that wealth or any other success which is beyond their abilities is criminal and that the Government is to blame for allowing it. Such men also cannot see that many measures which will aid the whole country indirectly must aid some classes directly. Sometimes it is industry that must be aided, just now it is the farmers, sometimes others. But in each case classes whose benefit is only indirect are very likely to feel that they have been injured.

"All this makes good material, not only for party wars, but especially for demagogues. It is far easier to stir emotions than to appeal to reason, so the demagogues have exploited both the real and the fanciful wrongs. Now they are getting caught in their own net, for they cannot do the things they promised, and the people whom they taught to suspect every one, quite naturally suspect them too.

"Incidentally, wild charges have been made so often, and have so often been proved untrue, that the time has come

when it is harder than ever to get attention to real wrongs. There is very seldom now any attack or exposure or complaint that a man can make that will not be charged to politics and heavily discounted. People believe almost any evil thing in general, but can hardly be aroused to deal with any evil in particular."

"How would you go about it to remove the distrust and restore confidence?" I asked.

"Be trustworthy," he smiled. "That is a slow and tiresome thing," he went on after a pause. "In the Government it means hard and careful work, beginning with improvement in the administrative evils I spoke of. But it is hard to get any interest in that; it would have to be dramatized to arouse public interest, and reforms would meet direct opposition as well as inertia. Their value would appear only in the long run, in re-established confidence. They might never have any value for any party.

"Another thing must be more care in selection of public servants. It is time to apply the rule of Cæsar's wife, and this means a change in the minds of the people as well as in the politicians. The officials must feel a greater responsibility to the country, must develop a loyalty to public service, and the people must insist that their loyalty shall be to the Nation as a whole, instead of giving support to men who make a parade of loyalty to some particular group or leader, as is now often the case.

People Want Change

"I KNOW all this sounds rather trite," he interrupted himself. "But it happens to be true. Politics can't rise much above the level of what the public demands, and usually will fall below. The reason there is a chance for improvement now is that the public is disgusted with the old methods and is demanding something better."

"What should the Republican party do about it?" was the next question.

"In the first place, it must do something to show a definite spirit that is worthy of trust, not merely talk," he replied. "It must give evidences of public spirit. The passage of the Child Labor Amendment would be such a proof. It would appeal to an immense number of people. It would show that the party is not committed to business, right or wrong. These are political reasons—there is no need to argue the reasons of morality, humanity, and public policy just now. You know them.

"Another thing is to establish a definite and forward-looking foreign policy. The party has had none, except opposi-

tion. It has won that opposition, but has put nothing in its place. America wants disarmament, international peace and good will, friendliness everywhere. The party must have a policy that will work toward those things. There is now no use in discussing the League or even the World Court in the old form. We must find something on which the people can unite.

"Then there must be no more humbug or bluff. Where we have failed we had better admit it. The people know it, anyway, and denying it fools no one."

"Would you have the party go further than to admit failure in specific cases?" I interjected.

"No. There is no reason why the Republican party should admit faults, however real, which can just as fairly be charged against the other party and against politics as a whole. When there has been a definite failure, that we must admit. But the party has no reason to confess a universal fault as if it were a private sin of its own.

"We must take particular care with our platform, though. There must be in it nothing that is not sincere and real. No 'bunk,' no false issues, no 'vote-catchers.' We must use only real issues, and if they are hard to understand we must undertake the tedious work of educating the people, instead of trying to hornswoggle them. I am sure that enough people have intelligence enough so that the only ones who need to fear real issues are those who are on the wrong side."

"I suppose this includes the idea that every issue must be for the benefit of the whole country?"

"That would take care of itself, wouldn't it?" he replied. "If issues are going to be real, they must be able to stand scrutiny.

"Finally, there is something that will hardly show for a while, but that is really the most necessary of all if the party is to regain and keep public confidence. That is a shifting of the whole idea of party purpose from success to service. Men have been given power merely because they could deliver votes. We must choose them more and more because they can deliver confidence; for, in America, confidence is the best vote getter. We must make decent public service a matter of loyalty to the party, and punish any failure in it as sharply as we have been in the habit of punishing a betrayal of the party. That is the only way in which we can really grapple with the great problem of inefficient government.

"This is not a thing that can be done with a few high-sounding words. It will be slow to do, and slower still to prove

that we have done it. But it must be done, for until it is, the only claim we have to support will be that we are not quite so bad as our opponents."

"That seems a pretty big order," I remarked when he showed that he was through. "How would you sum it up? It is generally recognized that the great need of America to-day is leadership. What would you say was the form that leadership should take in the political field?"

The Senator whistled. He got his pipe going again before he answered.

"Well," he said finally, "if I knew that, I'd be about ready to run the country. In the present confused state of mind the first man who really finds out what ought to be done will set the course for the next generation at least. But you might try this, just as a suggestion. I should say that the fundamental purpose of leadership to-day ought to be to get politicians, parties, and Government to treat the American people as if they were mostly honest, intelligent, and patriotic, instead of assuming that they are grasping, selfish, and like to be fooled."

How Honesty Works

"ISN'T it rather optimistic to hope that it can succeed?" I asked. "It isn't often tried. Few politicians have dared be honest, and most political policy lately has been based on the idea of tickling some particular selfish interest, and fooling the rest."

"Not a bit," he insisted. "There's been a lot of grabbing lately, to be sure. Politics has been too much of a grab-bag affair, and every one has had to grab or get left. But the great majority of Americans do not want more than their fair share, if they can trust the people in power to give them that."

"It's not very spectacular."

"No. Decent honesty isn't spectacular. But it works. We have an example of it right now. Look at the public attitude toward President Coolidge. Folks are not grabbing at him nor hustling him. They are leaving things to him to handle, and giving him all the time he wants to handle them.

"There is only one reason for that. He isn't spectacular. He doesn't rant. He makes no grand-stand plays. He is the exact opposite of a 'popular idol.' He does all the things a politician doesn't believe in. He has made no effort to rally the people to any flaming standard. Yet in State after State he is showing more strength than even his friends expected, and is everywhere proving stronger than his party.

"There is only one reason for that. He is trusted."

A National Monument Underground

By S. R. WINTERS

The great Carlsbad Cavern, now a National Monument, has never been thoroughly explored. This immemorial home of bats may some day be known as one of the wonders of the world. Mr. Winters tells of our present knowledge of this vast cavern

TUNNELS so long that no one has yet searched out their ends; ceilings so high that torchlights fail to illumine them; weird beauty in a thousand shapes. All these await the observer in the Carlsbad Cavern, twenty-two miles southwest of Carlsbad, New Mexico. Withal, this little explored cave is already destined to be classified among the famous caverns of the world. For these reasons, a Presidential proclamation was recently issued designating it as a National Monument.

"The chambers in this cavern are the largest ever discovered," said Willis T. Lee, of the Geological Survey, United States Department of the Interior, in an interview with the writer upon his return to Washington, after having examined and photographed this phenomenally large and spectacular subterranean cavity. This superlative with reference to the magnitude of the chambers of this cave, an estimate from the conservative mind of the geologist, was voiced after Mr. Lee had examined literature on the subject of caverns at home and abroad. And as yet only eight miles of the cave have been traversed!

One room of this newly designated National Monument is more than half a mile in length and is several hundred feet wide—although nobody knows how wide. Its floor is 170 feet below the entrance, which was formed by the fall of a small portion of the roof. Within less than two miles from this point the floor descends 500 feet, and yet the bottom of the cavern reaches still deeper, since chambers and hallways have been discovered 200 feet lower. The depths of this subterranean cavity, it is conservatively estimated, lie 1,000 feet below the entrance.

Quite contrary to one newspaper report that the interior presented an array of colors, the materials are snow white. The limestone in which this immense cave has been fashioned is approximately 1,300 feet thick, and is underlaid by an equally thick series of beds of soft shale and sandstone that include thick beds of gypsum and rock salt. The occurrence

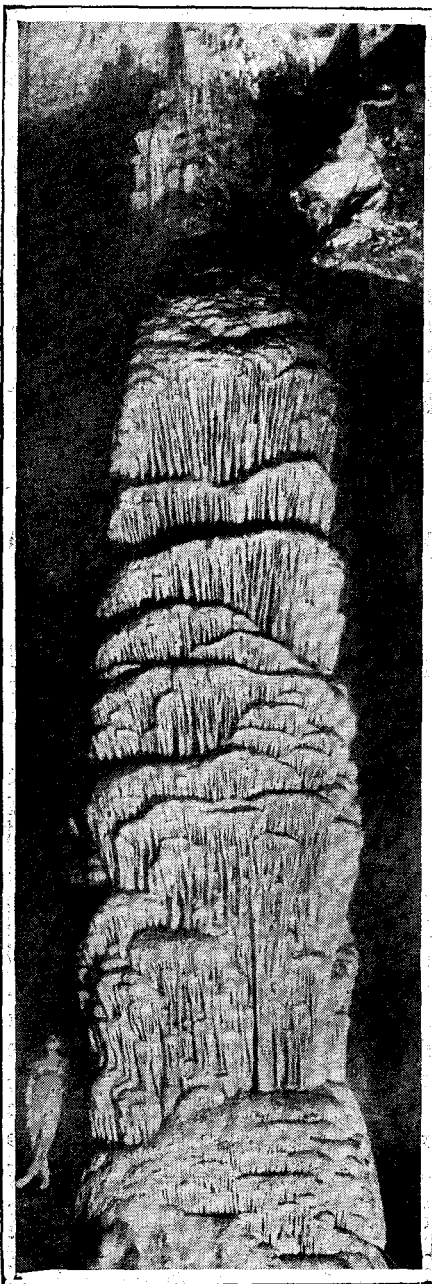


Photo by Ray V. Davis

A dome in the Big Room, a vast cave over half a mile long and more than 300 feet high

of these easily soluble beds under the 1,300 feet of hard yet soluble limestone may have produced a cavernous condition of the rocks that will show spectacular results, according to the Geological Survey.

The discovery of this monster hole underground had its origin in an unusual natural phenomenon. Bats making their exit at the close of daylight from a hole in the side of a valley attracted the attention of J. L. White and Bige Long, residents of southeastern New Mexico. That was in 1901, when this cave in the eastern foothills of the Guadalupe Mountains was first discovered. These original explorers penetrated the opening from which this army of bats emerged, and found a cave with vast deposits of bat guano. These deposits have proved to be a veritable mine for fertilizers, it having been estimated that at least 100,000 tons of bat guano have been recovered for the past several years, or from 1901 until the World War.

"As you stand there at twilight, bats begin coming out of this cave, and for three hours millions upon millions of them make their exit," Mr. Lee told me. "Where they go to and where they obtain feed is a mystery. They are so thick as they emerge from this cave that I reached up at random and grabbed a bat. They return to the cavern in the morning, consuming another three hours in making their entrance."

The recent expedition of this geologist of the United States Department of the Interior to the vicinity of Carlsbad, the principal town in southeastern New Mexico, was primarily for the purpose of examining a reservoir that had been tentatively selected for dam sites on the Pecos River. He did not find the prospective location for such an engineering project. He did, however, accurately appraise Carlsbad Cavern as a future wonder spot of the world.

Upon the return of Mr. Lee from New Mexico, the National Park Service recommended that this subterranean cavity should be made a National Monument. This recommendation has been favorably acted upon, and President Calvin Coolidge has already issued a proclamation setting it apart for this purpose. Meanwhile Mr. Lee has determined upon a system of nomenclature for the huge chambers. Instead of Greek names, In-