

What Liberty Means To Robert A. Taft

HENRY STEELE COMMAGER

LIBERTY, Senator Taft insists, is the paramount issue of this campaign. "I have never seen Republicans so determined . . . [to] bring to an end once and for all the system and the philosophy which threatens . . . liberty," he said in his National Republican Club speech, and again, with equal vehemence and vagueness, the "great issue [is] . . . to preserve the liberty of this country, to resume progress under the principles of liberty."

The argument here, as elsewhere, is elementary enough: Liberty has made America great; since the advent of the New Deal we have been losing our liberties and therefore our greatness; a continuation of the New Deal-Fair Deal philosophy and practice will lead to totalitarianism, the destruction of American liberties, and the twilight of American greatness.

If Senator Taft were not so painfully serious and if the issues were not so momentous, we might suppose that all this was said whimsically or facetiously. But—like that earlier champion of liberty, William Lloyd Garrison—Taft is in earnest, and he will be heard. Yet it is difficult to know whether to be more astonished at the first or the second part of the argument—at the assumption that we are losing our liberties or at the notion that we are losing our greatness.

If Senator Taft seriously believes that the United States is becoming a totalitarian country—a term which he invokes with alarming frequency—he should talk to politicians who have made opposition speeches in Perón's Argentina or Franco's Spain or Stalin's Russia. If he seriously believes that under the New Deal and the Fair Deal American business has lost its incentive or its energy, the people their prosperity, the nation its wealth, he should

compare the American economy of 1930 with that of 1950. A ruined economy that boasts the highest wealth, highest income, highest employment, highest savings, and highest productivity in history is only less prodigious than a totalitarian government that allows not only Senator Taft but a five-star general still on active service to wage relentless warfare upon it.

Yet we can deny neither the sincerity of Senator Taft's animadversions about the New Deal nor the passion behind them, nor can we ignore the fact that the Senator's misgivings are shared by a large body of his fellow Republicans. What shall we say, then, of this ever-recurrent argument that since Roosevelt's accession to the Presidency Americans have been steadily losing their liberties? Before we can hope to understand the charge at all, we must consider what the Senator and his followers mean by the term.

Liberty is, of course, one of those words that can mean very different things to different people, and sometimes even different things to the same person at different times. Sometimes we are reminded of Emerson's outburst when Daniel Webster defended the Fugitive Slave Act as a gesture toward liberty: "The word liberty in the mouth of Mr. Webster is like the word love in the mouth of a whore." To Senator Taft, liberty is not a positive but a negative thing. It is freedom from interference—not from the interference of private corporations or associations, to be sure, but from government. His argument—at least during campaigns—can be reduced to the simplest of syllogisms without doing violence to its intellectual dignity: Governmental activity is socialism; liberty is the opposite of socialism; liberty is therefore the opposite of governmental activity. That this



may seem excessively simple, excessively illogical, or excessively confused will not be denied, but it is what the Senator has said again and again during the current campaign.

Where Does It Hurt, Bob?

It is fair to ask here for a bill of particulars, for those who lose their liberties must surely be conscious of what it is they are losing. Precisely what liberties have been lost? What liberties have been curtailed? What liberties have been qualified? What is there that Senator Taft could say or do in 1932 that he cannot say or do in 1952? Can he worship as freely now as twenty years ago, or has freedom of religion been curtailed? Is he free to speak, in the Senate and out, or is he required to guard his words or to fall back upon a dubious Senatorial immunity? Is the press free to report his speeches, or has it been muzzled or intimidated? Is the party to which he adheres free to put up candidates and conduct a campaign—the kind of freedom not permitted in any totalitarian state? Are Republicans free to assemble in convention and to petition for redress of grievances? Is

the Senator secure in his own person, and in his papers and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures; does he have available to him due process of law? Is his property—or that of his fellow Republicans—taken without due compensation?

But it is unnecessary to enlarge upon this. Clearly Senator Taft does not contend that these basic liberties guaranteed in the Bill of Rights are imperiled. Nor is there any reason to suppose that he is deeply concerned for them; if he were he would not be supporting Senator McCarthy. What he is concerned about is what the conservative wings of both parties have always been concerned about in recent years—freedom from governmental restrictions on the economy. He is for free enterprise and against any impairment of that enterprise. He is against excessive regulations, but does not tell us when regulations become excessive. He is against high taxes, but does not indicate the point at which they become too high except by a vague gesture toward a limitation of one type of taxation in times of normality. He is against centralization of power. He is against bureaucracy and regimentation and Presidential dictatorship. All this may be taken for granted. But it is in the economic field that he rallies his followers to resist invasions of liberty.

It will be readily admitted that the last generation has seen a tremendous burgeoning of laws, regulations, orders, and practices in the economic and social realms. In one sense all of these—labor laws, social-security laws, banking laws, farm-subsidy provisions, Tennessee Valley programs, and so forth—are restrictions on individual liberty, just as a forty-mile speed limit or a compulsory school law or a pure-food-and-drug law are restrictions on individual liberty and on enterprise. Yet when we contemplate the elaborate framework of law and regulation designed to maintain order and justice in our complex economy, we are reminded of John Locke's observation that "liberty of man under government is to have a standing law to live by."

Whose Freedom?

Actually, all of us are in danger of going astray when we discuss liberty, in danger of interpreting and applying the concept in a narrow and doctrinaire fashion. We would do well to keep



in mind Harold Laski's warning that liberty does not mean the same thing to all—to the Georgia Negro and the Georgia white man, to the unemployed coal miner and the coal operator. Nor is it irrelevant to recall that in our own history governmental interference with the alleged rights of some has meant liberty for others, and that the most spectacular example of government intervention in the American economy (and incidentally the most spectacular example of the exercise of inherent Presidential power) was Emancipation, which brought liberty to almost four million Negroes.

Even in the last twenty years it is probable that there has actually been an expansion rather than a contraction of liberty for the average man and woman. For the average American has more security than he had a generation ago, and it did not require Franklin Roosevelt to remind us that "in order to preserve democratic institutions we need . . . to prove that practical operation of democratic government is equal to the task of protecting the security of the people," or that "the first line of defense [for liberty] lies in the protection of economic security." The average American, Negro as well as white, workingman as well as employer, farmer as well as city dweller, has more genuine opportunity to develop his own interests, more real scope for meaningful private enterprise, than he has had at any time in the previous half century. He has more time in which to cultivate

those interests, and more education to make the cultivation significant.

Even businessmen, even corporations do not appear to be suffering unduly from restrictions upon their freedom. Certain restrictions they have always had to recognize, the limitations inherent in the grant of a charter, for example; the limitation of "business affected with a public interest" which has been part of our Constitutional law for three-quarters of a century. Other restrictions have been added in the last two decades—such as restrictions on labor policies, on finances, on advertising. Yet elaborate as these are, they do not seem to have interfered very seriously with either production or profits. An economy that boasts a "permanent revolution" is scarcely a controlled or a frustrated or a defeated economy.

Yet, according to Senator Taft, the growth of Big Government flows from "totalitarian theory," and requires all patriotic Republicans to "bring to an end once and for all the system and the philosophy which threatens the existence and the liberty and the future of themselves and their children." Clearly then, it is not just misguided policies but basic principles that are at stake. We can presumably expect Senator Taft and his followers to repudiate the whole body of laws regulating the national economy, to return to the Jeffersonian principle that that government is best that governs least, to cherish Tom Paine's aphorism that "Government, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence. . . ." We can expect that if they come to power they will sweep away the whole "totalitarian" machinery and re-establish liberty.

Taft's Liberty in Action

What, then, are we to look for when the motley forces of the new libertarians, waving aloft the banners of Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner, capture the citadels of the government? Will they repeal the income tax, the most revolutionary of all measures affecting the national economy? They will, apparently, reduce it—if possible to a maximum of twenty-five per cent during times of peace; assuredly a pusillanimous compromise with principle. Will they repeal Social Security? But the Republican platform of 1948 called for an extension of Social Security, with increasing benefits to the old! Will they turn TVA over to private companies? If

so, no word of this has leaked out as yet either to platform makers or to campaign orators. Will they repeal the bank-deposit guarantee, thus returning to the halcyon days of the 1920's when the nation suffered some ten thousand bank failures? Will they repeal the Securities Exchange Act, thus permitting the stock market some of that freedom it enjoyed in 1929? Will they abandon the whole socialistic program of farm subsidies and conservation payments? But the platform of 1948 called for a program of "sunder" soil conservation and the protection, by the Federal government, of "reasonable" market prices! It is worth noting, too, that in his "Answer to Abilene" Senator Taft committed himself to the continuation of the current system of farm-price support, and to Federal aid to education, housing, and security whenever the need for such aid was apparent.

The Real Threat

It is all very confusing. For if Senator Taft is prepared to accept almost the whole of the New Deal and to outdeal the Fair Deal in some respects, what happens to the great principle that was to be the major issue of the campaign, Liberty against Socialism?

And is the issue of liberty to go by default? It should not, for it is a very real issue.

No one who looks dispassionately at the American scene today can doubt that there *are* dangers to liberty, and that these dangers come precisely from the sources that Senator Taft fears—the attack on free enterprise and the overweening claims of the state.

For all his study of our political past, Senator Taft understands neither the principle of private enterprise nor the real nature of Constitutional limitations on government. The free enterprise that has been basic to American freedom, progress, and prosperity is not primarily economic but intellectual and moral. Free enterprise in economy is not antecedent to other freedoms; it is a product of other freedoms. Liberty is not something that may come as a result of free enterprise; free enterprise is something that flows from liberty. Freedom is not something we may hope to have if we have prosperity; prosperity is something we may achieve and retain if we cling to freedom. Where liberty has been destroyed, economic freedom too has been destroyed.

The attack upon free enterprise in ideas and the invasion by the state of the areas of intellectual activity are the major problems of liberty in our country today. Here it is possible to give a bill of particulars, though by no means a complete one: the limitation on voluntary association by the doctrine of guilt by association, and the use of blacklists of organizations that some governmental agency or branch thinks subversive; the effective denial of free speech by the threat of economic or social penalties for the advocacy of unpopular ideas; limitations on academic freedom by loyalty oaths, censorship, intimidation, and dismissals; limitation on political freedom by ostracism or even punishment of those who join unpopular parties or support unpopular causes; limitation on economic freedom by the establishment of "the American system of private enterprise" as a fetish and a touchstone that all must respect; limitation on freedom of movement by denial of passports and visas without provision for a hearing or for due process; limitation on the right of privacy by acquiescence in the exploitation of captive audiences by radio stations; the censorship of books, plays, and films by self-appointed religious or 'patriotic' organizations, and of textbooks by local and state educational authorities or veterans' groups; the denial of the right to work by self-appointed protectors of Americanism and morality; the deprivation of the rights and liberties of Negroes, Orientals, and, in some communities, Jews. The list could, alas, be extended, but it is sufficient to suggest something of the real nature of the problem of liberty in our time.

Where's Taft?

And where do Senator Taft and his fellow crusaders for freedom stand on these matters? "We've made our progress," the Senator has said, "because we've had freedom to think, freedom to try out new ideas." True enough, and we might reasonably expect the Senator to champion freedom to think and to welcome new ideas. Yet this is the man who has consistently supported Senator McCarthy, the very symbol of the assault on freedom to think and to try out new ideas. This is the man who opposed the confirmation of David Lilienthal for chairmanship of the Atomic Energy Commission, presumably on the

ground that Senator Hickenlooper must be sustained. This is the man who regularly supported Congressional witch hunts, who has joined in the hue and cry against Acheson, Jessup, and others for tolerating "Communism" in the State Department. The Senator has been a very St. George in the contest against the Presidential usurpation of power, but in the most serious challenge of civilian power by the military since the time of McClellan, he rallied to the military, and the symbol of that challenge has now been chosen by his supporters to sound the keynote of the party. Ever zealous for free enterprise in the economy, he has been eloquently silent when freedom itself has been assailed. The work of vindicating those liberties inscribed in the Bill of Rights and in the heart and conscience of America he has left to others.





'Let's Look At the Record'

GEORGE D. BLACKWOOD

SINCE 1938 there has been no regular majority in Congress on domestic policy, but rather three minorities—the Northern-Western Democratic bloc, the Southern Democrats, and the Republicans. In foreign affairs, there has been another fragmentation: The Democrats have tended toward unity, the Republicans toward disunity.

The recent emphasis on isolationism has obscured the G.O.P. internationalism that was notable for generations. The reciprocity policy of James G. Blaine, the Open Door of John Hay, the hearty backing by Elihu Root and William Howard Taft of the League of Nations' efforts to enforce peace and the World Court, and the activities of Theodore Roosevelt typified this outlook. The day before his assassination, William McKinley said, "Isolation is no longer possible."

By 1939 the internationalist tradition seemed to have been totally forgotten among Republicans. The majority of them in Congress voted against lifting the arms embargo, against Lend-Lease, and against further revisions of the Neutrality Act. The nomination of Wendell Willkie in 1940 marked the beginnings of an intense intraparty struggle that seems to be reaching its climax now. During the war, the Willkie-Dewey forces were in the saddle, and on April 20, 1942, the Republican National Committee announced that in the postwar era the United States had "an obligation to assist in bringing about understanding, comity and co-operation among the nations of the world." The Taft forces

opposed the issuance of this proclamation, but lost. The Mackinac Declaration on Foreign Policy (September, 1943) also bore the Willkie stamp. More significant, the internationalist viewpoint found a Congressional leader in an ex-isolationist, Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg of Michigan.

The G.O.P. Division

Those who think of American politics solely in terms of the Presidency might assert that the Republicans have become an internationalist party, and that they will continue as such if General Eisenhower is nominated. But ninety-six Senators and 435 Representatives must be taken into account. The tendency of many voters to think only of the two men who are running for the Presidency results in misleading oversimplifications.

It is not entirely just to stigmatize the opposition to the Willkie-Dewey-Vandenberg-Eisenhower viewpoint as "isolationist." This term has of course been repudiated by Senator Taft, and perhaps a better word would be "nationalist," used by Colonel Robert R. McCormick's *Chicago Tribune* to designate the wing of the party that is dominant throughout most of the Midwest. This group castigates the rival wing of the party as "Eastern internationalists" and "me tooers," and stresses the need for a foreign policy devoted to what Taft calls a "frankly selfish viewpoint."

This year the Republican "class of 1946" in the Senate faces re-election. Elected in the G.O.P. upsurge of that year, seventeen men (out of forty-six Republicans in the Senate) are running for re-election, compared with fourteen of the fifty Democrats. One other 1946 victor, William Knowland of California, will be on the ballot, but

having won both party primaries on June 3, is for all practical purposes re-elected. One incumbent, Fred A. Seaton of Nebraska, who succeeded the late Senator Wherry, is retiring, and Owen Brewster of Maine lost to Governor Payne in the primary.

The G.O.P. Senators in the race are: Williams of Delaware, Jenner of Indiana, Lodge of Massachusetts, Thye of Minnesota, Kem of Missouri, Ecton of Montana, Butler of Nebraska, Malone of Nevada, Smith of New Jersey, Ives of New York, Langer of North Dakota, Bricker of Ohio, Martin of Pennsylvania, Watkins of Utah, Flanders of Vermont, Cain of Washington, and McCarthy of Wisconsin.

An Internationalist Beginning

The course of Republican internationalism can be determined by a look at what has happened on the Republican side of the Senate in the six years these men have been in office.

In 1947, with the world in the throes of postwar adjustment, the Republican-dominated Eightieth Congress received a proposal to extend emergency relief to Austria, Hungary, Greece, China, Italy, and Poland. A House move to cut the appropriation from \$350 million to \$200 million was blocked in the Senate. Kem's motion to accept the House figure lost 64 to 19, with only twelve of the forty-four Republicans present voting for it.

At about the same time, the two houses were debating the Truman Doctrine. Like many other foreign-policy issues, this was by no means clear-cut, but the debate showed that the temper of the Congress was internationalist. The bill passed the Senate 67 to 23; the Republicans voted in its favor, 35 to 16. Later in the year, the Marshall Plan began to take shape, and by No-