

U.S. Politics: Has It a Future?

GERALD JOHNSON

THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN POLITICS, by Samuel Lubell. *Harper & Brothers*. \$3.50.

THE MAN who writes about the future of anything in the year 1952 is a bold, even reckless fellow; one who writes about the future of politics is nothing less than a daredevil. Here, for example, comes Samuel Lubell with a book that was partly obsolete before the advance copies reached the reviewers, not to mention the bookstores; for while the book was on the press Harry S. Truman announced his withdrawal from the Presidential race.

Mr. Lubell had foreseen that possibility, of course, and had allowed for it, but he could not foresee the circumstances surrounding the announcement. Therefore he could not guess that Truman would not only upset the applecart but would scatter the fruit all over the premises, to the infinite woe of all political prophets. But so it happened, and as a result some of his passages have a slightly unearthly sound, reminding one of the ghostly cadences of a piece of campaign literature read on the Wednesday after Election Day.

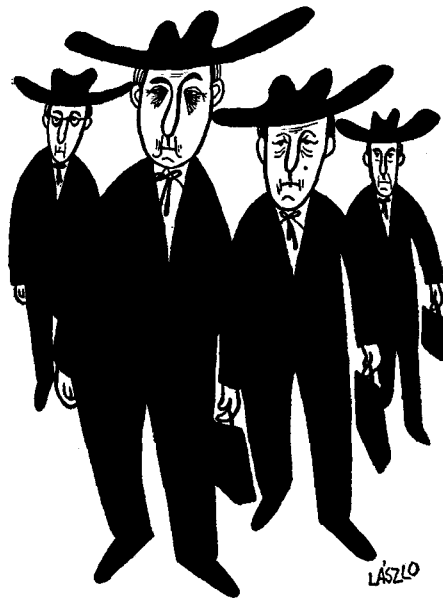
This is one of the occupational risks of writing a book about a situation so fluid that it changes much more rapidly than books can be produced. It is not a reflection upon either the perspicacity or the sincerity of the writer. At worst, it lays him under suspicion of assuming too great a risk, which is certainly no crime.

Amnesia . . .

This is a role that Mr. Lubell sustains pretty well throughout the work. He has perceived the break in historical continuity attending the advent of Franklin D. Roosevelt. If you are tempted to ask "Who has not?", restrain the impulse, for that is not a rhetorical question. The whole Taft

wing of the Republican Party, constituting a huge block of voters, has not perceived it. This is Mr. Lubell's thesis. The future of American politics, he believes, hinges upon the development of an increased perceptiveness in the electorate. The American capacity for ignoring the obvious is, in fact, wondrous; the registration rolls are loaded with people who could, in all innocence, lose a bass drum in a telephone booth.

In his introductory chapter Mr. Lubell cites eight factors that have modi-



fied the basic structure of American politics within the past twenty years. Every one of them is as plain as a pike-staff, once it is mentioned; yet ninety-nine per cent of current political oratory touches on none of them. They are impersonal factors—such things as the rise of a new suburban middle class, the migration of the Negro, the urbanization of farm life, and the power vacuum created by the collapse

of Germany and Japan and the enfeeblement of Great Britain. These are cold facts, but we prefer to discuss warm personalities. Such facts as these are determining what we shall have to do whether we like it or not; but we prefer to think that the future will be determined by the outcome of a struggle between Eisenhower and Taft and between the survivor and the Democratic nominee.

. . . and Nostalgia

Mr. Lubell has some biting comment on the delusion of those Republicans who believed for twelve years that all they had to whip was Roosevelt. When Roosevelt died they assumed that it was all over; and even the "Miracle of '48" did not disillusion them. They merely decided that they had underestimated Truman, which was true enough, but not the whole truth and not even the important truth. The important truth is that for twenty years the Republicans have been the party of nostalgia, and they will not become really formidable again until they face the future rather than the past. Lubell argues persuasively that the Republicans could win the Presidency in 1952 without actually becoming the majority party again. It would not do them much good if some vigorous personality such as Eisenhower should capture the White House in 1952 if the party were to lose control of Congress in 1954.

This argument is supported by a wealth of corroborative detail collected by perhaps the most searching analysis ever made of twentieth-century election returns. Mr. Lubell's diligence is downright terrifying. He has processed the statistics of each of the more than three thousand counties in the United States since 1892, and has visited a vast number of them to supplement his

figures with personal interviews. In the course of his labor he has turned up curious and sometimes startling lore in every section of the country and does frightful execution upon popular mythology.

Dead Hands, New Frontiers

For one thing, he shows how heavily the principle of mortmain lies upon the country, not merely in the late Confederacy but in New England and the Middle West as well. The dead hand obviously controls Maine and Vermont; but he thinks that what we call isolationism is really resentment of two wars against Germany and in aid of Britain. Perhaps subconsciously, German Americans and Irish Americans still react to Bismarck and Cromwell. Jefferson was wrong: The earth does not belong to the living, but in large part to the illustrious dead.

The most interesting idea in this book, however, is its description of the new frontier to be found in the cheap to moderately expensive suburbs of our great cities. A new middle class is arriving there, sons of the flood of immigrants who arrived in this country prior to the First World War. These children of the slums were organized by the Democratic bosses; now that they have grown prosperous and moved into better neighborhoods, they turn Republican only to a minor extent. Vast numbers remember only too clearly the depression of the early 1930's and which party came to their aid. Simultaneously Negroes arrived in Northern cities in great numbers and made common cause with the underprivileged of other races. Together, the more successful members of these groups now constitute a middle class that is far out of sympathy with traditional Republicanism.

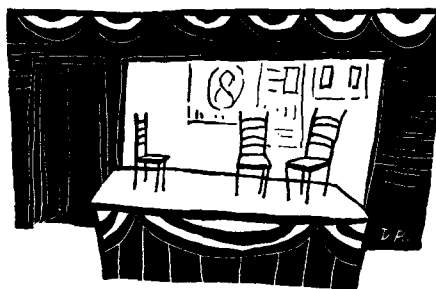
These—and a dozen other cogent arguments not mentioned here—lead Lubell to develop a theory of political parties based on an astronomical analogy. The majority party, whatever its name, is the party of furious internal stresses, comparable to the violent activity of the sun, while the minority party, relatively quiescent, shines by reflected light. The moon party will remain the minority until the sun party explodes from its internal pressures.

It is an interesting theory, but it leads one to wonder if Mr. Lubell ever heard of the Madison Square Garden

convention of 1924, or of the campaign of 1928. Indeed, as far back as the Presidency of Andrew Jackson, the party of battle, murder, and sudden death has been the Democratic, whether it was in power or out. Harmony has always been its unattainable ideal—as far back as 1908, sardonic critics set to the tune of “Tammany” a melodious description of a Democratic conclave:

*Harmony, harmony!
Slug that guy from Tennessee!
Murder! Fire! Ouch! Oh, gee!
Harmony, harmony!
Throw out Ryan!
Kill Bill Bryan!
Ha-a-a-armon-e-e-e!*

The truth is, Mr. Lubell himself more than once seems to share the



American capacity for ignoring the obvious. In analyzing the defeat of Senator Frank P. Graham of North Carolina two years ago, he works out a complicated theory of how the party bosses quit in the runoff primary. But he makes no mention of the fact that Bob Reynolds, the only genuine rabble rouser North Carolina sent to the Senate before Willis Smith, ran a poor third in the first primary and then threw his fifty thousand well-disciplined Ku Kluxers solidly against Graham in the second.

His estimate of Truman, again, is a combination of the remarkably acute and the remarkably obtuse. He sees Truman as “the man who bought time,” who was furiously active in order to stand still. This is true; it was also true of Lincoln. But later he says of the President: “No shaper of history, he has been a remarkably sensitive instrument through which the tensions and conflicts of our times have registered.”

No shaper of history! This of the man who ordered the atomic bomb dropped, who ordered the Communists held at any cost in Greece and Turkey,

who adopted the Marshall Plan, who responded with the Airlift to the challenge at Berlin, who instantly accepted battle in Korea, who organized the North Atlantic alliance, who induced the nations of western Europe to unite for the common defense, and who fired MacArthur. The FEPC was blocked, but it will continue to shape domestic politics for years to come. Point Four has never been fully implemented, but it will affect our foreign policy indefinitely. This ineffective-seeming individual from Missouri has been by far the most prodigious shaper of American history since Lincoln—and I am not forgetting Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Time Will Tell

How well he has shaped it is, of course, another matter. If, as Mr. Lubell half suspects, time is working against us, it is going to be just too bad; but if, as is quite possible, time is in our favor, Truman will emerge as a great President. In either event, his hand has lain heavily upon our destiny, and its impress will not soon be removed. What Truman actually is will not be known for some years, not until we see what his efforts have produced; but it is already clear that he is not negligible. Unfortunately, that is precisely what the world thought he was in 1945, and many Americans, especially among the intelligentsia, cannot persuade themselves to give up that preconception. Even as shrewd an observer as Samuel Lubell seems a little bemused by this habit of thought.

Yet after you have given Mr. Lubell all the worst of it, his book remains a good one. Grant that he sometimes permits a beautiful theory to murder the brutal fact, grant that his political astronomy is Ptolemaic rather than Copernican, grant that he shares the common American tendency to look at Truman through the wrong end of the telescope—after all that you have not disposed of Lubell. He remains an assiduous and tireless collector of facts, therefore highly informative; he remains an ingenious and intelligent theorist, therefore interesting and stimulating; and he remains a highly competent writer, therefore easy to follow and frequently charming. After all, it is no commonplace book on politics that is at once informative, stimulating, and pleasant.



The Proud, Hopeless People of Spain

CHARLES WERTENBAKER

THE FACE OF SPAIN by Gerald Brenan. Pellegrini & Cudahy. \$3.75.

IT IS CURIOUS that Americans, who fought a war with Spain, who passionately took sides in Spain's Civil War, and who are now in the process of lining up with Spain in case of another war, will not read books about Spain. Gerald Brenan's *Spanish Labyrinth*, the one indispensable book to a foreigner who would understand that country, has long been out of print, and his *The Face of Spain* has not sold out a modest first printing of three thousand copies since its publication last October. The last eight months have been months of negotiation to bring Spain into at least an informal alliance with the United States, and it seems too bad that more Americans haven't bothered to find out what sort of people our potential allies are.

Brenan, an Englishman who lived six years in Primo de Rivera's Spain of the 1920's and another three or four under

the Republic, went back in the spring of 1948 to see the Spain of Francisco Franco. He flew to Madrid, then traveled by train and bus south to Cordova, Málaga, Granada, and the hill towns of Andalusia, north again to Don Quixote's La Mancha, then west to Madrid by way of Talavera and Toledo.

The Blind St. Franco

Brenan covered a good deal of territory not seen by the average tourist and kept out of the luxury hotels and the even more luxurious inns the government runs for the tourists. He did not intend to write about politics, he says. "I was tired of politics, especially of the hopeless politics of the Peninsula . . ." But he was "besieged" by people who wanted to talk about the political situation; he listened, and kept a diary of what he was told. It is these conversations that make the book so important, because in them the Spanish people are speaking through a sensitive interpreter to the outside world that has forgotten them.

The term "outside world" is used advisedly, although what the Spanish people are hidden behind is not so much a curtain as a comforter. It is easy enough to spend years in Spain—and many diplomats and newspapermen do it—without seeing more than a beautiful and romantic country of bullfights, flamenco, lavish living, smart resorts, and cheap servants. In fact, Brenan offers, for what it is worth, testimony that even the Caudillo sees little more than that.

Brenan is no sooner out of Madrid than a Falangist doctor sitting opposite him on the train is complaining that the Reds didn't shoot enough landowners; they won't pay a living wage, says the doctor, and that is why Spain is so poor. The doctor, who has been to Russia, admits that not even there did he see people as miserable as a crowd on the station platform at Andújar. But when Brenan suggests that Franco might do something about it, the doctor breaks out: "Ah, Franco! . . . He's a saint, that man is. He's so good his image ought to be on all

