

How to Win Battles And Influence Voters

JAMES MacGREGOR BURNS

PARTY POLITICS in America has a peculiar rhythm all its own. Unlike parties in Britain or on the Continent, the American party must win two quite different contests to seize power nationally. In the *Congressional* election, a series of local contests is conducted under a variety of local, ideological, and economic conditions. In the *Presidential* election, there is national fighting, aimed especially at securing the votes of the states that hold the balance of power in the electoral college.

An American party is like an army that in one campaign must conduct guerrilla warfare in hundreds of battles spread out through the hills and jungles, and next time has to win a concentrated battle with massed armor.

This is a simple fact, to be sure. But its implications are of cardinal importance, especially for the Opposition. The party in power has a set of national leaders—President, Cabinet members, and the like—who direct the party toward victory in the next Presidential election, plus a set of Congressional leaders who, operating through the Congressional campaign committees, try to protect their majorities.

Small Prizes vs. a Big One

The predicament of the Opposition is this: It has no national leaders empowered to guide it to Presidential victory. On the contrary, the party is run nationally by a coterie of Congressional chiefs—committee old-timers—with their sights set on a series of local elections throughout the country. The defeated Presidential candidate in the last election, called the “titular” leader, is not even that. He has no authority, no position, not even a title.

The danger of party control by Congressional leaders is not simply that they may ignore the effort necessary to capture the Presidency. The trouble is that they may lead the party in such a way that Presidential victory is made less likely. For Congressional victories can be won at the expense of Presidential. Congressmen may back a set of national policies that are popular in many districts—especially in districts embracing small towns and rural areas—but highly unpopular in the great

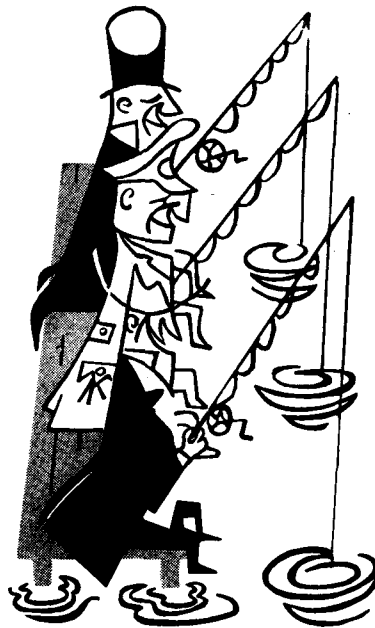
they fear is any major effort in the party that would prejudice their own chances of winning elections in their bailiwicks or jeopardize the influence of their own party factions.

The upshot of this situation is usually a policy of drift and opportunism. The Opposition does not offer a consistent, nationally oriented program on the basis of which a Presidential candidate can go to the nation. It offers a batch of complaints, catchwords, and regional and special-interest outcries—a grab bag of contradictory propositions that Congressional candidates anywhere in the country can draw from in taking potshots at their opponents. It adopts a policy of watchful waiting—waiting for the party in power to make a fatal mistake.

A policy of drift and opportunism does not win Presidential elections. The only exception in this century was the Republican victory in 1920. During the past half century the Democrats have won the Presidency (as against *keeping* it) twice. The first occasion was in 1912, when the Republicans split neatly in two. The second was in 1932, when the Republicans were burdened with blame for the great depression. Today there is little prospect of a formal Republican split at election time, in spite of the deep schism on foreign policy that embarrasses the Republicans the rest of the time. And even the most partisan Democrat might recoil at the thought of regaining power only as the result of another great depression.

The Roosevelt Venture

The Democrats would do well to remember a piece of almost forgotten party history. The time was late in 1924, in the wake of a disastrous de-



urban and industrial sectors, which are frequently the main battleground in Presidential contests. And Congressional leaders may thwart action that is necessary to make the party a better-organized, better-led instrument for winning Presidential campaigns.

The party chieftains in Congress are not, of course, opposed to capturing the Presidency as such. What

feat for the Democrats, who had failed utterly to capitalize on the Harding Administration's scandals. Franklin D. Roosevelt, physically crippled, defeated in his last two tries for public office, holding no position in the party, was appalled at the condition of the Democratic machine. He had seen its outworn

national chairman to call a conference of about 150 Democrats as the first step in a plan of action.

THE EFFORT was a complete failure. It simply ran head on into the opposition of key Democrats in Congress. They were interested only in the Congressional elections of 1926.

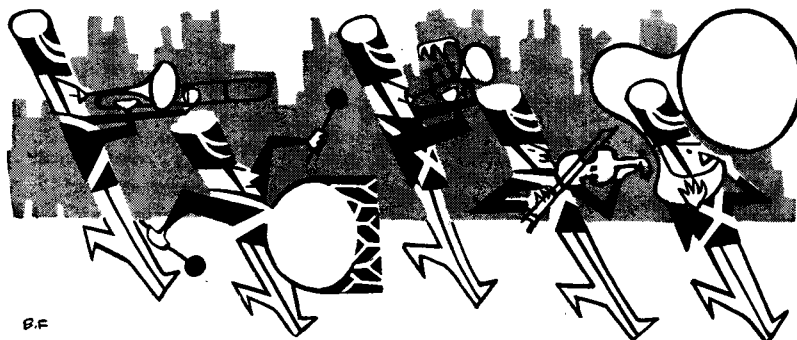


organization at its worst in his campaign for the Vice-Presidency in 1920. Conditions were even bleaker after the debacle of 1924. Democratic officials were out collecting money from millionaires to pay the party's bills. The national headquarters consisted of two women in a Washington office. "Could anything be more of a farce?" Roosevelt exploded to a friend.

He decided on a bold plan of reform. Neatly bypassing the national committee, he wrote directly to over a thousand rank-and-file Democrats outlining ways of rejuvenating the party. He wanted a national party conference that would set over-all policy and establish an active, full-time national headquarters. He wanted a finance program that would collect five dollars each from tens of thousands of Democrats rather than large gifts from a few fat cats. He wanted a hard-hitting publicity program. Above all, he wanted a liberal party that could rise above its conservative elements, local pressures, and sectional biases.

His queries struck a responsive chord in the party. The recurrent theme in the several hundred replies to his letter was the need for more unity, improved organization, better leadership, more discipline. Armed with these opinions from the rank and file and with the backing of John W. Davis, James M. Cox, Josephus Daniels, Cordell Hull, and other leaders, Roosevelt asked the

Louis Howe, with his usual political insight, put his finger on the problem. "Your political leader in Washington," he wrote to Davis, "is almost invariably a Congressman or Senator, over whose head hangs the dread of becoming involved in something which will prejudice his chance of re-election in his own



home district and his inclination is always not to do any positive thing unless driven to it by some purely local situation at home."

So the Democrats did nothing. No conference was called. National party activities were further curtailed. Jesse Jones kept on raising money from millionaires. The party won a few more House and Senate seats in 1926. But two years later its Presidential candidate was badly defeated once again. The fact that President Roosevelt in the 1930's failed to make most of the reforms he had urged in the 1920's is an interesting aspect of Roosevelt's development as a politician.

What about the Republicans' experience in opposition? They, like the Democrats, have regained the Presidency twice in this century. The first of these—Harding's victory in 1920—must be considered a victory for opportunism under the guidance of the Republican oligarchy in the Senate. Chosen by a coterie of Senatorial leaders and state bosses, Harding took all sides of the League of Nations issue. He conducted a vapid front-porch campaign that fitted in perfectly with the wishes of Senators Smoot, Lodge, Watson, and the rest. And he won.

More recently, however, a policy of opportunistic opposition has not worked for the Republicans. Indeed, the cabal of Congressional leaders and their record in office have been a burden too heavy for the G.O.P. Presidential nominee to bear.

Take the experience of 1940. The Republican Convention brushed aside Robert A. Taft and Arthur Vandenberg and Joseph W. Martin and nominated Wendell L. Willkie. But Roosevelt did not let the G.O.P. off the hook so easily. He campaigned not against Willkie but—unforgettably—against "Martin, Bar-

ton, and Fish." It was significant that while Willkie lost, Taft, Martin, and Vandenberg went on to victory after victory in their state or local contests in 1940 and afterward.

Or consider what happened in 1948. President Harry S. Truman campaigned less against Dewey—whose record in New York was not easily assailable—than against the famous Eightieth Congress. This was the Congress that the Republicans controlled after their Congressional victories in 1946. In past years a Congressional midterm victory was often the prelude to Presidential victory two years later. Why not in 1948? Was not Mr. Truman's unexpected

triumph testament, at least in part, to the power of the Republican Congressmen to load their party down with handicaps on Capitol Hill?

What a party really wants to do, of course, is win both the Presidency and Congress. A good case can be made for the proposition that if the party takes the Presidency it will win Congress as well, but not vice versa. The Presidential candidate who mobilizes the country behind his program is likely to sweep his party's Congressional candidates in.

While recent studies have shown that coattail riding is a complex process—actually every candidate has his hands on a lot of other coattails—Mr. Roosevelt in 1936 and General Eisenhower in 1952 have shown the impact of a strong Presidential candidate on Congressional contests.

HARD party experience indicates, then, that the Opposition must win two different types of election to get a firm grip on power, and that winning the Presidential one may be basic to winning the Congressional. It indicates that the party's leadership in Congress can badly handicap its effort to regain the Presidency. It indicates that the Opposition must somehow find national leadership outside Congress that can organize the party's program and summon the party's energies for a great national effort.

The Virtue of Consistency

Ultimately the issue is not simply how to *oppose*. It is one of governing. And the two are closely related, for winning power demagogically means governing demagogically.

For the "outs" to take inconsistent positions, bombarding the "ins" from all points in the political spectrum, may be good tactics, yielding short-term results. But in a day when governmental action in most fields is highly interrelated, when defense policy and farm policy and fiscal policy and resources policy all influence one another, leaders must offer programs that have consistency and coherence.

Opposition for the sake of opposition—or for the sake of local advantage in a Congressional district—also has grave implications abroad. The chancelleries of nations whose defenses and economies are solidly

tied in with ours must heed the Opposition's declarations almost as closely as the Administration's. Thirty years ago the British could afford to ignore Big Bill Thompson of Chicago when he threatened to "punch King George in the snoot." But when the Democratic majority leader in the Senate says he favors the Bricker resolution to chop down the President's treaty-making powers, he becomes one more element of doubt and uncertainty in the calculations of Foreign Ministers.

The Democrats' Course

The practical implications of all this for the Opposition today are fourfold:

1. *The Democrats could win in 1954 at the expense of winning in 1956.* Opportunistic potshooting at the Republicans from all directions may pay off in next year's Congressional



elections. But it may weaken the party's national effort in the next Presidential campaign. Democratic Congressmen may gain votes by showing how they have saved President Eisenhower from his own party. But where does this leave the Democratic nominee who may have to face this same Eisenhower in 1956?

2. *Win or lose in 1954, the Democrats must thereafter find some way of choosing a national leader early.* The job of winning the Presidency should be tackled a couple of years before the election; the normal three or four months is not enough. As soon as possible after the Congressional elections, the Democrats should hold the kind of conference that Roosevelt wanted to call thirty years ago. At such a conference, a party program could be shaped; and the party would either accept Adlai E. Stevenson as its leader or establish machinery to choose a new "Leader of the Opposition"—who

might or might not become the party's nominee for President in 1956.

3. *The Democratic Opposition must be consistent and responsible.* It must oppose in the manner of a party that expects to govern, and to govern well. Much of the case for some kind of party conference is that it would produce a party program for all to see, a program that offered a clear set of alternatives to the policies of the present Administration.

4. *The national party should give more help to Congressional candidates.* This is especially important in areas where the national party program has only marginal appeal. The worst problem of campaigning today is money. Better financing of Congressional campaigns from national headquarters would enable the candidates to take the risk of hewing more closely to the national party program. Moreover, the national leadership should concentrate more on building up the local Democratic parties. The writer can testify as a local Democratic chairman that communication between national headquarters and the field has been almost nil.

THE RHYTHM of American politics is not just an academic matter to the Republicans, either. After all, they may be the Opposition again before long. But even now they are finding that the difficulties of governing stem from the manner in which they campaigned in opposition.

If the problem of the Democrats is to find national leadership, the task of the Republicans is to convert the personal popularity of President Eisenhower into party strength at the polls. Without leadership from the White House, control of the party will shift increasingly into the hands of the Jenners and the Brickers. These Congressional chieftains were an embarrassment to the party in 1952 and might sink it in 1956.

Republicans and Democrats alike have to work within a system of alternating Congressional and Presidential elections. There is no substitute for strong national leadership in a party, whether it is trying to win a Presidential election or to run an Administration once it wins.

The Reluctant Candidate— An Inside Story

J. M. ARVEY, as told to JOHN MADIGAN

IT WAS about 12:45 A.M. last November 5 when Governor Adlai Stevenson walked into the packed ballroom on the second floor of the Leland Hotel in Springfield, Illinois. His face was set in a forced smile. He tugged nervously at his breast-pocket handkerchief—a gesture that television viewers had seen frequently throughout the campaign.

The nation's TV cameras were on him again. It was his last appearance as the Democratic Party's 1952 nominee for President. He looked as if he wanted to get it over with quickly. And he did. The concession speech was brief and the pledge to support General Eisenhower was sincere.

Now, more than a year later, Adlai Stevenson is almost as much a part of our national political pattern as he would have been if he were elected, and it is evident that he is not going to be able to chart his own future. In 1952 he had only to battle against the wishes of those who had high hopes that he would prove a good candidate. In 1956 Adlai will have to deal with millions who feel they know him and that he understands what they need and want.

Whether this means that convention delegates will again nominate him I cannot say. Neither can he. There will be strong opposition on the convention floor, but can any opposition be more difficult to overcome than the handicap of his own reluctance in 1952?

How Did It Start?

I don't think anyone really knows who was the first to suggest Adlai Stevenson for national office. Any Governor is a potential candidate. In his case there was far more potential than the mere fact of his having

been chief executive of the nation's fourth most populous state: a rich ancestral background in government, a fine record of public service in national and international affairs, a fine record as Governor, and renown as a speaker and writer.

Back in August, 1951, the rumor started that Governor Stevenson would be a candidate to succeed



Vice-President Alben Barkley. The Governor, despite our urgings, had not yet announced whether he would even be a candidate for re-election. He remained silent throughout the year—a circumstance which was later presented by his political enemies as evidence that he was angling all the time for the national ticket. There wasn't a grain of truth in such charges. He told me one night in November, a year before the election: "I've been happy as Governor, and there is so much still to be done in Illinois—but I don't know whether I want to run."

The war had interrupted his law career. He felt he would like to return to it. He had always thought he would enjoy teaching, but had never

found occasion to attempt it. He had loved international politics—particularly in the role of one who took part in important events and yet was out of the glare of the spotlight.

He wasn't certain of his own course, but he saw some of the political signs of the future before many a professional saw them. He warned that political leaders at all levels had better get the best candidates available if they wanted to survive. He was a good prophet then and a better one a couple of months later during the preconvention battles between backers of Senator Taft and General Eisenhower.

STEVENSON and some friends were sitting in my Chicago apartment early in 1952 when he told us:

"It would be utterly stupid of the Republicans not to nominate Eisenhower. There is no one in our party who can beat him. This is a hero-worshipping country. And he doesn't have any scars to detract from his glamour."

By the turn of the year rumors connecting Stevenson with the national ticket had died down considerably. But it is significant to note that when they were still heard they spoke of the Governor in relation to the Presidency as well as the Vice-Presidency. This was no calculated switch. It was the first spontaneous sign of a genuine "draft."

Then, on January 7, 1952, Stevenson announced in Springfield that after "long and prayerful consideration" he had decided to run for re-election as Governor. He had withheld his announcement until slate-makers of our powerful Cook County Democratic organization had picked local candidates who he