

# The Durability Of Harry Flood Byrd

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GOVERNORS OF VIRGINIA are appointed by Harry Flood Byrd, subject to confirmation by the electorate. That in effect has been the procedure in the Old Dominion for the past thirty-two years. And no Byrd appointment has failed of confirmation.

Although the contest for the governorship now in progress varies in important respects from the old routine, most observers predict that another Byrd appointment will be confirmed with the election of State Attorney General J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., in November.

One governor, James H. Price, who served from 1938 to 1942, was endorsed by Senator Byrd unwillingly. Price was a New Deal-inclined lieutenant governor whose exasperating popularity forced the senator to give the signal for his election. Otherwise the traditional procedure was carried out, and four years later the regular succession of Byrd governors was resumed. With the exception of Price, each of the last eight gentlemen who have presided over this ancient commonwealth has been Byrd's uninhibited personal choice.

That is, perhaps, the most impressive manifestation of the "Byrd machine." The machine also makes the laws of Virginia, names the judiciary, elects most of the county officers, and to a large extent shapes the social attitudes and the thinking of the state. It can also be said that the peculiar atmosphere and traditions of Virginia have produced the Byrd machine.

"Machine" is not the nicest word for it; it may even be misleading. In its own state it is better known as the "organization." It is not properly to be compared with other political machines—not to be mentioned in the same breath with, say, the old Pendergast or Crump machines. The Byrd machine is genteel—there are no gallus-snapping or banjo-playing characters in Virginia

politics—and it is singularly honest. Apart from its acceptance of the white-supremacy doctrine since the Supreme Court's decision against public-school segregation, it has shown notable concern, in its parsimonious way, for the welfare of the state. Nor is it the creation of Harry Byrd, though Byrd has achieved an ascendancy over it unequalled by any of its former chiefs. It is an oligarchy that has ruled Virginia, with only minor interruptions, for the past fifty-five years.

THE ORGANIZATION is commonly regarded as dating from the turn of the century, or from the promulgation of the Virginia Constitution of 1902. By means of the poll tax and other restrictive measures, that instrument virtually disfranchised the Negro—and the poor white too, excepting the steadily decreasing number of veterans of the War Between the States—and shattered the Virginia Republican Party. The total vote cast in the state fell from



261,645 in the Presidential election of 1900 to 134,428 in that of 1904.

The origins of the organization go further back, to the days when most Virginians voted on Election Day and government was everybody's business. It was called the organization in the 1880's, while it was still the underdog, while General William Mahone and his motley aggregation of Readjustors, Republicans, and Negroes dominated Vir-

ginia. Its long tenancy of the governor's mansion began when General Fitzhugh Lee canvassed the state mounted on his famous Uncle Robert's saddle and rode into the governorship in 1885. It acquired its first long-term boss in Thomas S. Martin, a railway lawyer, who was elected to the United State Senate in 1893 and ruled the machine until his death in 1919.

The philosophy of the organization has changed little, if at all, during this long period. It is significant that the party to which it belongs was known originally as the Conservative Party of Virginia; it took the name "Democratic" only in the election of 1883. What there was of liberalism in Virginia in the latter half of the nineteenth century was expressed in the program of the Readjustors and the Republicans. General Mahone was proud to be called the "friend of the Negro" and the "friend of the working man." No leader of the Democratic "organization" has ever cared to be tagged with either label.

## When It's Apple Harvest Time . . .

Descended from William Byrd, the founder of Richmond and Petersburg, Harry Byrd was well suited to be the beau ideal of the Virginia oligarchy. Generations of improvident mediocrity squandered the original fortune of the Byrd family, but recent years have witnessed a spectacular revival of both its fame and its wealth. The senator's father was speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates, and his brother, the late Admiral Richard Evelyn Byrd, ranks among the great American explorers.

Byrd is a self-made millionaire, a circumstance that does not impair his status as an aristocrat and greatly enhances his authority as a spokesman for the businessman. His family was in such financial straits in his youth that he was obliged to quit school after the fifth grade and go to work. He worked with such diligence and business acumen that he first rescued the family's small newspaper business from bankruptcy and then made a fortune in apple orchards.

Today at seventy he is a courtly, casually well-dressed gentleman who is generally liked by his fellow sena-

tors and is adored by his followers in Virginia. His cherubic features belie both his shrewdness and his dynamic energy. His life is divided into three distinct compartments: those of U.S. senator, Virginia political boss, and orchardist. His fine physical condition derives in part from vigorous and often outdoor activity in the third compartment. The apple harvest, soon to begin, will find the senator driving his battered Chevrolet from morning till night over bumpy orchard roads, supervising the work in his eleven orchards, five packing houses, one cannery, and three cold-storage units.

Byrd's phenomenal hold upon the organization and upon Virginia stems largely from his sturdy personal integrity and from his record as governor of the state. During his four-year term (1926-1930) the state government was almost completely overhauled. The state's roadbuilding program went forward at an impressive rate on his "pay-as-you-go" plan. It is pertinent to recall also that Byrd brought about the enactment of a stern anti-lynching law which effectively put an end to lynchings in Virginia.

**I**F YOU ASK a Byrd machine man why his organization nearly always wins, he is likely to say that it is because Virginians like it. That is to a large extent true, and many of those who do not like it feel that if they did not have the Byrd machine they might have something worse. The machine's reputation for honesty is perhaps its greatest bulwark. In fairly rare instances a county or city official misappropriates funds, but there is no cover-up by the machine, and no reverberating scandal that might open the way for an anti-machine crusade ever occurs in Virginia.

The machine has only a small number of voters to control. For the past thirty years the vote in Virginia Democratic primaries, which have determined every gubernatorial choice, has averaged less than eleven per cent of the adult population. There has been a marked increase in voter participation in several recent elections, but Virginia long ranked near the bottom of the list of states in the number of citizens voting in proportion to population.

Few people vote in Virginia because of the poll tax, because many are satisfied with things as they are, because the apparent invincibility of the organization makes it seem use-



less for the dissatisfied to oppose it, because many have lost the habit of voting—and because the machine likes it that way.

The average beginner in Virginia politics cultivates the "right men" in the organization; their policies are his policies and their candidates his candidates. If he has exceptional talents, they are directed not to blazing new trails but to adducing persuasive arguments in support of trails already charted. Then if he is able to meet the requirements of ideological conformity, he must yield to another stern organization rule, which may be the hardest of all: He must stand aside and await his turn for political advancement.

#### The Art of the Gentle Nod

The Democratic primary of 1949 furnished a striking illustration of the operation of this rule, even though it revealed at the same time a significant deterioration of machine discipline. A year before the primary date, each of three high-ranking machine men felt that the time had arrived for the realization of his ambition to occupy the governor's chair. State Senator John S. Battle, Democratic state chairman and former mayor of Richmond Horace H. Edwards, and Representative Thomas B. Stanley each was preparing for the contest. Byrd gave his nod to Battle, gently at first in the hope that more definite action would not be necessary. But the two other candidates displayed unwonted stubbornness.

After wavering for six months, Stanley at last yielded and announced that he would not enter the race. Edwards ignored the signal and plunged into a dynamic and heavily financed campaign. He had built an extensive organization and had enlisted a large following before Byrd found it necessary to intervene. Then the senator sounded an unmistakable bugle call in the form of a campaign speech for Battle, and the able and personable Edwards found his followers deserting by the thousands. He got only fifteen per cent of the vote, and his status as an organization leader came to an end.

Stanley, on the other hand, having carried out the prescribed ritual of standing aside, was almost immediately indicated as the Byrd choice for governor in 1953. When that year came around, another aggressive aspirant, Attorney General J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., was chafing at the bit, and again the ritual was enacted. Almond stood aside, with a special flourish, for the sake of the organization.

#### Gentlemen Who Think Alike

In any attempt to appraise what the Byrd machine has done for and to Virginia, one will find much that is commendable. While other states wrestle with the problem of mounting deficits, Virginia has a perennial problem of how to dispose of an un-failing surplus. The state is debt-free as far as direct obligations of the commonwealth are concerned, although there are several hundred million dollars outstanding in county, city, and toll-road bond issues. Finally, throughout the state legislature and Virginia officialdom one is likely to find gentlemen of refinement and good manners—qualities not to be equated with a passion for justice and human rights, but assuredly to be prized in any state.

Speaking of the machine issue during his campaign for governor, John Stewart Battle said: "As for this so-called iniquitous machine, it is nothing more or less than a loosely knit group of Virginians . . . who usually think alike, who are interested in the welfare of the commonwealth, who are supremely interested in giving Virginia good

government and good public servants, and they usually act together."

That is a sincere definition of the ideal Byrd machine from the lips of one of its most admirable products.

On the debit side, the machine has left the state sadly deficient in public services. Public schools, prisons, hospitals, and mental institutions in Virginia are on the whole far below national standards. The taxpayer gets no more than his rather low taxes will buy—perhaps even less. By neglecting the savings possible in modern large-scale construction, rigid adherence to the "pay-as-you-go" principle is proving costly in some fields. The state has been building a group of mental-hospital buildings at Dunbar, near Williamsburg, intermittently since 1934, and at the present rate of progress it will still be abuilding in 1964. The project could have been completed in short order and at far less total expense with bond financing.

The machine has made "liberal" a term of reproach among many Virginians, and it has caused the democratic principle to atrophy. It is responsible for a stuffy tendency toward uniformity of opinion in a state with an incomparably rich and varied heritage.

**S**OME DAY the Byrd machine will break up. In fact the process seemed already under way when the issue of race integration came along to give it a new lease on life.

Far-reaching changes are taking place in the Old Dominion. The population of the state has increased from 2,677,772 in 1940 to 3,318,680 in 1950 and to probably four million today, and the newcomers are generally ill disposed to such a thing as the Byrd machine. Most of them are either liberal Democrats from the North, or Republicans. Urbanization and industrialization also have gone on apace; the machine relies mainly on the rural vote and is anathema to organized labor.

One of the state's ten Congressional districts has detached itself almost entirely from the Byrd-machine orbit. In the Tenth District, in the metropolitan and suburban area of Washington, the Democratic committees are mostly dominated by

independent or anti-machine Democrats, and a Republican, Joel T. Broyhill, is the district's representative in Congress. The population of the area has risen from 131,492 to 465,000 since 1940 and is still growing fast.

Meanwhile, Senator Byrd and his colleagues are growing older, and few new faces have appeared in the upper echelons of the machine in the past ten years. Almond, its present candidate for governor, is a comparative youngster at fifty-eight. Governor Stanley and former Governor Battle are both sixty-six. Former Governor William M. Tuck, generally regarded as the machine's second in command, and E. Blackburn Moore, speaker of the House of Delegates, are sixty. Representative Howard W. Smith, still a power in machine councils, is seventy-four. E. R. Combs, a political genius who did more to shape the modern Byrd machine than anyone else except its namesake, died last January at the age of eighty. Byrd himself is seventy, and there is no one of comparable stature in sight to succeed him when the time comes.

#### **Melee and Maneuver**

Liberal Democrats are in at least temporary eclipse in the present pro-segregation storm, but the machine has faced a serious challenge in recent years from that quarter. In 1949 Colonel Francis Pickens Miller, a liberal and belligerently anti-machine leader, ran in the Democratic gubernatorial primary and got thirty-five per cent of the vote in a four-cornered race.

Future historians may record that primary of 1949 as the beginning of the decline of the organization. Five candidates teetered on the verge of the contest, and four went into it vigorously. In addition to Battle, Edwards, and Miller, there was Remmie L. Arnold, a wealthy industrialist taking a capricious fling at politics. A conservative but not identified with the Byrd machine, Arnold fared worse than Edwards. The number of competing candidates in the primary and the size of the aggregate vote—eighteen per cent of those of voting age—were both unprecedented in recent Virginia history.

The organization was thoroughly

shaken by its narrow escape from defeat in this melee. Even Byrd's eleventh-hour intervention had saved the day only by a narrow margin. Battle had received less than forty-three per cent of the vote cast. The alarming possibility loomed that in another primary a split in the organization vote might permit an anti-machine candidate to emerge with a plurality victory and take over the state administration.

In other one-party Southern states, assurance of a majority choice in the nomination of candidates for governor has long been provided by the runoff primary system. If no candidate receives a majority on the first round, a runoff contest is held between the two leading candidates. But the organization had never found this necessary in Virginia. Its own processes, called formerly "the anointment" and more recently "the Byrd nod," had always been sufficient to unite its forces behind a single candidate. The "anointed" candidate had always received an overwhelming majority of the primary vote.

At long last the managers of the Byrd organization decided to institute the runoff primary system in Virginia. No attempt was made to "sell" the idea, or even to explain it, to a large public; the word merely went down the line. When the general assembly met in 1952, the far-reaching measure was swiftly approved by a nearly unanimous vote.

**H**AVING fortified itself against the liberal Democratic menace, in 1953, with something like consternation, the machine found an old, old enemy advancing against it. An awakened Republican Party had found a redoubtable leader, its first since the death of Mahone in 1895. Republican State Senator Ted Dalton ran for governor and 182,887 voters came from somewhere and voted for him. They represented forty-five per cent of the total vote cast.

Although Virginia had given its electoral votes to Eisenhower and elected three Republican representatives in 1952, this large Republican vote in a state election was a general surprise. But for a certain lack of reverence for the "pay-as-you-go" principle, it is widely believed that

Dalton would have been elected governor. The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* observed recently: "Senator Dalton might well have won the Governorship in 1953, if he had not come out for a \$100,000,000 bond issue."

Elated Republicans began to overhaul and expand their organization; veteran G.O.P. leaders of the old school were replaced by bustling young men. The party looked forward with confidence to a second Dalton try in 1957. But an explosive new issue was soon to make a radical change in the political picture.

### The Machine Slips Gears

The Supreme Court decision of May 17, 1954, declaring segregation in public schools unconstitutional "did something" to the Byrd machine no less than to Virginia. In the anger, hysteria, and confusion that ensued, its leaders behaved out of character. The organization's penny-pinching caution vanished when it came to this issue. Special commission studies, special sessions of the general assembly, and special elections were ordered, and costly legal talent was employed at the drop of a hat.

The Byrd machine's administrative system was thrown out of gear. The gentle routine in which a boss gave his commands by a nod or a seemingly casual remark was ill suited for a crisis like this. The first assumption in many quarters was that the organization would work toward a constructive solution of the problem. Governor Stanley himself, within a few hours after the decision was handed down, declared his intention to "work toward a plan which will be acceptable to our citizens and in keeping with the edict of the court."

But machine leaders soon began to confer—with extremists from the

fiercely segregationist and politically powerful Black Belt doing most of the talking. On June 25 Governor Stanley executed something like an about-face, declaring: "I shall use every legal means at my command to continue segregated schools in Virginia." The Byrd-machine line had been laid down. From then on fulminations against the Supreme Court, along with their inevitable encouragement to race prejudice, became the established policy.

**D**EFIANCE of the Supreme Court of the United States was something new to modern Virginians, and in a large part of the state the difficulties in the way of compliance with its decision did not at first appear overwhelming. Only twenty-two per cent of the population of Virginia is colored. There is a large proportion of Negroes in the Black Belt area, but this area accounts for less than a third of the population of Virginia. In large sections of the state Negroes are no more common than they are in a number of Northern states. In twenty-one counties the Negro percentage of the population ranges from zero to five. Some of these counties would already have begun to desegregate their schools had it not been for the restraining hand of Richmond.

Desegregation initiatives, however, were squelched and voices of moderation were hushed. Under the aegis of the Byrd machine, the whole state moved toward defiance. But the public never quite kept up with the machine, and the machine, for its part, was unable to keep up with Senator Byrd, or even to fathom his intentions.

A study commission was set up, and after seventeen months it produced the Gray Plan, named after the commission's chairman, State

Senator Garland Gray. The Gray Plan was considered bold at the time; in retrospect it is regarded as the essence of moderation. It consisted of elaborate devices that could be used either for circumvention of the court's ruling or for gradual compliance with it, and provided for local option on the question. Governor Stanley gave the Gray Plan his unqualified endorsement and immediately called a special session of the legislature. That body quickly ordered a special referendum election—the next step in the plan. The Byrd machine mobilized all its resources in a fierce campaign and carried the election for the plan. The third step was taken when a constitutional convention met and voted to amend the state constitution.

By that time, however, the machine had been ordered to drop the Gray Plan. Senator Byrd's thinking had gone far beyond such conciliatory measures; he was already enlisting support in Congress for the "Southern Manifesto." The Gray Plan was repudiated by all the faithful, including Mr. Gray, and the legislature moved on to "interposition" and "massive resistance."

In July, 1956, the machine's high command met in Senator Byrd's Washington office and decided to go all the way. State funds were to be cut off from any school district that might take the first step of integration. A special session of the legislature two months later enacted a series of laws, called Virginia's "first, second, third, and fourth lines of defense." They included the cut-off-the-funds law and other measures to ensure that public schools would be closed rather than integrated.

Unplanned and incoherent as the Byrd machine's course had been, it accomplished the senator's purpose of placing Virginia in the forefront



of "massive resistance," and added to the machine's other assets what has become the most powerful political force in the South—race prejudice.

### Who Said That?

The organization is riding now on the crest of the wave of prejudice and defiance. "This will keep us in power for twenty-five years!" a machine leader is widely reported to have exclaimed. Just which leader was overheard has not been revealed, but the remark undoubtedly expressed a thought in many organization minds.

This was the setting in which the present contest for the governorship developed. Senator Byrd gave his nod to Attorney General Almond, and he was nominated in a perfunctory Democratic primary. The Republican state convention, with considerable enthusiasm, nominated Dalton again.

On the all-overshadowing issue of segregation, the Virginia G.O.P. has taken a relatively moderate position. Republican strength lies mainly in those sections of Virginia where Negroes are fewest and where race feeling is least marked. Dalton has denounced "massive resistance" and is urging a plan of pupil assignment by local boards, involving presumably some integration. But "massive resistance" is still popular in Virginia, and the Democrats point with pride to the fact that under their rule no Negro child has yet been admitted to a previously all-white school.

A peremptory order for the desegregation of schools in Arlington County was issued by a Federal district court on September 14. It might have brought the state's reckless anti-integration laws into play before the present contest was over, resulting in the closing of some schools and the cutting off of state funds but it has now been suspended. The odds at this writing are against a Republican victory in November, despite the remarkable progress of the rejuvenated G.O.P.

The aging Byrd machine has received a formidable shot in the arm, one which is not likely to keep it in power for twenty-five years more but which undoubtedly will last until the segregationist hysteria has run its course.

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

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This is the season of the year when the stream of America's public affairs breaks off into a dozen smaller and diluted channels, the period when it becomes harder than ever for those who read and listen to bring any of several complicated matters into understandable focus. The focusing mechanisms do not quite function when Congress is dispersed and the President is away. The news on what could be life-or-death matters comes in unrelated dribbles, a handout statement here, a television interview there, a news conference by a secondary official somewhere else. Only on certain international affairs, on the level of the United Nations again in session, is there any real focusing through the processes of debate and analysis and conclusion.

There will be many threads, though not much of a fabric, for anyone to consider and adopt, but things have moved far enough this fall to make it a reasonable guess that three threads at least will widen and lengthen in the months ahead. Three great matters are no doubt going to absorb more and more minds, stimulate more and hotter debate, and become the dominant public issues that determine the principal work of the next Congress, and possibly the political cast of the country for a considerable period ahead.

One is race relations in this country. Those who had expected a steadily diminishing controversy, a steadily widening area of moderation, were apparently premature and possibly quite wrong. The general effect of the Little Rock affair has probably been to harden the lines

in this struggle. The mood of relief and compromise in which Congress ended the last session is not likely to be there when the new session opens, and the terrible strain at the core of the national Democratic Party may only be intensified.

Another of these threads is inflation. Some men here who learn to cast their thoughts far ahead for political survival believe inflation is bound to become the most dominating political issue of all, on which the 1958 elections will turn. The news that the President will informally discuss inflation directly from time to time with a few selected Federal officials does not indicate a program for halting it, but only an increasing worry about it. Inflation itself may not become a prairie fire, but the politics inspired by inflation easily can.

The third thread is national defense. Russia seems to be switching back to an implacable cold-war line of policy, and years of warning that arbitrary budget limits are giving the Russians an alarming advantage have now been dramatized in the news about their intercontinental missile, followed almost immediately by revelations that we are actually cutting back some of our continental defenses. Pretty surely when Congress reconvenes, generalized verbal assurances will no longer suffice.

This autumn equinox has produced political thunderheads already larger than a man's hand. It will be surprising indeed if the storms fail to follow.

(From a broadcast over CBS Radio)