

4. Business' Public Role in 1953

ELMO ROPER



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ANY analysis of what the American public expects of business in 1953 (and until 1956 for that matter) must at least partially include an analysis of what the public expects from the Republican Party. For

whether the fact is liked by businessmen—or Republican politicians—the Republican Party is rather firmly fixed in the public's mind as the Party of Business. Businessmen themselves have encouraged this view.

The second underlying fact in any such analysis is that the Party of Business has just been returned to power—after twenty years in the doghouse. This alone is not enough to prove that there is currently a very favorable attitude toward business on the part of a great majority of people. There were other factors in the election, such as the personality of General Eisenhower, high prices, the Korean War, Communism, and corruption in Washington. Perhaps these were the deciding factors in the election, but we have other evidence to indicate that a change in the public's attitude toward more confidence in and more respect for business was an underlying factor in the recent election of the Businessman's Party to power.

It would be well not to underestimate the difficulties that lie ahead. It is entirely possible that after a brief period of Honeymoon harmony among the Republicans, General Eisenhower will have to rely on some Democratic votes in order to put his program through Congress. So, although the majority party will be functioning in tandem with the minority party, it is the majority party which will be blamed for failures just as it will be praised for success.

Both business and the Republican Party will be watched closely—for behavior as well as accomplishment. It is likely that critics of business as well as professional critics of the Republican Party—with their eye on 1956—are hoping that Business takes an attitude something like this: "Well, the public, which has really loved us all

along, has finally come back to its senses. The professional reformers, the critics of private enterprise, the leftists, and the cranks—we've been their whipping boy for long enough, and now that we've thrown the rascals out, ho for the joy ride!

"The mandate of the public is clear. All we have to do is measure everything in terms of immediate value to business and we'll be doing exactly what the farmers, white-collar workers, and organized labor meant us to do when they gave us their vote this time. They know they've had all the breaks for a long time and don't want any more. Out with high corporate and personal income taxes at once! Off with the controls, all of them! Down the incinerator chute with the forms and questionnaires Government has been pestering us with. It's *our* turn now . . ."

If such an extreme attitude should emerge as the guiding philosophy of business or the Businessman's Party, the public will be sorely disappointed. Business, which by its good demeanor since the war has so excellently rid itself of the Depression label which clung to it throughout the Thirties, will be thrown out of power and perhaps this time for good.

The nation itself is faced with enormous problems. Let us admit it: It can well be that some of those problems, whether created abroad or inherited from the previous Administration at home, are impossible of

satisfactory solution. But any party simply because it is responsible for executive-legislative action during the next four years, will be judged as though responsible for cause and effect. Should that action be influenced by self-interest rather than an understanding of the broad public good, should there be short-sighted expediency of action rather than long-range planning and wise collaboration with leaders in every field, then the Republican tenure will have been but an episode.

I DO not join the prophets of doom when I point to a possible parallel with the situation in England, where the Conservative Party returned to power after making promises it is often finding utterly impossible to fulfill. The great personality of Churchill and the most unselfish endeavors of many of the excellent men around him are proving incapable of coping with the problems they inherited from their predecessors and with the basic economic weaknesses of England today. The simple fact that the Conservative Party inherited these problems at the moment when they approached their most critical stage could well place a severe handicap on this party in England which is the nearest counterpart of the Republican Party here. If the demeanor of the Conservative Party should be anything but highminded, efficient, and incorrupt, it could be eclipsed by other forces more extreme—with untold consequences to England.

The situation is not exactly parallel because here in the United States there is basic economic *strength* rather than weakness. But the present favorable attitude of the public toward business is such that it can change drastically and quickly if the Republican Party, the Party of Business, believes that it has "earned" a joy ride. Actions of short-sighted self-interest will not be condoned. Everyone in the public eye is *always* on permanent probation!

But nevertheless the Party of Business has earned—and has been given—a mandate. The important thing is how this mandate will be interpreted. If it is to be interpreted properly, it is important to examine the terms and conditions of the public's approval which business now enjoys.

During the past twenty years we have asked thousands of people hundreds of questions about various aspects of business. From them it is clear that business seems to have won its way out of the "Public Be Damned" onus of fifty years ago. Moreover, the Businessman's Party no longer wears the "Depression" label which was

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"Happy New Era!"



The Awful Gulf of Mind

P. W. BRIDGMAN

TWO small books lately published —“The Impact of Science on Society,” by Bertrand Russell,* and “Modern Science and Modern Man,” by James B. Conant,** are so similar in their general topic that the title of either might have been used to subtitle the other. Lord Russell’s book is, on the whole, more concerned with the status of society in the future, when the present tumult and shouting shall have died down, while President Conant’s is more concerned with the immediate present and future.

The main theses of Russell’s book have by now become familiar, either through his own earlier writings or through the writings of others: the growing impossibility of narrow nationalism with a single world government; the ultimate and logical consequence; the necessity for limitation of population through birth control; and the growing drift toward dictatorship, totalitarianism, and suppression of the individual as the technical tools for the control of the masses, including psychological and biological tools, become more effective.

This leads Lord Russell to make some pretty gloomy predictions. For example, he says: “But if human life is to continue in spite of science, mankind will have to learn a discipline of the passions which in the past has not

been necessary. Men will have to submit to the law even when they think the law unjust and iniquitous.” One wonders whether a frame of mind which will accept unjust law is adequately described in terms of “discipline of the passions.”

On the other hand, there are passages not so gloomy. Russell is inclined to think that in an eventual war of extermination between a power in which the individual has been subordinated to the state and a power in which the individual is regarded as the end of the state, the latter will win because of the superior scientific development of the country which encourages individual initiative.

Lord Russell devotes a considerable portion of his book to analyzing and expounding the conditions which must be satisfied if certain desired goals are to be reached. Thus he writes: “Means must be found of subjecting the relation of nations to the rule of law, so that a single nation will no longer be, as at present, the judge of its own case.” Yet he makes little if any inquiry into the methods by which such means may be found. His closest approach to a solution is offered with mock humility—“love, Christian love, or compassion.” But surely the solution is not as simple as this. Love must also be intelligent, and our present unsolved problem is to find what in our bafflingly complicated modern life constitutes intelligent love. The solution demands, I believe, the development of an ethics

that goes so far beyond our present ethics as to be essentially new.

“THE Impact of Science on Society” is a typical Russellian production. The reader will find it impossible to put it down, held by the sheer fascination of watching his mind work. At the same time I think Russell puts his tongue in his cheek too often. Many times the reader can defend himself against his charges, as, for example, against this outrageous piece of pseudo-history: “While population was sparse, people merely moved on when former fields became unsatisfactory. Then it was found that corpses could be used as fertilizers, and human sacrifice became common. This had the double advantage of increasing the yield and diminishing the number of mouths to be fed.” But the defense is not always so obvious. Sometimes the reader feels a suspicion that Russell does not particularly care whether he finds a defense for himself or not, a suspicion that can only diminish the effectiveness of the argument. Which is a pity.

The temper and tone of President Conant’s book are different. This, like

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* **THE IMPACT OF SCIENCE ON SOCIETY.** By Bertrand Russell. New York: Simon & Schuster. 114 pp. \$3.

** **MODERN SCIENCE AND MODERN MAN.** By James B. Conant. New York: Columbia University Press. 111 pp. \$2.25.