

A YOUNG REPUBLICAN

The Party and the Deep Blue Sea

"Ideally, the Republican Platform should acknowledge a domestic enemy, the State."

By WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR.

TWO thousand words are mine to give "... an appraisal of the Republican Party as it is today, what it stands for, and what changes might be expected if it were swept into office next year." In a word, it is in sorry shape; it stands, though with overtones of reluctance, for a continued transfer of social power into the hands of the State; changes would be few, and yet such changes as there would be are desirable.

Albert Jay Nock once wrote in *Our Enemy the State* that the average American is the most unphilosophical of persons, that "Mr. Jefferson Brick, General Choke and the Honourable Elijah Pogram made a first-class job of indoctrinating their countrymen with the idea that a philosophy is wholly unnecessary, and that a concern with the theory of things is effeminate and unbecoming." Mr. Nock sums up American political adolescence by suggesting that Michel Chevalier properly tagged us, even though he wrote a hundred years ago, as having the "morale of an army on the march."

As witness to this, of course, is our lack of purposive, three-dimensional thinking about the nature of the State. Reflecting this void, our two major political parties have painfully constructed an ephemeral battle line dividing two almost identical streams of superficial thought about the proper role of the State in a free society. It is perhaps due in part to our frantic preoccupation with the trivia that separate the 1952 Republican from the 1952 Democrat that we do tragic little thinking about the genus State, which many of us still believe, along with Herbert Spencer, to be "begotten of aggression and by aggression," and which many of us still regard, along with Henry Mencken, as "the common enemy of all well-disposed, industrious, and decent men."

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THUS, the most striking feature of the coming elections, and certainly the one that will

most puzzle future students of our history, is that in 1952 no American citizen had an opportunity forthrightly to reject the ideology of the Leviathan State. The pretensions of the Republican Party to offering a significant alternative to Statism are palpably unconvincing.

They are not, of course, to be measured by Republican compliance with the extensive and productive tax laws that are needed to support a vigorous anti-Communist foreign policy. The indices of the Republican attitude towards a free society are seen in far less spectacular items than ECA aid or a 50-billion dollar defense budget, and yet they are seen in far more meaningful terms. For the "opposition" party today countenances all the important hallmarks of political and economic centralization: managed currency, egalitarian fiscal policies, federal minimum wage laws, federal social security, federal subsidization of favored classes, institutions and special interests, and the withering away of state boundaries.

The question that hotly follows is why. Why does the Opposition Party refuse to offer a genuine opposition? At this juncture the Statists leap to their most favorite answer to the query. They tell us that the anarchistic, uncivilized, uncharitable rugged individualism associated with the pre-Roosevelt era is forever discredited by the American people. The social revolution of the New Deal is a *fait accompli* and no political party could rally any enthusiasm in 1952 for a genuinely anti-Statist program.

My own diagnosis does not totally contradict this one. To begin with, I see the issue primarily as one of freedom or non-freedom. To the extent that a fraction of the individual's time, which we will for convenience equate with his earnings, is *a priori* mortgaged to the government and against his will, then he is to that same extent not free. Since there is no money except the individual's money, and since his money represents his labor or his savings or the produce of his tools, the assessment of that money by the State represents a direct levy on that individual's freedom. Now, if it is true, as the Liberals would have it, that the Republican Party could not

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evoke any support for a program that calls for extracting from the individual *only* that money necessary to carry on the minimum functions of government (loosely, defense, courts, and conservation), then it must follow that the American people no longer value maximum individual freedom.

Now this may well be the case. Most human beings respond to education, and freedom has been depreciated in the nation's schools for some years now. The responsibility of the State to regulate and nourish individual lives is not only acknowledged, but eloquently and insistently affirmed by an increasing number of the most efficacious of influence-molders: the teachers.

And yet, there has been no dramatic show-down. There is no tangible proof that the Republican Party would indeed fail to win over the people to a platform of freedom. And even if it should fail, it would have succeeded in alerting the people to the fact that there still exists, in theory at least, an alternative to State Paternalism. And this would seem to be a noble enough and a traditional service for a political party whose birth and early success grew out of its refusal to condone human slavery.

One thing we know: in the past we have temporized with collectivism, and we have lost. And after the campaigns were over, we were left not with the exhilaration and pride of having done our best to restore freedom, but with the sickening humiliation of having failed to seduce the American people because we were pitted against a more glib, a more extravagant, a more experienced gigolo.

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THERE is perhaps a more decisive reason why the Republican Party will not seriously oppose the Democrats, and here we return to the indictment of Mr. Nock against the American people. It may be that because we exhibit the morale of an army on the march it is a fair deduction that we cannot understand the nature of the State, the irreconcilability between individual freedom and State-sponsored security; and perhaps because of this endemic inability to "see things as they are," we feel we can have our cake and eat it too.

Perhaps our plight is even worse than our inability to think through the implications of federal social security, the implications of Big Government. Perhaps our trouble is that we don't think about it *at all*. There is disturbing evidence that this is our Number One national problem,

and one which the Republican Party, at least, is doing very little to alleviate, for it refuses even to raise the issue.

The objection arises that such apathy hardly squares with the widespread tension and excitement—even today, more than half a year before the national elections—over which of the two parties will wield the mace after next November. After all, the nation's editors and columnists are greeting the pre-election season like a bridge club would the divorce of its president. They linger over tid-bit details, they fabricate and circularize them, and they dress them up in all sorts of fanciful costumes as they solemnly contemplate a) who will be nominated, and b) who will win.

But the sense of such activity is gone when the spotlight refuses to train on political platforms, focusing instead on political personalities. National politics have become so remote, so unresponsive, that the basic and all-important unit of society—the individual—feels powerless to assert himself, even assuming he wished to do so.

The result, of course, is a battle for power waged by towering political personalities who are bored by issues, who are afraid to stand or fall on competing political ideologies. Thus there is less and less thought about grave issues of policy, and more and more attention to dramatic personae. There is no more flamboyant example of this than the suggestion by Senator Claude Pepper, at the Democratic Convention of 1948, that Eisenhower be nominated by acclamation and that he be allowed to write his own platform!

Given, then, our preoccupation with species as against genus, it is perhaps inevitable that the forthcoming election, no matter who wins it, will make little difference to the azimuth of our national parade.

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THE most important issue of the day, it is time to admit it, is survival. Here there is apparently some confusion in the ranks of conservatives, and hard thinking is in order for them. The thus-far invincible aggressiveness of the Soviet Union does or does not constitute a threat to the security of the United States, and we have got to decide which. If it does, we shall have to rearrange, sensibly, our battle plans; and this means that we have got to accept Big Government for the duration—for neither an offensive nor a defensive war can be waged, given our present government skills, except through the instrument of a totalitarian bureaucracy within

our shores. The question is raised: does it make a great deal of difference if we lose our freedom to a Georgian bandit or to a Missouri ignoramus? The question is a good one.

Still and all, our chances of ultimate victory against an indigenous bureaucracy are far greater than they could ever be against one controlled from abroad, one that would be nourished and protected by a world-wide Communist monolith.

Thus, many conservatives, and many Republicans, have got to think this problem through. And if they deem Soviet power a menace to our freedom (as I happen to), they will have to support large armies and air forces, atomic energy, central intelligence, war production boards and the attendant centralization of power in Washington—even with Truman at the reins of it all.

This, of course, does not argue that there should be bipartisanship in the means of foreign policy, resignation to excessive government waste and dishonesty, or, especially, any diminution of our effort to alert the American people to the horrors of welfarism. That campaign can never end, and we cannot repeat too often Jefferson's infallible axiom: "The government can only do something *for* the people in proportion as it can do something *to* the people"—adding, out of the insight garnered from a turbulent and revealing post-Jeffersonian chapter in world history, "and as it most certainly *will* do something to the people."

We must repeat this truism as often as Roosevelt repeated his promises to keep us out of war. Only then might the people believe it.

But with the publication of Senator Taft's book on foreign policy, few people harbor any suspicions that a Republican Administration would refuse vigorously to prosecute an effective and single-minded anti-Soviet foreign policy. Thus on the most important tactical issue of the day, the qualifications of the Republicans and the Democrats are roughly even, except that the odds are slightly in favor of the party that would not be hamstrung by obstinate and unreasoned allegiance to policies and figures responsible for blatant errors of the past.

The second issue of the campaign, the strategic issue, will not be raised, as I have indicated. Ideally, the Republican platform should acknowledge a domestic enemy, the State. The Republicans will unquestionably indulge again in their unprepossessing routine of litanies about the desirability of individualism and the evils of collectivism; and indeed, even desultory opposition to at least the most adventurous demands of the

Fair Deal makes the GOP, in my mind, the sounder national choice.

Yet, assuming a Republican victory, there is little reason to hope to stratify the government even where it is; any such hope is fast dissipated if we review the Party's record of assimilating, one by one, the articles of the New Deal.

The history of the GOP over the past fifteen years gives evidence of disheartening, though unsuccessful, opportunism. What were once the most dramatic and bitterly contested innovations of the New Deal—the cited managed currency, egalitarian tax policies, minimum wage laws, civil rights legislation, labor monopolies, and social security—now seem to be indelibly sketched into the "opposition" platform.

It appears to be the new historic destiny of the Republican Party to accept the Democratic platform, less a token constant. To that end, for example, Truman calls for national health measures and the Brannan plan, and the Republicans oppose them. But there is no indication that the organic relationship between the two parties is due for a change. In 1956 we may well see the Republican platform approving the health and farm measures, but violently disputing the Democrats' call for national ownership of steel, railroads and coal. The election of 1980 may well be fought over the issue whether any American has the right to criticize the party in power; and the Big Issue of 1984 might center on whether there shall be an election in 1988.

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TO CONCLUDE, a sensible attitude towards the Republican Party (for those who don't feel they have "to be with history if history is leading them into an abyss") would be to insist that it declare for substantive policy alternatives, to reflect the passions of that unknown but perhaps formidable number of persons who want to vote for the free marketplace but don't know where to go to do it.

Thus, the Republican Party should repudiate the inroads that have been made over the past years into individual freedom. But since the Republican Party will do no such thing, or at least gives no evidence that it contemplates doing any such thing, the election loses much of its interest and all its claims to an exercise of political democracy. Still and all, reason calls for Republican victory—if only to record a lack of faith in Harry Truman, suspicion of accelerated Statism, and the clean and human desire to see new names and faces in the headlines every morning.