

## CHAPTER XIX

### The Radical Rich

THERE WAS A TIME, in these United States, when a candidate for public office could qualify with the electorate only by fixing his birthplace in or near the "log cabin." He may have acquired a competence, or even a fortune, since then, but it was in the tradition that he must have been born of poor parents and made his way up the ladder by sheer ability, self-reliance and perseverance in the face of hardship. In short, he had to be "self made." The so-called Protestant Ethic then prevalent held that man was a sturdy and responsible individual, responsible to himself, his society and his God. Anybody who could not measure up to that standard could not qualify for public office or even popular respect. One who was born "with a silver spoon in his mouth" might be envied, but he could not aspire to public acclaim; he had to live out his life in the seclusion of his own class.

Theodore Roosevelt broke the tradition, but his was a special case. Though he had been born of fairly well-to-do parents, this circumstance was overcome by the story of his life, which had been popularized by his exploits in the Spanish-American War. When he organized his regiment of Rough Riders, it was brought out that as a boy he had been in poor health and that by sheer strength of will he had

overcome this handicap; he had made a "man" of himself by going West and enduring the hardships of life on the range; his Rough Riders consisted mainly of cowboys with whom he had roughed it during those years. So, in a way, he came within the scope of the Protestant Ethic, despite his origin, by an exercise of will power. Besides, he came along at a time when politics was in particularly bad odor, thanks to the stories of corruption unearthed by the "muck-rakers," and the professional politicians were in need of a show of respectability; he supplied it.

The point is that in those days the scions of great wealth—like Rockefeller, Harriman, Kennedy or Mennen Williams—would have had little chance in the public arena. Nor, indeed, would they condescend to lend their names to politics. The rich engaged in politics only to the extent of buying, through campaign contributions, the privileges which politicians could sell them, but showed no inclination to expose themselves to the shafts of public opinion. Perhaps this was due to the fact that a name like Roosevelt, Harriman or Rockefeller was anathema to the public, and they knew it. At any rate, no man of great wealth, whether self-accumulated or inherited, sought political preferment.

In the last thirty years, or since Franklin D. Roosevelt, the attitude of the public toward men of means, and particularly toward the inheritors of it, has been reversed, and now it is customary for such names to appear on the ballot. This is a political phenomenon worth exploring. Why does the electorate vote for the sons of rich men, and why do these sons seek public office?

The answer to the first question—why does the electorate vote for the sons of rich men?—seems to lie in the deterio-

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ration of the Protestant Ethic and the rising popularity of what has been called the Freudian Ethic. The Protestant Ethic, as has been noted, held that man is by nature a sturdy individual, self-reliant and responsible. The Freudian Ethic says this is not so. Freud said that the individual comes into this world unwillingly and is biologically incapable of meeting its demands. The baby suffers a trauma at birth—by virtue of coming out of the warmth and comfort of the womb and being confronted with conflict—and suffers throughout life from neuroses. Society is to blame for all the sufferings of mankind. The Freudians—those who have expanded the Freudian concept of the human character into an ideology—have undertaken, therefore, to alter society so as to make the path of the individual through life easier, more comfortable. The way to alter society to fit the Freudian pattern is through government action. This is called “social legislation,” which turns out to be handouts of tax money. Now, everybody is favorably inclined toward something-for-nothing, and the more of it they get the more they want. And so, it has come to pass that the bulk of the electorate casts its ballot for those who promise them more and more largess, rather than for those who insist that the people accept responsibility for their own welfare. And the sons of rich men, those whose fathers have taken care of all their needs and wants since birth, are inclined to look upon this Freudian concept with favor; they are all for giving, for taking care of people and for relieving them of responsibility. Hence, they promise and are elected.

But why do these sons run for office? Their fathers, those who made the fortunes through reliance on their own initiative and enterprise, certainly did not seek political pre-

ferment. Why do the sons go in for politics? There are several answers to this question, none of which is completely satisfying. Some psychologists maintain that their urgency derives from a guilt complex; feeling that they have no right to the wealth they inherited, that this wealth was ill-gotten, they have a compulsion to alter the system whereby their fathers or grandfathers accumulated this abundance. For, it is noted, they are all socialists and look with abhorrence on the capitalistic system; or, at least, they act as if they do when in office; they are all for leveling schemes and propose measures which will, if pursued, destroy all profits from enterprise, if not enterprise itself.

Then there is the power complex theory. These boys have had pretty much their own way since birth, have become satiated with the things that their economic power gave them, and are looking for new worlds to conquer. They yearn for political power for its own sake, not for any increase in economic power, which they have always enjoyed. And so, they spend their millions to buy political office; and when they are in office they give of the taxpayers' money not because of any sympathy for the "underprivileged," but because they have learned that by giving they buy votes, without which their tenure in office is jeopardized. And staying in office, continuing to exert power over people, has become the only reason for existence; without political power they would have to lead the humdrum life of enjoying their inherited wealth.

Then there is the theory advanced by G. K. Chesterton that the rich are really radical, that they are always in the forefront of new fashions, in thought as well as in customs; while those to whom the business of existence is a full-time

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job are for letting things alone. There is some historic support for this theory. The Gracchi brothers did much to introduce the New Deal in ancient Rome and they came from wealthy surroundings. The Protestant Reformation could not have got going without the support of well-heeled princes. It was the barons of England who induced King John to sign the Magna Carta, not the hoi polloi. And our own American Revolution was sponsored by men of means, while a peer of the realm, Lafayette, was a prominent leader of the French Revolution.

To be sure, the arguers for a revolution, the theoreticians and the intellectuals, may come from the class called poor, but until rich men get hold of it the proposed change never gets off the ground. Thus, Alexander Hamilton was a relatively poor man when he advocated the centralized government which the well-to-do, in the main, wanted. Theirs was the Constitution, and theirs alone. All the evidence indicates that the small farmer and the artisan, the bulk of the population, were doing fairly well under the Articles of Confederation and feared the radical instrument that had come out of the Philadelphia convention; they were conservative, or reactionary if you will. With few exceptions, the "advanced" thinkers were on the wealthy side, and that was so not because they hoped to gain by the proposed centralization. True, a number of delegates to the Constitutional Convention had been speculating in Continental paper which could become of value only if the proposed government was instituted; the industrialists among them hoped for a protective tariff, and the land speculators were looking avidly to the opportunities in the West when this vast continent had been incorporated in the public domain. But,

men like Madison and Adams and Jay were high-minded in their radicalism; they sincerely believed that the *summum bonum* was a government of, by and for the "rich and well-born"; they feared the ascendancy of the "mob." They were for change and they were the rich. The fact that a poor man was their leader does not deny the thesis; new ideas can and do originate in the minds of poor men, but they usually remain "crackpot" ideas until men of means give them standing.

So, beginning with the birth of the nation, every new idea that ever came to fruition had the sanction and the support of the affluent. The poor have ever been stand-patters, and for very good reason. Their preoccupation being what it is, any proposition to disturb their adjustment becomes suspect. Only when the making of a living becomes precarious will they listen to promising proposals; desperation rather than aspiration makes radicals of them. Politics to that class means "better times," and they will never throw out of office a known rascal if during his regime they enjoyed some regularity of income.

The New Deal was put over by the rich. Mr. Hoover was kicked out of office by the votes of the masses, to be sure, but that would have happened even if his opponent had been a confessed horse-thief; radicalism was rampant because poverty was. But, it was not until after the election that the New Deal came upon us, and there is reason to believe that Mr. Roosevelt himself did not think of it until after his inauguration. It was then that he called upon the college boys to mix him a miracle brew. The administering of this concoction was the work of the rich. The best monopoly brains of the country were at Mr. Roosevelt's beck and call

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throughout his regime, and heading his enforcement agencies were the finest skills in business. He could not have done without this cooperation.

Yes, the poor were for the New Deal, too, but only on a bread-and-butter basis. That's all it meant to them. They surely did not think up the make-wage projects; very few could tell you what the hieroglyphics WPA or PWA stood for. The NRA was the brain-child of professors from heavily endowed colleges, made to function by industrialists. When Mr. Roosevelt closed the banks it was the financiers, not the clock-punchers, who hailed him as their savior. The dispossessed sharecroppers would have settled for a bit of "growin' land"; they were given leaning shovels. The impoverished farmers did not ask Washington for hand-outs; all they wanted was relief from mortgage indebtedness, and they were getting that by way of private arrangements. Interest delinquencies were being forgiven and capital amounts were being voluntarily slashed, before 1933, and it looked as though the farmers would bale themselves out by the old-fashioned deflation of fictitious values; but this process was halted by the manna-from-heaven plan, and the bankers and insurance companies sang hosannas to the New Deal.

It was not because they could put it to their profit that the 1933 radicalism was taken up by the rich and given respectability. They embraced it because it had the glamor of the "latest thing." Maybe the yearning for novelty germinates in ennui, maybe it springs from the desire for self-expression or the hankering for leadership. At any rate, the glittering novelty of the New Deal perked up the jaded appetites of those who had time and money on their hands, and they went in for the "more abundant life" philosophy

with the same enthusiasm that they put into new-fangled religions, futuristic art and the latest dance steps. They lionized the literateurs of "social significance", they financed research foundations and manned them with Ph.D.'s who knew in advance what they were supposed to find out, they underwrote the salaries of professors who preached New Dealism. And, they subscribed heavily to the budgets of publications who criticised Mr. Roosevelt only when he was not as New Dealish as the editors wanted him to be.

The poor fell in line, for that is their inclination; those who occupy the lower rungs on the social ladder always emulate the envied ones above, and in this case the emulation was facilitated by need. Just as the shop-girl took to cigarette-smoking after the "better class" ladies made the practice *de rigueur*, so the socialistic nostrums became popular only after the wealthy made them respectable. The old values of freedom, self-reliance and individual responsibility were lost for lack of a reminder. Where in the public press could one read about individualism for twenty years after the inauguration of the New Deal?

Fashions in ideas make their way against reason, and even self-interest cannot restrain them once they get going. Even now, in the light of what Hitler did to the wealthy who put him in position to do so, Americans of that class cannot bring themselves to a renunciation of the Statism they fostered under Roosevelt. If they were capable of putting two and two together and coming up with the correct sum, they would howl their heads off at every accretion of State power. They would fight like mad against the growth of bureaucracy, against each and every intervention in the economy, every law that put a penny into the hands



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of the politician, every proposal leading to the militarization of the country. Not only because the weakening of the State must make for the social good, but because the strengthening of the State must eventuate in their own subjugation. But, despite the lessons of history, despite the dictates of reason, they seem incapable of understanding that the Caesarism they foster will cut their own throats; they go along with the trend on the theory, apparently, that sufficient unto the day is the unslit throat. They are slaves of their own fashioning.

Yes, the rich took to socialism because it was radical; even Theodore Roosevelt and Andrew Carnegie advocated the income tax. The inheritors of great wealth, who got their education during the heyday of the New Deal, embraced socialism because it was the "right thing" to do, because their class made it fashionable. Now that socialism is pretty well entrenched in this country, what new radicalism can the well-to-do take up? Perhaps they will turn to exotic religion. Or even to the faith of their fathers, though that would hardly be radical enough. Maybe the more curious among them will look into such esoteric philosophies as existentialism and undertake to make them fashionable. Then, again, the more thoughtful among them might undertake to reverse the political and social trend by digging into old fashioned individualism, which would be radical indeed.

There are indications that this is actually happening now. Whereas fifteen years ago there were so-called conservative publications, today several are being supported more or less liberally, while movements, like the one for the repeal of the income tax amendment, are gaining headway, thanks

to contributions from the well-to-do. Foundations for the advocacy of the free market and limited government are springing up. One hears more and more about the primacy of the individual, while doubt is being thrown on the virtues of collectivism, even in the endowed universities. Industrialists are issuing pamphlets and subsidizing advertisements favorable to the free economy; some are really anti-Statist in nature. There is today a formidable literature on the subject of freedom, while fifteen years ago there was none. So, it could be that the new fashion in thought will be the old doctrine of individualism, and some day even a Rockefeller may run for office on a platform of that kind.