

In Praise of Party Piffle

THE CONTRADICTIONS AND AMBIGUITIES in the platform adopted by the late Republican convention prompted the press which serves the party to promise satisfying revision by Candidate Willkie.

Similar deficiencies in the Democratic platform are likewise lost in that party's complete obeisance to Candidate Roosevelt.

The mass mind has a way of penetrating the murk of dialectic and of arriving at reality and the mass mind has discovered that political parties consist of candidates, not principles of political action. Thus our democratic process, which was presumed to be a method of selecting a course of government guided by principle, becomes government by elected leaders.

The policy of the nation is determined by the wisdom or ignorance, good will or foibles, moral strength or frailty of the men to whom we entrust it. That is, to our chosen Medicine Men.

This faith in our leaders is a flight from our own ignorance. Lacking knowledge of the cause of our unhappy environment, we establish idols to whom we then pray for deliverance; when no change for the better is forthcoming, we destroy old idols for new ones and continue our supplication.

The inefficacy of our prayers suggests the lack of divinity in our elected idols. These man-made gods seem to be as clayish as the stock from which they are made. That is, our political leaders can be no wiser and no more virtuous than we are; our leadership is a reflection of ourselves.

This is demonstrated in both the method of arriving at pre-election pledges and the utter disregard of them after election. Our would-be leaders seek to embody in these promises of performance not their considered ideas of government principle and management but what they believe to be the hopes and desires of the voters. The problem of platform makers is to ascertain what the public wants, and to promise delivery.

But the unenlightened public is similarly confused; its appetites are its principles, its variegated desires unrelated to public policy; therefore, the promises must be contradictory and ambiguous.

After election the impossible promissory platform cannot be a guide for government. Only by the wisdom or whim of the elected official—limited only by an intuition of what the confused public mind will accept—can a course be charted.

A notorious case of this kind is the Democratic platform upon which Mr. Roosevelt rode to victory in 1932. In it were statements of policy which were in direct violation of legislative action promulgated by the successful candidate immediately after election; indeed, in this platform there was no indication of the shape or character which the New Deal took.

The people were hardly shocked by this complete violation of the supposedly contractual obligation, because in their confusion they were ready to accept any plan that promised relief from continuing poverty which their Medicine Man might propose. In their prayerful ecstasy the repudiation of platform promises was completely forgotten.

In the platform of 1932 there was one pledge that was kept—the repeal of the prohibition amendment. It was kept because the desire was unmistakably expressed. Here was one thing that the people knew they wanted.

Politicians, then, will give us the legislation we want, provided we know what we want and are articulate about it. The politician who should try to go beyond this formula, who should attempt legislation for which there is no popular demand even if in his considered opinion it would result in a better social order—such as the socialization of rent and the abolition of taxes—probably would be stoned to death. At any rate the lack of public opinion in its support would vitiate his legislation, and the principle involved would be discredited.

In the present state of public enlightenment, Messrs. Willkie and Roosevelt can offer us, without fear of effective criticism, the contradiction of non-involvement and aid to belligerents, the impossibility of taxes that encourage production, the anomaly of relief and prosperity. Since nobody will pay any attention to such stupidities, knowing full well that platforms have no relation to political performance, the issue of this campaign will be resolved by the preponderance of faith in either of the candidates for the job of Medicine Man of the United States.

Those who retain faith in, or have received benefits from, the legerdmain of the New Deal will vote to continue its apostle in office. Mr. Willkie will appeal to those who have suffered from the metaphysical gyrations of the last eight years, or who believe devoutly that in him they have found a deliverer, a saviour.

So, let's cast a vote for Franklin D. W. Willkie.