

The Inevitable Third Term

WILL HE RUN for a third term? If he does, can he win? How about the American tradition?

Speculation along these lines will be furious until Mr. Roosevelt chooses to settle the argument of his succession by his own dictum or the Democratic convention in July renders its verdict. Most important, from a social point of view, will be the reaction of the American people to his bid, should he make it, for a third term.

In the fifth century B. C., Athens was in the doldrums. It had a depression. Its people were divided economically between the wealthy landowners and the landless artisans. Its unemployment problem was aggravated by an influx of migrant job seekers from other city-states and from Asia Minor through the port of Piraeus.

Along came a spell-binder from the upper class, who was duly elected to a magistracy by the people. He became general-in-chief and remained so almost without interruption for thirty years. His name was Pericles.

The political set-up of that day in some respects was more democratic than our present arrangement, for every citizen of the city-state theoretically had a hand in the running of it. The franchise was denied to slaves and women, but citizenship carried with it the right to vote directly on all public affairs and on all officials. Ultimately Pericles did restrict the suffrage to those whose parents on both sides were Athenian-born, because of the growing population of foreigners, but this limitation was not imposed until he had been kept in office for most of his time. He was indeed the people's choice, year after year.

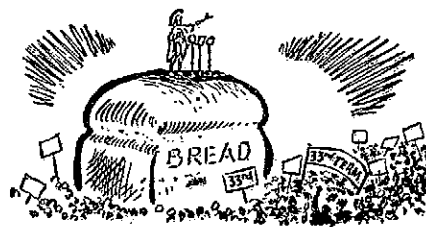
For he fostered public works projects that provided employment for both artisans and artists. He gave encouragement to the professional class of his day; that is, the philosophers. He provided free seats for the "underprivileged" at the popular form of entertainment, the Dionysia. When things got very bad he led his people into war, but, until circumstances and ill-advised collaborators forced him into the disastrous Peloponnesian War, he made certain that his martial excursions were short and profitable.

In one respect he had an advantage over modern rulers in that he did not have to tax his people too heavily; for his make-work and relief program he found funds in the treasury of the Delian League, a confederation of island city-states dependent upon the protection of the Athenian navy.

For about three decades Pericles ruled the roost

in Athens. His was the original fireside chat. The best swinger of rhetoric of his era, he was a great promiser, a great reliever.

The story of Pericles suggests that the economic condition of a country may have a bearing upon the



continuity of a political party or an official in power. Maybe that explains, also, President Roosevelt's plea to Congress last month to let him spend next fiscal year's relief fund (estimated at \$975,000,000) in eight months, four of which precede the election.

But regardless of the present third term tempest-in-the-teapot, history tells us that the form of government we may expect to enjoy in the future will depend on the ease or difficulty with which we can make a living. No political structure, no constitutional restrictions, no system of checks and balances, no traditional fetishes can withstand the pressure of economic forces. A pauperized people have no patience with forms. They want bread. And he who gives a hungry man a meal is his sanctified hero.

Therefore, whether Mr. Roosevelt runs for the third term, whether he is elected, is important only as a tendential indication. Are eleven years of depression enough? Have we been conditioned sufficiently to accept paternalism as a fixed political arrangement? If not, we will be.

For there is no indication that our economy will change for the better in the near future. Rather, there are indices that point to further decline. With every decline comes a break-down of moral stamina, and slave resignation will express itself in the Pericles plan. The third term is inevitable.