

The Baby-Kissing Contest

CANDIDATE Willkie has a political philosophy which, according to his acceptance speech, amounts to this: The New Deal is all right, but let me run it.

Candidate Roosevelt seems to be hiding any political philosophy he may espouse behind the dignity of his present office. Yet it leaked out, perhaps by design, in the acceptance speech of his running mate, and sounds like this: Elect me or the bogey-man of Berlin will get you.

One man is depending for election on the popularity of the hand-out tradition perfected by the other, plus the traditional unpopularity of the third term. The other rests his case on the mass fear which he has been instrumental in fomenting. In the sniping which seems to be all there is, or will be, to this campaign, contradictory generalities and rabble-rousing cover the absence of any definite political program on either side.

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Well, what can we expect?

Those who retain faith in the efficacy of politics as an instrument for social or economic betterment completely ignore the lesson of history, past and current, if they are familiar with it. Politics is merely the modus operandi of those who seek control of the power to tax the people. And they are not the politicians; they are the privileged group to whom the politicians are necessary for the continuance and extension of their lucrative privileges. The private collection of rent, the greatest of all privileges, is directly dependent on, and in proportion to, the collection of taxes. One could not exist without the other.

The marriage of politics and privilege is not a diabolical scheme carefully worked out by immoral men in secret conclave. It is a practice sanctified by time, hallowed by tradition, congealed in law, romanticized in the song and story of education. While immoral men may profit by it, men of the highest motives will defend it with argument and with their lives. Politicians are not consciously thieves; they are merely the product of the mores of their time. Pericles and Caesar were politicians; so are Hitler and Stalin.

Since the business (regardless of the motives) of politicians is to gain control of the power to tax the people, their success, where popular suf-

frage is the leverage, is dependent on the credulity of the people. Faith in the candidate is more precious than the understanding of principles. And where there is little understanding principles are decidedly dangerous.

Therefore, politics utilizes a propaganda technique for gaining faith in one's self, for destroying faith in one's opponent. Expounding of principles of government, economics or a social order may be indulged in only to the extent that the candidate believes the people understand or are ready to accept his theses. Sometimes this is done for the mere purpose of establishing a reputation for erudition and ability; always the principles expounded are sufficiently contradictory to appeal to groups of conflicting interests.

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The whole case of those who are striving for a better social order, then, rests not on politics and politicians but on a wider understanding of the forces which determine social trends. Candidates will not talk over our heads. Indeed, they cannot, for they do not know any more than we do; they are molded by the mores.

But, must all the people be educated before the social order can be freed of privilege and of taxation and their attendant evils? Maybe. What difference does it make? If that is the job, that must be done. But there seems to be something in the theory of an educable vanguard—the intellectually curious who throughout the ages have attracted the more phlegmatic by their ideas and their sincerity. It may be that an educable vanguard—like the Prophets of Israel or the Apostles of Christ—is all that is needed. Perhaps only one per cent of the people can and will lead the rest.

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The point is that politics and politicians offer no hope for deliverance from the chaotic and cancerous social order in which we live. Rather, unless and until the course to correct this condition gains common recognition, the condition will be perpetuated through politics by politicians.

In the meantime, we must endure candidates like Willkie and Roosevelt, campaigns like the present one, with a sanity-saving bit of humor: "Yer pays yer money and yer takes yer choice."