

On the Significance of the Election

di Murray N. Rothbard

The major and significant interpretations of the election are as follows: 1) a resounding defeat for all the pet "darlings" of the Socialist ADA-CIO-PAC masterminds; 2) a triumphant vindication of what has come to be known as "McCarthyism"; 3) a growing resurgence of what is misnamed "isolationism" and should rather be known as "Continentalism" or "America First."

In other words a swing to the Right of major proportions. This swing is even more significant than the vintage election of 1946. The 1946 victory was a heroic one, to be sure, but it was more of a tentative reaction, particularly against the OPA mess, than a result of clear thinking.

And incidentally, 4) the election dumped into the ashcan at last the celebrated and fallacious "large vote" doctrine of the Socialist Louis Bean. This latter was particularly pleasing to me as an amateur election expert. Bean had coined the doctrine that the larger the vote, the more votes for the Democrats; on this premise he explained the elections from 1940-48. I, on the contrary, recognized this as subtle leftist propaganda implying: 1) that the mass of the "people" are pro-Democratic, and 2) that the best way for Republicans to win was to sit back and do nothing, hoping for a light vote. I, on the contrary, coined a different doctrine to explain these results, viz: that the Republicans will make great gains waging an aggressive, ultra-right wing campaign, and will lose campaigning on a "high-minded," mealy-mouthed basis. My theory was fully justified in 1948, when the leftist, "high-minded" Dewey and Warren went down to a ringing defeat, even though the vote was relatively light! So while Bean luxuriated in the bath of a winning prediction, I came to the conclusion that the light vote meant, not that Truman had received a mandate, but that ultra-right-wing Republicans had gone fishing in disgust on election day. As a result, Bean now must eat crow; the vote was relatively heavy – over 40 million – yet the Republicans won smashing victories; further, the vote was heaviest, and the House seats were picked up, precisely in those states where the Republicans won in the Senatorial contests. Furthermore, those Senate victories occurred in the very states where the Republicans ran on an aggressive, true liberal, (1) "red-baiting," "pink-baiting," "isolationist" type campaign; and further [text missing].. [the r]eason that such an aggressive campaign is needed [is] because after all, the Dems have the office-holders and the union bosses, and, if the people are unaroused and apathetic, will win.

Some examples: Illinois – a clear-cut case. Majority Leader Lucas ran mainly on Truman's foreign policy, having shied away from socialized medicine and Brannan plan. Truman stressed "isolationism" as the key issue. On the other hand, there was Everett McKinley Dirksen, one of the GREATEST.

It was Dirksen who dubbed the so-called Marshall Plan, "Operation Rathole." It was Dirksen who heralded a return to America First; it was Dirksen who denounced the Fair Deal and all its works. The Number One point [text missing] of the campaign of Dirksen and magnificent Chicago Tribune was Vote Democratic – Vote for Endless Wars. When Truman called for election of Dems on behalf of peace, Dirksen said "what peace?" Dirksen won in a smashing victory, nearly carrying Chicago itself. Watch Dirksen; he's a comer!

The same theme was repeated in the other states: Taft's dazzling and wonderful liquidation of the political power of the union bosses; Butler's smashing victory over Bad Tydings; the ultra-right wing Millikin crushing the ultra-leftist Carroll; the right-wing Capehart's handy victory in Indiana; Dick Nixon's phenomenal victory over the Douglas woman on the issue of "red-baiting"; the NAM's Bennett triumphing over the leftist Thomas;

Hickenlooper's thumping victory; Wiley's smashing victory in McCarthy's home state over the direct issue of "McCarthyism"; Herman Welker's great victory in Idaho (watch Welker; he's a comer); Pat McCarran's triumph in Nevada – the previous ousters of Pepper, Taylor, and especially Frank Graham by Willis Smith in an aggressive campaign.

The only way to win in politics is: a) offer a clear-cut consistent program, and b) take the offensive, always slam the opponent. Vote Democrat and you vote for Coddling of Commies; for Union Goons; for Endless Wars; for Higher Taxes; for Regimentation; for Inflation. That is the path the winning Republicans took, and that is the path they must take in 1952. (Or, in McCarthy's phrase, oust the "pinks and the punks" from the government.)

What about the cases where the Dems won? Well, there was Lehman in New York – but Hanley ran a weak, defensive, pathetic campaign, and the fact that he only lost by about 200,000 votes is evidence that he could have won on an aggressive "baiting" campaign against Lehman. Sure, Dewey won handily, but with the support of many leftists, and against a complete unknown. Even so, he won by less of a percentage than Taft, who ran against the heaviest campaign ever conducted by the union bosses and ADA intelligentsia.

McMahon and Benton in Connecticut ran against men who put a weak, mushy, leftish, "Dewey-type" campaign. Talbot even refused to let McCarthy campaign for him in Connecticut. So, polite and "high-minded," Talbot was snowed under. Bush lost in Connecticut even though – praise the lawd – Bowles was ejected. Bush lost because he is a partner of W. Averill Harriman, and ran that sort of campaign, alienating the small but gallant band of extreme right-wingers headed by Vivien Kellems, who "cut" Bush to teach him a lesson.(2)

Donnell lost in Missouri (and to an anti-Truman Democrat) because this middle-of-the-roader waged the politest campaign since the Dewey fiasco. He was consequently trounced. Rev. Alexander lost in Oklahoma because he went on record as favoring world-government, which cooked his goose in that highly patriotic state, where they still salute the American Flag and believe in the Declaration of Independence.

What about Pennsylvania? Duff, a Socialist-Republican, was supposed to win by a smashing margin. Actually, he almost lost, and won by only 150,000 votes. He ran a polite, leftish campaign, until, in the final week, his scared advisers told him for Christ sake get on the ball, whereupon he "McCarthyized" diligently, saving his political neck.

What of the House seats? At first glance, it looks as if my prediction was way off there. However, it was remarkably accurate in the states where Right-wing Republicans were running for Senate: we picked up about the predicted seats in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio; fell behind my predictions in New York, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Connecticut, where mealy-mouths ran.

Just a word about the House members – all good, pure [laissez faire] Liberals will be saddened by the knowledge that the following won't be back (due to retirement): Frederick C. Smith (Ohio), Michener, Macy, LeFevre, McMillen, Church. But on the other hand, back in the House are such great guys as Buffett of Omaha, George Schwabe, B.C. Reece, Charles Kersten. And one newcomer is none other than Frank T. Bow (Ohio). It was Bow who made Senator McCarthy himself take a back seat by uncovering the pinko activities of Secretary of Interior Chapman. Senator Schoepfel, not exactly a leftist, backed down on the charges soon, but Bow never did. Keep your eye on Bow; he's a comer.

The 1952 Republican convention will be a dramatic and significant one; it will represent a fight to the finish between the True Liberal wing, which has more or less dominated the party in Congress, and the Socialist wing, which has taken over the Presidential campaigns. The battle lines are being drawn, so it is far too early to predict the outcome. My hunch, however, is that this time the Rightists can do it, and if they do, it will be an epic occasion.

*From a letter of November 15, 1950. Some punctuation and abbreviations have been changed.

1. Where Rothbard says "true liberal" or "Liberal," he is referring to laissez faire liberals.
2. Presumably the grandfather of the present GOP nominee.