



**P**olitics is, in the best sense of the word, an unprincipled business. It has no place for inflexible principles of thought and behavior, save as preambles to bills or perorations for speeches. Expediency is definitely the determining factor in all political transactions.

This was illustrated in the recent imbroglio over the tidelands oil bill, which gave the several states title to certain offshore lands and the subsoil minerals. Opposed to the bill were a number of Southern Democrats.

It so happens that the Democrats, and particularly the Southern Democrats, have long been committed to the doctrine of states' rights, as opposed to the centralization of power. They have held to the autonomy of the states, in the management of their internal affairs, as a principle so sacred as to justify secession from the Union.

Yet we recently found the Southern Democrats filibustering against a bill that, in a measure, supported states' rights. Why? Simply because it was a Republican Administration that advocated this measure, and it was deemed good politics for the Democrats to oppose it. They were establishing an "issue" which they hoped would stand them in good stead in the 1954 elections.

**A**s for the controversy over the tidelands bill itself, a good deal of fustian was expended about the "big steal" — an implication that the oil corporations would be the beneficiaries of the bill. But the real issue pertained to the important matter of taxation, namely: Who would get the rent (or the royalties) of the offshore oil lands, the federal government or the states? (For in either case, the lands would be leased to operating companies to do the actual pumping of the oil.)

The original constitutional principle was that only the states would have the power to levy

taxes on land values. It was an assurance that the states would have the wherewithal to carry on their affairs independent of the central government. To be sure, the Sixteenth Amendment, giving the federal government the right to tax incomes, whittled away the exclusive authority of the states to levy direct taxes. But the right to levy the direct tax on land values was not included in the Amendment. It remained the sole prerogative of the states.

This small guarantee of the fiscal autonomy of the states would have been breached by the defeat of the tidelands bill. For, a precedent would have been established for federal taxation of land within the boundaries of the states.

Many of the states now embrace land that was once under water; much of the cities of New York and Chicago, for instance, consists of filled-in land. Could the federal right to tax offshore lands be interpreted to include the taxation of these once submerged areas? How about the harbors of New Orleans, Boston and Philadelphia, all once under water? Then, of course, there was the question of whether the federal government could tax oyster beds and other offshore sources of wealth, if it could tax submerged oil wells.

The Truman Administration recognized the states' rights issue involved in the controversy, and sought to get around it by bribery. It offered to split the royalties with the states. Attached to this offer was a condition that should have gagged the states' righters, namely that the money thus allocated to the states was to be used for education. The federal government would thereby attain the position of being a benefactor of the states' school systems — thus furthering the drive toward federal control of schools.

Involved in this controversy, then, was the old issue of states' rights versus centralization. And some Southern Democrats, guided only by political expediency, lined up against the principle for which their forbears fought.

On the morning of November 5, 1952, the thoughts of all good politicians turned to future Novembers. Those who were elected began planning their re-election campaigns, those who were defeated concentrated on means of getting back into power. Principles were talked about, but as everybody on Pennsylvania Avenue knows, this kind of talk had little effect on the strategy being formulated; the talk was intended, it is always intended, to please the voters' ears.

The first four months of the Eisenhower regime were hidden in a cloud of confusion; but it is now apparent that the White House was busy mapping a strategy. The Democrats, relegated to the role of counter-punchers, had to wait for the Republicans to reveal their strategy, before they could formulate one of their own.

It gradually became apparent that the "mess" in Washington is not to be cleaned up. The "mess," which was an oratorical issue in the campaign, is nothing but a proliferation of government jobs. The corrupt elements at which the Republicans had directed their barbs, apparently have ducked under cover. And new jobholders must become acquainted with their powers before they can misuse them. But the number of jobs has not been materially cut, and it is evident that as soon as the Republicans can eliminate entrenched jobholders (not an easy task), the emptied chairs will be filled.

Only one bureau has been abolished, the OPS, but against that there is a new Cabinet department with considerable employment possibilities. Yes, the "mess" will continue. And Democrats are taking note of that.

The principle invoked during the campaign was, in effect, that the "mess" was due to government intervention. It was hinted that if the Republicans got in, they would take steps to reduce the amount of intervention and, inferentially, would reduce the size of government. But now it appears that the strategy for re-election is to be that used by the previous regimes: build up a machine of Republican jobholders, while seeming to take government out of the hair of the people.

This is not duplicity; it is politics. The Republican regime could not, even if it wished, abolish the Welfare State which is the heart of the "mess." The people would not stand for it.

Instances come to hand even as this is being written. The House of Representatives has ordered substantial cuts in appropriations for Bonneville and other power projects; congressmen from the affected areas are screaming that their jobs will be jeopardized if these cuts are upheld. Farm senators report complaints from constituents because of proposed cuts in rural electrification, soil conservation and similar spending. Where ordnance plants and private defense factories are threatened, the citizens are becoming fidgety. Although the House has voted to end public housing, the Senate will put it back because, by the time the Senate acts, the bankers and builders and unions will have become articulate.

The resistance of large groups of voters to any shrinking of the Welfare State will hamper the Republicans in their avowed purpose to cut expenses and lower taxes. Therefore, the promise of the campaign will not be fulfilled. That is what the Democrats are praying for.

To be sure, the Democrats are hoping that the Republicans will follow *some* principle in government. Nothing, in fact, would please them more than to see the "ins" follow a strict course of retrenchment, of reducing the size of government and taxes — and, in short, of liquidating the Welfare State. That would be principled action; but, it would also assure the Republicans of defeat. Why? Because the people have become *inured* to handouts and will trade principle for profit any day. And the politicians know it.

Washington is not without its humorous touches. There is a good deal of howling about "politics" from bureaucrats who have felt the ax. They are quite sincerely outraged, forgetting completely that their own appointment, in the good old days, was just as political. Proving that if you become well accustomed to something glorified, the halo seems to grow quite becoming.