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## Political Parties in a Free Society

By GLENN E. HOOVER

"I never submitted the whole system of my opinion to the creed of any party of men whatever, in religion, in philosophy, in politics or in anything else, where I was capable of thinking for myself. Such an addiction is the last degradation of a free and moral agent. If I could not go to Heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all." (Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to Francis Hopkinson, March 13, 1789)

THE CURRENT DECLINE in the prestige of political parties is all but universal. Britain, with two parties, each resting on class support, may be an exception, but in the other democracies parties are seldom rated higher than necessary evils. We discount what they say, suspect what they do, and no longer look to them for solutions to our graver problems. Their older adherents are losing their enthusiasm, and the younger voters, particularly in Germany, France and Italy, are openly hostile to them.

In this country the confusion about political parties results from the conflicting opinions of them which are still propagated. Our schoolroom definition of a political party runs about as follows: a political party is an organization whose members have agreed on principles and programs designed to serve the public interest. Each of such parties tries to persuade a majority to give it control of the government (federal, state, or local) so that it can put its beneficent program into effect. Such parties are obviously of the imagined or idealized variety and, with few exceptions, they are as unreal as unicorns.

Those who believe that political parties are devices which unselfish citizens use in the public interest are confused when they learn that those who won our country its independence disapproved of parties. They showed this disapproval by adopting a Constitution which was to enable

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our national government to function without parties of any kind. Nor was this an oversight: President Washington and his contemporaries knew the history of parties or "factions" and in his Farewell Address he solemnly warned us of their dangers.

We gradually learned too that politics is a dirty business, that "politician" is a term of reproach and that those who manipulate the party machinery—the "practical politicians"—are the worst species of an evil genus. On every hand we heard that party politics should be rigorously excluded from the conduct of our foreign affairs, the administration of our schools, our municipal governments, our judicial system and from every governmental agency whose work must be well done.

It may help to clarify the issues if we recall that the critics of political parties are not opposed to organizations created to further some particular reform. To illustrate, no one would criticize organizations designed to lower the voting age, abolish our protective tariffs or do away with peacetime conscription. Such organizations will dissolve, either when they have attained their objectives or have abandoned their hopes. Our major political parties are different. They have no definite objectives, but only a continuing desire to gain or retain for themselves the rewards which a victorious party can distribute. As has been said, such parties are like empty bottles into which any liquid can be poured, if only the labels remain unchanged.

To understand the *raison d'être* of our permanent political parties we should recall the objectives of those who first invented the device. Those objectives were not obscure. To the credit of these inventors be it said, they were not hypocrites. Andrew Jackson, his contemporaries and successors were frankly interested in getting jobs for their adherents and governmental favors for their chief financial supporters. For those who manipulate the machinery of both our major parties these are still the ties that bind—whatever be the planks in their platforms or the idealistic utterances of their candidates.

The national committees of the major parties furnish the direction and control of the party apparatus. Their interest in government is revealed by the following United Press dispatch, published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (a Republican newspaper) of April 12, 1955:

The White House has decided to step up its campaign to provide more federal jobs for patronage-hungry Republicans, it was disclosed today. . . . Informed sources said a memorandum on the new proposals is being drafted at the White House and should be sent to heads of federal agencies within two weeks. . . .

It will streamline the paper work involved in the program set in motion by the White House last year for recruiting applicants for many government posts through the GOP National Committee. . . .

If anyone believes that the national committee of the Democratic Party is less concerned with getting jobs for the party faithful than its counterpart in the Republican Party, he lacks sophistication. Both committees are concerned only with *Realpolitik*, i.e., with distributing governmental favors to those who keep the machinery going.

#### Nonpartisan Elections and Independent Voting

OUR MISTRUST OF PARTIES is shown by the increasing number of officials elected on a nonpartisan basis. The directors of our school districts, the elected school administrators and state and county judges are commonly chosen in this fashion. In two states the members of the legislature as well, are chosen in nonpartisan elections and one may safely predict that other states will adopt this reform. The California Senate recently voted 26 to 9 to submit such an amendment, and if adopted it would complete the electoral reforms urged by Governor Hiram Johnson in his early crusading days.

But it is in the field of local governments, and particularly our cities, that most progress has been made. The following table shows the number of cities that have already decided that political parties have no place in the conduct of municipal affairs:

Population Groups	Total No. of Cities	Number Reporting	Partisan Elections	Non-Partisan
Over 500,000	17	17	47.0	53.0
250,000 to 500,000	23	23	17.4	82.6
100,000 to 250,000	65	65	40.0	60.0
50,000 to 100,000	129	127	29.9	70.1
25,000 to 50,000	277	268	38.4	61.6
10,000 to 25,000	835	805	39.8	60.2
5,000 to 10,000	1,181	1,135	41.7	58.3
Total	2,527	2,440	39.8	60.2

Source: International City Managers' Association, *Municipal Year Book, 1954*, p. 75.

The extent of independent voting in what are supposedly partisan elections, also shows that parties have lost their influence, even on those who technically adhere to them. On this point the results of the general election in California in November, 1954, are illuminating. California law requires that those who wish to take part in a primary election must indicate their party affiliation when they register. As a result, each party's

"strength" is presumably indicated by the registration figures, even in advance of the election. The results of that election are summarized below:

California General Election, November, 1954			
Registration	Votes for Governor	Votes for U. S. Senator	Number of Congressmen Elected
Dem. 3,266,831	1,739,368	1,788,071	11
Rep. 2,415,249	2,290,519	2,090,836	19

Note: There were 174,476 registrants who declined to state any party preference, and 12,623 voters who registered as affiliated with minor parties.

What conclusions can be drawn from these results in a state where the Democrats outnumber the Republicans approximately 4 to 3? The election of a Republican governor and a Republican senator might be explained as personal triumphs of outstanding candidates but when the Republicans win the congressional seats 19 to 11 one can only conclude that party ties rest lightly on the California voters.

Some may believe that this applies only to the Democratic voters, but our common sense tells us that Democrats and Republicans are alike in disregarding the party affiliations of candidates. One can only conclude that candidates of the Republican minority are more popular than their opponents—even if that popularity is due, at least in part, to the efforts of an overwhelmingly Republican press and a much larger campaign fund. In any event, party labels are widely disregarded.

#### Parties and the Selection of Candidates

THE MAJOR PARTIES, either by conventions or party primaries, select the candidates whose names, together with their party labels, are to appear on the final ballot. Some believe this process (nomination) is a useful service which may offset the political evils attributed to the two big party "machines." However, in several democracies, all candidates for seats in the national parliament get their names on the ballot by the same procedure, whether they are endorsed by political parties, churches, fraternal societies, trade unions—or by no organizations at all.

For example, the procedure for nominating candidates for seats in the British House of Commons is simplicity itself. Any person may become a candidate by filling in a "nominating paper" containing an adequate description of himself, the signature of ten electors of his district and a deposit of 150 pounds, which he will forfeit if he does not receive one-eighth of the votes cast. This deposit ensures that a candidate is serious and not merely a publicity seeker; this seems preferable to the usual Amer-

ican practice of requiring independent candidates to present petitions signed by a large number of voters. If crack-pots and self-advertisers want to see their names on the ballot, it is better that they forfeit a deposit to the government than that they spend as much or more to hire professional circulators of petitions.

Because nomination by party conventions proved unsatisfactory, most states now regulate—and pay for—the party primary elections. In Britain the parties make their own selection without the intervention of the government, and no party labels appear on the ballot. In their general or parliamentary elections, the ballots could not be shorter; each voter has only to mark his choice for a representative in the House of Commons. It is assumed that voters know what party endorsement, if any, each candidate has received and largely because of their short ballot, this assumption is justified.

Our practice of listing the names of candidates in a "party column," perhaps under a Republican eagle or a Democratic rooster, resulted from our "long ballot" and the political illiteracy of our voters. Party symbols, "party columns" and the like are a convenience for those who want to vote a "straight" ticket, but do not know the party affiliations of the candidates. Such devices are also favored by office seekers who hope to be judged by their party labels rather than their own merits. The fact that irrational voters and mediocre candidates favor such devices is, in itself, sufficient to condemn them.

Our political parties, or "factions" as they were first called, have tried various methods for reaching agreement on the candidates they would support at the general election. Thus far no method has proved completely satisfactory. As our parties began to take shape their presidential candidates were chosen by the "Congressional Caucus" consisting of each party's delegation in the Congress, and candidates for state office were chosen by the "Legislative Caucus," consisting of each party's delegation in the state legislature.

This method proved unacceptable to those who believed the selection of candidates should be made by the "people" rather than office holders, and in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the "caucus" was abandoned in favor of state and national conventions. The national conventions still nominate the candidates for President and Vice-President, but in most states, the task of nominating party candidates has been taken away from the state party conventions. The conventions, it was said, were manipulated by "politicians," and direct primary laws were passed which

put the nominating power in the hands of those eligible to vote in the primary election.

The direct primary does enable the "rank and file" to choose directly their party's nominees, but the considerable cost of the primary election is borne by the taxpayers. Another objection to the direct primary is that it requires each voter to make another trip to the polling place where he is often confronted with a ballot as long as his arm, filled with names of people of whom he knows little or nothing. Many citizens respond to frequent elections and long ballots by refusing to vote at all. This is a natural reaction and experience has shown that non-voting is an evil that cannot be cured by exhortation.

The direct primary also gives a considerable advantage to candidates who have, or can get, the considerable funds which are required if a direct appeal is to be made to a large number of voters. For example, it is generally admitted that whoever would campaign seriously for Governor of California, or United States Senator from that state, will need a campaign fund of at least \$400,000. To be elected to either of these offices with a smaller fund would be something of a miracle and in California prudent candidates rely less on miracles than on money. In states which are smaller, both in area and in population, than California, smaller campaign funds may suffice, but in all states where the direct primary system prevails, big money still talks.

In the bad old days of the convention system, wealthy men, it is said, could win nominations by bribing delegates or promising to contribute generously to a campaign fund. The direct primary was supposed to enable the poorer aspirants to compete on equal terms with men who had money, but, to put it mildly, our hopes have been deferred. For example, the last senatorial race in Oklahoma was between an oil-millionaire and a cattle-millionaire; there, as in other states, the line between Democracy and Plutocracy has become a very thin line indeed.

#### Political Parties and the Independent Mind

FREE SOCIETIES were first established to protect persons and property but it is even more important that we protect our minds. Men are, by nature, puny and defenseless creatures and our species owes its dominance to our better developed reasoning powers. Nations too are strong in proportion to the intellectual freedom which their citizens enjoy. The notion that a state can be strengthened by controlling thought, discouraging dissent and creating a "monolithic" public opinion is a Communist-Fascist error that persists in defiance of all the teachings of history.

We know the evil which results when the mind of one person is dominated by another, and the pressures which organizations can exert are even more pernicious. All organizations designed to formulate and spread doctrine will develop orthodoxies to which they become emotionally attached. They will then discourage such free inquiry as might threaten their established creeds. A religious sect which believes its particular orthodoxy has divine approval may logically seek to preserve it, but in worldly affairs, creeds become dangerous as they become venerable. Orthodoxies in any field are designed to restrict thought, not to encourage it.

Organizations can shape our thinking without our being aware of it, for the content of our minds is largely drawn from the minds of those around us. We get our ideas from our parents, our teachers, our neighbors and the organizations which operate in our environment. It is only the independent thinkers, the men and women of genius who develop their own ideas. For example, if our religious and political beliefs were the result of our personal investigations, the Moslem creed would attract about the same percentage of adherents in Texas as in Turkey, and the percentage of children who matured into Republicans would be about the same in Alabama as in Maine.

A glance at the political map of any country, including our own, will show the extent to which we "inherit" our political beliefs. Sound ideas may be acquired in that way, but the fact remains that to accept uncritically the ideas of our "elders and betters," is completely irrational. As preparation for living in the modern world all "inherited" beliefs should be examined anew. These beliefs, and our elders who hold them, have made of our century—thus far—the most unstable, fear-filled, war-ravaged century in recorded history. Our very survival calls for an environment in which our minds can develop in complete freedom; in short an environment in which orthodox thinking will give way to heretical thinking—the only kind of thinking there ever was or can be.

The power of the political parties to shape our minds will obviously vary with the strength of the parties. In most European countries parties are strong, party discipline is enforced and dissenters must "follow the party line," resign or suffer expulsion. In the United States only the Communist Party operates in this fashion. Our other parties are not, strictly speaking, organizations at all. They have no principles to which new members must subscribe, and have no members, in the usual sense of that word, for anyone is a Democrat or Republican who so declares, and he can change his mind—and his party—at will.

In view of the nebulous character of our major parties, it might seem that they would have little effect on those who profess to adhere to them. However, to be identified with either party is to impose certain limitations on freedom of speech and possibly on freedom of thought as well. One known to his community as a party member will be reluctant to speak out against his party's leaders, candidates, or policies, although he might condemn them were it not for the fact that his party colleagues would consider him disloyal.

For instance, President Eisenhower is perhaps the least political of recent Presidents, and yet in the last electoral campaign he was finally cajoled into urging support for all Republican candidates, including those he did not even know and some he must have personally despised. This recommendation was defended on the ground that he made it as head of his party and not as President. However, if party tradition requires a President to talk the nonsense we are accustomed to hear from party hacks, the party system must bear the blame.

#### Summary

OUR MAJOR PARTIES have no distinctive principles nor programs. Their chief function is to secure and distribute the offices and the governmental favors which political victories make possible. Our Federal government was designed to operate without them and could do so now without any changes in our Constitution. The claim that they are essential in the process of nominating and electing candidates is without merit. The public's disapproval of them is shown by the spread of non-partisan elections and the growing disregard of party ties in elections that are nominally of a partisan nature.

Political parties are most commonly criticized for the spoils system, the inefficiency and the downright corruption with which the party machines, both local and national, have been associated. However, a more serious charge against them is that, by their very existence, they hamper freedom of thought and freedom of expression. Graft, inefficiency and corruption are evils we can bear, but if our wisdom cannot preserve us from the unprecedented dangers now confronting us, our civilization, and even our species, may perish.

Political parties are partially based on the instinct which impelled our primitive ancestors and other gregarious animals to unite for their common defense. It was only in this way that they could survive among stronger, faster and fiercer creatures. But the urge to "run with the pack," which served primitive men so well, may serve us badly. We are now menaced

by human folly combined with an incredible capacity for mutual destruction. Survival now depends not on power but on wisdom. All our efforts will be fruitless unless we can learn how classes, races and nations may live in peace together.

Knowledge and wisdom grow best where men can think, speak, write—or hold their tongues—without regard for the opinions of any organizations to which they may belong. Most of us are intellectually docile, and can be easily made to think, as well as march, in lock-step. However, when the pressure to conform is strong the best minds are wasted and the decisions of the mediocre ones will prevail. In our continuous search for the wiser course we all lose when potential eagles are confined to coops or submit themselves to the rule of the flock.

It is important too that the common man think his thoughts and utter them, unrestrained by the prejudices and timidities which party loyalties develop. This is reputed to be the Century of the Common Man, and in the course of it thus far, his political power has grown apace—but what of his wisdom? In free and democratic societies our future rests on the ability of that common man to choose wisely his elected officers. If the spirit of party hinders him in that task the second half of our fear-ridden Century may be even worse than the first.

*Oakland, Calif.*

### *The Disposal of Agricultural Surpluses by Private Charity*

A MARKET ECONOMY cannot tolerate surpluses. Every manufacturer or retailer has a haunting fear of overstocked warehouses or shelves. From the standpoint of the whole economy Say's Law of Markets furnishes the analytical tool which enables us to see why current output depends upon an equivalent demand if a glut is to be avoided.

The farm industry has been threatened for a long time by the large stocks of agricultural products directly or contingently owned by the government. The Eisenhower administration is quite well aware of the threat to agricultural stability from the existence of these surplus farm products. It has announced its intention of disposing of these surpluses by sales at home and abroad. The administration seems to be unduly concerned about the billions of dollars it has invested in these farm products and can be said to have adopted the attitude of the commercial huckster who seeks a money return on his overstocked inventory. A government cannot and should not be primarily concerned about commercial costs since its chief function is the welfare of the country, including the maintenance of economic stability. It would be more realistic for the government to write