

# THE POLITICAL PARTIES OF TO-DAY

*A Study in Republican and  
Democratic Politics*

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## Preface to the Second Edition

SINCE the first appearance of this book in the midst of the presidential campaign of 1924, an interesting and significant episode in the history of American politics has been concluded, and the party leaders have begun to maneuver their respective followings into position for the next campaign. I have set forth in an appendix an interpretation of the election of 1924 and also in other appendices a note on the illuminating presidential poll conducted by the *Literary Digest*, together with some further discussion of the growth of urban interests in national politics. I have also corrected some typographical errors which had crept into the body of the book. In reviewing this study of partisan electoral strategy, I am more than ever impressed with the wisdom embodied in Professor Frederick J. Turner's penetrating observation: "Statesmanship in this nation consists not only in representing the special interests of the leader's own section, but in finding a formula that will bring the different regions together in a common policy."

June 30, 1925.

A. N. H.

## PREFACE

WHAT do the political parties of to-day stand for? This question is often asked, and it is rarely answered to the satisfaction of the inquirer. Republican and Democratic politicians have their answers ready enough, but these answers are mutually contradictory and, since they are never disinterested, it is not surprising that they are not convincing. The most authoritative answers are those which are contained in the national party platforms, but what these platforms mean no man can tell by merely reading them.

It is not difficult to ascertain what the parties have stood for in the past. In the light of past performances one may form an opinion concerning what they might be expected to stand for in the future under similar conditions. But precisely similar conditions will never return, and predictions of future policy based on past performance may go far astray. It should be possible, however, at least to form an opinion concerning the future usefulness of the present political organizations. Should they be scrapped, in order to make way for more serviceable parties? Or should they be kept in such state of repair as may be practicable, despite the great changes in the paramount political issues which have occurred since they were first organized? And if there is to be a realignment of parties in national politics, what sort of parties may be expected in place of those we now have?

These are some of the questions which are discussed in the following pages. In the first chapter the problem of partisanship in national politics is stated and the point of

view from which it is approached in the subsequent chapters is set forth. Chapter II is devoted to showing that the paramount issues in national politics must ordinarily be economic issues; Chapter III, to showing what are the principal economic interests in the United States that may be expected to give rise to partisan issues in national politics; and Chapter IV, to showing that these economic interests influence national politics through the power of the sections which they dominate. Any reader who is ready to accept these propositions without further proof can save his time by proceeding rapidly from Chapter I to Chapter V, in which the discussion of the historical basis of the existing national parties begins. But he should not neglect to examine the maps, illustrating the political sections and economic regions into which the country is divided, and to read the explanations of these maps in Appendices A and B. He should also examine the charts and tables in the third and fourth chapters which illustrate the nature and strength of the economic and sectional forces in national politics.

In conclusion an attempt is made to forecast the alternatives to the present parties that may be practicable in the near future. The author does not attempt to show that any particular realignment of parties is desirable, nor is he interested in pleading the cause of either of the existing parties. He proposes nothing. He is content to expose. He believes that the citizen who understands the American system of partisan politics and the national parties which that system has produced can be trusted to determine for himself what his duty requires of him when primary and general elections come along.

A. N. H.

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# THE POLITICAL PARTIES OF TO-DAY

## CHAPTER I

### EMPTY BOTTLES

"WHY not scrap them both?" Under this title a well-informed and popular writer on political questions has discussed the utility of the two great parties in American politics.<sup>1</sup> His conclusion, as his title suggests, was decidedly unfavorable to the existing partisan organizations. "The party term Republican," he declared, "isn't definitive any more. It isn't even descriptive. No more so is the party term Democrat. They are labels on empty bottles, signs on untenanted houses, cloaks that cover but do not conceal the skeletons beneath them. No man who is in this Government can give a valid, vital, present-day reason for calling himself a Republican. . . . Nor can any Democrat, either in or out of the Government."

Mr. Blythe is aware, of course, that one will find something that claims to represent Republicanism operating at Washington and elsewhere, and something that claims to represent Democracy. But, he writes, "there are no genuine issues between them, no authentic differences of policy or performance. There is nothing between them save the desire of the Republicans, who are in power, to stay in power, and the desire of the Democrats, who are out of power, to get back in power." What reasons, then,

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Blythe in the *Saturday Evening Post*, March 25, 1922.



can partisans give for calling themselves Republicans or Democrats? Mr. Blythe is ready with an answer. "All can and will give historical, sentimental, sectional, hereditary reasons, but not one of them can prove to a young chap just coming twenty-one why it is to his benefit and to the benefit of his country to join the Republican (or Democratic) party in premises that have any application to existing civic, economic or governmental conditions." . . . And he concludes that "the only reason there is for being either a Republican or a Democrat in this year 1922 is the reason of past performance. That isn't much of a reason, but it is the best there is."

This, according to Mr. Blythe, is the present condition of American politics, but it was not always thus. "As recently as twenty-five years ago," he continues, "it meant something to be a Republican." And he proceeds to tell what Republicanism, as he understands it, meant a generation ago. In a subsequent article, entitled "Flux," Mr. Blythe returned to the attack.<sup>1</sup> "A generation ago," he declared, "the Republican party was an organized, disciplined, cohesive affair, with an idea, an intelligence, and an incentive. To-day it has no outstanding principles. . . . It is merely a title, emblematical of the past, and supplying a party designation to groups, blocs, cabals, and lone bandits who must have a designation in order to get their names on the ballots. . . . There is nothing national about the Republican party except its political history; and the Democratic party is in a similar case. Neither has any present-day virility, present-day usefulness, save as mediums for job-getters to get jobs."

To the reader of the history of American politics there is a familiar sound in this contrast between the unprincipled character of contemporary partisanship and the happier conditions of a bygone age. A generation ago the

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Blythe in the *Saturday Evening Post*, August 19, 1922.



most highly respected critic of American politics was the late Viscount Bryce, then plain Mr. James Bryce, the eminent British Liberal statesman, the associate of Gladstone in his hard-fought campaigns for home rule in Ireland and for the rights of oppressed peoples everywhere. Bryce was a great admirer of the American people and a profound student of their system of government. In his authoritative work, *The American Commonwealth*, the first edition of which appeared in 1888, he discussed at length the condition of parties. At that period, according to Mr. Blythe, Republicanism and Democracy meant something. But what did Bryce find?

"Neither party," Bryce reported, "has as a party any clean-cut principles, any distinctive tenets. Both have traditions. Both claim to have tendencies. Both have certainly war cries, organizations, interests, enlisted in their support. But those interests are in the main the interests of getting or keeping the patronage of the government. Tenets or policies . . . have all but vanished. . . . All has been lost except office, or the hope of getting it." In a later edition of his book Bryce summed up his opinion of the Republican and Democratic parties in the very figure of speech which Mr. Blythe has innocently appropriated for his own. "The great parties," Bryce declared, "were like two bottles. Each bore a label denoting the kind of liquor it contained, but each was empty." Bryce was fond of this metaphor. Evidently he deemed it as instructive as it is interesting. In his last great work, *Modern Democracies*, published in 1921, he quotes a "famous journalist" who had once remarked to him, speaking of the American political parties, "Our two parties are like two bottles, both empty, but bearing different labels." Bryce was still thinking of a time when, according to Mr. Blythe, it meant something to be a Republican. Mr. Blythe elaborates the comparison. "The white

label on the green bottle signifies Republicanism. The green label on the white bottle signifies Democracy. And there is nothing in one bottle that is not in the other, and not much in either." But Mr. Blythe is not writing of the time Bryce had in mind; he writes of the present day.

Mr. Blythe and Viscount Bryce were not the first to discover the contrast between the former greatness and the contemporary decline of the political parties. Nearly a century ago, when Andrew Jackson filled the place in the public eye which was occupied by Grover Cleveland at the time when Bryce began to write on American politics, a sagacious French Liberal, Alexis de Tocqueville, came to the United States, observed with rare penetration the condition of our politics, and returned, like Bryce, to his own country to write an immortal book. In this book, *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville commented at length on the state of parties. The example of the United States showed, he conceded, that parties were a necessary evil in free governments. Then he added the grim observation, "America has had great parties, but has them no longer." Tocqueville's observations are so interesting, and his reflections so instructive, that they are worthy of more extended quotation.

"The political parties which I style great," he wrote, "are those which cling to principles rather than to their consequences; to general, and not to special cases; to ideas, and not to men. These parties are usually distinguished by nobler features, more generous passions, more genuine convictions, and a more bold and open conduct, than the others. In them private interest, which always plays the chief part in political passions, is more studiously veiled under the pretext of the public good; and it may even be sometimes concealed from the eyes of the very persons whom it excites and impels." Such, according to Tocqueville, were the parties which America had formerly had

when the Founding Fathers, after the close of the Revolution, were engaged in forming the more perfect Union. But the work of the Federalists was mainly done in the eighteenth century, and some years before Tocqueville's arrival in the country that party had wholly disappeared. The "era of good feeling," which contemporary politicians professed to have enjoyed in the years of the Monroe administration, was disturbed by no small amount of factionous contention in national politics; but there was no recognized party except the Democratic-Republican party founded by Thomas Jefferson. By the time Tocqueville arrived the factions were consolidating their respective positions under the aggressive leadership of some of the most skillful politicians the country has ever produced, notably, Jackson, Van Buren, Calhoun, Clay, and Webster, to mention only the most conspicuous leaders. It was at that very time that the traditions of which Bryce wrote a half century later were being established. Yet Tocqueville was able to conclude his discussion of partisanship in American politics with an observation which his contemporaries were slow to challenge. "*Great political parties,*" he affirmed with emphasis, "are not to be met with in the United States at the present time."

And what of the parties which had existed in the earliest years of the Republic, the parties which Tocqueville, Bryce, and Mr. Blythe would doubtless all agree in pronouncing great? What impression did those original parties make upon the Founding Fathers themselves?

It is unnecessary to multiply instances of the distrust which was felt by the wisest among them concerning the nature of the contemporary partisanship. It will suffice to cite the opinions of the two greatest party leaders America has produced—Washington, the undisputed head of the Federalists, and Jefferson, who organized the opposition under the banner of the Democratic Republicans.

Washington, whose party, when deprived of his own judicious leadership, was promptly overthrown by the Jeffersonians, was dismayed by the violent contentions of the original parties. In his Farewell Address he repeatedly notes the evils of partisanship and finally denounces the whole party system as a menace to the safety of the Republic.

"I have already intimated to you," he began, "the danger of Parties in the State, with particular reference to the founding of them on geographical discriminations. Let me now take a more comprehensive view, and warn you in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the spirit of party, generally." He points out that party spirit, having its root in the strongest passions of the human mind, is inseparable from our nature; that it exists under different shapes in all governments; and that it is seen "in its greatest rankness" in those of the popular form, being "truly their worst enemy." He had observed its workings during his own administrations, when the "great" parties noted by Tocqueville were forming, and he spoke from the heart when he declared: "It serves always to distract the public councils and enfeeble the public administration. It agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms, kindles the animosity of one part against another, foment occasionally riot and insurrection. It opens the door to foreign influence and corruption which find a facilitated access to the Government itself through the channels of party passions. . . ." He notes the opinion that "parties in free countries are useful checks upon the administration of the Government, and serve to keep alive the Spirit of Liberty." He concedes that within certain limits this is probably true, but he is confident that there will always be enough of that spirit for every salutary purpose, and "there being constant danger of excess, the effort ought to be, by force of

public opinion, to mitigate and assuage it. A fire not to be quenched; it demands a uniform vigilance to prevent its bursting into a flame, lest, instead of warming, it should consume."

Jefferson, when he finally came to power in 1801, after one of the hardest fought campaigns the country has ever seen, was exceedingly anxious to calm the troubled waters of party strife. "We are all Republicans," he declared in his First Inaugural, "we are all Federalists." It may have meant something to have been a Federalist or a Republican in those days, but it did not mean much that Washington and Jefferson were desirous of perpetuating. The latter, by his temperate use of power, and by shrewdly adopting the most expedient of the measures originally advocated by his opponents, greatly contributed to the eventual extinction of the original party divisions, as noted by the discerning Tocqueville.

Evidently the "great" parties which the Fathers led produced no more favorable impression upon the judicious contemporary observer than the parties of Andrew Jackson's time produced upon Tocqueville, or those of Grover Cleveland's time upon Bryce, or those of our own day upon Mr. Samuel Blythe. Why is it that to the successive generations of men the parties which occupy the contemporary political scene always appear unprincipled and obstructive, if not actually dangerous, while those of an earlier age are regarded with a more tolerant eye and their leaders receive the praise reserved for those only who have deserved well of their country? It may be suspected that, as time passes, distance lends a false enchantment to the view. One is reminded of the lamentation of the old farmer, who in a moment of depression is reported to have exclaimed: "Things ain't what they used to be; in fact, they never was!" Or, on the other hand, it may be that the contemporary parties do not deserve the casti-

gation which they have received from the successive generations of critics.

The praise or blame which critics bestow upon political parties is greatly influenced by the notions which they hold, consciously or unconsciously, concerning the nature of partisanship. There are two conflicting theories of what a party is, or, to speak more properly, of what it might or ought to be. Most criticism of partisan politics, whether favorable or unfavorable, bears the impress of one or the other of these theories. The validity of such criticism depends to a substantial extent upon the soundness of the theory upon which it is based.

One of these theories was admirably expressed by the great English orator, Edmund Burke. A political party, he declared, is "a body of men, united for the purpose of promoting by their joint endeavors the public interest, upon some principle in which they are all agreed." Upon this theory a body of men, who act together in politics, must satisfy three specific requirements in order to qualify as an approved party. First, the object of their union must be to promote the public, and not merely some private, interest. Secondly, the means which they adopt to gain their end must be that of action upon a principle, and not merely upon grounds of expediency. Finally, they must all be agreed concerning both the means and the end. Such a theory of partisanship has always appealed to the more idealistic sort of men. It seems to satisfy all the requirements of an exalted patriotism. Judged by such a theory, however, the existing parties have always been found wanting by the critics. The halo with which gentle memory enshrouds the past may impart a more kindly aspect to the parties which, having fulfilled their purpose, have passed from the political scene, but those appearing on the contemporary stage at least have seemed too devoted to personal or local or other partial interests, too



destitute of principle, too torn by factions, to meet the test prescribed by the political idealists. Factions, there are, and *blocs*, and the personal followings of masterful leaders and the great combinations of interests called parties, but true parties always remain to be established. Man, the political animal. never is, but always is to be, blest.

The other theory is more favored by those who pride themselves upon taking a strictly realistic view of politics. A party, they assert, is, as the name implies, a part of the whole body of people who have combined together in order to pursue more effectively their own particular interests. This they endeavor to do by the adoption of such expedients as seem most advantageous to themselves and most promising of success. They may or may not all be agreed on the choice of measures to gain their ends, but they must agree at least in preferring the superior effectiveness of concerted action, even at the cost of much compromising of differences among themselves, to an unrestrained but futile liberty of doing in politics exactly as they please.

This theory may not be generally approved as a statement of what a political party ought to be, but it is often accepted as the best explanation of what a party really is. The other theory, the "practical" politician may admit, furnishes an inspiring interpretation of the political controversies of the past. It may even furnish an attractive picture of the ideal parties which some distant future has in store. Nevertheless, they insist, it fails to describe the kind of parties which the present age affords. It may be a more agreeable theory of partisan politics, but it does not square with the contemporary practice. Popular government, they point out, is supposed to exist for the service of the people, and in a democracy, if not elsewhere, each citizen must determine for himself how it can best serve



him. In looking out first for themselves, therefore, the people are only doing what the nature of democracy requires of them. Those who hold this theory of partisanship do not ordinarily expect that parties will be materially different in the near future from the self-seeking and unprincipled organizations which they now seem to be, and they suspect that the parties of the past have always been like those of the present.

These realistic theorists would doubtless agree with Mr. Blythe that the existing parties are like empty bottles. They would agree with Bryce that the parties of a quarter-century ago were like empty bottles. They would agree with Tocqueville that in the absence of great parties the country, in Andrew Jackson's time, "swarmed" with lesser controversies. They would agree with Washington and Jefferson that party spirit was an unfortunate manifestation of human nature which should be repressed as much as possible. But they would reject Tocqueville's opinion that America had once had great parties. They would also reject Bryce's opinion that the Jacksonian Democracy and the Republicanism of Abraham Lincoln had been something different and greater than the Democracy of Grover Cleveland and the Republicanism of William McKinley. They would finally reject Mr. Blythe's opinion that Republicanism and Democracy meant something more in the time of Grover Cleveland and William McKinley than at the present time.

Tocqueville, whose extraordinary insight into the realities of politics makes his *Democracy in America* so interesting and instructive, even after the lapse of nearly a hundred years, offers some noteworthy reflections upon the organization of parties as he observed the process in the time of Andrew Jackson.

"The pains which are taken to create parties are inconceivable, and at the present day it is no easy task. In the

United States there is no religious animosity, because all religion is respected and no sect is predominant; there is no jealousy of rank, because the people are everything and none can contest their authority; lastly, there is no public misery to serve as a means of agitation, because the physical position of the country opens so wide a field to industry, that man only needs to be let alone to be able to accomplish prodigies. Nevertheless, ambitious men will succeed in creating parties, since it is difficult to eject a person from authority upon the mere ground that his place is coveted by others. All the skill of the actors in the political world lies in the art of creating parties. A political aspirant in the United States begins by discerning his own interest, and discovering those other interests which may be collected around and amalgamated with it. He then contrives to find out some doctrine or principle which may suit the purposes of this new association, and which he adopts in order to bring forward his party and secure its popularity. . . . This being done, the new party is ushered into the political world."<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to decide which of these theories would be the more absurd, if either of them were held as an exclusive explanation of the American system of partisan politics. No well-informed politicians are so "practical" as to be blind to the presence in all parties of many persons who are genuinely devoted to the public interest, as they understand it, though "realistic" critics might insist that any person's understanding of the public interest is affected, even though unconsciously, by his own particular point of view—that is, by his private interests, which must often be different from those of other members of the "public." The "realistic" critic must concede, too, the existence of "principles" upon which men have acted, regardless of the consequences to their personal fortunes. Patriotism,

<sup>1</sup> *Democracy in America*, Reeve's translation, vol. I, p. 226.