

The Election Results

Losses, Gains, Their Extent and Causes

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REACTIONARY circles throughout the United States are jubilant over the election results of November 8. We cannot, indeed, deny that they have reason. The Republican Party increased the number of states in its control from seven to eighteen, including Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, and almost doubled its numbers in Congress. Unquestionably, the economic royalists who rely mainly upon the Republican Party strengthened their positions of power in the government of the country, and the positions held by the democratic masses were correspondingly weakened.

Nothing is ever gained by underestimating the effective forces of the enemy. And we must say frankly that the people suffered many defeats. But it is equally important to avoid any exaggeration of the enemy's victories, and to understand exactly how and why these things took place. And when the reactionaries hail these victories as a turn of mass sentiment against the New Deal, and against President Roosevelt, it is necessary to subject such claims to the most searching examination. If true, it would have the most far-reaching consequences. We must *know* if it is true or false.

It is my considered opinion that this claim of a turn of the tide away from Roosevelt and the New Deal is profoundly incorrect. In outlining the main reasons for this view we will also discover the answer to the problem of how to reclaim the lost positions of democracy and progress.

In most states the Republicans carefully avoided the New Deal as the central issue; indeed, they generally accepted the *objectives* of the New Deal and almost all of its established policies that are now written into law. They pictured themselves as "better New Dealers" than their opponents. They acted as if they believed the majority of the voters supported Roosevelt and the New Deal and that any head-on collision would spell certain defeat. The event confirmed this belief. Only in Pennsylvania did an openly reactionary campaign result in Republican victory. In California it carried a long-established administration down to overwhelming defeat. In New York, a "liberal" Republican face and campaign could not overcome the New Deal lead, and O'Brian's campaign against Wagner on the issue of amending the National Labor Relations Act flopped miserably, leaving O'Brian far behind his ticket.

In some states the Republicans boldly set out to outbid the New Deal. Harold E. Stassen in Minnesota almost forgot he was a Re-

publican, and ran as the inheritor of the mantle of the late Farmer-Labor governor, Floyd B. Olson; he promised more aid and government jobs for workers and farmers than Governor Benson had provided; he promised higher old-age pensions; and he promised, also, lower taxes and a balanced budget. He promised everything to everybody. Gov. Elmer Benson looked like a staid old conservative beside him. Leverett Saltonstall in Massachusetts made the Townsend plan, which promises \$200 per month old-age pensions to all over sixty years of age, one of his principal attractions. Republicans generally flirted with, where they did not endorse, the Townsend plan, and received the votes of that section of the old-age pension movement.

The Republican campaign was a flank attack against the New Deal, carefully camouflaged with demagogy and promises of all things to all men. That it deceived an important section of the voters is unquestionable, but that it registered a serious political turn of those voters is more than doubtful. All the evidence points the other way. The very nature of the Republican campaign proves that the masses demand more, not less, of governmental aid and control of economic life.

One distinct shift of voters was more conscious and fundamental. That was the desertion of Roosevelt by almost all his former upper-class supporters. The so-called upper classes went Republican *en bloc*.

They poured out campaign funds in an unprecedented stream. They even obeyed their leaders and kept their "hate Roosevelt" propaganda confined to their own clubs and parlors, so as not to alienate the masses. They practiced "fraternizing" with the Townsend leaders, and patted them on the back. They concealed their smiles at the "liberal" speeches of their candidates. They knew exactly what they wanted—power—and they were out to get it at any cost. This stratum is no loss to the New Deal, which had just as well make up its mind to kiss the upper classes goodbye for good. Hoover (and Chamberlain) typifies their natural leadership.

It was among farmers and city middle classes that the Republicans registered those gains which changed defeat to victory. Even here, it was not so much that they were able to swing New Deal supporters to anti-New Deal moods and policies; it was rather that the Republicans were able to bring out the full strength they had polled in 1936, the presidential year, while the New Dealers

could mobilize their full strength only among the workers, but found the farmers and middle classes more apathetic, with a distinct section, confused by demagogy and Red-baiting, inclined to ignore the elections.

It is probably no exaggeration to say that the working-class vote was stronger for the New Deal than in any previous election. This was true in spite of the damaging split of labor, which William Green tried with might and main to carry over into the elections for the benefit of the Republicans. The Republican strategy of splitting the New Deal support had less success among the workers than anywhere else. In state after state the local AFL organizations repudiated William Green's orders and went down the line in unity with Labor's Non-Partisan League. Where the split in labor's national leadership was very damaging, however, was in its effect in discouraging and alienating sections of the farmers and middle classes.

Considerable help was given the Republicans by organized splitting policies carried out among the progressive forces by the Socialist leaders and by Phil La Follette. Norman Thomas and his followers largely liquidated their own voting strength in the country, by the nature of their campaign, which was directed almost 100 percent against the New Deal; but they undoubtedly did much damage by sowing confusion and apathy among their former followers. The Old Guard Socialists in Connecticut ran up an unprecedented vote of 165,000, with the result of giving the Republican Party control of the state with only 35 percent of the total vote. The Old Guard Socialists in New York damaged the American Labor Party ticket, by splitting appeals directed against some of the most popular candidates on its ticket, denouncing them in the most approved Dies-committee style as "Communists"; but it is highly significant that the two outstanding Labor Party victories, Vito Marcantonio to Congress and Oscar Garcia-Rivera to the State Assembly, were precisely the two candidacies against which the Old Guard directed their heaviest fire. The Socialists, with their Trotskyist and Lovestoneite allies, also carried on damaging work against Governor Murphy in Michigan, as well as in other states. In California and elsewhere, Trotskyites were openly taken into the service of the anti-New Deal election campaign apparatus.

To Phil La Follette and his vest-pocket "National Progressives" must be assigned the main responsibility for Republican victories in Wisconsin and Minnesota. With his vicious attack against the New Deal, his fascist-like trimmings, and his intrigues within the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota (also extended into other states), he brought demoralization and feuds into the progressive camp as far as the prestige of his famous father's name could carry him.

The chief national campaign instruments of the Republicans were, strangely enough,

directed and operated by nominal Democrats. They were the House Committee Investigating Un-American Activities, headed by Congressman Martin Dies, and the Senate Committee to Investigate Election Practices, headed by Senator Sheppard. Both these gentlemen are from Texas, and both operate under the spiritual guidance of Vice-President John N. Garner. They carried on sniping warfare against the New Deal candidates everywhere, and Martin Dies furnished the main campaign material for the Republicans in California, Minnesota, Michigan, and Ohio, and in general throughout the country. Martin Dies plastered the Communist label all over the New Deal. The fantastic irresponsibility of his "evidence" was demonstrated a few days before the election, when he produced for a second time his "star," the notorious J. B. Matthews, to tie up the Roosevelt administration with the well-known "Moscow gold" issue. Matthews had spent several days on the witness stand in August, making unlimited "disclosures" about "Communist plots." But at that time he had "forgotten" or concealed the most sensational of all. He came back on November 5, with the previously neglected item, namely, that he had been the go-between for the general secretary of the Communist Party to negotiate with Washington for "diplomatic immunity" in behalf of shipments of "Moscow gold" to the United States to finance a revolution here. Even the "exposure" of Shirley Temple was surpassed.

Treason among the nominal supporters of the New Deal, demagoguery, and a false liberal face on the part of the Republicans, and the shortcomings of the practical program of the New Deal, together with the incubus of the Hagues and Curleys; plus the division in the top leadership of labor, and the splitting activities of La Follette, the Socialist leaders, and their Trotskyist and Lovestoneite allies—these were the chief factors that gave sufficient victories to the Republican Party reactionaries to offset the continuing New Deal tide among the masses of the people. And these are serious enough to demand the most thorough study and action in the progressive camp in preparation for the crucial battles of 1940.

The effects of the great betrayal of Munich upon the election results, while too intangible for immediate analysis, were doubtless a factor.

As to the Communist Party's role in the elections—that is a long story by itself. Sufficient for the moment is to note the big rise in the Communist vote (more than 100,000 for Israel Amter in New York, about 120,000 for Anita Whitney in California), and the outstanding fact that nowhere did the Communist campaign contribute to division among the progressive, democratic, and labor forces, and that everywhere the Communists were among the most energetic workers and fighters for a common front to defeat the candidates of reaction and big business.

Post-Election Roundup

On-the-Spot Analyses from Five of the Major Battlegrounds in the November 8th Voting

I: How Marcantonio Won

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New York City.

THAT favorite phrase of the political tyro, dusted off every time election day comes around, about the "Voice of the Peepul," may have fallen into disrepute, but it certainly was heard in the Twentieth Congressional District on Nov. 8, 1938. Climaxing a local campaign that contained within itself every element of what we glibly label the "world situation," it sounded an inspiring lesson for the whole country.

The geographical designation, Twentieth Congressional District, may not mean much to anyone who doesn't know it in terms of fire-trap tenement houses rising row after row in grim testimony to hunger and unemployment; pale, stunted children with bright black eyes who do mischief on narrow, traffic-laden streets because they have no decent, protected playgrounds; overworked, weary women who try to feed and clothe the family on relief and WPA wages. Italians, Puerto Ricans, Irish, Negroes, Jews—70 percent of them on inadequate relief—that is the congressional district to which Vito Marcantonio never stopped being "the congressman."

The campaign to send him back to Congress, because, in Mayor LaGuardia's words, "Harlem needed him there" (the nation too) started in a bitter primary fight. The Republican Party leadership put up a candidate against him. Lanzetta, the Democratic incumbent, entered himself on the ALP slate and in retaliation Marcantonio entered the Democratic fight. The Socialist Party, in keeping with its general "line," entered Murray Gross, bolstered by a series of slanderous articles in the *New Leader* and the *Jewish Daily Forward*.

The one consistent theme of the whole opposition was Red-baiting; their official slogan: "Defeat Marcantonio, Save Harlem from Communism." Slum clearance? Government housing? Relief? Jobs for the young people? Civil rights? Adequate social security for the old? Only Marcantonio campaigned on these issues. His opponents—all of them—answered with the same old tune: "Save Harlem from Communism."

The climax of the primary fight was a batch of several thousand telegrams sent to Italian voters—in Italian—telling them to go to the polls and defeat Marcantonio. They were signed "Luigi Pasciano, vice consul." Immediate investigation—those who received them brought them right to Marcantonio—disclosed

that there was no such person in the Italian consular service and protests from campaign headquarters brought indignant denials from the consulate that it might have had a hand in such a business.

Marcantonio won the American Labor Party and Republican nominations with a majority that made his opponents look a little bit sick—especially when he got 1,930 votes on the Democratic line—almost 30 percent of that vote.

The election campaign itself reeked with vilification and slander that went on all the time; pasted on the walls on posters, sent through the mails in letters, handed out on street corners in tons of leaflets. The Socialist Party joined in with a contribution in the form of a folder showing Marcantonio with one arm raised in a clenched-fist salute, captioned "Hurray for Stalin," and the other outstretched, fascist style, labeled "Viva Il Duce." It also mentioned in passing that Marcantonio did not have the backing of such labor leaders as Luigi Antonini, state chairman of the American Labor Party. The *Jewish Daily Forward* followed this up with a blacklist just before election day, leading off with the warning, "Don't vote for Vito Marcantonio, Communist, president of the Communist International Labor Defense."

But much more important is the answer of the people of Harlem. Scores of them, Italians, Puerto Ricans, Irish, Negroes, Jews, day after day and night after night reported at campaign headquarters; climbed up and down the foul and ill-lighted tenement stairs canvassing for the "congressman." They went right into those miserable slum homes and told their neighbors why a vote for Marcantonio was a vote for progress, prosperity, and democracy. A Non-Partisan Youth Committee—forty neighborhood organizations—worked with truly dynamic energy, jubilantly freed from the enervating and corrupting influence of Tammany Hall. Every progressive organization in the district campaigned.

Lanzetta and Tammany got busy. On the last night of registration week, race riots started. Italian hoodlums, armed with clubs, descended on the Puerto Rican streets. Notes were left in letter boxes reading, "You better move out of here or else," signed with a skull-and-cross-bones. Fights were provoked on every corner. After one week of this unabated terror,