

THE CHOICE AND ITS ECHO

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It seems to us in all our ignorance of the workings of professional politics that the nation faces an important turning point in the present election. Soon a decision will be made—perhaps not a final one, but at least a near final one—that will influence its future course; and one cannot escape the presentiment that a profound commitment of national policy in one of two divergent directions is inevitable.

Like many others in this country who take the trouble to read, inquire and try to come to some reasonable conclusion of our own, we are disturbed. We have good friends on each side of the present political argument. There are “liberal” friends, intelligent and well-meaning, who are convinced that the proper course of this country’s future lies in the establishment of a controlled economy and who, although they may be reluctant to call it socialism, believe that this complex modern society can be directed only by increased federal management in the hands of intellectual specialists. There are “conservative” friends who are certain that only by reversing the trend of central control and restoring individual and local initiative can the country avert a steady national decline, and who bewail the increasing takeover of the country’s problems by utopian dreamers.

One of the aspects of the present contest responsible for our feeling of uneasiness is the character and personality of the two presidential candidates. In this regard the questions of whether progressive socialism is good, or conservative constitutionalism is bad, is beside the point.

The attributes and past records of the two candidates as individual men stand in marked contrast. Even should one be willing to admit that Senator Goldwater is perhaps not proven in background, training and depth of knowledge to lead a nation such as this one, none of his critics deny that his motives are sincere, that his moral fiber is sound, that his patriotism is unquestioned. On the other hand, even among his loyal backers, President Johnson is considered a man of expedience, whose integrity is questionable, whose ambition is admitted, and whose ethics and morality throughout his years in government have been the subject of searching and bitter debate.

Regardless of how right the liberals may be in their belief that the future of this nation lies in progressive socialism, how is it that they can endorse and favor a political opportunist with a reputation of duplicity and deceit? (. . . “Johnson has long represented for me the epitome of the politician type that I despise. I do not like wheelers and dealers, traders, connivers, conciliators, liars, crooks and everything else this type of man seems to represent.”)

The liberals justify their support of Johnson by saying that he is a natural product of our times and that, actually because of his deviousness and adeptness at the underhanded practices of power politics, he above all is best suited to manage the political machinery of government as it exists today. In other words, they imply that our present government, evolving over three decades of liberal and socialistic guidance, is a jungle of collusion and riddled with dishonesty to such an extent that only a politician thoroughly schooled in personal intrigue and fraudulence is capable of making it function.

Another justification by liberals for the support of President Johnson is the fact that he is a leader who has clearly demonstrated superior ability in getting things done; he is a master at moving legislation through Congress.

Within very recent memory there have been a number of leaders possessing these qualities that the liberals find so admirable. In this country, Long of Louisiana qualified well in this respect. He reclaimed land; provided free lunches and books for school children; built roads, bridges, monuments, universities, hospitals, medical schools; and he so organized and streamlined the legislative processes of his state that the passage of any bill he sponsored was swift and automatic. In Italy, Mussolini drained the Pontine Marshes, resettled the farmers, made trains run on schedule, restored grandeur and impressively displayed great talent in managing his legislators and accomplishing exalted national projects. In Germany, Hitler built autobahns, established youth movements, promoted health and welfare, stimulated the economy, restored national unity, and through his great persuasiveness and ability to get cooperation from his Reichstag, had no difficulty in solving the problems for many minority groups. And during World War II, likeable old "Uncle Joe" Stalin was greatly admired here for his craftiness and skill in getting things done.

It is disturbing that in spite of their noble aims and concern for the salvation and elevation of humanity, the liberals are willing to accept the leadership of a morally questionable, shrewd, personally ambitious, and powerful politician to further their cause. Disturbingly too, during the last months of the campaign, we have witnessed many presumably responsible leaders (conservative and liberal alike) of the news media, of business, of industry, of labor, of government, of religion, of science and of education declaring themselves for President Johnson. Many of these same influential forces only a short time ago were righteously condemning this man for his corrupt associations and were ready to relegate him to political obscurity.

It is with these cynical admissions on the part of liberalism and wavering conservatism that our apprehension grows. If the skidding morality, decline in idealism and deterioration of principle of the country as a whole is such that this does represent "the mainstream of thought" in America, Mr. Johnson will surely be elected. If he is indeed a

creature of our own design and we willingly entrust ourselves to his leadership, then we should admit that the principles of expedience, compromise, special privilege, force and sleazy morality are to be the guideposts to the future.

Yet one cannot help but feel that there is something basically wrong with one's thinking when, given the choice of honesty (though it may not be comfortable) or dishonesty (which may be convenient), one chooses dishonesty.

Perhaps not in the next four years, nor the next ten, nor the next twenty or fifty, but eventually, a government that chooses to be dominated by leadership committed to deceit, immorality, corruption and coercion will falter and collapse. And when, with all its complexity, it does disintegrate, it will take with it all of the complacent and those governed by self-interest, along with its disturbed conservatives and well-intentioned liberals, and plunge them into an era of unparalleled chaos with a crash that will echo across many generations.

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