The 1936 Elections

Roosevelt Sweep Opens New Period of Struggle

This is the second in a series of articles by Jay Lovestone dealing with the results of the presidential election campaign.

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By JAY LOVESTONE

THE LAST Presidential elections were held at a sort of intersection point of trends, historically speaking—trends which had been developing and maturing for some time, trends aggravated and accentuated by the economic crisis itself or reaching maturing points. These trends sort of cut across each other to a focal point, marking a movement of deep-going change.

Briefly evaluated, the situation in which the American election campaign was waged was the following: Basically the economic crisis continued; its depth is revealed by the stagnation in the capital market, by the increasingly effective challenge to its privileged position in the world market, particularly in the Far East, by the huge organic, chronic unemployment, by the failure even to approach fundamentally the source of disparity between agriculture and industry, by the growing acuteness of social security as a problem of mass dimensions, as a problem which could no longer be avoided or even reduced by illusions. It is in this atmosphere that the middle class found itself facing ever more anxious moments; it is in such an atmosphere that labor was on the threshold of something new, something definite—thanks to the unquestioned and unquestionable dominance of the mass production industries of American economic life, and thanks to the new wave of members pouring into the unions in the last years.

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Politically, the role of the government had become one in which it was the biggest investor, the biggest customer on the market, and in which state capitalism was being extended constantly on a gigantic scale. Though the Supreme Court threw out the N.R.A., yet there were certain ineradicable consequences which flow from it as specific American expressions of state capitalism. Furthermore, never before had old political labels lost so much meaning and assumed so much new content in relation to important issues as at this time. One need but look at the growth in population of the bourgeois innocents clubs, to wit the Coughlin movement, the Townsend movement, the Epic movement, the Lemke outfit, etc. These clubs were political organizations representing various shades of big bourgeois and petty bourgeois opinion, from pale progressivism to the crudest reactionary notions of outright fascism. Under these circumstances, naturally the question of reconstructing the government, of modernizing its structure to meet the new, became all the more acute in the light of the heavy blows dealt the New Deal by a whole series of Supreme Court decisions. In such a situation, American foreign policy was beginning to assume new forms and in a measure new content. It is no accident that the blackest jingoes of the American ruling class could find only words of highest praise for Roosevelt's magnanimity in the war budget. Naturally, the problem of government budgetary deficits assumes, at such a moment, an importance of greater proportions than is usually expected.

It is not the object of the writer to burden the reader with details as to figures and facts of the Roosevelt sweep. There would be no point of repeating that what happened here was something that had not happened since the days of Monroe. No one could emphasize sufficiently the tremendous import of Pennsylvania going so solidly Democratic for the first time in nine decades. Likewise, very much could be said but need not be said here about the loss of Du Pont's satrapy, Delaware, by the Republicans. The same applies in general to the terrific shellacking handed the Kansas Coolidge (Landon). From one point of view, let no one forget that not only the Presidency was involved in the last elections but also the Senate and the House, and the results here, results of almost equal importance, were about as one-sided.

In a moment of jest, Farley spoke of asking for a recount in Maine and Vermont, but all jest aside, it is the conviction of the writer that, if Roosevelt had spoken in these states, and had thrown overboard Brann in Maine instead of allowing the latter to throw overboard the New Deal, the Democratic Party could probably have carried Maine also. This would have meant, in the words of Farley, that as Maine went, Vermont would go. We hope we are wrong in our suspicion that the C.P. probably regrets exceedingly the loss of Maine and Vermont by the Democrats because they continue to remain in the Republican column, thus tending to disturb "the unity of the American people."

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All sorts of silly explanations have been offered for this Roosevelt victory. Some say that the administration simply bought the votes. This is too shallow an approach, though one need not hesitate to recognize the very vital role played by the PWA and its brother organizations in American democracy in 1936. Some of the most reactionary spokesmen of big capital have begun to yell that Roosevelt terrorized the people. Of course this is too hypocritical even to deserve comment. At any rate, those who have denounced Roosevelt as a red, as a communist, feel rather uncomfortable nowadays, if they have really begun to believe what they have tried to talk others and perhaps themselves into believing. Nor should one seek to evaluate the results of the election campaign merely as a personal triumph. Very little stock is to be put in the personal triumph, though of course no one can deny that Roosevelt was a particularly capable champion of so-called enlightened American capitalism. Time and again we have emphasized this in the columns of the **Workers Age** in an effort to convince labor that Roosevelt was dangerous to the labor movement, not only as an enemy, but also as a friend.

In order to show that we are not at all minimizing the role played by Roosevelt, we cite an estimate made as far back as 1928, after the Hoover sweep. I then said the following: **"The Democratic Party is not in very good shape today. But the Democratic Party has a future in capitalist society. It will be reorganized completely. It may not win the next elections, but it has vitality. It polled about 40% of the total popular vote. It obtained a great proportion of this popular vote—especially in the industrial centers. Seventy-five per cent of its strength is today outside of the hitherto solid South. And Smith is not thru. Of course, it is possible that the newly elected Governor of New York, Franklin D. Roosevelt, may come forward as the leader of the Democratic Party."** (Communist, December 1928, Page 749).

We cite the above because it also has some valuable lessons for those who would rush to write off the Republican Party because of its latest defeat.

But there are diverse factors and stronger social and economic forces at work, responsible for the avalanche. It is our conviction that these forces have reached a cumulative point in the Roosevelt landslide, ushering in a new period in the life of American capitalism. What are the specific and decisive causes of the 1936 election results which proved so overwhelming a surprise to practically all political observers, which proved so painful and rude a shock to so many important figures in the ranks of the American ruling class? Why do we say that the Roosevelt avalanche ushers in a new period in the life of American capitalism, is the beginning of a new epoch in the struggle of the American working class?

The third article in this series will appear in the next issue.

Revolutionary Greetings

to the

Business Views

BUSINESS WEEK, NOV. 7.

"Washington still sees Roosevelt as a sailor, bending his course to the wind, tacking to the Left, tacking to the Right, but intending to keep closer to the middle than most of his friends or enemies on the Left and Right like to believe. Beyond the intention rises a question mark: How far over can he be pushed by opposition or pulled by ambition? So far, Washington believes that the landowner of Hyde Park doesn't vision the United States as a country in which he, a private citizen of considerable wealth, cannot live comfortably and happily.

"President Roosevelt gave way briefly to passion and emotion in some of his later speeches. He seemed to dissipate any lingering hope that he might turn to the right. It was made clear that we may be confronted in the future with class issues rather than national issues and that class interest may be paramount to national interest. The end of the campaign will stimulate rather than terminate the interest of the national government in labor as a class and as a politicai issue.

" . . . As business men, election results are in part our own responsibility. Every effort should be made to clarify the thinking and mold the policies of government and to cooperate with its