

SOME IMPLICATIONS OF PROBLEMS OF REGIONAL CONTROL FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

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In the report of President Roosevelt's committee to investigate economic and social conditions in the South, there are many significant factors of political bearing. Political tendencies always reflect economic trends and social urges, allowing one to read the social and economic history to a very great degree from a knowledge of the political history, so it is not unusual that one should be able to see political implications in the picture that is portrayed.

Out of the chaos that followed the Civil War and Reconstruction, there arose the "solid south" that has been a by-word in political history since 1877. From the injustices and the short-sighted Congressional policy of reconstruction, there resulted the natural reaction that caused the political leaders to organize the dazed white population into a bitter opposition to anything that smacked of the majority party in control at that time; an opposition which was reflected in a situation so ably described by Abe Martin, the old newspaper philosopher who stated once that the Republicans of Arkansas were having their annual convention; it was the annual post-masters' convention. In the resulting condition, the negroes, who were definitely aligned with the Republican Party through the efforts of northern agents in their midst, and who served as the backbone of Republican strength during the reconstruction days were disfranchised just as soon as the old leaders regained control of the political organization, and are still kept from voting, in large numbers, throughout the old south.

In the report of the industrial development of the area which the committee gives, we see the seeds of an impending political change. The committee points out that the major portion of the industrialization that has come in the past several decades has been in the hands of northern firms and backed by northern capital. Such a condition is seen in our own state where the oil industry receives its life-blood from the centers of concentrated capital in the northern and eastern part of the United States. Certain counties have been normally Democratic, but have seen that majority fade temporarily during an intensive oil development, only to see it return after that development has subsided. This industrial development has brought a new color into the political picture of the areas where it has permeated. The agricultural economy that prevailed there has gradually given way to an industrial society, with its changing interests and altered political demands. The old doctrines of decentralization and low tariff that were the backbone of the Democratic Party in these regions have given way to a new demand that the tariff be adjusted to take care of the new industry centered there and that stabilized economic organization, fitting into the national picture, be developed. In such a change, Democratic doctrines give way to Republican theories.

There are many concrete examples of this transition. Louisiana senators have long been recognized as being favorable to protection on raw sugar, in order to promote the sugar raising industry so dominant in their state. While Oklahoma has been recognized as normally belonging in the Democratic column, we can throw our hats as high into the air as anyone when

the matter of protective tariff on the cheap imported oil is advocated. The old opposition to protection that characterized South Carolina after manufacturing failed to develop there as a result of the protective tariff of 1816 which her own John C. Calhoun had supported, is dying down as she becomes one of the leading centers of the textile, and other industries, in the old southeast. Even the Underwood tariff of Wilson's administration, drawn up under the sponsorship of democratic committees headed by southern men in Congress, lowered the tariff to the minimum rates that had been in existence since the Civil War, but did not abandon the principle of protection.

Even in the field of national elections, the changed political principles have made themselves felt. In 1920, the "solid south" was broken by the defection of the Oklahoma and Tennessee electoral votes to the Republican candidates. While many other factors were doubtlessly instrumental in affecting this change, it is significant that both of these states had large industrial interests developed by that time. Added to the Republican strength of the mountains of East Tennessee and the natural Republican vote of the north half of Oklahoma, the interests of those who felt their purposes could best be obtained under a Republican administration were sufficient to offset the usual Democratic majorities. In 1928, the spread of Republican electoral votes in the south became even more marked; Oklahoma and Tennessee again swerving from the "straight and narrow way" and Texas, Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Florida joining in the procession. While the factor of industrialization might not have been the only one, or even the deciding one in the break, it is significant that in every instance, the states that went over to the Republican ranks were states in which the manufacturing industry was very highly developed and was strong enough to wield a political influence, or to which a rather sizeable migration of potential Republicans had taken place because of changed economic interests; as in the case of the Rio Grande Valley in Texas and the northern migration to Florida, brought about by the land boom.

Out of the illiteracy, noted in the report of the committee, many political problems are bound to arise. While it is true that a large percentage of the illiterates are numbered among the negroes, who are still disfranchised in many areas, still general education is shown by the committee's report to be more restricted than in other sections of the nation, among the whites. This indicates that large groups of the voters are subject to mass leadership by those who use the measures of demagogery to gain personal ends. This was clearly demonstrated by the whispering campaign against Al Smith in the so-called "Bible belt" during the presidential canvass of 1928. While this was tried in many sections of the country, it was in the deep south that the plan of defaming the candidate on the basis of his religious affiliation was most effective. Such illiteracy accounts, partially, for the fact that such large majorities are consistently rolled up for the candidates of one party regardless of their lack of qualifications. Only a continued growth of the public school system in the south, with the resulting educational improvement of the masses of that region, will offer a partial solution of the political problems arising from illiteracy. It is a striking commentary to note that Atlanta, one of the most progressive cities in the old South, is this year engaged in a heated campaign to make her high schools co-educational, a condition that has existed for years in areas where the doctrine of free public education has flourished.

In the areas where the negroes are allowed to vote, and where there is a large group of illiterate and indigent whites, as we find in so many areas in the south, according to the report under consideration, a new problem in practical politics has arisen from the new federal policy of extensive spending for relief in the south. Large groups of voters, particularly the

negroes, in Oklahoma and other states have transferred their allegiance from the party that was in the majority in the federal government for so long, to the party that has control of the government at the present time and to whom they give the credit for furnishing them with relief and the necessities of life. The great problem that arises is just how permanent this transfer of allegiance will be. Upon this question will hang the fate of the two parties in state and national campaigns in a number of the southern states, and the hope that such affiliation can be retained, is bound to influence the amount of money that the federal government will continue to appropriate for public works and direct relief in the area included in this report.

Thus, from the problems pointed out by the committee to investigate the economic and social conditions in the south, we find a number of political implications. With conditions which brought about the domination of the political situation by one party during the long period since the old leaders regained control after reconstruction changing, a number of factors present today threaten to change that situation in areas of the South. Industrialization, with its resultant changes in outlook and interest, has made its effect felt and has contributed to a changed policy toward tariff and other political questions in large sections of the country, even contributing to recurrent breaks in the solid phalanx of Democratic states. The continued disfranchisement of the negroes and the incapacity of so many illiterate whites in the area to cast an intelligent vote, complicates the whole problem of political control and is conducive to demagogery. The extensive use of federal funds for public building programs, and relief reaching such a large percentage of the voting population as it does in the poverty stricken regions of the south has given the party in control of the government at Washington a weapon that will be a vital force in political campaigns of the future. The south has political, as well as economic and social problems.