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NBC Program for Radio  
Senator Dirksen's Radio and TV Message

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Which had upon it the New Deal stamp of the Roosevelt period and the Fair Deal stamp of the Truman can probably be regarded as the counterpart of the Liberal Party in England. In other words, it goes a little further in that direction than the Republican Party. The Republican Party, in my judgement, since the days of Abraham Lincoln has been conservative. When I say conservative I mean a party that is dedicated to conserving cultural and spiritual and economic resources of the country under a free system where the major economic judgements are made in the free market. We do not believe in control. We believe in regulation but no more than is absolutely necessary to keep the system functioning, and I think that makes a distinction between the two parties.

Is the third party movement likely or necessary in the United States? First, I doubt very much whether a third party is necessary; and secondly it is doubtful whether it will ever be very likely unless you can get a real major split. We have had third parties over the years, and sometime ago it was my pleasure when I had a bit of leisure time to run down the general history of third parties and also to what extent they commanded support from the American people. When you measure it in the light, it was quite small, as a matter of fact. So it might be said, judging from the history, that third parties do not have great appeal for the people; and this other fact should be added - when you set up a third party of course you are dealing with the creation of additional party machinery in localities, in counties, in states, and that is no easy undertaking for anybody to get started in the field

Senator, the system of selecting candidates for national office by convention the most desirable way?

Well, if it isn't the most desirable way, I doubt whether there are any better or more practical methods which have been suggested thus far. A number of bills have been introduced in the Senate and House over a period of years for the purpose of selecting presidential candidates in a national primary. To undertake a national primary, the filing of petitions or whatever method will be devised in order to get a name on the ballot, to deal with a large number of people who would submit themselves for the presidential office in a primary contest in the various states would offer real difficulty, in my judgement; and I am frankly at a loss to see how it would work within the time factor and within the frame of the practical difficulties which you usually encounter in the selection of a presidential and vice-presidential nominee.

What influences does the legendary smoke-filled room have in the national convention?

I have no idea who ever created the term, "smoke-filled room;" and it is entirely possible that back in early days probably when I was born in 1896 when there was far less communication of thought over the country by means of newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, and all the other devices for disseminating information that you could have such a thing, such a phenomenon as a smoke-filled room where

party leaders would get together, take the cards out of their packets, determine who had how much strength, and then begin to swap and deal in order to pick some particular candidate. I presume that's the time when they originally the phrase also, "the hand-picked candidate," but today there can be no such thing as a smoke-filled room. In the first place, people know pretty well what goes on. The average American voter is well-informed. The average delegate to a political convention is not only well-informed but he is a man of substance, character, and responsibility in his own community, and he is independent in his thinking so that he knows where he wants to go and what he wants to do. So in the context of the information that is available the people everywhere today, the smoke-filled room, if it ever had any real place in American Politics is a thing of the past. Now I think there is one additional comment. It is not quite fair ever to think of, let us say, the delegate from a state getting together. Caucusing in a hotel room that is large enough to hold them, considering all the possibilities before them. Now you might conceivably put a tag on them and say, "Well, look, there are the elected delegates from that state meeting in a room, reporters and the public generally are barred while they carry on the discussions, so they are doing some dealing in this smoke-filled room. They're not doing anything of the kind. They're just beating out their viewpoints on the anvil of discussion, and when it's all over, they come to a conclusion in the matter; and that is quite a different thing because that happens everyday, not only in social life, in church life, in lodge life, in business life but in nearly every segment of American activity; and so applying it to the political field makes it at once an entirely proper undertaking and a proper approach.

Senator, how much play does the individual voter have in the running of his party or in the decisions of his government?

Well, the individual can have as much to say as he likes and as deep as his interest might lie. And when I say that, he has a vote as to who will be the precinct committeemen in the precinct where he lives; he has a vote if he is interested, he can go to the county convention, when the precinct committeemen pick a county chairman; in a primary state, such as the state of Illinois, he has a vote on who shall be the candidate of local office, for state office, and if there is a presidential primary, for the presidential office as well. So you see it is the vote which is the bit weapon of the voter and as Lincoln once said, "The political power of the state resides not in the voter but in the voter who votes." You see that is an entirely different thing. You have a state where maybe thirty-five percent of the electorate will vote in a primary and perhaps pick a candidate for nomination for office who is not the most desirable person in the world. Well, it is just a question of how many voters will get out and indicate their choice of who shall be the party nominee and to what extent he wants to interest himself in public activities. That is the important thing, and that is where it begins -- with the individual voter because he is the man that in every case a candidate has got to seal.

Would you say there has been a change in the type of man who enters politics today from the politician of fifty or a hundred years ago?

Yes, I think so. I have to be a little guarded on this point, but just look at the thinking back in my mind, I think the average person who submits himself for public service particularly at the national level is by averages at least

somewhat younger than they were in other days. They not only are younger, but I think they look younger. I can remember in twenty-five years of Congressional service, serving with only one Congressman and no Senators who every wore a beard, and that was Congressman George Pinkham of Massachusetts. It gave him a rather dignified look, as you can well imagine, but he was the only one. Now as I look at the pictures of the old-timers, let us say, all along the walls and corridors here in the Senate and in the House, they look infinitely more dignified than we do today. Perhaps it is the fact that there is so much to be done and you have to hurry about it, and you do it with all zeal and determination, and that gives it an animation that seems a little different. Now they weren't quite as overwhelmed with the details of work in those earlier days, for look how the country has grown. In the last forty years, in the last twenty years, the country has grown by forty-eight million people. In the last ten years, it has grown by over twenty-eight million people. You see there wasn't quite so much business. First, the population wasn't there. Secondly, look at all the activities that have been placed upon the statute books. Here you add I use radio today as a medium of communication. There was no radio in those early days, and actually there was no Federal Communications Commission until I came to Congress in 1933 and had a chance to vote on the bill for the first time, so in every field our country has grown, and younger people now have submitted themselves; and then if the time permits let me make this one other observation. We have had in this generation two major world wars. You see I was in one of them. I was on the Western Front in 1918. Just think of sending millions of youngsters abroad somehow to expand their backgrounds, give them a better grasp of the world, then when they come back and finish their college training if they have an opportunity, it is only a jiffy until they start thinking in terms of the public service and public office; it is only a little while now as I envision it that you are going to have a great many younger people who believe that there is a place for them in public service, and they are going to be candidates for public office at all levels whether it is local, state, or national.

Are the voters of today more inclined to vote their individual preference than to follow the choices of party organizations?

I think there is a very substantial independent vote in the country, and if one had to document it, I presume he could go back to The Primaries by George Gallup in the opinion survey polls he makes from time to time. One would gather from that that there is a very substantial segment of voters in the entire electorate that are not too closely wedded either to one party or the other or to one precise viewpoint or another or to one party platform or another. So they wait for the candidates, and they wait for an explanation of the platform and the views and the things the candidate hopes to achieve if he is elected to office and make that the basis for their determination when they go into the voting booth.

How important are the geographic, the ethnic, the religious characteristics?

To a considerable extent and depending on the area I think they have a very considerable being, a very considerable impact. I would guess that in certain

rural states, let's take for instance sparsely populated states like Nevada or Montana or South Dakota or North Dakota, you probably wouldn't get too much of an impact. But where you get a very large segment of people who have a common ancestral background and who have, let us say, common views on certain matters, there, of course you will find that that will have a very considerable influence on the candidate and also on the election outcome. That is a very natural thing. Consider for a moment, the Polish people. Look how deeply they are wedded to the hope that freedom can be consummated for their ancestral homeland, Poland. They want to do everything they can in that direction, and one can well understand it when that instinct is so deep and is based upon affection and tradition and all the things that they took in with mother's milk long ago. Consequently where you have a large group of Polish people in Chicago, in Buffalo, in New York, or elsewhere, it has a very definite impact on the campaign; and then if you have a Polish candidate for office, obviously they would look with favor upon his ambitions and aspirations; and in that respect it would make a difference. Now you could say as much, I think, for other groups. You could say that for a Scandinavian group; you could say it for a German group. And then of course you get some other groups in some areas. You get a high concentration of the Negro vote. So you see that in itself will make a difference; so you don't limit it just to sectional, cultural, or ethnic groups. You have to include racial groups as well, and that is the reason the national committees of both parties do set up a division in that committee and campaign time which is the division that deals with the ethnic groups, and they make that their special forte. So you see even the national committees do recognize that fact.

Senator, is patronage an important part of our political system?

Well, at one time patronage was the most important consideration. Where you developed some real effort on the part of party workers would be the hope that there would be a reward for his zeal, his devotion in the form of a job. It might be a very humble job; it might be something infinitely better; but in any event before the growth of the merit system, patronage was an important consideration in the political scheme. Then came these various groups that began to insist upon action in the matter of the merit and the civil service fields. Actually that began when President Garfield was assassinated, I guess 1883, wasn't it? by a disappointed office seeker; and that gave an urge to civil service reform that it had never gotten before. The result was that over the years both at the national level and at the state level more and more jobs, more and more people have been covered in the merit system. And that means they become career people, and they can be separated from service only for cause and have a right of appeal. Well you have thereby diminished the number of available jobs, and as a result patronage, as such is not nearly so important a factor as it was in those earlier days.

Senator, one final question here. What changes do you foresee in our political system in the next fifty years?

Oh, goodness, that's an all-embracing question over a long period of time; and I think it would be a little difficult on the spur of the moment to give you a

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categoricaal answer. You know one reason why I'm always afraid of making a prophecy is that it can fall so wide of the mark unless you bring a tremendous imagination there. You know in 1900 they gathered a lot of interesting people and also took forecasts and prophecies from people abroad as to what the next fifty years would bring. People like Sam Gompers, the leader in the labor field, Jay Gould, the financier, Dean Ferrar, William Jennings Bryan, H. G. Wells and others. I have often said that our whole group in the New York Herald Tribune Symposium in 1900 only one was correct, oddly enough, and that was Arthur Twining Hadley, the President of Yale. For it was Dr. Hadley who said that he foresaw the day when pressure groups would yield such influence in legislative halls that it would menace our system of government and our freedom. Now, rather than speculate so much on the change in the next fifty years I'd rather speculate on the challenge that the fifty years will bring. Now there are certain things that are constant in life, but one great variable always will be -- whether or not we will keep our eye on freedom and what it means economically, politically, and socially to the expansion and the growth of the country, for if we preserve the free atmosphere in which the human spirit and the mind can unfold then, of course, there is no limit to our economic destiny. Now that I regard as a necessity and here I can tell you something that I foresee which I believe is dictaged by the arithmetic table. In a little while our population will be two hundred million. It will go beyond that I am sure as time goes on. There will be more youngsters who stay in school longer as time goes on. Theretirement age of people will be dropped. If it started at seventy, it drops to sixty-five, in some cases] sixty-two. There are movements afoot now to drop it to sixty and to fifty-five. Well, now look at the equation. Two hundred million people, more youngsters in school longer, more older people away from the workbench Urbia, the result is that the percentage of the whole population who will have to do the productive work of the country will percentage-wise be infininely smaller. That will be the hard core of producers. How is this smaller number going to produce for a greater number of people, including our export business abroad? It is very simple. There have to be new devices, new processes, new machinery new automation, new everything in themechanical field, because it is answered by one simple fact -- you have to multiply human hands. Now then, how do you do it? There have to be incentives for it, incentives for people with imagination and with rewards to come up with new processes and new devices where fewer people can produce for a greater number and still expand the enjoyment of living and the standard of living of our country. So the whole hope then is what? To preserve a free atmosphere in which mind and talent can unfold and flower and make that possible; and if we hang on to that one thing, then of course, I can prophecy just as surely as I sit here today that the America of fifty years from now will be so different from the standpoint of delights, gadgets, devices, leisure, all the rest that goes with it that if we were to come back we would scarcely recognize it.

Senator, thank you very much.