Gutter Politics

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001
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The 1954 Congressional and State elections are over and the official returns are in. The election was unusual in many respects, the majorities in both houses of Congress fell short of predictions, there were upsets and disappointments, and analysts are still trying to figure out if there was a trend and what kind, pro-Democratic, anti-Eisenhower, anti-Republican or was it merely an expression of the unpredictable independent voter.

Without regard to the victories and defeats, the American public has witnessed during the 1954 campaign one of the worst exhibitions of cheap and shoddy politics in our history. The quality of this campaign sank to the lowest possible levels. The New York Times saw the situation perfectly when it protested "the violation of decency, honesty and fair play" committed by some of the leaders and candidates during the campaign.

Elections, as a rule, are easily forgotten, put aside for another two years. But the 1954 election cannot be so easily forgotten. The Democratic Party, a partner in our American two-party system has been labeled by its opposition as being traitors, and warmongers who plunge the country into war to achieve prosperity. The citizens of our great nations should not rest until these falsehoods and those who made these accusations are properly exposed.

The 1954 campaign deteriorated into what has been aptly labeled "gutter politics." It is unfortunate that a campaign cannot be conducted by the two great American parties on the issues, instead of resorting to name-calling and smear.

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If this trend in political campaigning is not halted the public officials who emerge out of such a system will inevitably be poorly qualified by education, experience, conviction and character. They will be tools of pressure groups, interested only in their own material gain and grinding their own private ax.

"Gutter politics" is discouraging the able, honest and intelligent men from coming into the service of the Federal and State Governments. Public office involves a great deal of self-sacrifice and ridicule, but certainly there must be a limit.

The campaign which is now being reconstructed began with pledges of fair play, but soon campaigning on the issues proved ineffective in turning the tide against the Democratic candidates in key states so in a moment of desperation the Republican Party leaders resorted to the deliberate smear. These smear tactics were not limited to individual candidates but were aimed at the Democratic Party as an organization.

No one blames candidates for public office for wanting to win by pointing out the mistakes and voting record of their opponents, but no candidate or leader can be excused or forgiven for the tactics used by Vice President Nixon and his fellow party leaders.

Nixon campaigned throughout the nation labeling the Democratic Party as socialistic, left-wing, soft on Communism. Nixon and his associates have dragged politics to its lowest ebb.

The Vice President, in his nation-wide speaking tour, dwelled almost entirely on Communism, subversion, and scandal in past
Democratic Administrations. He dwelt upon the "left-wing clique" of the Democratic Party, always forgetting that it was the Democrats in Congress who originated and fought for legislation outlawing the Communist Party at the end of the second session of the 83rd Congress.

On one occasion, Nixon cited 12 cases from the files of the Eisenhower security program to support his statement that the Truman program "covered up and cleared the Communists and the security risks" and the Eisenhower program "clean up and fired them." He did not name the government employees involved but referred to them simply as "Case 1" on up to "Case 12" and employee A, B, C, etc. The actual names would have added much to these accusations, why were they not released. It simply is another case of the numbers game, with little if anything to back them up. If these files are open for political purposes they should be open for all people to examine. The people have a right to know the names and correct statistics of the number of Communists and security risks that past Democratic administrations covered and how many came in under the present Administration. Numbers make an interesting story, but they can be distorted with little effort.

Mr. Nixon has attacked the Truman regime numerous times for continuing "a war (in Korea) our men were not allowed to win." American people were concerned that "there was no leadership to bring it (the war) to an end, no leadership to blunt the threat
of Communist aggression." He does not say that the course of action taken by the Republican Administration in ending the war in Korea was more or less a continuation of the program set up under President Truman. The Republicans did not end the war, they merely completed negotiations.

In the Wyoming senatorial race, Senator Joseph C. O'Mahoney was accused by his opponent of having been a foreign agent, Agent 783. It was implied that the Senator was in pay of some foreign power hostile to our country or that he was guilty of something sinister. They stopped there, but further investigation shows that there were many prominent men in the nation, of both political parties, who had at some time during their career come under this category in their practice of law. This is just one of the many illustrations of the deliberate smears used against Democratic candidates for office. The facts were deliberately altered to suit the needs of the party.

In his speech at Cheyenne, Wyoming on October 23 Nixon said "Why is the Communist party of the United States fighting so desperately and openly for the defeat of Republican candidates for the House and Senate, and for the election of an anti-Eisenhower Congress?"

"Part of the reason can be found in the fact that the candidates running on the Democratic ticket in the key states are almost without exception members of the Democratic party's left-wing clique which has been so blind to the Communist conspiracy and has tolerated it in the United States."
Nixon declared in a speech in Butte, Montana on October 22 that he was in possession of a copy of "secret memorandum" sent in October 1953, to California leaders of the Communist party which directed them to "achieve unity behind single candidates in the Democratic primaries—if possible agree upon in advance."

He may as well have said that the Communist Party was affiliated with the Democratic Party. Such deliberate falsification of the facts is playing right into the hands of the Communists. It is driving a wedge between the Republican and Democratic parties,
making cooperation impossible in matters of importance when one party falsely accuses the other of treason, irresponsibility and recklessness.

In the state of Montana political propaganda issued in the campaign reached the most deplorable state that I have witnessed in all the years that I have taken part in state and national politics.

Republican sponsored advertisements accused the Democrats of allowing Communists in high places, but refused to give the names and refused to discuss the circumstances. They take credit for setting up a rigid program to wipe out Communist spies in government. It was the Democrats who surprised the Administration and pressed for and achieved legislation outlawing the Communist Party.

The Republicans told Montanans through various mediums of communication that they had restored honesty, integrity and efficiency to government. They failed to explain the Dixon-Yates deal, the split in their own party ranks and the low morale that is so evident in our government agencies.

Montana Farmers were asked to remember in November that it was the Democrats who drove them down the road to economic political slavery by the Democratic farm program and the Brannan Plan. We all know that the farm prices and income have dropped drastically in the past two years of the Republican Administration and they even adopted the Brannan Plan for wool.
They accused Senator James Murray and his associates, labeled as left-wingers, of trying to destroy the people's water rights and steal their water with MVA and CVA. The Republicans were not content to debate the merits of private versus public power, they introduced false insinuations.

Perhaps one of the most deplorable advertisements carried in Montana newspapers was an ad sponsored by a Republican candidate for State Senator reading as follows: "Fathers--Mothers and Sweethearts -- The claimed prosperity of the Democrats was pregnant with the blood of the battlefield, alarms, crisis, controls, regimentation, nepotism and graft." Is it possible the American politics has stooped to such a low level. The 1954 campaign did just that.

The deterioration of American political life in the campaigns of recent years is disgraceful, there must be a solution to the reckless use of money and wild charges which have so characterized the campaigns of the past decade.

Perhaps the solution to the whole problem lies within the conscience of the American people. If we continue to condone such tactics, there will eventually be only the unscrupulous in control of the destinies of the nation and the end of representative self-government in the tradition of the Founding Fathers.

The sort of campaign we witnessed is unworthy of the high offices in our Government. At least they should be above "gutter politics." Unless the deterioration of our political system is not averted, it will not be the Communists and foreign agents that we will have to worry about, it will be those within who will deprive the Americans of their liberties.