'47 The Magazine of the Year • MARCH • Vol. I, No. I

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MY COUNTRY, RIGHT or LEFT?

An editor of the Gallup Poll, analyzing public opinion trends, explains a sharp swing

By William A. Lydgate

THERE have been four outstanding trends of public opinion in the United States since the end of the war: (1) a stiffening attitude toward Russia, (2) rising fear of another war, (3) a strongly developing sentiment for laws to control labor unions and regulate strikes, and (4) a swing to the right politically. Those trends have a vital bearing on the future.

Public opinion is a mighty, sometimes a brutal, force. It puts governments in and out of office, starts and stops wars, sets the tone of morality, makes and breaks heroes. What people think today largely determines what they will do tomorrow. The poll takers, such as Gallup, Elmo Roper, and various state and local polls, regularly take the nation's pulse and tell us how we feel. Right now it takes only two words to describe how we feel: *horribly disillusioned.*

The average American never doubted we would win the war; but he did wonder whether we would win the peace. He's not wondering any more. He's sure now that we are not winning the peace, as things stand today.

He started out after V-J day being optimistic about the future. Polls found a large majority of voters saying there was no likelihood of another major war in our lifetime—only 38 per cent were gloomy enough to believe there would be. Everywhere there was confidence that Russia would cooperate with us in fashioning a world order under which civilized nations could move forward to new achievements, free from the curse of fascism and the threat

of war. All recognized that tough problems lay ahead in creating what every liberal wanted the United Nations to become — a true Parliament of Man. But the air was full of hope.

Now that hope is largely dead.

Within one year after V-J day, the Gallup Poll was finding that almost nobody thought Russia would co-operate with us; that fewer than half the voters of the country were satisfied with the progress of the United Nations; and, most melancholy fact of all, that two out of every three (65 per cent) said they thought the United States would find itself in another war within 25 years. And those disillusioned views persist today.

Russia is being singled out by the American people as the culprit holding up world peace and understanding. Less than nine months after Potsdam, six out of every ten Americans had come to the conclusion that Russia was not merely trying to secure her borders against attack, but was seeking to dominate the rest of the world. Her foreign policy was condemned by nine out of ten voters expressing an opinion. Not since the days of Hitler had the American public been so nearly unanimous in its attitude toward any foreign country. The "get tough" policy of Byrnes struck a responsive chord in American public opinion. In fact, the voters were "getting tough" in their own private thinking long before the State Department adopted that policy.

The Wallace affair, in spite of all the publicity it got, caused no change in public thinking. Afterward the people, for better or worse, continued as strong as

ever in their feeling that the U. S. must be firm with the U.S.S.R. A big majority (78 per cent) think Russia has spies at work in the United States, and most Americans want to counteract Soviet propaganda abroad with a positive international program telling the world the advantages of democracy.

However, the let's-drop-a-few-atom-bombs-on-Moscow extremism doesn't appeal to our people. We don't want war with Russia—democracies never want to start wars. But neither would the people support a State Department with a policy of meeting Russia any more than half way. The country's attitude doesn't change materially whenever the Russians show signs of temporarily relaxing their expansionist drives, or when they issue mollifying statements. Most people here seem to have reached the point where they cease to place much reliance on the small assurances handed out from time to time by the Kremlin.

The falling off in the warmth of the public's feeling toward Russia is well symbolized by a story that recently was going the rounds of the American delegation and secretariat at the United

Nations. Some members of the U. N. Military Commission decided (so the story goes) to take a few days' vacation and journey out to South Dakota to shoot pheasants. Hearing of this, a correspondent from Tass, the Russian news agency, appeared at the Military Commission headquarters and buttonholed the press secretary.

"Tell me," he asked, "are the Russians going shooting too?"

"Look, Ivan," the press secretary replied, "I said pheasants, not peasants."

It's a curious situation—nobody wants war with Russia, yet everybody (or two out of three of us) expects there will be war within 25 years, and we all have Russia in mind.

The very fact that the situation appears so gloomy may, however, be a healthy sign. Instead of idealistically supposing, as many did after 1918, that the world was safe for democracy, the nation today soberly realizes that you have to work to keep peace. The question all along has been whether the American people will want to pull out of Europe and turn isolationist. That's still the vital question of the future. The foreign offices of every nation are studying our actions carefully to find the answer.

So far as American public opinion is concerned, there's plenty of evidence on hand to supply the answer. It is NO, we are not turning isolationist. The *Fortune* Survey recently found six out of every ten voters wanting either to strengthen the existing U. N. organization or to form a world government in which the various countries would become states. In short, six out of every ten expressed "internationalist" sentiments as opposed to the "isolationism" of the 1920's and 1930's.

The wave of isolationism after the first World War set in comparatively early. Today, 18 months after World War II, no such wave appears to have started. In fact, the Gallup Poll has found a whopping majority opposed to pulling our troops out of Europe or the Orient. Even before the war ended, the public was thinking in terms of long occupations of the enemy countries. The more uncertainty and trouble there is abroad, the more determined the American people become *not* to pull out. Our quarrels with Russia have done a lot to keep alive the internationalist sentiment of the country.

There are a couple of important things, however, which that internationalist sentiment does not include. It does not include any public desire to share the secret or "know-how" of the atomic bomb with other countries, or to indulge in drastic disarmament. The average American envisions an army of 1,000,000 men and consistently votes in favor of keeping the peace-time military draft

of young men. After the last war the United States neither joined the League of Nations nor kept a strong standing army—and we ended up in war. Today the average American apparently wants to reverse both those old policies by participating in a world organization and keeping militarily strong.

ON THE domestic front, voters list labor troubles alongside the high cost of living as the two leading issues since V-J day.

The public is not antiunion. It believes in the right of collective bargaining, and it is quite often in sympathy with union demands for higher pay. But the public has become decidedly antistrike in its sentiments. The poll takers have collected a mass of information on attitudes toward labor-management disputes, and the pattern of public thinking is clear.

The average American outside the labor union movement feels that union leaders have grossly abused their power. He feels that unions and their leaders frequently ignore the welfare of the general public. He is opposed to the exercise of uncurbed power, whether it comes from the right or from the left. One of the basic lessons of American history—a lesson that dictators such as Hitler never seem to learn—is that the common people of this country will stand being pushed around just so long and no longer. Once they believe they are being bullied a powerful anger burgeons which is none the less awesome because it develops slowly and stays within the bounds of the law. In the 1880's the railroad magnates pushed people around, and were slapped down with the I.C.C. law regulating railroads. Trusts abused their power until public pressure brought the antitrust laws. Financial dictation by the banks led to the Federal Reserve Act. There was food and drug poisoning, then came the Food and Drug Act. Commodity gambling resulted in commodity exchange regulations. Stock market abuses brought the S.E.C. regulation, which stock exchange officials opposed as bitterly as union leaders have fought all attempts to regulate unions. Employers for years were unfair to unions, and we had the Wagner

Labor Act to foster and protect the growth of the union movement. Today the public feels that many unions have become swollen with power, that they show callous, even reckless, disregard of the public interest. Is regulation of labor unions coming? So far as public opinion is concerned, it's long overdue.

What kind of regulations? Here are five steps which polls have found the public in favor of taking. (1) calling off all strikes and lockouts for a period of one year, to get production going full blast; (2) permanently prohibiting strikes in public utilities, such as gas, electric, telephone and local transportation companies, which can paralyze whole cities; (3) require a cooling-off period before any strike can be called, with investigation of the issues during the waiting period; (4) compulsory arbitration of labor disputes if they can't be settled privately between labor and management; and (5) legislation to prohibit "feather-bedding" or make-work practices on the part of unions.

Rightly or wrongly, the public tends to put the blame for industrial disputes more on labor than on management. The public may be quite unfair to labor in that respect. But the unions have missed the boat for years in their handling of public relations. The resulting unpopularity has obscured the merits of many of their arguments. It is significant that whereas the trend of opinion during the last few years has been toward union regulation, there's almost no sentiment for government regulation of big business.

The swing to the right politically, which was dramatically evidenced by the November elections, was actually in evidence even before the war. It was temporarily halted by war. The high point of New Deal voting strength was the 1936 election, when Roosevelt polled 62½ per cent of the major party vote, a popular landslide almost without parallel in our history. Yet two years later the Democrats lost 76 seats in the House. Two years after that (1940) Roosevelt polled only 55 per cent of the popular vote against Wendell Willkie. The revolt against the Democratic Party began, then, sometime between 1936 and 1940. It started on the farms and in the small towns of the nation. The feeling grew that the Democratic administration was not working on behalf of all the people, but had become, instead, purely a labor administration. The war sustained Roosevelt in office, his third term and fourth term victories resulting from the fact that a majority felt it unwise to change the man at the helm in the midst of war. Soon after peace returned, the Democratic Party tide receded. The Truman administration was not alone to blame; the swing to the right started years before he took over. And it would have required superhuman political genius to avert this once the war ended. The country simply grew tired of reform and tired of government controls.

Some liberals hoped that the veterans of World War II would be a force for continued social reform; that they would crusade in the postwar years against economic and social injustice. Here and there veterans have taken a spectacular part in politics. But poll after poll has found that the veterans as a group think no differently from the rest of the population about most public issues.

If there is another big depression, with bread lines and unemployment, this country may go back to reform. Otherwise, the future, judging by the mood of the public, shapes up something like the following:

A breathing spell for business. Amendment of the Wagner Labor Act, along with legislation to regulate labor union practices and control strikes. No major new social legislation. Continued public support for American co-operation with other nations, but a firm attitude toward Russia, Opposition to sharing the secrets of the atom bomb. Support for a strong army and navy, and peacetime military training for all young men. No drastic cut in income taxes (the public is more frightened by the size of the public debt than by the size of the taxes it has to pay).

In general there will be public apathy about politics, with low voter turnout on election days. There's no Roosevelt in the White House to dramatize government and make politics fun for Joe Doakes to watch and share.

Illustrated by John Groth