

The Election Campaign

The Twin Danger of Complacency and Pessimism

By William Z. Foster



THERE is every indication that the Presidential elections will be closely fought, with the outcome by no means a foregone conclusion. If the Roosevelt forces are to win they will have to dig in and work as they have done in no previous campaign. And one of the biggest obstacles they will have to overcome is moods of complacency and over-confidence in their own ranks. This super-optimism springs from the current widespread almost fatalistic belief that Roosevelt is a practically unbeatable vote-getter. It is further fed by so-called popular polls, which in many cases show that Roosevelt has an edge over Dewey with regard to their respective backing among the voters.

The ultra-enthusiastic notion that "the election is in the bag for Roosevelt" is held widely in liberal and trade union circles. This careless optimism can do vast harm by weakening the efforts of Roosevelt's supporters. For if the election is "in the bag," what sense is there in plunging in and doing real campaigning? Recently a well-known pro-Roosevelt radio commentator, one of the most pronounced of the "in the bag" theorists, gave a striking example of just how deadening such over-confidence can be. He was explaining that Dewey had deprived the New York soldiers of their right to vote in November, which is a dangerous blow against Roosevelt; but he dismissed the whole matter lightly by asserting that after all this anti-democratic action would do no good to Dewey,

as Roosevelt is sure to carry New York State anyhow by a huge majority. The logic of such a stand is, of course, to do nothing to get the vote to the soldiers; in fact, to make no real effort to defeat Dewey.

Besides fighting against such crippling, over-optimism, efforts must also be devoted to overcoming the opposite extreme of unjustified pessimism, which is also prevalent and which is very harmful, too, in its paralyzing effects. Such negative moods largely stem from the popular polls, which many people have come to look upon as reliable expressions of the voters' sentiments. Thus, when Mr. Gallup puts out figures to the effect that Michigan and New York are at the present time in the Dewey column, waves of pessimism and passivity are thereby set afloat among the less alert of the pro-Roosevelt forces. And curiously enough, there are often to be found both unjustified optimism and groundless pessimism in the same person. That is, a devotee of the popular polls may foolishly consider his own State lost for Roosevelt, because the Gallup poll indicates so, and, at the same time enthusiastically believe that the national election is "in the bag" for Roosevelt, because the Fortune poll leaves this implication.

Obviously such shallow moods of complacency and defeatism must be counteracted or else serious harm may result. The popular polls must be discounted. Past election experiences have taught us that they are, at best, very inaccurate and that, at worst, they are definitely compiled to accomplish

certain political results. Moreover, in such a fluid political situation as we are now in, it is impossible, above all at this early stage, to measure accurately the voters' moods.

ALL EFFORTS NEEDED

Two things should guide us in the present election situation. The first of these is the fact that beyond question a substantial majority of the American people favor the foreign and domestic policies that President Roosevelt has been and is now putting into effect—a reality which is eloquently testified to by the attempts of Dewey to pilfer these policies, in form at least. The second thing is that Roosevelt can be elected only if the most strenuous efforts are put forth to rally to his active support the great democratic masses of the people—which means especially that the utmost endeavors must be made to bring the myriads of women to the polls, to get the ballot into the hands of as many soldiers as possible, to mobilize the tens of millions of organized and unorganized workers, etc.

Nothing must be allowed to stand in the way of doing this huge mass educational and organizational work, on the broadest possible non-partisan basis. We must be alertly on guard against the foolish optimism that counts the victory already won, because some highly questionable national or state poll says so, and we must also fight against all tendencies to say that everything is lost, because Mr. Gallup may happen to think so or want to create that impression. In this most vital election since 1864, what is needed is hard work and clear-sighted realism, not rainbow-chasing after popular polls.