

CHAPTER 13

Road to Disenchantment

IN 1947 a motley array of crusaders had taken to the third-party road. Hopes had been high, theirs was a vision of a better world—a world of peace, freedom, and abundance. By the end of the trail, their hopes had been shattered—their independent political path had become a road to disenchantment—disenchantment for the candidates, disenchantment for their fellow politicians, disenchantment for the followers of whatever motivation and persuasion, disenchantment for more objective viewers of the American political scene.

For Henry A. Wallace, with his vision of a broad people's party to wage the "fight for peace" on behalf of the common man, the blow was most shattering of all. For he had staked his reputation—a reputation based on a lifetime of service in the public interest—on the outcome of his personal crusade against the Truman-doctrine style of foreign policy. And only in the most limited sense was there achievement of his basic goal, that the people might have a choice—an alternative to the bipartisan get-tough-with-Russia policy. The people had their choice, and they rejected it in no uncertain terms.

But the factors accompanying the defeat were far more tragic than defeat itself. For victory in the immediate sense of a triumph at the polls had never been expected. Instead, the hope had been to demonstrate a substantial discontent—

discontent with the abandonment of Franklin D. Roosevelt's foreign policy, discontent with the termination of the Democratic Party's New Deal outlook. Embarking on the third-party course without the firm backing of either farm or labor segments had seemed foolhardy from the beginning. Indeed it had been early labeled "quixotic politics." Nevertheless, a major show of support for a third-party venture had been maneuvered by long-time friends and trusted advisers to convince the former Vice President that he must make the political sacrifice. But once he had been convinced, once his decision had been announced, many of these friends and advisers had rapidly retreated to the storm cellar of political conformity. Others turned their backs on him as the campaign progressed. Henry Wallace soon discovered that the waging of a *losing*—or even worse, a *hopeless*—political campaign is one of the real tests of friendship.

Nor did the people themselves, the common man in whom he placed such reliance, respond in any numbers to his call. Faced with more imminent domestic issues, the American voter turned his back on the "remote, unrealistic" national scene. Faced with a third-party promise of negotiations with the Russians, he found increasing signs of Soviet intransigence throughout a complex hostile world. Faced with the prospect of a Dewey Republican victory, he turned to the lesser evil—an always human, newly vigorous and hard-hitting Harry S. Truman. At least he turned in terms of a small plurality of the scant 51 per cent of qualified voters who actually took the trouble to go to the polls—thus casting a quavering mandate for a Fair Deal program that was to be so little realized.

√ But the ultimate in disenchantment for the man who had so increased the stature of the vice presidency in his many wartime services—the man who as Secretary of Agriculture had been both the experimenter and creator of a model administrative order, the man who had been the philosopher

spearhead of the New Deal—was not the anticipated though untimely termination of his political career. Rather it was the smearing of his entire record, the attempt to cast into disrepute the accomplishments of a lifetime in the service of humanity. No *de la Mancha* in his earlier jousts, he became the disillusioned victim of those who had earlier urged upon him this third-party course of action.

The ultimate post-Korean capture of the party he had founded by the extremists of the left came almost as an anticlimax to the quiet, graying, friendly man who had attempted to embody in practice the most basic tenets of his fundamental Christianity.

To Glen H. Taylor, too, the Progressive Party path had proved a road to disenchantment. Far more the practical politician than his running mate, he had nevertheless made his decision, not on a politically rational basis, but on the basis of conscience. Realizing the likely sacrifice of the “best job [he’d] ever had,” he too had hoped to stir the conscience of the American public by his part in the crusade. But the public had cast him in the buffoon’s role—that of a “singing cowboy”—a role that TV could cast much better. Seeking, perhaps, to use the Communists for the advancement of a more democratic capitalistic society, he found that they had used and destroyed him in the process. For his “leftwing” association—an association viciously misrepresented to the voters of Idaho in his fatal 1950 primary battle—returned to haunt Taylor.

A similar fate lent disenchantment to many other “professionals” who had taken to the third-party road. Rexford Guy Tugwell, Elmer Benson, “Beanie” Baldwin—all emerged with reputations tarnished, political careers ended with the added embitterment that it had been in a hopeless cause. Even Vito Marcantonio, that long-time tightrope walker of the extreme left, came ultimately to the end of the rope—and eventually

to the point where he could follow the "party line" no longer. What of the crusaders themselves—those who had embarked with hopes so high, with naïveté and amateurism blazoned so clearly on their shields, on this holy war for a more peaceful world? Disillusionment was the lot of all—public rejection, hostility in an ever increasing period of conformity. Economic sacrifice, the loss of jobs, the scorn of neighbors was in store for many. But even worse was the public reaction that greeted their endeavor—a crystallization, a hardening of opinion against the ideas they advocated, the solidifying of support for a peacetime militarization which they fought. Not only was the fifteen-billion-dollar defense budget soon to climb to the permanent forty-billion-dollar level, but the peacetime draft which they opposed as "un-American" was to become so accepted a part of the scene that Congress could easily re-enact it within short years as "noncontroversial."

Even the Communists emerged among the disenchanted. Their "superior understanding" of American history had once more led them astray. The universe of America had proved larger than the world of Union Square. And even in New York, the balance-of-power position so carefully built over the years by the American Labor Party was soon in ruins about their heads as they pursued their policy of narrowness and exclusion to its logical and suicidal conclusion.

But there was still a broader aura of disenchantment to those who watched as more objective outside observers. Those who viewed the bipartisan foreign policy with grave reservations—the same reservations attached to any democratic policy adopted without discussion, opposition, or presentation of alternatives—saw as the ultimate outcome of 1948 a minimization and termination of opposition to the Churchill-Truman-Dulles "line." Indeed the mere presentation of contrary views moved into the realm of treasonous or at least "un-American" activity. The witch-hunting of the postwar period became more and more pronounced, with political for-

tunes sought and found by opportunistic self-seekers willing to whip the hysteria into ever greater frenzy.

Nor was the damage limited to the realm of the politically active. Free speech everywhere—on campus, in lecture hall, at city desk, in classroom and city hall all across the nation—fell prey to the hostility unleashed by shortsighted political demagoguery. Conformity was advancing inexorably, moving on to overwhelm not only the positions abandoned by the Wallace crusaders but those still occupied by their adversaries of the ADA and the Democratic Party. The unleashed tide failed to distinguish between liberal friend and foe. Under its wave went those who had looked to 1948 as the beginning of a realignment of the parties into more meaningful issues-based groups.

And to those still waiting hopefully for “the coming of a third party,” the Wallace experience was bitter confirmation of the insuperable barriers in the way of any group hoping to emulate the British Labour success. True, the ballot obstacles had not proved as impassable as expected for a party launched in sufficient time with adequate breadth and organization to wage a ballot drive all across the land—provided it was able to pick up a degree of undercover support from a major adversary hoping to profit by its presence. True, the financial hurdle had been well overcome by the unique voluntarism of the fundraising ventures, but—as had been observed—only Henry A. Wallace could get away with it—only zealous crusaders were likely to respond to such persuasion.

Organizationally, however, the Progressive Party had merely added another exclamation point to the political truism “It takes a machine to beat a machine.” More than zeal, ambition, and the willing support of amateurs is necessary to establish even the foundations of a lasting party structure. Above all, success at the polls and favorable conditions of the times exist as the bare minima on which a lasting organization may be built. The Jim Farleys, who had claimed that

given time and workers they could build viable machines without patronage, had never been faced with that dire necessity—either in New York or nationally.

The third-party path on which the crusaders had embarked with such high hopes had then become the road to disenchantment by the end of 1950. But were there any contrary signs to be observed along the way? Like many another minor party of protest, the Progressives had served both immediate and less visible long-range functions. From the short-range partisan standpoint of the Democrats, the Wallace party temporarily attracted the albatross-like “Communist issue” that was to prove so damaging only four years later. But beyond that, the domestic shift of the Truman administration and the beginning of the attacks on the “no-good, do-nothing 80th Congress”—a Congress in whose first session the minority Democratic Senate leadership and House rank and file had sided with the majority—were clearly attributable, in part at least, to the Wallace attraction for old line New Dealers. The 1947 threat of labor and liberal defections had not been an idle one. Nor had it gone unnoted by Democratic Party strategists. For the first time in American history, a minor party saw its thunder stolen in the very midst of the campaign, rather than four or forty years later. In unexpected fashion, the philosopher of the New Deal had served to father the Fair Deal of his opponent.

Foreign policy, on the other hand, provided no similar instance of an equally remarkable, radical, and rapid policy shift by Harry S. Truman. Containment remained the dogma of the day. And yet, in his 1949 inaugural, once established policy had been covered in the major (but now forgotten) first three points, the President came to point four. A thrill ran through the rain-chilled crowd in Capitol Plaza as the victorious candidate announced a plan of technical assistance that, save for its bilateral nature, might clearly have been inspired by the dismissed cabinet member who had kept insisting on

the need for an American foreign policy promoting the interests of people, rather than governments.

From the vantage point of a decade later, the ultimate contributions of Henry A. Wallace to American foreign policy had emerged as even more pronounced. A different time, a different President, a different Premier—all these were obviously true. And yet the rapid shift within a short year from the continued containment and non-negotiation of a Dulles to the summits and visits of an Eisenhower who had become his own Secretary of State had much of the Wallace hue about them. (Indeed, the illness-aborted display of 1955 with its Geneva summit had convinced the erstwhile Republican Wallace to return to his *first* party—at least for the 1956 presidential campaign.)

And IDA—the International Development Authority so long espoused by Senator A. S. “Mike” Monroney and so unexpectedly adopted by the administration in early 1960—was clearly a refinement of the 1949 Wallace proposal for a similarly named multilateral approach to the problems of those nations with great need, but less than sound banking collateral, for capital development. The renewed interest during the late 1950’s of so many Democratic Senators and Congressmen in a return to multilateral assistance, and in a changed emphasis upon economic rather than military assistance, was reminiscent of the speeches ten years earlier of the former Vice President. His very words—“We shall never be able to rely upon allies bought with our arms”—became the basic argument of many who at an earlier time had supported the Truman doctrine.

By late 1959, the American policy of “firmness” toward Russia had lost support not only in domestic circles but even abroad in the mind of its coauthor, former Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who, citing “changed circumstances,” supported British abandonment of the concept. And in America its firm supporters remained a handful of those who had

participated in its formulation—Truman, Acheson, Dulles, and Harriman. Policy planner George Kennan—the “Mr. X” of its earliest defense—had moved completely over to a “disengagement” position.

And so the “fight for peace” of Henry A. Wallace had been vindicated in a sense. Under different sponsorship, under more favorable circumstances, with more amenable principals, and under the more urgent threat of the H-bomb, his basic ideas were being adopted by way of ushering in his “Century of the Common Man.” The road to disenchantment had proved to have another turning; in the long run, Wallace’s crusade would prove to have been more than just quixotic.