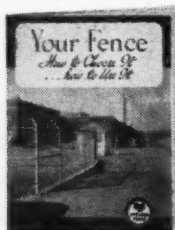


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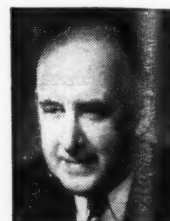
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Perspective

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Light on an Old Fraud

by Raymond Moley



IN WHAT history may call the great Stassen gaffe, the principal therein proposed to ignore the preferences of a great majority of Republican leaders and to present a ticket to please some people in the Republican Party, "in labor, minorities, and independents" and "the independent people at home, important portions of the population abroad, and the uncommitted nations in the world." Only somewhat less befuddled are those who have been telling us for some years that Republicans should ignore their own party membership and prepare a ticket and program to convert Democrats and to cozen "independents."

This strategy—very popular these days with people who, while paying lip service to the President, would attack the Republican Party—assumes that there is a fixed number of Democrats and Republicans, with a decisive minority of so-called independents. The conclusion that they would have us draw is that the only way a candidate on the Republican ticket can win is to look so much and talk so much like a "liberal" Democrat that voters will switch sides and elect him.

This concept I have called "the myth of a static electorate."

The fallacy behind it is the idea that political action is concerned with conversion, or perhaps reconversion. On the other hand, true masters of politics design political activity—all the printing and oratory, all the piety and wit—to inspire party members with confidence and to stir the sympathetic but lazy to get out and vote.

INDEPENDENTS SCORNE

The late Ed Flynn of the Bronx, up to the end F.D.R.'s most intimate political mentor, told me back in the 1930s that his strategy and Mr. Roosevelt's was to assume the loyalty of Democrats who had voted for the party before 1932 and to aim at people who had not been voting but who were radical in outlook. Flynn and Mr. Roosevelt scoffed at the idea of converting Republicans. They were people to attack, not flatter. Flynn scorned the idea of "independents."

I studied two British elections at firsthand, in 1950 and 1955, and talked with many professional workers in both parties in England, Scotland,

and Wales. The lasting lesson I learned was that those realists paid little attention to opposition voters. They used their resources to get out every sympathizer, and many needed plenty of prodding. The contest was a matter of efficiency, and since there were twice as many professional Conservative agents, the victory went to that party. It was left to the theorists in London and Oxford to believe that speeches were decisive. "Independents" over there are contemptuously known as "floaters."

So far as I know, Billy Graham is not trying to turn Catholics and Jews into Methodists and Baptists, but to get at the unaffiliated. He is much too wise to call the unwashed and unsaved "independent."

MARKET FOR VOTES

In 1952 Stevenson received about 27 million votes, which is roughly the sum of Truman's (1948) 24 million, Wallace's and Thurmond's (1948) 1 million each, and a million more new voters in old Democratic families. Mr. Eisenhower received Dewey's 22 million plus some millions who had been conservatively inclined but indifferent in 1948, plus a number of new voters. Except in the South, there were few conversions.

While the 1952 vote was large, there were and are somewhere around 40 million eligibles who failed to vote. That is the market for votes where either party may find a majority. Those nonvoting eligibles are not "independent." They are merely inactive. Republicans may confidently assume that more than half of them are inclined to conservatism.

The people who are talking about a static electorate also say that, since Democratic candidates for the House received in 1952 more votes than Republican candidates, the Republican Party is a permanent minority. They fail to add that there were 93 districts in which there were no contests and that 82 of them were Democratic. In all contested districts Republican candidates were 3,282,000 votes ahead.

Except in describing a single election, it is absurd to talk about minority or majority parties. The size of a party's vote is whatever zeal and hard work can make it.