

A MERCURY SURVEY OF OPINION LEADERS

BY EDWARD L. BERNAYS

IN A preview of American public opinion, published in the March 1944 AMERICAN MERCURY, I attempted by querying representative group leaders and opinion-molders throughout the country, to evaluate the trends of public opinion and action in the following six months; and to interpret and project them into the future. The test was made in the belief that the views of group leaders and opinion-molders today are likely to be the pattern of popular thought tomorrow, and that a synthesis of their views is a fair indication of the direction in which we are travelling.

The results of our survey proved to be remarkably accurate. Public opinion and events took place according to expectation. I have completed a new survey to try to forecast public opinion on major issues, arising out of present events and in some cases to forecast events themselves. This article gives in broad outline the results of our latest survey.

We queried a substantial and representative number of group leaders and opinion-molders. An astounding

percentage answered. These men and women reflect the thought of the country in education, commerce and industry, banking and finance, press and radio, government service, labor, agriculture, professional and other vocational interests, and social welfare including many organizations and associations with millions of followers.

Here are the conclusions to be drawn from this study:

The American people will join a post war union of nations;

With victory, America and her Allies will occupy a conquered Germany and Japan until they become economically sound and politically democratic;

America believes it will not enter another war until at least twenty-five years from now;

Americans think that Presidential tenure should be limited by law;

Postwar taxes should be levied on all income groups, and distributed proportionately;

Wartime controls should be continued in the postwar period, primarily on necessary goods, through minimum wage laws, and wage ceilings;

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Reconversion should be handled by both government and private industry, and not by government alone;

In the light of current political, economic and social trends, the United States will move in the next ten years towards a mixed economy, increasing cooperative interest and control by both government and private industry;

The people will demand a law requiring confirmation of treaties by a majority vote of both houses of Congress;

We will have compulsory military training for young men after the war — but on the question of a national service of men and women a forecast is difficult because we are divided.

II

To a question of primary importance to all Americans, *Should the United States join a postwar union of nations?* 96.2 per cent of the answers, an overwhelming vote cutting across all regional and other lines, definitely favored our participation in such a world union.

Out from Kansas, for instance, comes the warning, "Unless we do organize the world thus, the present war may as well continue indefinitely without an armistice."

A Santa Barbara, California, newspaper editor adds, "But it's all academic and doesn't really matter unless we are willing to pay the price of peace, which is economic adjustment and a Christian spirit."

Getting down to more detailed issues, 36.9 per cent thought that the

"big four" (USA, Great Britain, Russia and China) should dominate, as against a bare 9.6 per cent willing to give equal representation to all member nations regardless of population and territory.

Typical of the comments was that of a Chicago physician: "All games need an umpire." "Why not be realistic? That will happen anyway," says the publisher of a Pennsylvania paper.

And at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, an eminent educator observes, "The 'big four' will do as they please. The best we can do is hope it will please them to act sensibly. Exactly what is sensible isn't so clear as many of us think."

Only 44.1 per cent supported the use of group military force against aggression — and only 9.2 per cent were willing to give the "big four" the right to veto military action should one of their own number be proved an aggressor.

To the question, *Do you think the United States is apt to be engaged in another war in the next 5, 10, 15, or 25 years?* only one half of our respondents answered. Of these, 78.05 per cent believed that another war would not come before 25 years, 12.08 per cent in 15 years, 7.5 per cent in 10 years, and 2.2 per cent in 5 years. There were many who said that a response would depend upon the success of a union of nations or that they would prefer thinking in terms of peace rather than to be committed on the possibility of another war.

The hopes and fears of the people,

in fact, much more than their opinions, served to dominate their response to this question, but more prominent were the suggestions that thinking of any possibility of war should be abandoned in preference to planning, and a sense of determination to secure peace. "Stop talking about war, work for peace," was the general opinion.

To the question, *Do you favor a change in the law requiring Senate confirmation of foreign treaties by a 2/3 vote?* the tide ran strongly in favor of balancing executive and legislative authority, and called for broader public participation and representation in whatever foreign commitments we may make. A South Dakota editor's reminder, "A few Senators cheated us after World War I," and a Hartford, Connecticut, educator's comment, "The more people to decide, the less international skullduggery," were evidently in the thoughts of the 62.7 per cent who wanted to change the present law which requires only Senate confirmation. Specifically 80.7 per cent of the leaders want this changed to a requirement for a majority vote of both houses of Congress as against 19.3 per cent who would be satisfied with a majority vote of the Senate alone.

In answer to, *What to do with Germany when victory is achieved?* the preponderant opinion (69.7 per cent) emphasizes that Germany must be occupied until it is economically sound and politically democratic.

This was an insistent note, regard-

less of vocations or regions. 6.9 per cent would keep Naziland occupied for five years by a United Nations Military Government, 10.5 per cent would strip the country of heavy industry and convert it into an agricultural nation, 11.9 per cent call for dismemberment; and 1.3 per cent believe we should do nothing.

In relation to both Germany and Japan, in fact, there is an emphasis on constructive rehabilitation measures rather than vengeance. As to what to do with Japan, 50.1 per cent voted, as the first course of postwar action, for occupation until it becomes economically sound and politically democratic, even though as an alternative there is a stronger percentage for Japan's dismemberment, 29.73 per cent as against 11.9 per cent for Germany. Minority choices are 12.8 per cent, for the stripping of the country of heavy industries and agricultural conversion; 6.08 per cent, for a five-year occupation period by a United Nations Military Government; and 1.01 per cent who felt that no action should be taken at all.

Extremes of emotional response to the treatment of Japan can be sensed in comments added by two editors from the pivotal state of California. While one demanded, "Sterilize them. Let them live out their lives and then die out," another countered with "You can't hammer people into being peaceful. You can only love them into it." The same differences held in regard to postwar Germany.

But, "If we are going to police the

world, and we damn well are, then we're going to need policemen," warns a New York State editor. 69.2 per cent were unequivocally in favor of *compulsory military training for young men* after the war, with 30.7 per cent opposed. As a historian from the state of Michigan declares, "Youth needs to know the cost of freedom, the need and duty of defending it, and the obligations it involves. Not for 'goose-stepping' or 'technical' ends, however. I would combine with it vocational training." A university professor from Texas confirms, "The safety of democracy depends on a free citizenry trained to defend its rights."

Still, the demands for clarification of the proposed program cut across all shades of opinion. Many pointed out that strictly military methods are quickly outmoded today so that there should be emphasis on the basic techniques of organization, quick thinking and body building.

On the related question, however, *Do you favor some form of national service (not necessarily military) for both men and women?*, the vote was closely divided with 54.4 per cent voting *no* against 45.5 per cent *yes*. In the majority of negative comments there was a certain emotional aversion to any forced change in the status of women, and more to any possibility of gradual regimentation for the whole population. "I do not favor any more Federal controls over the people in any form," says the head of a Shreveport, Louisiana, organization, voting *no*. "Regimented youth movements

are too handy tools for demagogues and tyrants," adds a Cedar Rapids, Iowa, editor, while a news director in Minneapolis, Minnesota, thinks, "Women need discipline more, but I can't see it in compulsory service form. . . ." In contradiction to this point of view, an Aurora, Illinois, leader answers, "Yes. We do not need to be regimented, but should be organized for any possible emergency. Our Air Raid training under Civilian Defense was excellent." And a lecturer in Boston, Massachusetts, agrees, "This would be helpful, instilling respect, responsibility and reverence for country and fellow citizens."

III

The recent Presidential election gave us an opportunity to get an answer to the question, *What factors influenced your vote most strongly — domestic issues, international issues, or the personality and character of the candidate?* Three factors, it appeared, were of near equal importance in the minds of the leaders. 37.6 per cent declared international factors most strongly influenced their choice, 33.3 per cent domestic issues, 29.1 per cent personality and character of the candidate.

In response to *How long do you think Presidential tenure should be set by law?*, 74.6 per cent suggested limiting the term in some way, generally adding comments like, "It is of the essence of democracy that there be frequent changes in the Presidency."

48.8 per cent were for one eight year or two consecutive four-year periods, 25.4 per cent were for the present system of no limitations, on the principle, "Let the people rule."

Among new proposals for tenure, 19.2 per cent favored a six-year term, while minorities of 5.3 per cent felt that one four-year period without re-election was adequate, and 1.3 per cent thought that a twelve-year occupancy of the White House was preferred. There were even a few suggestions for a seven-year term or for elections patterned on the English vote of confidence. In general, among professional groups there was a definite cleavage. Labor, social welfare, civic leaders and heads of large national cross-section groups voted for no limitations, while the press, commerce, industry, banking and finance, education and professions such as medicine, the church and the law, favored restriction.

After Germany and Japan are defeated, our leaders believe in some continuation of wartime wage and price ceiling control. 57.6 per cent would maintain the price ceilings on luxury goods, in comparison with 86.6 per cent on necessary goods and 71.6 per cent on wage ceilings, and 81.0 per cent would maintain minimum wage laws. 15.73 per cent of those questioned voted to continue such controls for one year, 28.25 per cent for two years, and 11.65 per cent for five years, while a surprising 44.36 per cent are in favor of "indefinitely."

The close majority (57.1 per cent)

wishing to see free international trade without tariff barriers did so with the general conviction that "tariffs make wars," but with skepticism, in many cases, that free trade is either possible, or practical. A national network radio commentator declares, "Generally speaking, yes. The United States can make better products, so we need not fear competition on essential items."

The 42.9 per cent holding out for tariffs, however, offered a consideration of our need for self-protection and the maintenance of standards of living, wage scales, and the like, against what was frequently called "idealism." In line with this opposition, a nationally known Washington newspaper columnist contends, "No. To start with, free trade is ideal; but our present wage scale now depends on tariffs to a large extent, and we are committed to them whether we like it or not."

There was a strong agreement on how reconversion should be handled. Only 2.0 per cent wanted government alone to handle the job; 8.9 per cent private industry alone, while a grand total of 89.1 per cent declared here was a task for both government and private industry. Including labor as a factor, leaders in general rejected the need of cleavages between these interests, but called instead for co-operation on problems necessary to the public good. As an upstate New York industrial representative declared, "Both government and private industry are inextricably bound up in the production of war goods. Together

they must work out the details of reconversion and disposal."

On Management-Labor relations, 21.1 per cent sought greater control for unions, 78.8 per cent demanded less control by unions. 28.3 per cent wanted more pro-Labor legislation, 71.6 per cent more pro-Management legislation. These figures will no doubt appall the rank and file of Labor — and frankly, they disturb the writer.

But they are presented here for the therapeutic value the truth ought to have. There was agreement that cooperation, including unbiased government supervision in public interest rather than pressure group interest, should be the objective. A Yale professor put it this way, "There should be a combination of forces, including (1) legislation either 'pro-Labor' or 'pro-Management' which would redress evils as they appear, and (2) a greater sense of responsibility (to their constituents and to the public) on the part of both labor leaders and business management." A Philadelphia publisher wrote, "Man is hoggish and predatory. A balance of power seems best, but difficult to maintain."

As to postwar taxes, there was the same emphasis on the cooperative relationship between citizens and government with emphasis on a proportionate distribution of taxes on all income groups (87.4 per cent).

With sound American thinking prevailing, it is not surprising that in answer to the question as to *What*

direction the United States will move in the next ten years? only 4.9 per cent of American leaders believe we will move to complete state control. 39.3 per cent believe that we will continue as a nation of free capitalistic enterprise more or less as at present, while 55.7 per cent believe we are moving increasingly towards a mixed economy of private industry and state control.

A leader in a nationally known labor organization, whose opinion was echoed by heads of industries as well, says, "The drift toward a modified state socialism is a worldwide phenomenon, and is not confined to this country. It is compounded partly of a feeling that free enterprise has failed to provide solutions for certain important questions, and partly on the fact that government is being required to furnish services which free enterprise either cannot or will not undertake."

"It is a mistake," agrees an editor out in Indiana, "to assume that any state control automatically restricts and never expands private enterprise. TVA is a good example of such expansion along with and because of government enterprise."

I believe this survey gives a true picture of what America's leaders think and how America in the future, in line with its leaders' thinking and action, will move on the important questions facing the nation.



SOME TRUTHS ABOUT POLAND

BY WILLIAM HENRY CHAMBERLIN

IT is unfortunate that American public opinion, never too well informed about the smaller European countries, has to some extent been forced to choose between two propagandist versions of Poland. One is the idealized legend of ardent Polish sympathizers, the other an excessively dark picture drawn by groups hostile to the Poles.

There are ugly spots in the Polish record. Liberal friends of the country are the first to acknowledge this. During most of its life as an independent state Poland was governed by semi-dictatorial methods. The Poles, long oppressed themselves, were often intolerant in their treatment of racial minorities. Polish administrative methods in Eastern Galicia, where the Ukrainians are a majority of the population, were harsh and oppressive. Even now the Polish Government would strengthen its case if it included two or three Ukrainians in the Cabinet and proclaimed some federative principle for the future, with local self-government for regions with non-Polish majorities.

There was anti-Semitism in Poland,

as in Rumania and other East European countries. It grew out of the same unhealthy soil of poverty, economic depression and urban overcrowding, and led to regrettable social and economic discrimination. Also, the seizure of Wilno and the taking of Teschen from Czechoslovakia after the Munich settlement were high-handed acts in the international field.

However, one need not accept an unreal picture of Poland as a Sir Galahad among nations in order to recognize the right of the Polish people, who have fought heroically and suffered unimaginable horrors, to determine their own political fate.

Poland's past cannot be reasonably appraised in the abstract. Two considerations of time and place, in particular, should be noted:

First, Poland during the thirties was wedged in between two powerful and ruthless totalitarian states, Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, which certainly did not contribute to the flourishing of democracy. Second, the Polish record, bad as it was in many respects, was strikingly better than that of the Soviet Union, if one takes

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