

[Calif. Univ. IIR (L.A.)  
=

THE 1958 ELECTION:

Its Significance for Labor,

✓  
✓ An Address Delivered to the  
California Labor Press Conference, Monterey,

November 22, 1958 //

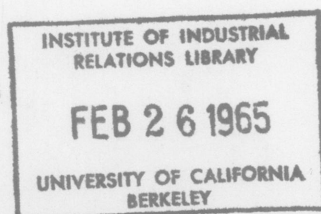
by

Irving Bernstein

At your Fresno conference two years ago I made an analysis of the 1956 elections. Everything I said then must now be turned upside down.

This reminds me of a story about Ben-Gurion, the prime minister of Israel, who spends fifteen minutes each morning standing on his head. This, it is said, is not because of his interest in exotic eastern philosophies. Rather, it is because he wants to view American foreign policy in the Middle East in proper perspective.

U.C. Los Angeles, Institute of Industrial Relations (Los Angeles)



Los Angeles, Institute of Industrial Relations, Univ. of California, 1958??

To my knowledge there has not been in recent times a political reversal so sharp and so dramatic as this one within a period of two short years with so little apparent cause. It occurred without a major depression, as in 1929, or a war, as in 1939 or 1950. Compare the position of Eisenhower and his party exactly two years ago with the situation today. There can be no doubt that there has been a profound change in the mood and thinking of the American people, and this change is pregnant with significance for the future. Let's look at the election results.

#### Results

This will be news to you: there was a Democratic landslide. The election changed the composition of the Senate as follows:

	<u>Senate</u>	
	<u>Before</u>	<u>After</u>
Democrats	49	64
Republicans	47	34

The Democrats captured 15 seats, one each in California, Connecticut, Indiana, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, Ohio, Utah, and Wyoming, and two each in West Virginia and Alaska. The Republicans gained none. Furthermore, it is now mathematically impossible for the Republicans to win control of the Senate in 1960.

Corresponding figures for the House are:

	<u>House of Representatives</u>	
	<u>Before</u>	<u>After</u>
Democrats	235	283
Republicans	200	153

The Democrats gained 48 seats and now have their biggest margin since 1936.

They made clean sweeps in Connecticut, Maryland, Vermont, and Alaska and turned a minority into a majority in California, Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania. With one exception every Democratic incumbent was reelected. The exception was Coya Knutson whose husband's plea that she return to her home in Minnesota was answered. The pots and pans need washing.

The governorship picture was much the same:

<u>Governors</u>		
	<u>Before</u>	<u>After</u>
Democrats	29	34
Republicans	19	14
In doubt		1

Of 33 governorships at stake, the Democrats won 24, including 8 held by the Republicans. However, 4 Democratic incumbents were defeated, so that the net gain is 4. It looks as though Nebraska will go Democratic too, bringing the net to 5. Democrats won from Republicans in California, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming, and probably in Nebraska. Republicans won from Democrats in New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Arizona. Rockefeller in New York and Hatfield in Oregon ran independent campaigns in which they avoided identification with the Eisenhower Administration and the Republican Party. Rhode Island's incumbent, Roberts, had personal troubles, as a result of the Democratic "steal" of the 1956 election through a technicality. Arizona seems to have become an independent kingdom in Antarctica under Barry I. And Goldwater, not very politely, invited Eisenhower and Nixon to stay out of Arizona during his campaign.



The fantastic size of the Democratic sweep was apparent in Connecticut, where Ribicoff was reelected governor by 606,000 to 360,000, the biggest margin in the history of the state; in 1954 he won by only 3,115 votes. He swept the whole Democratic ticket in, including the Senator and 6 House seats. Ribicoff declared himself "really shaken by the size of the vote.... No man deserves that kind of tribute." He carried Fairfield County (swish New York City suburbs) by 50,000 votes. This is as though Pat Brown had piled up commanding majorities in Bel Air, Westwood, and Brentwood! The magnitude of Ribicoff's victory is largely attributable to the fact that he has been a strong governor who has provided firm leadership. An example is his stand on the state speed limit. The voters of Connecticut obviously want strong leadership. I shall return to this point later.

The Democrats made huge gains in the state legislatures, with great significance for the future. For example: In California they captured both houses for the first time within the memory of man. In Massachusetts they also won both houses, the Senate for the first time since 1812. In Indiana they gained a 79-21 majority in the House and narrowed the Republican margin in the Senate to 27-23. Both California and Massachusetts will be regerry-mandered; the latter is where the idea was born. In Indiana where right-to-work legislation was enacted by the legislature rather than by referendum, the political shift may affect the future of this law. In Connecticut the Democrats gained control of both houses for the first time in 82 years. In Idaho they captured the House and lengthened their lead in the Senate. In Illinois they won the lower house but Republicans have a majority in the Senate. Maryland Democrats control the House 116-7 and the Senate 26-3. Michigan has a tie in



the House. In Montana the Democrats won the Senate for the first time in 20 years and already have the House. In Ohio they won both houses. In Oregon they control both houses. Pennsylvania Democrats gained 24 House seats to win a majority, but the Republicans have the Senate. In South Dakota the Democrats captured the Senate and closed the gap in the House. In Utah they took the House 42 to 22 and barely lost the Senate 13-12. In Wisconsin they won the House. In Wyoming Democrats won the House for the first time in 20 years.

This was a national sweep. Regionally considered, the Republicans suffered devastating losses everywhere but the South. They succeeded in re-electing 5 southern congressmen, including Alger in Dallas. Most serious was the shattering of traditional Republican control in New England and the Midwest.

	<u>Old HR</u>	<u>New HR</u>
<u>New England</u>		
Republicans	18	9
Democrats	10	19
<u>Midwest</u>		
Republicans	83	61
Democrats	46	68

The results in the traditionally midwestern Republican states were extraordinary, as shown by the following distribution of House seats:

	<u>1956</u>		<u>1958</u>	
	<u>Rep.</u>	<u>Dem.</u>	<u>Rep.</u>	<u>Dem.</u>
Kansas	5	1	3	3
Nebraska	4	0	2	2
Iowa	7	1	4	4
Wisconsin	7	3	5	5
Indiana	9	2	3	8

Moreover, Democratic governors were elected in all these states. There is presently no region of the United States in which the Republican Party is in the majority.

The magnitude of the sweep was so huge that it is obvious that the social groups which had deserted the Democratic Party in 1952 and 1956, for Ike especially and to a lesser extent for the Republicans, came home. The Democrats in 1958 succeeded in reconstituting the voting base of the old Rooseveltian New Deal of the thirties: the urban worker, the dirt farmer, the Negro, and the South.

Labor, obviously, voted heavily Democratic. Disturbed by unemployment and harried by right-to-work (notably in two major industrial states), workers poured out heavily in behalf of Democrats. I shall return to this later.

More startling is the farm vote. At Fresno two years ago I noted the sizable gains the Democrats had made then, for example, electing governors in Iowa and Kansas. The pace stepped up in 1958. I have already pointed to the results in such farm states as Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa and in heavily agricultural Wisconsin and Indiana. They are not unusual. In recent years we have been undergoing a farm revolution in the United States: agricultural depression in the midst of industrial prosperity, factory agriculture, a vast displacement of small farmers, technological and technical changes resulting in extraordinary advances in productivity, part-time farming. The result has been rural discontent, of which Benson has been the principal target and the Democrats the principal beneficiary. It has been accompanied by a gradual change in the attitude of the farmer toward the trade union. At one time he

was the most antiunion element in the United States. That attitude is breaking down. This will have an effect upon the future of right-to-work in those states (predominantly agricultural) that presently have right-to-work laws.

The Negro came back to the Democratic Party. His flirtation with the Republicans ended; in 1956 he voted against Eastland rather than for Ike. In the past the Negro was torn politically between his racial interest in civil rights and his economic interest as a worker. Eisenhower's failure to provide leadership in the integration crisis damaged the Republican appeal on the former. The recession, in which the Negro suffered heavily, helped the Democrats with the latter. Even in Maryland, where Republican Governor McKeldin did a fine job on school integration, a Negro steelworker at Sparrows Point told the New York Times: "That integration is fine, but that don't pay no grocery bills."

Finally, the results signify a marked shift leftward in the thinking of the American people. This will have an impact upon both parties. The Democratic gains were made wholly outside the South, and the new faces in Congress and the state capitols are, by and large, liberals. While southern conservatives will by virtue of seniority continue in control of the top places in the congressional machinery, they will find it more difficult to police the northerners in their party. The shift within the Republican Party is even more dramatic. Again, excepting the Kingdom of Arizona, the Ancient Republicans lost and the Modern Republicans won. We must tearfully say goodbye to such troglodytes as Bricker, Malone, and our own good Bill Knowland (not to mention Helen). The victorious Republicans, like Rockefeller, Scott, Hatfield, and Keating, are cut from quite a different stamp. "The Right Wing of the Republican Party," Richard Rovere has noted, "has been shattered."



### Why Did It Happen?

Those of you who were at Fresno two years ago will recall that I attributed Eisenhower's great 1956 victory primarily to an affirmation of the traditional Republican conception of the presidency. By and large, Republican presidents have displayed the ornaments of leadership without providing actual leadership. Dean Acheson has pointed to "the chronic inclination of the party to divorce power from responsibility.... In the name of checking 'executive aggrandizements,' the party historically would subordinate the Executive to the Congress, and the national voice to a babel of local voices." Eisenhower was the quintessence of a Republican president. On November 6, 1956, the American people demonstrated overwhelmingly that they wanted a man who would fit this role.

On November 4, 1958, they dramatically reversed themselves. Since they did not enjoy the opportunity to repudiate Eisenhower personally, they did the next best thing by repudiating his party. The European press headlined the election results as a great defeat for Ike. "The Democratic Party," Adlai Stevenson declared, "has received a mandate to produce...leadership in a dangerous time." The only man in the United States who doesn't understand what happened is the President himself. "I do not see where there is anything that these people want the Administration to do differently," Eisenhower declared on November 5. The President's mood was hurt, angry, and bleak. His obtuseness, it seems to me, is a problem in bruised ego and hardly lends itself to political analysis.

The President most certainly is wrong. The American people want his Administration to do a great many things differently. Their mood has shifted dramatically since 1956. We have moved from an Age of Complacency to an Age of Anxiety. Just before the election Sam Lubell pointed out:

One finds a deep uneasiness. This uneasiness has a curious quality. It is not fretting over something that has already happened. Mainly, it reflects an anxiety over impending disaster, a sense that as a nation we are beset by problems which are slipping beyond our control.

A Wall Street Journal reporter uncovered the same mood: "Beneath the sense of well-being there sometimes runs a vague sense of uneasiness.... This uneasiness is vaguely of the future, not of the reasonably happy present."

What are the sources of this anxiety that have caused this repudiation of the Eisenhower Administration and the Republican Party?

First, there is the recognition, finally, that Soviet Russia and Communist China are here to stay whether we like it or not. Each is demonstrably a viable economic society and, even worse, both are growing industrially relatively more rapidly than the United States. You may recall that only a few years ago Dulles reassured us by predicting that time was on our side, that these systems would collapse of their own weight. The wish was father to the thought. Sputnik put an end to it. We now recognize uneasily that we shall have to live with them for a long time and that the United States will have little if any control over the destiny of either.

Second, there has been tension and the threat of war throughout the world, notably in the Middle and Far East. This has been accompanied increasingly by the breakdown of representative institutions. The American people have become uneasy as they have come to recognize that the United States lacks the power to impose peace and stability in these areas and that the institutions we cherish have little value to many other peoples.

Third, there has been growing racial and religious tension within the United States. As Little Rock and Norfolk have demonstrated, we have passed



the easy phase of school integration; we must now deal with defiance in the absence of leadership. We face the problem of integrating the Negro, the Puerto Rican, and the Mexican in our great cities. To this tension must be added religious bigotry: the bombing of synagogues in the South and the nasty anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism so evident in California during the campaign.

Fourth, there is the recession. Viewed as a problem in unemployment, which is its most important political aspect, this is the most severe of the three postwar downturns, both in volume and duration. Joblessness and short-time work have come as a great shock to folks who have forgotten the thirties or who never knew them. And it is harder to take at a higher standard of living. In the areas dominated by heavy industry, where layoffs have been most severe--coal, steel, auto--Democratic gains were considerable. Further, this unemployment is persistent. Due to sharp gains in productivity, most dramatically by automation, the pickup in physical activity has exceeded that of employment. Hence the recovery before the election did the Republicans little good.

Fifth, in the last year or two we have experienced growing dissatisfaction with and reëxamination of the goals of our pecuniary society. There seems to be an emerging conviction among the American people that materialism is not enough. The auto business has been a prime victim. The motor companies find it increasingly difficult to unload contraptions that resemble the Queen Mary rather than a motor vehicle, including the need for tugboats to berth them at the dock. A Ford executive remarked recently that what was wrong with the car business was that the American people no longer believed in keeping up with the Joneses. The "insolent chariot" is losing its value as a status symbol. This mood is evident as well in the very serious reëxamination of American education that is presently under way and in the phenomenal increase in adult education.



It is also evident in the recent concern with the rights of the individual union member in relation to his union.

Sixth is the muddle of the cities. There is growing concern at the local level with the fact that most of our great cities are obsolete and fail to meet our day-to-day needs in education, cleanliness, crowding, traffic, juvenile delinquency, relations between diverse ethnic, social, and religious groups, and clean air. I call your attention to the startling political fact that the Board of Supervisors of Los Angeles County within the past few weeks unanimously voted to forbid the burning of fuel oil for industrial purposes, a decision vigorously opposed by the oil industry. Can you conceive of any Southern California politicians defying the oil interests a few years ago?

Seventh is persistent inflation. There is obvious and widespread concern over the rise in the price level, particularly over inflation in the midst of a recession.

Eighth is the aforementioned revolution in U.S. agriculture, which has caused serious rural discontent.

Finally, Sherman Adams has demonstrated that the Democrats do not have a monopoly over corruption. Many Americans, for reasons that escape me, believed that the White House under Eisenhower was a hound's tooth rather than a seat of government. These people must now be disillusioned.

For all these reasons I think it fair to say that we are now in an Age of Anxiety and that the Democrats have been the political beneficiaries. The problems, of course, are formidably difficult and some can hardly be solved. They require hard thought and firm leadership, and the American people seem

convinced that President Eisenhower and his party provide neither. Whether the Democrats will do better remains to be seen.

### Labor's Role

The labor movement has greater cause for satisfaction over the results of this election than of any other since 1936. There are three grounds: (1) the candidates elected and defeated, (2) right-to-work, and (3) political organization.

#### 1. Candidates

The northern Democrats who won are by and large people the unions endorsed, and some of the Republicans who won without labor endorsement are folks labor can live with, notably Rockefeller. Several of the most outspoken enemies of labor have been retired, for example, Knowland and Bricker. Goldwater, of course, is the exception.

Of the 32 senatorial candidates COPE backed, 25 won. Seventy per cent of the House candidates it backed were winners. It backed 23 gubernatorial candidates, and 17 won. Of course, there were a number of races in all these categories in which COPE made no endorsements, presumably because it approved of neither candidate.

#### 2. Right-to-Work

The right-to-work movement, in my judgment, has passed the watershed and has now begun to run downhill. The 1958 election was the supreme test and it failed. The crucial nature of the test was recognized on both sides. Despite the efforts of Bricker in Ohio and Knight in California to keep the issue off the ballot, the right-to-work people had a now-or-never attitude and insisted on the big gamble in these industrial states.

They were trounced: defeated in California, Ohio, and Washington by approximately 60-40; soundly defeated in Colorado; narrowly whipped in Idaho (needed two-thirds, however); and squeaked by in Kansas.

The results revealed for the first time to many people what has long been clear: politically considered, right-to-work is a farm rather than an industrial issue. The only substantial group of voters who will buy it are farmers. For reasons already noted, their number and antiunionism are diminishing. Hence it is impossible for right-to-work to be put over in a predominantly industrial state if the electorate is informed. It was obvious six months ago that many union people in California were fearful. In retrospect, it is clear that their fear was based on the apathy and ignorance of the electorate. The massive campaigns in such states as California and Ohio aroused interest and removed ignorance.

Right-to-work wreaked havoc on the Republican Party, especially in California and Ohio. This certainly should strengthen the hand of the Knights, Rockefellers, and Halls in the future when they urge that the Republican Party avoid identification with this issue.

The arguments on both sides set an all-time high (or low?) in hokum. For the ordinary voter the political decision was very simple: if you believed in unions and collective bargaining you voted No--and vice versa. Despite the revelations of the McClellan Committee, most voters in the industrial states do believe in unions and collective bargaining. The union has now become a familiar and accepted part of the industrial landscape.



A word of caution is needed here: the fact that the advocates of Proposition 13 argued irrelevantly that it would end corruption and dictatorship does not mean that the results condone corruption and dictatorship. Rather it means that the voters were able to see through the snow.

### 3. Political Organization

There is reason to believe that the labor movement did a more effective job at the technical level than in any previous election. You will hear about this in detail from people better qualified to deal with it than I am. More union members were registered and more got to the polls than in the past, excepting the UAW. This was markedly the case in the right-to-work battles, especially California and Ohio. It was also true in Maine and Vermont, helping to explain the extraordinary Democratic gain in those states.

A year ago Mr. Meany was quoted as having said that only 40 per cent of union members were registered. A confidential analysis early this year in New York City revealed even more shocking results: Amalgamated Clothing Workers, 15,867 of 57,533; Hotel Trades Council, 4,163 of 18,201; Local 3 of the IBEW, 9,318 of 22,260; Millinery, 3,769 of 9,281. Even so politically active an organization as the Los Angeles Joint Board of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers had only 55 per cent registered after the June primaries. This organization, incidentally, mailed out over one million pieces of campaign literature, mainly by using retired members for the clerical work.

Large drives were undertaken in many parts of the country to get folks registered. In New York City the estimated gain was 60 to 100,000, and in the rest of the state, 50,000. Probably there were even greater gains in California and Ohio. The six Hotel and Restaurant locals in the Los Angeles Joint Board, for example, succeeded in registering 13,010 of their 15,972 members who were

eligible to vote, or 81.5 per cent. One interesting result of these registration studies is the revelation of a high incidence of noncitizenship in some industries. The labor movement will have to make these people citizens before it can get them to vote.

Another thing is money. There has probably never been a campaign into which the unions shoveled so much money. Hal Gibbons estimated that the Teamsters alone spent \$800,000, and all the bills were not yet in. The New York Times estimated--probably conservatively--that \$500,000 was spent in Ohio. I have been reliably informed that the California expenditures against Proposition 18 were in the neighborhood of \$2,500,000.

I hope that you will permit me to return after the 1960 elections. At this moment it looks like a shoo-in for the Anarcho-Vegetarian Party, and the reasons for its victory should prove most interesting.