

James Burnham

THE CASE AGAINST

Adlai Stevenson

Hamlet on the Hustings

IT WAS NEARLY three years ago, at a small Washington cocktail party, that I first heard Adlai Stevenson talked up for President. A jolly man from Florida looked around as he began his third Bourbon-on-the-rocks: "I guess you folks don't know that I'm managing the next President. Adlai don't know it either, but that's who it is, Adlai Stevenson, and it's as good as in the bag."

Two guests who had never before heard of Stevenson quickly put on the Washington expression meaning: "That's old stuff. Everyone cleared for Top Secret has known it for months." The cheerful Floridian proceeded:

"He's good-looking, young, quick on his feet, a hundred per cent clean record, fine family background right

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back to the Revolution, makes a pleasant speech and keeps it short, has lots of friends and three handsome children. In his own state, he ran half a million votes ahead of Truman in '48. And he's never made any enemies."

"What's his program?" asked a local grouch who was sitting in a corner.

"Program?" echoed the southern prophet in some surprise. "Oh, program. Why, Adlai's got a perfect program. Balance the budget and reduce taxes. Higher wages and lower prices. Enforce anti-discrimination and strengthen local government. Guaranteed employment, security, housing and medical care for all, and no socialism for America. Adequate rearmament for peace. Stand up to Stalin and always be ready to negotiate when Stalin shows that he's sincere. No witch-hunting and no Communists. Don't you worry about program, my friend. Sit down and write

it the way you like it, and that's it. And don't forget that Adlai hasn't any enemies."

The conversation then shifted to the latest iniquity of Senator McCarthy, but it lingered in memory. The personal part of the sketch that was happily drawn that afternoon has suddenly become a portrait painted on the full national canvas. There is surprisingly little dispute over the likeness.

I want to assume the accuracy of this sympathetic and now public picture. There is no doubt about the solidity and distinction of Adlai Stevenson's long line of forebears. Their frequent civic contributions have ranged from Presidency of the D. A. R. to the Vice Presidency of the national government. His plurality in running for Governor of Illinois is on record. The photographs of him and his sons prove that their appearance is pleasant. He was a successful practicing lawyer.

I shall further assume that he is well-read, as he seems to be, intelligent, thoughtful, gracious, sociable, friendly, as all who know him say that he is. He is free from any suspicion of personal corruption. His speech and even speeches are rare among American political products in being often witty — a little on the whimsical side, but still a rhetorical relief from the standard platitudes.

Granted all this, Stevenson would seem to be the most eligible of men for dinner party, week end, or fish-

ing trip. As a friend or attorney, for a lecture or a quiz show, he must rate near the top. He would even be a plausible choice for mayor of his home town, or governor of the state in which he is thoroughly established and widely connected.

THE NATIONAL CONVENTION of the Democratic Party did not, however, nominate Adlai Stevenson as candidate for mayor or governor, as friend or attorney or speaker or television performer. It recommended him to us, in this fifth year of the cold war and the twentieth of one-party incumbency, for the Presidency of the United States during the years 1953-57 — years when it will quite probably be decided whether free government and Western civilization are to endure or perish.

Immediately after the Democratic convention, the opinion suddenly became orthodox that the political troubles of the United States were all but ended. Whichever party won the election, the new President was going to be so close to perfect that everyone could sit back and relax. Lewis Gannett summed it up for the *New York Herald Tribune*: "One reader at least concluded that a country which had Stevenson and Eisenhower as opposing candidates would have a right to be a proud and unworried land."

Is it quite that easy?

Adlai Stevenson did not want the

nomination. No man has ever been so active a non-candidate as Stevenson. During the first six months of 1952, he stumped half the country, spoke at the biggest public dinners, held a dozen mass press conferences, appeared on all the leading TV programs, gave ten-page written answers to editors, had his picture on the cover of the biggest national news magazine, gave room and desk and many hours to the author of a book-length biography published a month before the convention, posed for a thousand photographs and newsreels, all to explain to his fellow-countrymen — to whom the issue had never occurred — that he did not want the nomination, was not a candidate for it, was “temperamentally, physically and mentally” unfit for it, and would shoot himself if he got it.

Judging with Shakespeare that this coyest of suitors did protest too much, and wickedly reasoning by Congreve’s principle that “she only is chaste who’s never been asked,” the convention nevertheless offered him the candidacy, and was not refused.

Just exactly who wanted Stevenson, and why?

No one will argue that the call which came that hot July night to the reluctant candidate in his tent on Astor Street was the spontaneous voice of the clamoring masses. Even the select portion of the masses which was sitting as convention dele-

gates had some difficulty clearing its collective throat. For two long ballots the decibel level of the call for Adlai was well below the majority mark. As for the ordinary Democratic Party members — the forgotten men of those proceedings — where they had been given a chance, they had shown that they wanted Estes Kefauver.

The facts plainly show that the call first issued from a set of voices that never grow hysterical though they carry a long way. The choice of Stevenson was made calmly and thoughtfully by those cold and able professionals, the bosses of the Democratic Party’s big-city machines. At their head was Jacob Arvey, chief of the Illinois party apparatus, who as original sponsor holds the political copyright on Stevenson.

WHY DID the bosses want Stevenson? As an individual, a person, he is in all respects unlike them. He is a cultivated, intelligent, many-sided amateur, who has only a literary acquaintance with the life of precincts and the local clubhouse. He has and has always had plenty of money. He seems to have traveled more in Europe than among American voters. What turned the eyes of the bosses toward him?

It was not so much that the bosses wanted Stevenson. A Harry Truman is more their dish of tea. It was rather that they immensely needed Stevenson, that they couldn’t do

without him. The bosses are business men. They are in the business of votes, patronage, and public contracts. With the ideas, principles, and morals of a prospective candidate the bosses are concerned only insofar as these affect the one point that counts. Is he promising voter-bait?

The 1952 problem of the Democratic bosses was simple to understand but hard to solve. Their party, after twenty years in power, had begun to stink so in the nostrils of the citizens that there didn't seem a chance in the world for its re-election. The bosses knew that they could count on a substantial bloc of Democratic votes from those held to the party by organizational ties, ancestral loyalty, or imperative special interest. They knew also that these votes are less than a majority, and that the election is going to be decided by the intermediary, factionally independent citizens — the "marginal" or "floating" voters. Every poll, every survey, as well as every conversation in bar or smoking room, told them that the independent citizens were fed up with the mess of apathy, scandal, corruption, and vulgarity that Washington has become through one party's too long and careless a stand at the troughs of power.

The bosses rightly sensed that disgust had come to take precedence over views on specific issues of policy. Any voters who would normally

incline more to the Democratic than to the Republican emphasis on foreign policy or social security or government enterprise, had become convinced that for the sake of the most elementary public hygiene the Washington stables had to be cleansed.

What the bosses so urgently needed, then, was someone to shield them through the perilous election period, one who could sweeten the odor that arises from the bureaus and the corridors. In Adlai Stevenson they have found, or hope that they have found, their chlorophyll, their Airwick.

The bosses' specifications were exact. They had to have a man with views vague enough to keep the party from splitting. Just so are Stevenson's views, as my early bird from Florida observed so neatly. *As a person* their candidate must seem to embody just the opposite of the qualities now reigning in the White House. Adlai Stevenson is made in this critical respect precisely to their measure. In every dimension — family, fortune, schooling, taste, mind, speech, amusements, friends — he is the detailed contrary of the Truman-Vaughan pattern.

Third, the bosses required someone as free as Galahad from any link to corruption. This third requirement was not so easy to fill from within the walls of the Democratic mansion. Even Adlai Stevenson has had a bit of trouble when his old

friend, Charlie Wray, whom he had appointed Illinois' head food inspector, was caught passing horse-meat as hamburger. Somehow, even after Stevenson became governor, the political murders, race riots, and big-time gambling did not disappear from the streets of Jacob Arvey's Chicago or Capone's old Cicero bailiwick. However, there was nothing on Stevenson personally. He had about him a wide aura of righteousness, reinforced by phrases from the Bible, a habit of self-deprecation, and an unbridled humility. Even die-hard Taft men in his presence couldn't bring themselves to mention low objects like mink coats, Florida hotels, and ice boxes.

THIS IS THE ANSWER to the question who picked Stevenson and why. He was picked by the Democratic bosses because they believe that with him at the head of their ticket they may be able to kid the independent voters into thinking that there can be a real change without changing the controlling party. From whatever combination of naïveté, self-disguised ambition, and sincere belief, Adlai Stevenson has lent himself to this maneuver, and allows himself to be led by Arvey's hand toward the plush and klieg-lighted altar.

The success of the maneuver depends, of course, on preserving the illusion that Stevenson is completely independent of the old-line party

machine. But in spite of tricks like making Springfield, Illinois, nominal party headquarters, and trying to keep Truman under wraps, the illusion is too crude. Reality keeps popping through.

The White House crowd has long been accustomed to thinking of the government as their private property. They failed to realize how strange it would look to the country when they summoned "their" candidate to be "briefed" and instructed by officials — like the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency — who are supposed to represent the nation as a whole, not one of its political parties.

Stevenson now and then tries by an abstract phrase or two to dissociate himself from Washington corruption. He does not and cannot specify names and incidents, analyze causes, or show concretely how what he himself has called "the Washington mess" can be cleaned. How can he, when to do so would simply prove that what is at fault is not this or that individual but a system and a party gone sour, that what the country — not Arvey but the citizens at large — needs is a new regime, not a fresh face and better manners.

Stevenson himself gave the show away, and displayed his handcuff to the party machine, when he ended his speech of acceptance as follows:

"I will give to you all I have, even

as he who came here tonight and honored me, as he has honored you — the Democratic Party — by a lifetime of service and bravery that will find him an imperishable page in the history of the Republic and of the Democratic Party — President Harry S. Truman.”

If any doubt remained, the Stevenson-appointed head of the Democratic National Committee removed it on August 20. According to the New York *Times* report: “Stephen A. Mitchell of Illinois took over today as chairman of the Democratic National Committee and promptly made gestures of the strongest deference to President Truman as still ‘head of the Democratic party.’”

Truman himself angrily blurted the next day that he (Truman) was “the center of the campaign.”

The bosses are not interested in ideas, but (in spite of my Florida friend) Stevenson does have certain ideas, or at least has been subject to certain influences. To the extent that these bear upon what will be the next four years’ most important questions, they should be prudently examined.

When asked what is “the biggest single issue of the day,” Stevenson replied: “Foreign policy, in my opinion. I would view with the utmost misgiving any indication that America was wobbling or indecisive.” Foreign policy means our relation to the Soviet Union and world Commu-

nism. Where, on the biggest single issue, does candidate Stevenson place himself? The indications are not altogether reassuring.

Stevenson seems to belong by temperament to that group of self-defined liberals who have on the one hand sparked the collectivist side of New Dealism, and on the other have provided the ideological culture material in which pro-Communist points of view and individual Communist agents have flourished. Stevenson, like most of the others, neither is nor was a Communist or fellow-traveler. But at the same time, these men did not shut their doors and ears to Communists or to Communist-originated policies.

Drunk from anti-Nazi Popular Front highballs spiked by the G.P.U., these liberals set the Washington atmosphere in which Communist cells grew in the bureaus. They spun the moral cloud under which aid went to Tito in 1944 instead of Mihailovitch, and Moscow’s stooges instead of the Free Poles were recognized as the government of Poland. They furnished the intellectual props for Yalta, and they — without knowing what they did — made smooth the road over which Mao and Chou marched to the conquest of China.

STEVENSON first went to Washington in 1933, at the call of Henry Wallace. He joined the Agricultural Adjustment Administration at ap-

proximately the same time as Alger Hiss, whom he came to know then, and the other individuals who soon constituted the deadly "Ware cell." From 1944 to 1947, in connection with the founding and first meetings of the United Nations, he resumed his friendship and collaboration with Alger Hiss. In the Hiss trial, the defense felt sure enough of Stevenson's attitude to seek — and get — his deposition as to Hiss's reputation for integrity, loyalty, and veracity.

It was Stevenson's friend, the poet Archibald MacLeish, favorite adornment of the literary Popular Fronts and Open Letters of the thirties, who persuaded Stevenson to come back to Washington to work for the United Nations. Another Stevenson friend, the then Senator Claude Pepper, long-time darling of the *Daily Worker*, pushed him through to his first active meeting with Franklin Roosevelt. The present tenant of Stevenson's farm is another good friend, Marshall Field II, known in those same thirties as the angel and publisher of the notorious New York *Compass*, a hotbed of fellow-travelers and pro-Soviet journalists, the leading perpetrator in its day of smears of anti-Communists.

Stevenson has chosen Wilson Wyatt, former head of Americans for Democratic Action, as his personal campaign manager, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., a present vice chairman of A.D.A., as his research director. The A.D.A., a pretentious

outfit of nostalgic New Dealers looking for a new depression to save the country from, and specializing in anti-anti-Communism, split a few years ago when its nonpartisan members refused to go along with its whitewashing of the State Department's China follies.

Schlesinger is married to the sister of John K. Fairbank, of Harvard, the O.S.S., the O.W.I., *Amerasia*, and the Institute of Pacific Relations. It would be a cruel thing to hold a man to blame for his brother-in-law. But Schlesinger has taken explicit political as well as personal responsibility for the *bona fides* of Fairbank — of whom it has been testified under oath that he was a member of the Communist Party, and who has been undeniably proved the active associate of Communists and pro-Communists. (The Military Occupation in Japan a year ago denied Fairbank an entry permit, which was, however, recently granted by the more obliging Department of State.)

Nor has Schlesinger turned his back on his friend, William Remington, convicted of perjury for denying his Communist Party membership and at present up on a technicality for retrial. From the Institute of Pacific Relations itself, proved by prolonged and meticulous Senate investigation to have been "infiltrated by Communists and . . . used for pro-Communist and pro-Soviet purposes," Schlesinger and his friends

have made no dissociation. Their condemnations have been reserved for those who exposed the I.P.R.

It is hard not to wonder what kind of research on Soviet and Communist problems will be turned out under Schlesinger's direction.

THERE IS NO QUESTION, certainly, about Adlai Stevenson's loyalty. But can one suppress an anxious concern about his knowledge, his judgment, and the pressures that have shaped his outlook on what he himself recognizes to be the ultimate problem of these coming years? In no public statement or writing has the introspective and voluble Stevenson ever made any analysis or accounting of the political meaning of his past and present associations. It was not a crime to have been a friend of Alger Hiss. It is a grievous political sin to refuse to face today what Hiss, and the Hisses, signify.

All of those who wrote about Stevenson in the months preceding the convention stressed the inner turmoil and torment — the word "agony" was often used — through which he was going in the effort to decide whether to accept the (still unoffered) nomination. He did not try to hide this nagging self-examination, but rather, like Hamlet, displayed it. He seemed unable to give a direct Yes or No answer to himself or others, and he too spoke of "the long agony" through which he was passing.

"I had no such self-confidence at all," he announced in April, "but yet I didn't want to seem to shrink from the job out of fear. I didn't want it — it seemed to me to mean honor, yes, but also misery. . . . I had hoped at first that just by taking a negative attitude, the situation might take care of itself. But as it began to get increasingly clear that that wasn't going to work, I had to think about another way. . . ." In one of his rare lapses of taste, he said as late as his acceptance speech: "I have asked the merciful Father of us all to let this cup pass from me."

This excruciating inability to decide important questions was not uniquely displayed in this instance. From all accounts, it is a characteristic of Stevenson's. His sympathetic biographer, Noel Busch, writes that when he was faced with the question of running for governor, "the resultant indecision upon Stevenson's part set a record." Just how this indecisiveness is to be explained, and how it is to be judged, are subject to a variety of psychological and moral interpretations. Mr. Busch seems to suggest that it may be connected with a psychic scar left by the tragic accident which was never mentioned from 1912, when it happened, until 1952, when *Time's* researcher stumbled across it. It is not the explanation, however, but the undoubted fact of his indecisiveness that is of public concern.

It is curious that in this respect

also Stevenson is the opposite of Harry Truman. Whatever his inferiority in knowledge, intelligence, taste, and breeding, Truman has proved that he can make up his mind, firmly, resolutely and rapidly. From the midst of the doubts of sycophants and bureaucrats, Truman has *decided*—to smash the Communists in Greece, run the planes into Berlin, send troops to Korea. The ability to decide is not the least of a political leader's qualifications. Stevenson, himself, oddly enough, quoted in a speech at the Chicago stadium:

On the plains of hesitation

Bleach the bones of countless thousands . . .

During the next four years there will be no lack of demand for major decisions. Some of them may be more momentous than any decisions yet taken by any man. It is not impossible that among these will be the question whether or not to launch the atomic bomb—and that the answer will not wait for even an hour. Whom shall we assign to say that Yes or No? Should we believe Adlai Stevenson when he warns us that he is “temperamentally, physically and mentally” not fit to be President?

To Be or Not To Be

» I would shoot myself if nominated. For the last time, I am not going to run for the Democratic Presidential nomination. I am not interested in the job.

ADLAI STEVENSON, *July 13, 1952.*

A question that involves millions of dollars

and millions of Americans —

What Price Presidents?

Serge Fliegers

ONE TANGY SPRING EVENING this year, a modest-looking man in a New Hampshire restaurant finished his dinner, paid his check, carefully slipped a dime under the edge of his plate and went about his business. That particular dime, his tip to the outraged waitress, proved the most expensive item in his entire career. The man's name was Robert A. Taft. The story of his ten-cent tip was picked up — some even say invented — by his political opponents. Together with other such tales it helped defeat him in the New England primaries. That defeat, in turn, started the chain of events which ultimately lost him the presidential nomination.

In this instance, Taft's personal frugality made him forget one cardinal fact that should be constantly

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remembered by both candidates and voters in this election: choosing the President of the United States has become the most expensive national pastime since Cheops erected his pyramid.

This is not only because candidates must switch from dime to dollar tips if they want to remain popular, or because political boosters spend as much as five million dollars on "I like Ike" and "Hurrah for Adlai" buttons.

Presidential elections have become expensive for a number of reasons. One among these reasons is that neither candidates nor voters have taken time out from campaigning to stop and ask:

How much does it cost to elect a President?

To call this the sixty-four-dollar question would be the understatement of the ages. It is a question that involves millions — not just tens but hundreds of millions.