

THE PASSING OF HUEY LONG

J. T. SALTER

LAST summer, as I visited the capitol of Cuba, I noticed a guard inside the doorway who hastily searched each person that entered, for firearms. I thought of this when I first heard that the American Caesar had been mortally wounded in his own capitol at Baton Rouge. I also wondered why he was not wearing a bullet-proof vest, after the fashion of a Hitler; for although Huey was, I believe, accurate in saying that he was *sui generis*, yet his problems in governing had more in common with those of the European dictators where violence has taken the place of public discussion than they had with the problems of leaders in countries where democratic processes still prevail.

He died like a Caesar; immediately after Dr. Weiss fired the shot that was to kill him within thirty-six hours, he is supposed to have said something about his work being unfinished, and wondering just why that fellow did it. Millions of people mourned at the news of his fate, for he was one political leader that stirred emotions "right down to the liver"; he touched people on the quick; probably millions of people knew and loved Huey. Other and greater millions undoubtedly felt relief when he died. They felt that this formidable threat to American democracy and institutions had been removed, and by a method as spectacular and unusual as any of the methods used by the Duke of the Delta in consolidating his power there. As time passes, more and more of those who first felt grief at this leader's abrupt farewell now say (as one of my university students said to me) "My father and I got up at five o'clock in the morning to get the first radio flash after Huey was shot. I couldn't eat anything that day, but now that it is all over, and when I think with my mind, I think it is best this way."

Huey might have seduced the American people in some such way, or for similar reasons, that a compelling and conscienceless woman might seduce a man who had never before strayed on to the primrose path. Logic may not be enough in a situation of this sort, for "You can't combat a dream with logic." If the masses of people were suffering enough, and if they thought that President Roosevelt was not doing all within his power to lessen their economic distress, they might have listened to Huey's dream of *Share-*

our-Wealth, no matter how many experts said it could never be.¹ Nearly all people have studied a grammar of language, but few of us have thought of a grammar of truth or evidence. Surely not every human action is the result of an intellectual process alone.¹ Senator Long was powerful because he understood the springs of human action in people generally, and he possessed the artistry and energy to use this knowledge to a surpassing degree.

To say that his empire now seems to be crumbling, and that none of his lieutenants or followers is capable of wielding his sceptre or wearing his crown—that is, holding his organization together and adding to it—is no stranger than saying that if Toscanini were to die, the Philharmonic Orchestra would be something else: it could not be the same, for in all the world there is only one Toscanini. Politics is an art too, and the virtuoso in politics deals with a subject-matter even more subtle and changing than the materials that the conductor has to work with. For a Toscanini can be absent from his highly trained orchestra for several months and his work will go on; but in politics the maestro's presence is forever required lest his kingdom be lost. American history furnishes other examples of not only the unpopularity, but also the impossibility, of absentee rulership.

Father Coughlin, Dr. Townsend, Governor Talmadge, and other "shepherds of discontent" remain, but they are cut on a less heroic mould, and they and the underprivileged are, or can be, answered by the social legislation provided by this administration or the next.

However, I now wish to present a portrait of Senator Long as I described him last summer, a short time before his assassination.

I.

Huey Pierce Long, one of the most representative of our political gladiators, is something of a *poseur* who appears to be the natural man; he is the *genus Americanum* possessed of a certain flair that enables him to appeal effectively to millions of individuals below, and a few above, a certain intellectual level (and this includes a preponderant number below a certain economic level). He talks "United States", even as a ward politician or a man in the street talks it. He does not cite Karl Marx, nor use any other sort of communist or socialist jargon. He is 200% American. He has, in a sense, something of the Mae West appeal about him. He not only has political "it", but for women he has the authentic

1. Note my *Boss Rule: Portraits in City Politics*. New York. 1935

primordial appeal. Moreover, all his life he has been a fighter, and with few exceptions—the Sands Point washroom battle, for example—he has come off with his colours flying. Nearly all of America loves a fighter, and all of America loves a winner. Huey himself is a combination of fighter, winner, mass psychologist, master salesman (“I can sell anybody anything”), and organizer—(his text being, “Go ye into all communities and preach the Gospel to every living creature”). His organization in Louisiana is so well perfected for doing this very thing that he and his party workers can within twenty-four hours place his message on the front porch of the farmers at the fork of the creek, the merchants at the cross roads, and the laborers in New Orleans or in any other section of the “Empire on the Delta”. (He is now attempting to organize the rest of the United States in this fashion).

He is a “Baptist preacher”; he combines the evangelism of the Reverend Billy Sunday and Aimee Semple MacPherson with the showmanship of a P. T. Barnum and the economies of a Get-Rich-Quick-Wallingford. And he, like Jean Jacques Rousseau, is a social reformer. The citizen of Geneva and the citizen of Winn Parish each posit as a cardinal tenet in their philosophy that “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.” The stuff of the Senator’s argument is built around a seemingly clear plan of a new order in which every man is a king. “There should be a guarantee of a family wealth of around \$5,000; enough for a home and automobile, a radio, and the ordinary conveniences and the opportunity to educate their children; . . . so there will be no such thing as a family living in poverty and distress.” He buttresses the approach and incentive for his more perfect society with a show of “facts” and literary allusions—statistics, myriad biblical passages, excerpts from Senate documents, the federal trade commission reports, newspaper and magazine articles, speeches of Daniel Webster, the Reverend Harry Emerson Fosdick, Franklin Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, Francis Bacon, Father Coughlin, Oliver Goldsmith, John Milton’s *Comus*, Encyclical Letters of Leo XIII and Pius XI, and homely illustrations from the life of the people. Notwithstanding this grand and motley array of personages and favorite quotations that issue forth from the radio, one is almost prepared to hear the Senator say—“Facts!—what do I care about facts? I am thinking of imaginary facts!” His objections can be understood by the most ignorant muskrat trapper in the marshes on the delta, but the administrative steps necessary for the realization of a society in which every man is a king, or the more perfect state of Rousseau, are obscure. This obscurity,

however, is not fatal to the less discerning, for Huey is a compelling orator, and the aptness of his comments on current discussions and prominent personalities, and the smart cracks (reminiscent of Big Bill Thompson or Mayor Jimmy Walker) all combine to give millions of listeners a changing amount of vicarious satisfaction. Huey is one of them—or would be, if they were a lot smarter! And Huey is articulate—their very own mouthpiece. He happens, moreover, to have one of the finest radio voices in America; probably the only other voice to excel it, or even to equal it, belongs to President Roosevelt. The Senator has something of a southern drawl that is both pleasing and convincing. He has a depth of timbre that indicates strength. He speaks in an intimate and confidential tone that suggests a conversation among a small group of people seated in a corner of a favorite club. One feels that he is of the people, and that he knows them as a wise master knows his hounds. He talks personally to his opponents over the radio. He speaks easily, rapidly, and fluently, and right at the beginning of his addresses he is likely to say, "Hello, friends, this is Huey P. Long speaking; and I have some important things to tell you. Before I begin, I want you to do me a favour. I am going to talk along for four or five minutes, just to keep things going. While I am doing it, I want you to go to the telephone and call up five of your friends and tell them Huey Long is on the air." This little device worked in Louisiana, and it works nationally. (Three times my students have called me to say that Huey was on the air. No one has ever done this for me when President Roosevelt spoke, or when the Philharmonic played).

In addition to being personal, he is witty in an oratorical way. He uses homely illustrations and parables that all can understand and that few forget. He uses words that paint pictures—pictures that speak of the discontented, and not only to them, but for them. For example, in his radio speech of January 9, 1935, he said: "Well, ladies and gentlemen, America, all the people of America, have been invited to a barbecue. God invited us all to come and eat and drink all we wanted. He smiled on our land, and we grew crops of plenty to eat and wear. He showed us in the earth the iron and other things to make anything we wanted. He unfolded to us the secrets of science so that our work might be easy. God called: 'Come to my feast'. Then what happened? Rockefeller, Morgan and their crowd stepped up and took enough for 120,000,000 and left only enough for 5,000,000 for all the other 115,000,000 to eat. And so, many million must go hungry, and without these good things God gave us, unless we call on them to put some of it

back." Long, like that (unrecognized) authority, Mr. Dooley, seeks to "comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable." His is the articulate voice of the inarticulate. And as they mispronounce many words, he mispronounces a few—"moe" for more; "befoe" for before; "the Yôu-nited States", for United States; "Lweezeana" for Louisiana, "govment" for government, etc. These and other colloquialisms merely strengthen his appeal; if he hasn't cultivated them, he should have, for they are an asset. He talks down to nobody; he is one of the people.

He is a particularly resourceful lawyer, and has won political support through his ability to outwit the Standard Oil Company and other great economic interests in Louisiana. (He declares that he has never appeared in court against a poor man, although he now has a contract with the Louisiana Tax Commission that he is to receive one-third of all back taxes which may be collected as a result of his activity in having property placed on the assessment tolls. His critics say that the sky is the limit to the money that he might obtain under this arrangement. It follows that if he were intelligently interested in the people, he would not accept a contract from the state in which his pay is to be based on fees rather than a fixed salary). He is a brawler, and he just doesn't care an iota about conventions—or rather he breaks those conventions the breaking of which will cause the most attention. An English edition of Huey would interrupt a Speech from the Throne. He has the gusto, but not the pugilistic skill, of a Jack Dempsey; the rowdiness, but not the artlessness, of a big boy pulling the carefully set curls of an orderly little school girl. And like Tweed of the old Tammany Hall, or ten thousand Jim Farleys who are in politics to-day, he is a machine politician who never neglects a trick—(he knows all of the recognized ones, and has created some new variations for the benefit of future practitioners of the art of governing)—in his quest of votes. At the present time, he is more of a threat to the administration than is the entire Republican party.

Whereas in the past the controlling maxim for political adventures was, "Never strike at a king unless you kill him", to-day (but in democratic lands only) there is a new rule of conduct prescribed for a certain type of ambitious politician. Huey had learned it early in Louisiana, but it was not until the beginning of the 74th congress and later that he acted upon it in the grand style. This new political maxim is: "If you want to become known, make enemies of big people and big interests. Their names are news, and yours, in being linked with theirs, will thus become news too."

Senator Long denounced with gusto and condemned with bitterness President Roosevelt and all his works. Other critics have spoken against the President since that time, but Huey was the first. In doing this he captured attention—made news, and was called a very smart politician. From that time (January 7, 1935) he has been a national leader of public opinion or public sentiment. In challenging the New Deal he said that America is "headed just as straight to hell as any bullet went to its mark." He attacked the "bluted plotocracy" and the Non-Partisan League at Wall Street and Broadway, "which," he maintains, "never goes out of office," in his attempt to prevent the repeal of the amendment requiring income-tax publicity. He launched an attack on the Standard Oil Company. And he vigorously opposed the adoption of the World Court resolution. He contended that the Standard Oil interest in the oil lands of Bolivia which are now endangered by the Paraguayan attack is the basic purpose for having the resolution offered at this time. He pled with the Senators to keep America safe for Americans, against the possible encroachments by those gentlemen of the World Court, "whose names I cannot even pronounce, let alone spell." In warning against the insidious propaganda of the Power Trust and the Standard Oil Company, he declared that "the good people of this country need someone to protect them who has had some bar-room experience."

No matter how involved the issue or abstract the problem under consideration, Senator Long invariably identifies it with a personal devil—something that can readily be dramatized for the moronic mass of voters, as well as those slightly above this mass. The financier Bernard Baruch, General Hugh Johnson, Postmaster Jim Farley, and, of course, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Rockefellers, are his most used exhibits. His attacks against Farley are most bitter; he charged Farley with misconduct in office, and offered a resolution of investigation, which was finally voted down. He knows that the one way to reach the great heart of Louisiana—and America, too, under given conditions—is to concentrate on a few points and repeat them. He also knows that the great mass of the people are more ready to hate than to think, and this leads him to use a personal whipping boy, Devil and God technique—a depression psychosis. Fortunately there are rivals for the citizen's attention both in his political world and without it. Also there is the law of diminishing return; there is, moreover, the courageous and appealing Roosevelt.

When the Senator is not engaged in a personal argument with a colleague, or not verbally lashing one of his personal devils, he

is likely to be explaining his Share-Our-Wealth-Plan. (He revealed his particularly shrewd political acumen in a masterly way when he answered General Johnson's radio attack against the "Pied Pipers." Immediately after Johnson spoke, Huey said that he would take the General from hell to breakfast very soon. He was then offered a free national broadcast. It was Huey's opportunity to speak to more millions than he had ever spoken to before. He briefly referred to "the late lamented, pampered, ex-Crown Prince, General Hugh S. Johnson, one of those satellites loaned by Wall Street to run the government;" he criticized the Roosevelt administration, and, then, he devoted the remaining ninety per cent. or more of his time to an explanation of his Share-Our-Wealth-Plan. Probably a million listeners heard the plan discussed that night that had not intended to—that had sought only entertainment—and they had got that too!

In his Des Moines speech to the National Farmers' Holiday Association of April 27th, after telling the farmers about his Plan, he bade them if they couldn't understand what he was saying, "shut your damned eyes and believe it!" Evidently many people (and not all farmers) are doing this very thing. About 5,000,000 individuals are supposed to belong to some 27,431 clubs (exact figures are unobtainable) in the Share-Our-Wealth Society.

In the beginning is the *plan*, and in the end is the *plan*. All else is subordinated to the natural desire of the poor to "soak" the rich and to share the wealth. The tonal qualities of the speaker's voice mean more than the logic of his argument. It is as though words were reality—ends in themselves; as though a condition would come to pass because Huey said so. If you believe it hard enough, it's true. The Senator's colossal and reassuring dogmatism (and dogmatism is useful in capturing the attention of a certain section of the electorate) is most strikingly revealed by examining Huey's speech in the Senate given less than four weeks before the President vetoed the Patman bonus bill. "The talk which has gone abroad is that the Patman bill has only one fault—which is that it might be vetoed by the President. Let Senators be told something from someone who knows something. The President is not going to veto the Patman bill. . . I am a politician, and a candidate for re-election. I would not veto the bonus. The President is a politician, and a candidate for re-election. He will not veto the bonus. I ask Senators to put that down. I know what I am talking about. There is not any chance on earth of the President vetoing the bonus."

II.

Huey Pierce Long was born in Winnfield parish, Louisiana, forty-two years ago. He is the seventh of nine children of a Louisiana farmer. (He has described his early life—"Rising before the sun, we toiled until dark, after which we did nothing except eat supper, listen to the whippoorwills, and go to bed.") His parents were poor, but not of the poorest—his father owned 320 acres and a log cabin. There is an intermingling of Irish, French, Pennsylvania Dutch and Welsh in Huey's nationality—in short he is American, and his ambition is equal to that of the best heroes in American history or in the novels of Horatio Alger. But he never intended to conquer the world with a hoe or spade. "From my earliest recollection I hated the farm work."

During his youth he lived an uneven life, alternating between a few months in school and more months out of it—visiting towns and cities in the south and southwest selling lard substitutes, packing-house products, patent medicines or anything, but always selling. And in selling he gained valuable experience and learned a lot of things about human nature; in politics one sells too—only here one sells himself. At nineteen he married a Miss Rose McConnell, who had won a baking contest that he had staged.

During these years he had been heading toward the profession of law. He writes: "I studied law as much as from sixteen to twenty hours each day." He was admitted to the bar at the age of twenty-one. He started out with a fifty-cent tin sign—"Huey Long, Lawyer"—over his door; and he gained recognition in supporting the underprivileged and attacking the corporations. His uniqueness, however, was based on his sense for publicity, his flair for reaching the mass mind. In carrying his message to Garcia he travelled in a motor car or on horseback, and spoke to people at the cross roads, in front of the country grocery—anywhere where he could address an audience. He used hundreds of thousands of handbills, circulars, and later, his own newspaper, the *Louisiana Progress* (now the *American Progress*), and the radio. He knew what was "biting" the people, and he told them with an artistry that made many claim Huey Long as their very own.

Early in his career he was prevented from getting an appointment by the "corporations". He never forgot. In his autobiography he writes: "Once disappointed over a political undertaking, I could never cast it from my mind. I awaited the opportunity of a political contest." At the age of twenty-five he was elected to the Railroad Commission; three years later he became its chair-

man. In 1924 he was defeated, but in 1928 he won the office of Governor. Two years later he was elected to the United States Senate. He delayed taking his seat in the Senate for more than a year, because he wanted to maintain control of the Governor's chair and to prevent the Lieutenant-Governor from occupying it; he also wanted to put through a legislative programme. A friend remonstrated with him, saying that the Senate seat had been vacant for more than a year. Huey shot back: "Hell, that seat has been vacant for more than thirty years!" (the approximate period of time that Huey's vanquished opponent had served in Congress). By the time he left Louisiana for Washington, he was ruling it as a subject province, although one that requires frequent and personal attention. Since that time, he has been reaching out for national power, without neglecting his own empire, however.

The quality of Huey Long can be understood only through an understanding not merely of his life, but of the environment in which he grew up—the state of Louisiana, a state in the South that is both solid and backward, a state that has gone Democratic in every presidential election since the carpet-baggers were driven out, following the Civil War. It is here that the poor are more abjectly poor than in any other part of the United States.¹ It is here that the Depression dates not from 1929—the *débauche* of that year merely intensified it—but from the war between the states. Legal slavery was then abolished, but economic slavery for many has remained. It is here that the lowest standard of living both culturally and economically (so far as the masses are concerned) is found. It is here that Pitchfork Ben Tillman of South Carolina challenged the aristocratic leaders, and stood for a period as the champion of the great unwashed. It was in this section of the United States that such rabble-rousers as Theodore G. Bilbo of Mississippi, Thomas J. Heflin of Alabama, rode into power on Pitchfork Ben's old issue of turning the aristocrats out. Huey is of this tradition, although he is smarter than the others. And he knows his state, and when he looks beyond it, he knows that this is his hour—while there is economic distress in all sections of the country.

1. Louisiana in 1920 was the most illiterate state in the American Union. In 1930, according to the Statistical Abstract of the United States, it was 47th, with 13.5% of its people over ten years of age unable to read and write (compared with 4.3% of the total population of the United States who are illiterate). In 1932 it was 42nd in rank among the states for the number of telephones per 1,000 inhabitants. In 1930 it was 44th in the number of farms with water piped into the dwelling and 42nd in the number of farms with electricity. But \$41,737,000 were available in 1932 for state road purposes, placing Louisiana sixth in rank among the states; it held fourth place for miles of highways under construction for that year; and second for miles of highways in the state system. Its state highway debt was \$51,760,000 or 10th in rank among the states in 1932. The per capita state, county, and minor civil divisions debt in 1922 was \$69.18; by 1932 it had become \$169.05 or 8th in state rank. Its per capita debt in 1931 for state government was \$39.41, placing Louisiana fifth in state rank.

In New Orleans if one talks to the man on the street, or even to the professors at Baton Rouge, he is more likely than not to find admiration expressed in the statements that he hears about the dauntless Long. An Episcopal rector of New Orleans told me that "Huey can quote any part of the Bible backward faster than I can quote the Lord's prayer forward." Casual interviews are likely to bring the alleged comment Huey made when he was elected Governor—"I'm going in there a poor man and coming out rich. The difference in me and the others is that I am telling you about it now." And then these sovereign citizens will go on to explain that "We have always been victims of political corruption from time immemorial. They taxed us and did not give us anything for it. Huey came along and gave us something. He has given us more paved roads than any other two states in the South."

The strategy he used in pointing out the value of good roads to the people, so that they would vote right on the bond issue, is remarkable. "He floated a bond issue for \$60,000,000. He made a checker board of the state highway system. First he paved a road for a few miles, and then he skipped a few miles, and then he paved again. (However, he usually happened to pave in parishes that favored him, and skipped in parishes that voted against him). The farmer travelling along on the pavement would suddenly find his car in the mud for a stretch. The road money was gone, but the lesson had been taught. The people voted for more roads." And for other things that they could see and feel—a \$14,000,000 capitol, new university buildings and a fine campus, a state university where, according to one of its professors, there are no salary cuts, and he added, "It would be plain nuts to buck Huey!"

After Mr. Long was elected Governor in 1928, he spoke at the university at Baton Rouge. In discussing admission requirements, he said, "Who is going to decide whether a boy is qualified to come? You professors? I can't think so. You were all against me in 1928, and if you cannot pick a Governor, how in hell can you pick a student?"

In March of this year there was a three-day convention of Deans and Advisers of Men at the Heidelberg Hotel in Baton Rouge. President James Smith welcomed the national delegates. There is no doubt that he considers Huey a big fellow. He arranged to have him speak at the banquet. Huey came with only two armed guards. His speech was amusing and rambling. Among other things, he said the educators' views toward politicians was all wrong. "Every man of you ought to be for my Share-Our-Wealth Plan. It means a college education for every boy and girl. I am so much for education that I stole \$5,000,000 from the State

Highway Commission to build university buildings. I sold some university land to the state for a capitol site. I figured it was worth \$350,000, but the state had already bought it for \$30,000. We had the university take it back, and we sold it all over again."

He then started talking about the problem of securing a new president for Louisiana State. (He was standing a few feet from the university's new president, James Smith, as he spoke). "We tried to find out where the man for President of L. S. U. was, and we were convinced that the smartest men were not in the state. We did not want the smartest men. We were convinced that the most beloved men were not in the state, but we did not want any beloved men. I said, 'Where is the man whose hide is as thick as an elephant's?' One fellow said, 'Over in Lafayette there is a fellow—came up from Jackson Parish—name's Jim Smith.' And I took good old Jim Smith." (All of the guests laughed at this sally except Mrs. Smith who, for the next few moments, sat as one congealed).

Those favorable to Long in Louisiana are likely to conclude—"Maybe Huey can't realize his Share-The-Wealth Plan, but he will go as far as he can." The more thoughtful of them concede "That the constitution is really out of existence now"—and then add—"but you can't eat the constitution."¹

¹The following poem was written by an outstanding citizen of Baton Rouge who kindly read my article in manuscript. He remarks that "it was written when Huey P. Long was Governor, and when things were not as bad as they are now (1935)."

THE BOOTLICKERS' CHORUS, or GOD SAVE THE KINGFISH.

(To be sung to the tune of *America*).

Lord of the commonweal,
Sire, at your feet we kneel,
Your boots to lick;
E'en though it makes us gag,
Not one of us will lag,
Our fealty ne'er shall flag,
Though the mud makes us sick.

Gravel or amiesite,
All that you do is right,
Your praise we'll sing;
Let your foes find their graves,
We'll be your humble slaves,
Great one that highroads paves,
Reign ever, O King!

Freedom's a thought for fools,
While our great Huey rules,
Under his sway
We of his loyal band,
When he gives loud command,
Rising shall at attention stand,
All glad to obey.

(Amiesite is a kind of paving material).

III.

His speeches in Congress (as elsewhere) are theatre. Up to the middle of March one of the President's advisers told me that Huey had taken up one-half of the Senate's time this session. Not less than one out of twelve lines in the congressional records belongs to him. When he speaks, not only are the galleries filled, but often Congressmen go over to observe the technique of the master spell-binder—the "Tom Sawyer in a toga." Huey likes the "warm embrace of the crowd," and prepares for his public as carefully as Ethel Barrymore ever prepared for hers. He tries out various poses, gestures, tones of voice, and stories before a small private group, asking which seems more effective, indicating that much of the utter naturalness about him is planned and calculated. But he receives visitors (including the commander of the *Emden*) in his bedroom, clad in his green silk pyjamas or in his underwear. The visitors may include writers coming for an interview or thirty of his political lieutenants—and on some of these occasions he is barefooted. In spite of his artifice, however, there is little doubt that he is the boy who never quite grew to maturity. There is still a lot of the ineradicable "boy" in his face and behavior.

Examining Huey's speeches leads one to believe that either (a) he has read widely in certain fields, or (b) has employed a research assistant to cull out quotable sayings from the "authorities", and possesses a most complete book of favorite quotations. And there is no possible doubt that he knows the Bible; he can quote it verbatim by the hour. This is one of the Senator's sources of strength. Another is his unusual talent in the law—something that is based on intellectual curiosity in this one field. In other fields, however, the quality of his learning may be gauged by the following incident. Dr. Thorning interviewed Senator Long for the weekly magazine, *America*. When he asked Huey if he had read the two Encyclical letters—the *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII and the *Quadragesimo Anno* of Pius XI, the Senator roared "Have I read them? I was the one who put them in the Congressional Record! And I quote the Pope in my book. Here it is." But when Dr. Thorning went on to ask the Senator's opinion "of one of the most important of the Holy Father's specific recommendations—namely that favoring the organization of occupational groups in the various industries, trades, arts, and professions", he was told: "That is part of the document which I have not read. I don't know anything about it, but it sounds like NRA. If it's

NRA, I'm against it." Earlier in the interview, when asked about the distribution of wealth plan advocated by Hilaire Belloc, he had proclaimed, "Never heard of him."¹

IV.

The realistic observer must judge Huey Long not by his words, but by his deeds—not by an imaginary plan for all America, but by the plan he uses for all Louisiana. For in Louisiana he is the Kingfish, and his word is law. There the Governor, legislature, and courts do not matter—they are all subservient to Mr. Long.² He is the government that runs the government. "The Empire on the Delta" is his social laboratory; an indication of what he would do on a national scale, were he in power, may be discovered by ascertaining what he has done in the one place where all power flows from him.

Some of Mr. Long's major accomplishments may be briefly noted. He has built many miles of roads—roads that according to Loyola University "far surpass Italy's renowned Via Appia." He has provided the children of the state with free school books.

¹ The following statements are excerpts from a letter written by a prominent citizen (not in politics) of New Orleans who graciously read my article in manuscript:

Clark: I simply wish to say to the Senator from Louisiana that he cannot read from the Constitution of the United States out of the Congressional Directory.

Long: I have a book here which on the cover says the Constitution of the United States is contained in it.

Clark: The Senator started to look for it in the Congressional Directory.

Long: Yes; I started to look for it in the Congressional Directory, but it is not in there. It ought to be in the Congressional Directory. They have a lot of other things in it which are not so important. I have been used to reading the Constitution of the United States out of the World Almanac. That is where most of my education has come from, and I am lost without my almanac.

² The following quotation from the *Congressional Record* (P. 8227, May 21, 1935) is revealing:

Long's flagrant disregard for truth and accuracy, his deliberate policy of indiscriminate character assassination and libels against all who dare oppose him, and his prostitution of the fundamental principles of honest democratic government, including impartial law enforcement and the administration of justice, in building up and administering his personal political machine, are, in the opinion of many citizens of Louisiana, including myself, his greatest crimes against public morals and our most sacred institutions. . . In other cases, the Governor has pardoned election thieves and other criminals, if they were affiliated with the Long machine. In short, in my opinion, Long's greatest crime, as I have said before, is that he has corrupted and undermined our historic and sacred institutions, and, above all, the morals of our younger generations in Louisiana. He has demonstrated that success can be attained by a constant policy of libel and character assassination, prostitution of the administration of justice, dishonest elections, and the ruthless and efficient use of the "spoils system" through countless thousands of state and municipal jobs. In this connection he has, by a series of legislative acts and "edicts", practically destroyed local self-government, and taken over the power to "hire and fire" all municipal employees as well as state employees.

He has substituted free ferries in place of toll bridges; he has brought about reduction of electric and gas rates. According to R. G. Swing, "more than 100,000 adults, white and black, learned to read and write in a single year" after Long became Governor. These and other achievements are outstanding in only one sense however, only when they are compared with what had been accomplished prior to the advent of Long. In comparison with a number of other states outside the south (Wisconsin, for example), the shortcomings of the Senator from Louisiana in his homeland are painfully marked.

In the United States Senate he loudly championed the child labor amendment to the federal constitution, but in his own state he does not ask his legislature to ratify it—and this in spite of the fact that Louisiana ranks ninth among the forty-eight states employing the most children in farm and factory. The Senator strongly urged the payment of a prevailing wage for the work relief measure when he spoke to his peers in the Senate; but when he was among his subjects at Baton Rouge, he said nothing about it. He has recently been sending university students circulars and printed speeches devoted to an educational programme, wherein the Government will pay for the student's college and professional training, but in Louisiana the school year has been shortened, the number of pupils per teacher has been increased, and in 1932-33 the median salary for grade-school teachers was reduced to \$622, and for high school teachers to \$977. The median salary for colored teachers is less than half the above.

He has not provided his people with old age pensions, unemployment insurance, or adequate labor legislation. The Senator's speeches are loaded down with references to Scripture—not labor legislation. He talks as though trade union movements do not exist. Much wealth may be shared through progressive taxation, but Louisiana lacks this sort of tax programme. Income taxes do not markedly rise in the higher brackets, and neither do inheritance taxes. Mr. Oliver Carlson reports that railroad assessments have been reduced \$36,000,000 since 1928, and that the special five-cent tax per barrel on crude oil has been lowered to one cent since the Standard Oil came to terms with Mr. Long.

An examination of the record reveals that Huey Long gives his attention to subjects that can be seen and felt, like free text books and good roads—something that can be dramatized for his public. He is not a progressive, but a shrewd, resourceful and courageous politician on his way to power. Democratic processes are of interest only when they hold something of value for him.

After that point has been reached, he discards them even as he would an empty bottle. Huey's faith is in Huey, and his trust is in force—not civic education. But even though he were sincerely interested in the welfare of the common man, his failure to understand fundamental economic and social problems confronting him would doom his leadership to failure. His method is that of the Dictators—not the Jeffersons and Lincolns.

The administration's best answer to a Huey Long or a Father Coughlin is enactment into law of a social programme in which first place will be given to the security of men, women, and children. Huey Long has often said: "If Roosevelt will live up to the promises he made when he started the New Deal, he'll hear no more criticism from me." This is true, regardless of what the Senator means when he says it; for if the voter has a reasonable chance to obtain "wages of decent living," if labor is guaranteed the right of collective bargaining, if our monetary system is managed for the common good rather than the private few; in short, if the common man is given social security, and if the Government's representatives will explain the import of the Government's actions for the people, and if Huey Long's record will be accurately described, he will lose all but his entertainment value.

Henry A. Wallace, secretary of Agriculture, in discussing what was needed to be done before a public opinion can be formed on a fundamental public policy, let fall a suggestion that might well be quoted here.

"There can be no final answer to our present difficulties: there can hardly be even a satisfactory tentative answer, until we decide which way we want to go. That question should be debated throughout America, and on the highest possible plane. It should be debated in Congress, in public forums, in city and county school-house meetings in every state. This time, our course must not be decided behind closed doors."

Finally, if a work-relief programme is adequately pursued, and if the social legislation of the Roosevelt administration does provide some genuine measure of economic security, an increasing number of American voters will see that neither Long nor Coughlin has anything feasible to offer that Roosevelt has not already thought of. Like Hitler and other dictators, they are merely "excrescences on the social epidermis," warts on the body politic, noteworthy only as symptoms of organic maladjustment—"fantastic creatures in a kitchen with obsolete plumbing." Since neither possesses economic wisdom nor true social purpose, the intelligent voter accords them a passing glance, and turns toward the social con-

ditions which they exploit, and which would inevitably throw up other Longs or Coughlins if the present ones should trip and fall.

Long's geographical constituency and Coughlin's social constituency have for two generations been denied by their betters economic security, culture, and a decent spiritual relationship to their environment. In their distress they respond uncritically to the coarse clowning, bucolic cunning and uncouth impudence of Huey, and to the indiscriminate denouncing for-its-own-sake of the pseudo-Jeremiah of the radio.

But the leadership of these men, as such, as distinguished from the inarticulate forces which they exploit, does not threaten the *status quo*. To the extent that their shouting finds mark at all, it confounds and handicaps the efforts of the real friends of the underprivileged. However, as I have indicated above, the incessant criticism prevents the real leaders from lagging, or from neglecting to consult the people about their plans at frequent intervals—and this is as it should be. Because what happens to the American people in the long run does not depend on Senator Long, Father Coughlin, or President Roosevelt: in a democracy, both the burden and the wisdom of government rest directly on the people. Their supreme problem is the selection of great leaders. They can most wisely exercise this function after great public discussion. Therefore, one faces 1936 with confidence.

NOTE—Although no single leader comparable to Huey Long remains among those appealing to the discontented, the Townsend group have a slogan—\$200 a month for everyone 60 years of age or over—that is possibly even more dramatic than the late Senator Long was in his most favored moment. Dr. Townsend declares that he now (December, 1935) controls eleven states; Mr. Clements, his co-founder and the secretary and treasurer of the movement, is a skilled and experienced organizer (he once organized opinion for Aimee Semple MacPherson), and he is attempting to organize everywhere; Earl Christenberry, former secretary to Huey Long, is now in charge of the Townsend office at Washington. The movement is strongest west of the Mississippi River, but it is coming eastward. Senators Borah (Idaho), Vandenberg (Michigan), Ashurst (Arizona), and McCarran (Nevada) have either endorsed the movement or are flirting with Townsend followers. Two facts are evident: (1) that the Townsend plan is financially impossible, and (2) that it strongly appeals to millions of voters. I have said before that one cannot always answer a dream with logic. I wish to add, however, that logic is the strongest weapon man has for answering dreams. It follows, moreover, that the answer must be stated as persuasively as human ingenuity can devise. Even the smartest politician cannot tell what will happen in 1936. The future is still the future; I have indicated my opinion that the people in the United States will meet the issue sanely as they have met past issues; other careful students of public affairs share this opinion; but of course, it is only an opinion.