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Make It 50/50!

Presidential campaigns look very much alike. We are now in our thirty-fourth, and if you ask almost any one of us to distinguish between the thirty-three gone before - save by their results - all we could think of would be:

1840 with its log cabins and coon skins and its slogan "Tippecanoe and Tyler, too;"

1860 with its flat boats and rail splitting;

1884 with "Rum, Romanism and Rebellion!"

We run our presidential campaigns according to set formulae; they are in a rut - a rut very exciting to those traveling it for the first time but dull enough for those of us who have been over it six or eight or ten or more times.

It looks as if the only thing that could make this thirty-fourth presidential campaign remembered for itself - not for the man it selects - would be a new slogan or an entirely new way of attacking the voter.

Of course we have two important elements to work with - the women and the radio. They will be remembered as first appearing in 1924. But you cannot say that they have given any particular fillip yet - certainly neither has made itself a symbol or created a slogan.

There is an experiment I would like to see made - a healthy one I am sure - one which might make 1924 memorable and carry on into the future everyday life of the country a stimulus to thinking - a spur to knowing instead of guessing, and that is:

End the monopoly of speakers. Give the audience a chance. Divide the time forty-five minutes for the speech, forty-five minutes for questions and answers. Make it 50/50! Think of the fillip that would give a political meeting!

It may sound hard on the candidate, but try it and you will find him starting on his toes and staying on his toes. If a speaker knows that what he gives as fact may be challenged when he stops and that the challenge is authorized, even invited, he is going to be mighty careful that he has authority for what he states. If he knows that his argument may be pulled to pieces, he is going to see that it is as closely knit as he knows how to knit it. If he knows that his conclusions are subject to attack he is going to prepare for the siege. Nother better could happen to him. If he is a wise man he will realize that he has a tremendous chance with both friends and enemies by the promptness, the completeness and the good nature with which he stands the battery that is to be turned upon him.

If good for the speaker it is better for the audience. An audience with nothing to do but listen and cheer is a stupid bunch. Its business is to accept and make a noise, not to think and demand reasons. How can a political speaker expect to draw anybody but his supporters when he does not allow the opposition to come back? No mortal man of intelligence is going to listen silently to a rehearsal of facts which he believes wrong, arguments which he has not accepted, conclusions which he thinks unsound unless he knows that he is going to have his chance when the speaker is through.

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Put your political meetings on a 50/50 basis and see what a change there will be in the make up of the audiences. There will be somebody there besides those that agree, and they will be awake, on the edge of their chairs, ready to pop up when you sit down; and the fight they will give you will make new men of your followers. They will do some thinking and answering - rescue you probably if you get into a hole. You will have such team work in the political meeting as never before was seen.

It is the greatest of chances to make converts. A man who faces his enemies boldly and dares their questions has taken the first step to winning them over. They know courage when they meet it. They know, too, that the man willing to stand up before a questioning battery of friendly and unfriendly believes he is right - is armed with facts and ideas. He is no mere orator set on stirring your blood with floods of high sounding words whose meaning he could not for the life of him translate into terms of the daily life of men and women.

What is a political campaign all about anyway? What is it but the effort of a leader to prove that he knows better than his rivals how to make the daily life of men more tolerable. He must do more than say in fine phrases that he can do this. He must show you, make it clear. And how can he relieve your doubts if he does not give you a chance to air those doubts, is not willing to make this effort to"show"you?

And think what it would mean to the radio audience! Make it 50/50 and the radio would become a political excitement instead of

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what Mr. Edison warned us recently it was in danger of becoming, a political bore.

Picture the community school, the grange hall with the radio picking up Mr. Coolidge or Mr. Davis or Mr. LaFollette who will "speak for forty-five minutes and answer questions forty-five."

You couldn't keep them away - men and women and children. They would applaud challenge and happy answer, as the movieaudience does the Thief of Bagdad when he raises his army out of the dust to destroy the cruel Mongols! No matter if the speaker cannot hear them cheer ~~out of an inner satisfaction at~~ the pertinent question, the happy retort. They feel themselves on the inside of the political world, not merely slavish, unheard listeners.

Make it 50/50, Mr. Politician!

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