A Republican Prescribes for His Party

The G. O. P., he says, faces a challenge. To retain national leadership, it must reflect a philosophy—Eisenhower's—which 'a majority of Americans' share.

By CLIFFORD CASE

WASHINGTON.

It is obvious that an impressive majority of Americans regard President Eisenhower as the Symbol-in-Chief of the basic philosophy which they believe should govern this country. Taking the country as a whole, I think it is equally obvious that neither of our political parties is presently so regarded.

I believe the Republican party can become an effective exponent and instrument of this philosophy. Perhaps the Democratic party can also, though inner cleavages make the task more difficult for them. But my concern is with the Republican party and I share, for two reasons, President Eisenhower's concern that our party meet the challenge.

In the first place, it is my deep conviction that, for our country's sake and the world's, too, it is of crucial importance that this philosophy continue to determine the policies and actions of the Government of the United States. And, in the second place, the situation presents our party with an unparalleled opportunity to erase from the minds of far too many people the identification of Republicanism with the doctrines and thinking of a bygone age. We can, if we will, establish a valid and irresistible claim to national leadership for the indefinite future.

To define this philosophy in which most Americans believe is a formidable task. In one sense, it does not exist. We are a pragmatic people, with little interest in elaborate philosophies. It is broadly true that "America does not have an ideology; it is one."

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But there are certain principles in which most Americans believe deeply. We believe that people (the individual rather than collective man) are the most important things in the world. Toynbee and others have suggested that the underlying basis for this is religious; the belief that each human being is created in the image of God or, at least, with a spark of the divine in him. I think they are probably right. But whatever its basis, the belief exists: people are entitled to equal treatment, to protection, to a fair break. Americans are compassionate. And Americans are optimistic. They believe that things can always be improved and that they ought to be.

But Americans have common sense, too. They have never worn rose-colored glasses when they looked at human nature. They know that man is rational and capable of great accomplishments. But they know, too, that man is not perfect, that he has enormous capacity for evil, to say nothing of lesser frailties, and that therefore no single man or group of men can be allowed to run the show. Americans have always insisted on a division of power. This has been true in both the structure of our Government and the organization of society.

Our insistence on civilian control of the military is an illustration of this. So is our skeptical reaction whenever suggestions are made to center authority in the hands of an elite. Characteristically American is the comment of Judge Learned Hand: "Plato jumped hurdles that are too high for my legs."

Surely this principle is one of the basic reasons for our strong belief in private property and a capitalist system of economics. But since we believe in these institutions pragmatically, not dogmatically, we have never permitted them to be ends in themselves. We do not shrink from governmental intervention to insure that our economy produce a constantly improved standard of living shared as widely as possible. And we insist that the Government intervene to protect the individual against hardships he cannot master through his own efforts.

Americans believe in work. Not just in work for the masses, with leisure for a chosen few. We believe that each should make his own way.

The American understands that while change is inevitable—and desirable—it must not be too rapid. George Kennan recently noted that progress must not be attempted at so fast a pace that the experience of the father has no relevance to the problems of the son.

JUST as he rejects violent or revolutionary change, the American also rejects, as destructive of the general feeling of security, any effort to pit one group of Americans against another. He knows that he cannot be secure unless everyone else is also secure. With occasional lapses, which, happily, are short-lived, he gives little heed to demagogues. Americans understand that tolerance and consideration for everyone are not only virtues but necessities, if we are to maintain a democratic society under government by consent.

These, I think, are some of the things Americans believe—not all Americans all the time, but most Americans most of the time. Americans, it is true, do not always live up to their own beliefs, but, by and large, they have seen to it that these beliefs govern their collective actions. And they generally respond to, and insist on having, leadership which stands for these principles.

This list of things in which Americans believe does not purport to be exhaustive. But I believe that a better understanding of what America is can be found in terms of this blend of compassion, optimism and common sense than in any of the explanations more commonly offered in ideological terms, such as "liberalism" or "conservatism."

ACTUALLY, America is neither liberal nor conservative. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say she is both—liberal in spirit and motivation, and conservative in action. For my own part, I should prefer not to use either of these terms, for they only make understanding more difficult. For example, among those wide of the mark are the self-styled "liberals" whose liberalism in recent years has been reduced to little more than sterile hostility to the American business system and an effort to solve all our problems through the aggrandizement of Federal power. Another group yearns to establish some sort of "conservatism" on a model vaguely drawn from European feudal experience and wholly irrelevant to the American scene.

Still another group insists that salvation lies only in a "return" to pure laissez faire as if, to paraphrase Mr. Justice Frankfurter, Adam Smith were a prophet whose generalizations had been imparted to him on Sinai and not merely a thinker who addressed himself to (Continued on Following Page)
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the elimination of restrictions which had become fetters upon initiative in his day. It is becoming clearer to everyone that none of these doctrinaire approaches can lead us anywhere. Yet Americans do have a working philosophy, Compassion—or decency, if you will—optimism and common sense are basic elements in that philosophy, and, as I have suggested, they are what America looks to find in its leaders. It is, I think, because most Americans feel that President Eisenhower possesses these characteristics to a degree greater than any other public figure today that he holds so unshakably the trust and confidence of the American people.

Of course, these are simple things. We are all familiar with the criticism that the President speaks in platitudes, albeit sincerely. Platitudes or not, these are principles that Americans believe in. And it is in large measure because of these principles that we have been able to prove that a great nation, despite its incomparable diversity and the enormous centrifugal forces which it contains, can nevertheless exist under government by consent.

At the outset, I suggested that, taken as a whole, the people of America do not think that either of our political parties, as a party, is an effective exponent of these principles. I believe this is so and I do not think that either party, as a party, can take much comfort from the results of the recent election. But if either of our major parties could persuade the American people that it effectively embodied these characteristics—the American people would give it their overwhelming support.

A party seeking this support must stand for an affirmative program and policies, ever pushing forward in accustomed areas, and ever breaking new ground as fast as fiscal prudence and social stability permit. This is the true "middle of the road" which Americans in overwhelming numbers believe is right.

There are those who admonish the Republicans not to attempt this affirmative role. They argue there is no political advantage in being moderately progressive since those who are will always be outdistanced by the ultra-radicals. A minority of the small group who advance this argument have a purely selfish interest in opposing any change. Others hold the pessimistic view that mankind is bent on a headlong dash to self-destruction and that the mission that can be done is to slow the descent.

The pessimists overlook the common sense of America. What they fear could become a reality only if the course they advocate were followed. Americans will turn to ultraradical leadership and dangerous tinkering with our institutions only if they should find that they have no alternative in the form of steady progress at a sound and balanced pace.

Nor would a party seeking to establish itself as the symbol of affirmative leadership have to make undue concessions to any particular group. The American people have many times demonstrated that if they support leadership in which they have confidence without receiving special favors. The problem, of course, is how either party—and my concern is with the Republican party—can gain this confidence.

This is not as easy as it might seem. It is not a simple thing, within the framework of American political habits and institutions, for either of our political parties, as parties, to present to the public a clear and convincing picture of what it stands for. Nor is it easy for a party to change its public image once it has been established.

For this purpose party platforms have little, if any, value. The public

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atives were always explained in terms of helping people.) The Democrats sounded like a team and they acted like a team. Both are important.

There were dissident Democrats all through the New Deal, of course. But, through a way of their own—self-restraint and of the Roosevelt political skill in dealing with individuals and in playing down the most seriously divisive issues, such as civil rights, the dissidents were regarded as a small minority not representative of the Democratic party as a whole.

When proposals came from the White House, Democrats in Congress were loud in their praise. The leaders in both houses and other prominent Democratic members worked effectively, through the committees and on the floor, to see that these measures became law. There was close cooperation between the party leadership in Congress and the White House; disagreements between them were for the most part adjusted privately. Both the appearance and the fact of unity between the President and Congressional Democrats were sustained with solid legislative results.

This period ended, for all practical purposes, with the defeat of the Supreme Court “packing” bill in 1937. But by that time the Democratic party had acquired a solid reputation for being “for the people.” That reputation lasted much longer than the period of truly effective cooperation between the President and his party in Congress. Indeed, it is still a political fact of considerable significance.

Is not the lesson for the Republicans plain? I think it is. And I believe there is no reason why we cannot act upon it.

It would be pointless to pretend, of course, that there are no factions within the Republican party or that any kind of forward-looking program, party-wide in conception, could be adopted without a certain amount of friction. Our party, like the Democratic party, is a coalition of many groups having many diverse goals, with a few common economic goals. The vitality of a political party in America depends, not upon a monolithic singleness of purpose, but upon its ability to give and take in particulars while remaining united on common objectives.

There are, for example, some prominent members of our party (the Democrats suffer from the same ills) who are opposed, in whole or in part, to the idea of foreign economic aid, which is a cornerstone of our current foreign policy. And, in the domestic field, there are those who object on principle to the Federal Government’s taking a leading role in relieving local shortages of schools, health services and similar welfare needs. Still others feel that almost every Government undertaking should be held subservient to the goal of achieving a balanced budget. Indeed, there are some who take a skeptical view of all that is embrased in what is loosely and imprecisely defined as “Eisenhower Republicanism.”

My belief is, however, that this represents a decided minority view within our party—and a diminishing one. I also believe that we can find very substantial agreement on the principles of the various legislative proposals which are necessary to give effect to the basic philosophy for which the President stands.

But there is a vital difference between acquiescence in principle and the kind of active, vocal and effective support which Congressional Republicans must give to a comprehensive, affirmative program if the party is to achieve public acceptance as a party dedicated to the Eisenhower philosophy.

It is necessary for the Republicans in Congress and their leadership to make a conscious and deliberate decision to give their collective support to the enactment of such a program. They must push as hard for progressivism as for prudence. Individual members, except where they cannot do so in good conscience, must support the program in its entirety—not merely those parts the need for which is immediate and pressing in their own constituencies. Committees and committee chairmen in both houses, though they must have full opportunity to exercise their responsibilities, must not be permitted to abuse their authority by bottling up legislation.

I do not suggest that either Republicans or Democrats in Congress should be mere rubber stamps. But I have tried to demonstrate that what Americans believe in and seek—and find exemplified in the President’s philosophy—should present no difficulties in principle for the great majority of Republican legislators.

For most of them—not all, of course, but certainly a great majority—the problem is not one of switching to a whole new and different set of basic principles, as was the case, for example, in Senator Vandenburg’s reorientation in the field of foreign policy. Such change as is necessary is mainly in emphasis and approach. It involves discarding certain attitudes and habits of speech understandably acquired during long years when the Republicans were the opposition party. It involves accepting with energy and enthusiasm an affirmative responsibility for providing the kind of leadership, at once progressive and prudent, which most Americans seek.

Surely a party which can’t do this has no right to expect the confidence and support of the American people and no valid claim to leadership. And, in the minds of the people, we Republicans in Congress are the Republican party.

It is hard to conceive a more favorable opportunity to win the confidence and support of the American people than that which lies in the next few months and years present to the Republican party. It rests with the Republicans in Congress and with the leadership of the White House whether we shall grasp that opportunity.