

ANNALS OF GOVERNMENT

SERVING THE PRESIDENT

THE TRUMAN YEARS—II

new yorker

IN October of 1945, Dr. Franc McCluer, the president of Westminster College, in Fulton, Missouri, read that Winston Churchill, who had been out of office since July, was planning to visit the United States early in 1946. McCluer, whose odd-shaped head had earned him the nickname Bullet, asked his old Westminster classmate Harry Vaughan, who had become President Harry Truman's military aide, to get the President to endorse an invitation to Churchill to speak at Westminster College.

The President considered Churchill "the first citizen of the world." But he hardly knew him, having spent only nine days with him at the Potsdam Conference, in the summer of 1945, before Churchill, defeated in the British elections, left the conference. Wanting to get to know him better, President Truman wrote, "This is a wonderful school in my home state. Hope you can do it. I'll introduce you."

Although those of us on the President's staff—I had just begun service as the President's acting naval aide—did not know it, Churchill harbored deep reservations about President Truman, and, in his own later words, "loathed the idea of [Truman] taking the place of Franklin Roosevelt." But for some time he had wanted to make a major speech summing up his view of the world, and especially of the growing Soviet threat. What better auspices for such a dramatic statement than a speech introduced by the President of the United States? He accepted at once, and President Truman invited him to travel between Washington and Fulton on the Presidential train—a journey that would allow them several days of close contact.

As soon as the train pulled out of Union Station, on March 4, 1946, the President had drinks served to his guests. Churchill, as was his wont, drank Scotch with water but no ice, for he viewed adding ice as a barbaric American custom. Holding his drink, he leaned back and said, "When I was in South Africa as a young man, the water was not fit to drink. I have felt

that way ever since about water, but I have learned that it can be made palatable by the addition of some whiskey." Like everyone, I had heard of Churchill's reputation as a drinker, but it was my impression that he drank very slowly, nursing a single drink for hours.

As we relaxed on the sofas and easy chairs in the President's private car, President Truman turned to his guest and said, "Now, Mr. Churchill, we are going to be together on this train for some time. I don't want to rest on formality, so I would ask you to call me Harry."

Bowing his head slightly and gracefully, Churchill replied, "I would be delighted to call you Harry. But you must call me Winston."

The President said, "I just don't know if I can do that. I have such admiration for you and what you mean, not only to your people but to this country and the world."

Churchill, smiling broadly, settled the matter: "Yes, you can. You must, or else I will not be able to call you Harry."

And President Truman, clearly pleased, agreed, saying, "Well, if you put it that way, Winston, I will call you Winston."

Churchill soon asked to be excused in order to work on his speech. His approach to speechwriting was in direct contrast to that of almost every American politician I have known. For one thing, he wrote each speech himself—something increasingly rare even then in American politics. He attached the greatest importance not only to his general theme but to the exact words

with which he conveyed it. Churchill did not know if he would ever be returned to office, but he wanted to warn the world, and especially the United States, about the dangers of Stalinism, just as he had warned the world in the nineteen-thirties about Hitler. He knew that his only influence lay in the power of his words, and he intended this speech to take its place alongside the wartime speeches with which he had rallied Britain in its moments of supreme peril.

President Truman had been in office less than a year. He was torn between a growing anger at and distrust of the Soviet Union and a residual hope that he could still work with Stalin. Just days before we boarded the train for Fulton, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal had circulated to senior officials and military officers a lengthy telegram from the American Embassy in Moscow warning that the Soviet Union, out of a combination of insecurity and age-old ambitions, would be a dangerous and destabilizing element in the postwar world. The message, which was to become known as the Long Telegram, was probably the most important, and most influential, message ever sent to Washington by an American diplomat. Its author, George F. Kennan, was soon to become famous. Forrestal circulated the Long Telegram widely among his friends in Washington, and sent it to several hundred senior American military officers around the world.

Secretary of State James Byrnes had read a draft of Churchill's speech the day before the train left Washington and had briefed President Truman on its contents. The President had said he would not read the final text, in order to be able to say later that he had not endorsed or approved it in advance. Yet when Churchill's press aide handed out the final version of the speech to reporters on the train the night before it was delivered the White House staff also got copies. Reading it, I was deeply impressed by its sweep and its sense of history. As for President Truman, despite his earlier decision he



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ing, and public-relations efforts. On August 17th, the F.B.I. began fingerprinting incumbent government employees, and on October 1, 1947, the loyalty program was officially launched.

Thus began an era in which every aspect of a person's private opinions on political issues suddenly seemed open to public scrutiny. The loyalty program gave rise to myriad similar programs in the private sector, which were often run with even less justice or justification. One of the most famous, in Hollywood, led to the blacklisting of many prominent members of the film community, and brought Ronald Reagan into his first important involvement in politics. Even people's reading habits could cause their dismissal, and even an unproved accusation of attendance at a meeting sponsored by a leftist group could destroy a person's career.

The State Department witnessed many of the most dramatic and most memorable battles of the era, including the tragic destruction of the Foreign Service Office careers of John Stewart Service, John Carter Vincent, and John Paton Davies. Not one of these men was a Communist, but each had made the mistake of frankly reporting why Communism was gaining strength, especially in China.

President Truman abhorred what was happening. But events took the issue out of his hands. The defection of a code clerk, Igor Gouzenko, from the Soviet Embassy in Canada generated enormous interest in the United States, and his testimony about Soviet espionage in the United States fuelled the right wing. The Alger Hiss affair began its long voyage through American history. In October, 1949, China fell to Mao. Four months later, Senator Joe McCarthy made his infamous speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, charging that the State Department was harboring Communists. Four months after that, the Korean War began. All the conditions for the right-wing assault on American civil liberties which we now call McCarthyism were in place.

The trend had begun to alarm President Truman well before the start of the Korean War. After the 1948 election, he indicated to me his growing dissatisfaction with both Hoover and

the atmosphere that had been created. But never once did he indicate that he thought the loyalty program had contributed to that atmosphere, or even that it was a mistake; in his eyes, the program had been originally designed to prevent only the excesses that were taking place, and would not have become a problem if Hoover had not perverted it. He felt that without the loyalty program the political pressures from the right wing would have been much greater, and more difficult to resist. At the time, I agreed with him; later, I came to a different conclusion.



D. Adetta

There has probably been no one, in my years in Washington, who amassed and abused power more shamefully than J. Edgar Hoover. As the disclosures of recent years have shown, his agenda for the F.B.I. was highly personal, and included vendettas against Robert F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and a host of other people whose views or behavior had somehow offended him.

In the nineteen-forties, we could only suspect the dimensions of his megalomania. By the nineteen-seventies, evidence was beginning to emerge about some of his activities. But even today, I think, there is a great deal we do not know about the uses to which J. Edgar Hoover put his vast array of agents, networks, and resources. He was very close to being an American Fascist. It is unfortunate that the new F.B.I. headquarters on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington still bears his name.

HISTORY will always treat Harry Truman's "whistle-stop" campaign by train across America as the dramatic highlight of his stunning upset victory over Thomas E. Dewey, but it did not seem so at the time. I remember it as a miserable, ceaseless, exhausting treadmill. Months after the 1948 campaign was over, I still woke occasionally in the middle of the night from a nightmare that I was trapped on that train. Only later did any of us aboard realize that riding the rails with Harry Truman in 1948 had conferred on us the status that goes with participation in a mythic event—the centerpiece of the greatest political upset in American history, and one of the last Presidential elections conducted before television,

jet travel, political consultants, modern polling and communications changed politics forever.

Many Democrats did not want or expect President Truman to run: they considered him an unelected usurper of F.D.R.'s mantle, with no chance against the Republicans. But I and many of my friends expected Harry Truman to run, and wanted him to run, even though his national campaigning thus far had been limited to an unremarkable run for the Vice-Presidency in 1944. Like everyone else, however, we were not sure he could win.

He was apparently not so sure himself, for in 1947 he secretly sent word to General Eisenhower that he would step aside if Eisenhower wanted the Democratic nomination. Neither President Truman nor anyone else had the slightest idea of Eisenhower's political views, and in the luminous aura that surrounded the war hero no one bothered to ask. Although Eisenhower declined President Truman's suggestion, the "Ike factor" was to cast a continuing shadow over the campaign until the very eve of the Democratic Convention. (Many liberal Democrats, including Hubert Humphrey, preferred Eisenhower to Truman.)

Of the President's secret offer to Eisenhower I knew nothing at the time. I am sure President Truman realized that I would have tried to dissuade him from such an action, so he simply did not tell me. The only occasion on which I heard the two men even touch on politics was during a luncheon that Eisenhower, then the Army Chief of Staff, gave President Truman at the Pentagon in early 1946. In a lighthearted manner, President Truman turned to Eisenhower and said, "General, if you ever want to go into politics, come to me and I'll sure endorse you." Ike just smiled his famous smile, and the conversation moved on. In any case, the possibility of Eisenhower's accepting the 1948 Democratic nomination (it was his for the asking) worried Truman for many months.

The obstacles to President Truman's reelection were staggering. Roosevelt's coalition was fragile and in danger of breaking up. Both Houses of Congress were in Republican hands. Part of the South followed Strom Thurmond, then the Democratic governor of South Carolina, in a regional

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and never said anything so strong in public about Laos.

Finally, the outgoing President offered Kennedy best wishes. He wanted us to know he would support—or, at least, not criticize—the new Administration in the area of foreign policy. There was only one issue on which he was taking an absolutely clear position in advance: China. If Kennedy recognized the People's Republic of China, as some liberal Democrats were urging him to, Eisenhower said, he would attack the decision and try to rally public opinion against it. Kennedy did not comment, but I had no doubt that Eisenhower's warning had its desired effect.

UNDOUBTEDLY the worst disaster of the Kennedy Administration was the invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. Launched on the morning of April 17, 1961, it was poorly planned, poorly executed, and heavily infiltrated by agents of Fidel Castro. Almost the entire invasion force was either killed or captured.

The Bay of Pigs changed the course of the Kennedy Administration. President Kennedy would never again accept anything that resembled conventional wisdom or bureaucratic momentum without intense questioning. He might make mistakes in the future, but they would be *his* mistakes, not someone else's. It had taken a catastrophe to turn the rhetoric about a new beginning into a harsh reality, but that had now happened.

The moment I entered the Oval Office for the first time after the Bay of Pigs, I could see a change in the President. His mood was sombre, his normal grace concealed in a shell of regret, anger, and distress. I had never seen him so depressed. As he had already publicly stated, he accepted the ultimate responsibility as his own. But he was angry. He wanted to prevent such a tragedy from ever recurring.

"Let me tell you something," he said. "I have had two full days of hell. I haven't slept. This has been the most excruciating period of my life. I doubt my Presidency could survive another catastrophe like this."

He did not dwell on the details of the disaster. He knew that, like the rest of the country, I was well aware of what had happened: that, contrary to C.I.A. predictions, the people of Cuba had not

rallied in support of the invasion force; that air cover for the invasion had not been planned properly; that Castro's agents had infiltrated the invasion force in advance; that the C.I.A.'s role in the invasion was going to be fully revealed; and that the whole operation had been ill conceived from the outset.

The President analyzed his predicament in precise, biting, angry words I will long remember: "I made a bad decision. The decision I made was faulty because it was based upon the wrong advice. The advice was wrong because it was based upon incorrect facts. And the incorrect facts were due to a failure of intelligence." He continued, "You were one of the main drafters of the legislation that created the C.I.A., and watched it develop since its birth. I want you to join a Presidential board to oversee the operations of the intelligence community." Referring to the condition I had set when I went to work on the transition, he said, "This is not a full-time job, and I consider it important that you participate as a member of this board."

Thus began almost seven years of service on one of the least-known and most sensitive organizations in the United States, the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, or P.F.I.A.B.—first as a member and then, for almost five years, beginning in April, 1963, as its chairman. I found the P.F.I.A.B., which still exists, though in greatly weakened form, to be one of the most rewarding governmental activities in which I had ever been involved. We met regularly, and reviewed hundreds of issues, ranging from satellite reconnaissance to every form of scientific and human intelligence. We made a hundred and seventy recommendations to President Kennedy in the space of only twenty-nine months, most of them relating to intelligence activities within the Depart-

ment of Defense, the rest to those in the Department of State, the C.I.A., and other departments. The President approved a hundred and twenty-five of our recommendations, disapproved two, and deferred action on the rest. At the time of his death, eighty-five of the hundred and twenty-five approved recommendations had been carried out. The rest were completed under President Johnson, and we continued to make recommendations at about the same pace throughout Johnson's tenure. We felt that the era of cloak-and-dagger operations had more or less run its course. To be sure, there was still a role in the world for the daring agent operating inside another government, or in a closed society such as the Soviet Union. We did not advocate any curtailment of such activities, but we felt that Allen Dulles, the director of the C.I.A., was insufficiently alert to the importance and the possibilities of collecting intelligence by utilizing new technologies. Under the tutelage of two brilliant scientists who served on the committee—Edwin Land, the inventor of the Polaroid Land Camera, and William Baker, vice-president of research for Bell Labs—I became a strong advocate of "collection by technical means." These two men were our teachers, turning all of us on the committee into missionaries for the view that the United States should vastly increase its commitment to the finest state-of-the-art technologies in the field of electronic, photographic, and satellite espionage.

From time to time, President Kennedy called on the P.F.I.A.B. to investigate the performance of the intelligence community. He wanted case studies by the P.F.I.A.B. of major intelligence failures, and he hoped that such studies would reduce the number of times we were surprised by events. In this last hope Kennedy, and the nation, were sorely disappointed, but he deserves praise for his intentions.

SOME questions, even though they can never be answered, constantly recur, and deserve attention. That is true of a question I have been asked repeatedly since Dallas: Would Kennedy have handled Vietnam the same way Johnson did? Obviously, history does not allow us to test such alternatives; one must rely on one's instincts. The two Presidents had the same

