

T.R.B.

from
Washington

Predictions

★ We got as far as our first "We predict," in a year-end political forecast, when we checked ourself. We fished out our folder marked "Predictions." It took us completely off the track.

"There is no cause for worry. The high tide of prosperity will continue." Andrew W. Mellon said that right before the 1929 smash.

"The economic condition of the world seems on the verge of a great forward movement," Bernard Baruch told Bruce Barton in an interview in *The American* magazine for June, 1929.

Poor old Hoover. "I can observe little on the horizon today to give us undue or great concern," he said, as the bottom dropped out.

But that's old stuff. Let's look at the yellowed clippings of a later date, the FDR-Landon Presidential race of 1936. You recall: Landon carried two states, Maine and Vermont. Our favorite predictor here was columnist David Lawrence: "Landon to win in Pennsylvania by 250,000," he wrote in the *Boston Transcript*, October 22. "New York for Landon," is another headline on a Lawrence column. Others were in there pitching, too: "California swings to Landon with rest of West Coast," said a correspondent of the *NY Sun*, Oct. 31. "Kiplinger Sure President Vote Will Be Close," according to a headline, Oct. 22, in the *Boston Herald*. And the *NY Herald Tribune* published what it described as "a new type of Presidential forecast" by Rogers C. Dunn, a voting research expert: "Landon To Win 33 States, New Forecast Shows."

Well, we were all younger then. We were, perhaps, more sure of ourselves. But a prediction that blows up in your face can be a humiliating matter. We

know. Let's pass hurriedly over Dewey's "victory" against Truman in 1948. This column (we blush to say) was so confident of a Dewey win that we went to press on it. We still recall our conflicting emotions that Wednesday morning: exhilaration over Truman's victory and mortification over our forthcoming reference to President-elect Dewey. All we can say is that the public loves this kind of thing. Nothing rejoices a reader more than to point out with a smirk, to some hardworking columnist, a little slip he has made like naming the wrong President.

Hum, hum. Here's a nice column by Stewart Alsop, June 2, 1951, beginning: "Secretary of State Dean Acheson cannot conceivably remain in office very much longer." And here's the "Newsgram" page of the *US News & World Report*, Feb. 13, 1953, "A Look Ahead": "Eisenhower will be a strong President, a leader." Even at that early hour of the new Administration, something led us to file that away.

The *Boston Globe*, Sept. 15, 1955, had a piece: "Why Ike Won't Run Again." Seems he had promised Mamie he wouldn't.

In 1957 the Soviets lofted Sputnik into space. In a way it resembled 1929. There was the same awful jolt to confidence and the same official rush to cover up. "The satellite is a nice scientific trick," said Charles Wilson, ex-Secretary of Defense. "Nobody is going to drop anything down on you from a satellite while you are asleep, so don't worry about it."

Senator Goldwater also refused to get excited "just because the Russians have lobbed a basketball into space that goes beep, beep, beep."

Silly Bauble

★ Clarence Randall, Ike's special adviser on foreign economic policy: "The satellite is a silly bauble. I am personally very gratified that our nation was not first."

General Eisenhower mildly protested that it "does not raise my apprehensions, not one iota."

Our most notable modern prophet is Defense Secretary McNamara. His field: Vietnam. "The corner has been definitely turned toward victory" (May, 1963). "The major part of the US military task can be completed by the end

of 1965" (October, 1963). "We have every reason to believe that plans will be successful in 1964" (December, 1963). "The US hopes to withdraw most of its troops from South Vietnam before the end of 1965" (February, 1964). We read, with mixed feelings, his latest effort last week: "We have stopped losing the war."

Sour Mood

★ So where were we when we got interrupted? Oh, we were just going to offer a few speculations, *not* predictions. Chief of these is that the dominant political issue next year will be Vietnam.

There certainly is a sour mood in this capital today. Draft calls and casualties are going up, and Administration officials are beginning to educate the public to the idea that it's going to be a long war. The man-in-the-street somehow can't understand it. How can a country as rich as the US, he asks, be thwarted in a silly little war? Surely there must be some easy way out.

This is what politicians call a "gut" issue. It affects everybody. It touches a naked nerve. The issue seems likely to grow - and it is 11 months to the midterm election. Republicans have been desperately looking for an issue: inflation - ? centralized government - ? Johnson the dictator? People don't get roused over such matters, not when the economy is booming. But a dirty war in Asia, with your boy in it, that is another matter.

House Minority Leader Gerald Ford of Michigan says he is resisting "increasing pressure" to break sharply with the Administration. Senator Dirksen and Richard Nixon want to extend bombing. Many Democrats go along. Mr. Johnson is in a cleft stick. If he tries to negotiate it will be a sign of "softness." If casualties mount, it will be because he did not use air power, or The Bomb.

Republicans insist they will not make this a political issue. But we can't believe they will keep Vietnam out of politics any more than they kept Korea out of politics.

Of course we are better mannered and less excitable today. Leopards have changed their spots, and politicians are less anxious to get elected. Just the same we predict - but no, not this week.