

# Mr. Eisenhower's Decision and the Eisenhower Program

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For Dwight Eisenhower, the decision was wholly personal. It involved him in a most tangible way, for it stands to affect his immediate future. He of course takes for granted, as most everyone else does, that the future of America and even of the world is involved in his decision, as indeed it is; but Eisenhower doesn't know just how, nor do most of Eisenhower's supporters. That is why, when the President finally confronted, from his office in the White House, a television audience of an estimated sixty-five million people, to "explain" why he had arrived at his breath-catching decision to run again, there was not a word said, not an inflection intentionally turned loose, having to do with the political or social or philosophical imperatives that impelled that decision.

There was no talk of alien forces, champing at the bit, whose designs he intends to frustrate. No mention of the need for his personal supervision of a grand political or moral purpose. In his climactic hour, at the summit of his popularity, Eisenhower as never before appeared as the very essence of himself. He was there as President "of all the people," the good and non-partisan friend of kings and sultans and nabobs, the intimate of commissars and generalissimos. There was not time, in the scant half hour during which he spoke, to refer to a nation and world in crisis. For there is no serious crisis, in the eyes of our President. And if there is one, something called "the Eisenhower program" will wish it away. Let us not have dire and embarrassing talk. Eisenhower and everyone else seem to be saying about a need for heroic exertions, about the stabbing cries that issue forth out of the total darkness to which one half the world is perpetually committed; for this is a time of cheer, of plenty, of warmheartedness, blurred images and diffuse sentimentality: this is the era of the Eisenhower program.

Mr. Eisenhower has always had difficulty in describing the nature of the Eisenhower program, and it is a difficulty traceable to something more subtle than the difficulty he has in formulating a phrase. The most expensive professional verbalizers in his entourage, or in his camp, have, fundamentally, the same difficulty. So that when the Eisenhower program, in conception and practice, is described, however enthusiastically, however ingeniously, or neatly, it nevertheless refuses to reduce to an orderly system of political or philosophical beliefs, or even to a consistent set of axioms or definitions as to the nature of the problem at hand, or how to deal with it. Like the pantaloons offered for sale by the Yankee peddler memorialized by Lincoln, the program seems to be "large enough for any man, small enough for any boy."

Eisenhower warns of the danger that a "treaty or agreement with other countries deprives our citizens of the rights guaranteed them by the Federal Constitution." And no constitutional amendment that seeks to secure those rights can find a place in the Eisenhower program.

Eisenhower's "principles demand that we use every political, every economic, every psychological tactic to see that the liberating spirit, in the nations conquered by Communism, shall never perish." And the Eisenhower program ends us up at Geneva, where we seek means to freeze the status quo, conspicuously refusing to press the matter of the satellite states.

The Democrats, Eisenhower complains, "most generally advise me which Senators I should work with and which I should disown. . . . To hear them talk, you would think that the Republican Party was something I invented and they own—that they can dictate to me a course of action, and Republican candidates will fall in

line. Well, let us be thankful that Republicans think for themselves." Unless, in thinking for themselves, they make proposals not sanctioned by the Eisenhower program, as, for example, Senators Knowland and Saltonstall and Bricker have on occasion done; in which case they are, as a matter of practical political fact, at least temporarily disowned by the Eisenhower program.

Eisenhower calls for "a Federal Reserve System exercising its functions in the money and credit system without pressure for political purposes from the Treasury and White House." And, after a few restrictive measures at the outset of the Administration, the Eisenhower program maintains the policies that result in a continuing credit inflation, which is the main present danger to the national economy.

"I do not believe that we can cure all the evils in men's hearts by law," Mr. Eisenhower says, "and when you get to compulsory action in certain phases of this thing I really believe we can do more by leadership in getting states to do it than to make it a federal compulsory thing." And a ruling by the Supreme Court based on contrary assumptions is heartily endorsed by the Eisenhower program.

Federal aid to education? The states "can do it better themselves, locally, with local responsibilities," says Mr. Eisenhower, than by "centralized help which will finally . . . lead again toward control and direction." And so, under the Eisenhower program, we are called upon to appropriate large sums to inaugurate a program of federal aid to education.

The economy? "I shall stop the profligate spending of my predecessors . . . reduce taxes, check the descent of this great nation, founded on the principles of private enterprise, into the morass of socialism and collectivism." And the Eisenhower program calls for continued high spend-

ing, here and abroad; for increasing subventions of various kinds; for expanding federal projects in various directions; for maintaining the tax burden at its present level.

"Thus, we shall help each captive nation to maintain an outward strain against its Moscow bond," Mr. Eisenhower promises. "The lands closed in behind the Iron Curtain will seethe with discontent: their peoples not servants docile under a Soviet master, but ardent patriots yearning to be free again." Whereupon Russia is reassured, by the American Secretary of State, speaking in the United Nations, that under the Eisenhower program "we can understand the particular desire of the Russian people to have close neighbors who are friendly. We sympathize also with that desire. The United States does not want Russia encircled by hostile peoples."

#### What is the Eisenhower program?

Is it a program which as a matter of policy seeks out the middle of the road? It has been so intimated, by Mr. Eisenhower himself—who added, ruefully, that "it takes great courage to follow the middle" against constant attack from both the left and the right. But Eisenhower's sharpest defenders would make no such concession. Not only because it is easy to establish that a number of the stances of the Eisenhower program as well as a number of the specific ventures of the program are not in fact middle-of-the-road; there are other objections to thus identifying the Eisenhower program.

It is indispensable to the program that it irradiate a moral purpose; and middle-of-the-road qua middle-of-the-road is a morally insecure position, as the first Republican President warned at Cooper Union. "Let us be diverted," said Lincoln, "by none of those sophistical contrivances wherewith we are so industriously plied and belabored—contrivances such as groping for some middle ground between the right and the wrong."

The objectives of the Eisenhower program? It is hard to say. What are the objectives of the housewife next door? To get on with her workaday chores, to continue to exercise a certain influence and control over the household, to like, and be liked, to be tranquil, and secure—and, always, to

live yet another day. Most of what goes on in the world has no discernible objective.

The Eisenhower program is no exception. For, essentially, it is a program undirected by principle, unchained to any coherent idea as to the nature of man and society, uncommitted to any estimate of the nature or potential of the enemy. Yet it is a program which, because of the personality of its leader and the ingenuity and devotion of its publicists, whatever it is up to at any given moment, is always emitting a squid-like ink of moral justification and intellectual tightness. The program suffers from the ultimate lifelessness of any



program unanimated by definition or principle, but it enjoys, too, a marvelous flexibility. It can respond quickly, and decisively, to the slightest political impulse, and it can reconcile opposites. Under the Eisenhower program one can, simultaneously, declare for a free market economy and veto the gas bill, stand by a policy of liberation and go to Geneva, lucubrate over constitutional rights and freedoms and forever abandon captured American soldiers, and over the whole package—and this is Mr. Eisenhower's historic skill—there is suffused a general benignity of a kind that disarms the multitude and transforms it into an enthusiastic political army. And included in the multitude are hosts of men and women who, in their own

moral and intellectual lives, live according to the word, and see things as they are.

Here, indeed, is the danger in the Eisenhower program, that transcends by far the danger of terrible strategic miscalculations of the power or intentions of the enemy, and transcends, too, the danger of a casual institutionalization of socialist measures and paraphernalia. In enshrining amorality, and blurring distinctions, and acclimatizing men to life without definition, we erode the Western position; and that, take or leave a few bombs and airplanes, is all we have got. The socialist tidal wave continues to build up a titanic power, and it is on the move. Effective resistance to it will call for supreme individual and collective exertion, but in behalf of what will this exertion be made? The Eisenhower program? A nation, to be loved, must be lovely, Burke said; and a position, to be effectively defended against the bewitching appeal of a utopian-materialist order, against the connivings and sacrifices of hundreds of millions of active partisans who aim at the hearts and minds of every individual on earth—a position that can stand up under all that must be clear, and bright, and intact: it cannot, after prolonged mutilation by aimless mushheadedness, generate the will to stand, resolute, against forces that history itself seems to be championing.

General Eisenhower is himself a good man. He is not a doctrinaire, or an adventurer who would commit the nation's destiny in pursuit of one beguiling horizon, or a redeemer cocksure of his afflatus. That is not a part of the Eisenhower program, for it is not a program administered either by traitors, or adventurers, or charisma-conscious political evangelists or, even, cynics. Therein its strengths—its only strengths. For some Americans who are aware of the Eisenhower program's terrifying weaknesses, those strengths are crucial, and will impel them to vote for Eisenhower in preference to the apparent alternative. The decisions that must be made before November are dreadful ones. As Eisenhower asked for help in reaching his own decision as to whether he should run, so we must all ask for help in reaching a decision as to whether we should vote for him.