OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS ON SPECIAL ELECTIONS IN WISCONSIN AND PENNSYLVANIA

by Andrew J. Biemiller

Several important special Congressional elections have been held this year. At least two of them provide sharp contrasts in the campaign issues selected and techniques employed. We present a review of both campaigns in the hope that all progressives will bear them in mind for reference in 1948.

The special elections held in the Second District of Wisconsin and the Eighth District of Pennsylvania are the ones to which we refer.

WISCONSIN

The Second Congressional District in Wisconsin has only elected one Democrat in 30 years and that was in 1932. It has from time to time been represented by a Progressive when the La Follette Third Party was still in existence. It comprises Dane County which includes Madison, the state capital, and four other counties which are mainly rural but which have some organized labor in them.

Carl Thompson, the Democratic candidate, is a young lawyer who was previously identified with Progressive Party politics. Glenn Davis, the successful Republican, is another young lawyer who had served one term in the state legislature as a Republican. Both of them are veterans. The Republican machine in the district has plenty of money and a good organization. It is the home district of the state Republican boss, Tom Coleman.

The Democratic Party in the district, which has never been strong, is in the process of rebuilding. The Democratic National Committee and its state chairman cooperated in every way to make the campaign a success. A fine volunteer "Thompson for Congress" committee ran the campaign. One outsider with political experience managed the campaign but remained in the background. The only speaking he did was at a few closed union meetings.

Labor from the beginning was consulted and was delighted with Thompson as a candidate but at no time, however, did labor take the leading role in the campaign. Out of 22 radio speeches that were made, only two were made by union leaders. A special edition of the Madison labor paper was gotten out and mailed to all union members in Madison five days before election. Bundle orders were distributed in factories in the other cities in the district.

Thompson himself did most of the speaking, stressing a six-point program in which protection of labor rights was only one of the six points. Monopoly, protection of farm cooperatives, social security, taxation, and housing were the main talking points. Others who spoke were representative of a good cross section of the district: farm leaders, lawyers, merchants, university professors, etc.
It should also be noted that in this campaign the liberal forces were aided immeasurably by the existence of a fine liberal newspaper, *The Capitol Times*, which pounded on broad issues for Thompson day in and day out.

As a result of this broad campaign with labor performing the useful and necessary function of getting out its own members to vote and getting them interested in the issues of the campaign, a near miracle in Wisconsin Congressional politics took place. Enthusiasm in the district is high, and everyone is now working and confident that they can elect Thompson in 1948. They are particularly working on registration which was one of the biggest weaknesses in the campaign.

**PENNSYLVANIA**

The district comprises Lehigh and Bucks Counties. Lehigh is a fairly heavily industrialized county, including Allentown and parts of Bethlehem; Bucks is entirely rural. It is not a district in which labor has the balance of power and the majority of the population are "Pennsylvania Dutch" and well set in their ways.

No seasoned observer believed there was a good chance of carrying the district. The best that most competent observers hoped for was an increase in the percentage of Democratic vote.

The Republican machine in the district is well oiled and well heeled. Bucks County is Joe Grundy's home territory. From the very beginning, the Republican registration was much heavier than the Democratic, and a survey of the unions showed only 40% to 60% of the members registered to vote.

The Democratic Party is in the process of rebuilding in this area. It is not well organized at present.

The Republican candidate, Frank Lichtenwalter, was speaker of the Pennsylvania legislature and very popular in the district. Phil Storch was president of the local newspaper guild and highly respected. He was originally urged to run by local labor people, AFL and CIO, and was wholeheartedly endorsed by the Democratic Party.

From the beginning, the Republicans expected to win the campaign but anticipated a margin of only 5000. Instead, they won by 17,000. They credit the activities of the Storch for Congress Committee, particularly the labor branch, with giving them the big victory.

Probably the worst error made in the campaign was to make the Taft-Hartley bill the campaign issue. Actually very few people in the district knew about the Taft-Hartley bill and those who did liked it. From the beginning, labor leaders took too prominent a role in the campaign, and for all practical purposes ran it. Tactics were used that might be valuable in large cities, such as extensive use of loud speakers. However, running loud speakers up and down the main streets of small Pennsylvania cities doesn't help get the conservative burgher vote. It antagonized them to such an extent that traditional Democratic strongholds like Emmaus were carried by the Republican campaign. It is worth noting that in some precincts the Republican candidate got more votes than there were registered Republican voters.
Some of the labor speakers in the campaign talked to farm and club groups in a rough-and-tumble fashion that may be valuable in strikes but only antagonizes rural and middle-class audiences. Furthermore, utter impatience was shown with volunteer workers who were called "jerks" because they asked simple questions.

On top of these general errors on the part of labor, a further complication was the introduction of too many "outsiders" into the campaign. Individuals appeared, some of whom had a strong fellow traveler background. Others ignored the habits and characteristics of the people of the district. They took over the campaign completely with local labor leaders not catching on in the beginning to their orientation. They sent a known party-liner from a CIO union with heavy Communist infiltration into a Reuther UAW stronghold to harangue for votes. In a highhanded manner, they at times refused to let Storch into his own campaign office in the headquarters. He was frequently not consulted on major political issues. The chairman of the Storch for Congress Club was also ignored. The speeches written and delivered, in many instances by the carpetbaggers, were full of party line material.

The whole internal struggle with the fellow travelers came to a head a couple of nights before election. Storch had prepared an ad with the assistance of the Democratic National Committee setting forth his views on certain subjects. A copy was intercepted by a fellow traveler stooge in the local newspaper office, and carpetbaggers threatened to pull out of the campaign because of two statements. One was an endorsement of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall plan; the other statement was that vigorous enforcement of all civil liberties was the best defense against militant Communism. The fellow travelers insisted that any endorsement of the Truman Doctrine and Marshall plan and any mention of Communism whatsoever must be eliminated. They finally backed down when Captain Harding of the Democratic National Committee threatened to put Storch on a nation-wide hookup to tell the story. The advertisement was run in the local paper as prepared. Nevertheless, the friction within the Storch forces caused by this and many other incidents was a real barrier to an effective and successful campaign.

The result of the Storch campaign is that today the entire liberal cause has been done irreparable harm, locally and nationally, mainly because of Communist activities and because of mistaken political tactics on the part of labor.

CONCLUSION

1. The introduction of Communists and fellow travelers in any campaign will ruin the candidate's prospects. The defeat of Savage in Washington's Third District in June 1947 served to underscore this sure lesson.

2. There are few districts in the country where labor, no matter how clear of Communist taint and tactics, should take on openly the major role in any campaign.

3. The Taft-Hartley bill cannot be made the major campaign issue.

4. Campaigns must be fought on a broad base that will appeal to a cross section of the people.

5. Registration campaigns must be made at once if we are to correct the weak vote cast for liberal candidates in 1946.