

Belles Lettres and Bell Ringers

BOSS RULE, by J. T. SALTER, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1935, \$2.50

Reviewed by Dr. Royden J. Dangerfield

BOSS RULE is a study of metropolitan, machine-controlled, Philadelphia politics. It is the product of an extended period spent in an endeavor to discover not only what but also who makes the wheels of a political machine revolve. The study is not the ordinary type of political treatise. Its raw materials are not theories, statistics nor court decisions, but men.

The volume contains four distinct parts. Part I is a general discussion of the party organization as it exists in American cities. The author has selected the Vare machine but it might well have been the Pendergast organization of Kansas City. The methods by which votes are secured by the politician are described in detail. The division leader is depicted as he endeavors to occupy the position of "the party's ambassador to His Majesty, the voter."

Part II contains character sketches of nine division leaders. In each case the services rendered by the "ward heeler" are enumerated and an effort made to discover why it is that each has been able to build up a loyal following within his division.

Few men are able to get others to reveal their personal history. Jack Salter is one of those so endowed. The charm as well as the value of this book is in no small part due to this ability. The volume is packed with "anecdote, incident, real conversations and human beings." The nine portraits reveal real persons who form a part of the Philadelphia machine and whose function it is to "get out the vote."

Brilliant as the portraits are, they constitute a minor contribution when compared with other parts of the volume. The type of picture has been painted by others; the same political technique has been described for other settings. It is Part III that attests the author's originality. This contains an account and appraisal of the election of November, 1933, when the Vare republican machine was routed completely by the national democratic administration. In analyzing the defeat, the author points to the personality of President Roosevelt and to federal relief as two primary causes. The radio addresses of the President and his infectious smile came

to make government more human. The national administration became a personal and a living thing to the voter. Heretofore, Washington had seemed far off and very impersonal. Federal relief brought the government down to the lowest classes of the voters, where before only the representative of the machine had penetrated. The service function of the division leader, seriously handicapped by inability to raise money during a depression, was now being carried on by the federal relief office.

In the mind of the author, "depressions are invariably hostile to the political party in power and can effect a reform where mere revelations of corruption fail." This is demonstrated in the democratic landslide of 1933. But, depressions are supposedly temporary things and the needs of the voters are continuing. For this reason Mr. Salter looks for the return to power of the party machine.

Part IV contains a rather startling suggestion. It is the author's belief that the local politician serves a most important function in American life and government. He is "next friend" to the great friendless mass. He is the "democratic jack-of-all-trades doing a variety of services that people urgently want done." He is necessary. The services he renders mean votes and votes can be sold to the detriment of society. The author proposes that the division leader be stripped of his patronage and other powers which he exercises to the detriment of government and that in return for these powers he be hired by the state to carry on his necessary functions without the evil effects of the past. He would still serve as the "intermediary between the citizen and the state" and since he was paid to do so there need be granted to him none of those unofficial powers which make of the machine a distinct menace. The suggestion is thought-provoking and cannot be dismissed in an easy fashion by any who is familiar with the fundamental services rendered by the professional precinct politician in any large city.

Dr. Salter was at one time (1927-1930) associate professor of government at the University of Oklahoma and secretary of the Oklahoma Municipal League. He is at present serving on the faculty of the University of Wisconsin. His study is the product of time spent in Philadelphia as a fellow of the Social Science Research Council.

Lynn Riggs, '23ex, has returned to his home in Santa Fe, New Mexico, after several months spent on the Pacific coast.



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