

# Presidential Elections

(Oklahoma Books and Writers)

JUST as interest in the 1940 presidential election nears a climax, the University of Oklahoma Press presents a book that might easily be termed a "form sheet" providing information upon which a prediction of the outcome could be made.

The book is *PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: From Abraham Lincoln to Franklin D. Roosevelt*, and the author is Cortez A. M. Ewing, professor of government and director of the School of Citizenship and Public Affairs in the University of Oklahoma.

Dr. Ewing traces the trends in presidential elections for the last eighty years, and finds that sectional interest plays a tremendous role in determining election results; that some sections habitually "lose" their electoral votes while nine of the Western states have not lost an electoral vote since 1916; that minority parties have an important significance; and that the electoral system sometimes nullifies the popular vote of a particular section.

Although conceding that any division of the country into political sections must be done on an arbitrary basis that would be open to some criticism, Dr. Ewing contends that it is impossible to get a clear picture of American politics if only the individual states are studied.

He therefore divides the states in a method that he considers most feasible, designating them as East, Border, South, Middle West, and West. He presents a wealth of factual detail—tables, charts, statistics—and analyzes the trends.

In discussing the significance of minority parties, Dr. Ewing says that "the luxury of pursuing an idealistic course is the special privilege of minor parties." The two large parties, he points out, must marshal the rank and file of American citizens into effective political bodies, and therefore are unwilling to push very far in advance of public thinking.

Minor parties also have on many occasions determined the winner of a presidential election, by drawing support from one or the other of the major parties, Dr. Ewing points out.

Political astuteness seems to reach a peak in the Middle West, according to analysis of electoral votes. The Middle West has supported the winner in seventeen of nineteen elections. The South, on the other extreme, has lost in nine of eighteen elections.

The electoral college system often

does violence to the doctrine of proportional representation, Dr. Ewing shows. In the 1932 election, for example, President Hoover received 5,440,493 votes in the Middle West, which constituted 43.83 per cent of its total poll. For these more than five million votes, the Republicans received not one electoral vote. On the other hand, in the three elections of 1864, 1868, and 1872, an electoral vote cost the Republicans about 12,383 popular votes, while an electoral vote cost the Democrats 44,073 votes.

Dr. Ewing has no sympathy for those who deprecate the economic aspects of political alignment in America.

"Democracy emerged as a social instrument for protection against the realistic practices of political tyranny," he comments. "As it matured, and after the threat of such arbitrariness became no more than a historical phenomenon, men's thinking turned to the economic aspects of the good life. And the latter will not be erased unless these political liberties are again jeopardized."

DR. EWING notes a strong tendency to abandon party loyalty and an increasing swing of voters from one party to another between elections. "It is not so much the party system itself that is being affected," he explains. "Rather it is the spirit that lies beneath it. . . . Party labels may change, party programs may be put forth with all the ponderous ostentation of the past, but the crispness with which electorate swings in preponderate majorities is a phenomenon new in American politics. From the very start of an official campaign, there has generally been no doubt of the November winner in any presidential race since 1916."

However, he sees no complete national unity near at hand. "The only unity that one perceives," he says, "is that which derives from the mutuality of problems and the human disposition to react to those problems, in whatever section they may arise, in a manner conducive to individual and social welfare. To a greater extent than formerly, American economy is becoming national in scope. Capitalism discovers similar support and opposition in every section, even though the social groups of all sections are not in common political phalanxes. There lies the chief defect to the general obser-

vation that the party system is becoming a mere reflection of the development of class consciousness in America."

The South is presented as problem number one of American democracy, because of its "shamefully small electorate and one-party system."

"If either of these two phenomena were abolished, the other would pass, and the section might develop a democratic order like that of the other sections," Dr. Ewing says.

Summarizing the "geography of decision," the book points out that after 1892, the Democrats became the champions of human, as against property, rights, but they experienced difficulty in securing the union of any sections with the South upon an enduring basis.

After the turn of the century, "the Republicans undertook the task of compromising the differences between industrialism and agrarianism, thus making the role of the Democrats more difficult than it might otherwise have been. For if the Republicans had reflected the interests of one to the economic detriment of the other, the Democrats might have entrenched themselves in sections other than the South.

"When the Republicans were unable to satisfy agrarians of the equity of the platform compromises, the Democrats came to power as the party of governmental intervention. For when business leaders objected to government in business and workers and farmers relied upon it, there came a division in American politics that could scarcely be compromised by a single party.

"The vote and participation chart reveal the fundamental change in American political habits in the days of Democratic-Populist fusion. A new political order was born in those stormy years. . . . More and more people came to have personal interests in these problems. The vote totals and the participation ratios rose. The country now stands at the peak for its entire history, but increased vote totals are still in prospect."

Dr. Ewing contends that while the wheels of the democratic process grind at a painfully slow pace, they are difficult to throw out of alignment. "Democracies come frequently to the cross roads," he says. "Though appearing to fumble, they ultimately make their choice; and a people usually has an uncanny sense of direction."