

# HUEY LONG

BY GEORGE E. SOKOLSKY

## I

THE Kingfish was shot down at the most hopeful moment in his career.

Four months later he was to have stood for reelection to the United States Senate, and would have been chosen, inevitably, by so vast a majority that no one, not even a Senatorial inquisition, could question the validity of his claim to leadership in Louisiana. His legislature had consolidated his authority by a series of acts the constitutionality of which, he believed, would stand any test in the Supreme Court. He was to have spent the summer in Arkansas and Mississippi annoying and destroying his Senatorial enemies. In his last speech in the Senate, his filibuster, he had prepared a campaign document which would be most useful in the South and in the Middle West, where he hoped to do President Roosevelt the keenest damage by effecting the defeat of his chief Senatorial lieutenants.

Then he was to devote himself to the 1936 presidential campaign. He had calculated, as have many others, that President Roosevelt could be defeated by a shift of five million votes correctly distributed. The Kingfish set out to deprive Mr. Roosevelt of those five million votes. He had supported Father Coughlin; he would support Upton Sinclair, Governor Talmadge of Georgia, Senator Borah, any of them or all of them, as long as he could shift five million votes away from Roosevelt.

Huey Long was lying flat on his

stomach in his bedroom in the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans. I sat near the bed.

'Sokolsky,' he said, 'all this talk about my running for President is eye-wash. I could n't carry the states with the big electoral votes. No Southerner could except in a year when it's a natural for the Democratic Party. But I'm after that —.'

He was referring to the President of the United States.

'But mind you, if the Republicans nominate Hoover, I shall be forced to organize a third party.'

He had in this particular conversation referred to Hoover several times and I was singularly impressed by his emphasis. I asked him about it.

'Hoover is the logical nominee of the Republican Party after the Roosevelt raw deal. But it's bad logic. Everything that I believe to be crazy in the Roosevelt Administration was initiated by Herbert Hoover. The only difference between Roosevelt and Hoover is that Hoover was sincere and frightened. Roosevelt is a natural gambler: he'll take a chance on anything.'

I had not expected to see the Kingfish in New Orleans. But I did hope to secure from Seymour Weiss, the manager of the Roosevelt Hotel, a letter of introduction which might eventually lead to free conversation. Mr. Weiss was in his private office. Yes, he told me, the Kingfish had unexpectedly

come to town and he hoped to see him sometime that evening.

At that moment there was a rattle of keys; a door opened and banged. In walked more energy and force than I had ever seen in my life except in that curiously complicated personality, T. V. Soong. Evidently some small justice somewhere in Louisiana had worked off a private grudge and Huey was in a rage. All the noise and excitement and fervor were so overwhelming that I could not quite follow the details. Mr. Weiss was apparently accustomed to such exhibitions. He sat listening coldly while the Kingfish announced what he would do to all the so-and-so's who double-crossed him. Finally Huey shouted: —

'Tell him to be here at nine tomorrow morning.'

I began to suspect that it was a show. The Kingfish had seen a stranger in Mr. Weiss's office. He dramatically covered his entrance. He turned on his 'press character,' the clowning rôle which the press advertised as the real man. He played up to that characterization.

When he subsided for a moment, I was presented to him. That was the cue for another act — an amazing vituperative performance, in the course of which, without my having said one word, he announced that I was a liar, a —, a — — —, and ——. He said that the press always lied about him, that when he fought for the very principles that the New York newspapers supported they attacked him, but that it all made no difference because he could go directly to the people, over the radio, in the movies, on the stump.

When he began to calm down I told him that I had read every statement he had made on the floor of the Senate as published in the *Congressional Record*, that my judgment of him as a public official was based upon that evidence,

and that I hoped my opinion of him as a man would not be spoiled by this visit.

The change was unbelievably swift. His funny face settled into a pleasant, serious mien. His long arms were in repose. He sat down next to me on the deep leather divan.

'I work hard on my speeches in the Senate. I don't suppose there is another man in the Senate who works as hard as I do. I have to. If they could throw me out, they would. I have to be careful every minute because if the Roosevelt crowd ever catches me napping they'll get me.'

'I'm the only Democrat left in the Senate in the sense that I'll fight dictatorship. Lots of other fellows would like to stand up the way I do, but they have n't fixed things up back home the way I have.'

'Hell, if Jim Farley and Ickes spent as much money getting rid of Republicans as they've spent against me in my own State of Louisiana, there would not be a Republican left in the Senate.'

'Money can't defeat me. Go out and talk to anybody in Louisiana. They'll tell you that the people of Louisiana will elect me to any office I want.'

It was no longer a show. Nor was it boasting. The alteration from one personality to another took a split second. The very swiftness of it, the unquestioned sincerity of the second personality, impressed upon me this psychological fact, that the explanation for Huey Long's success lay in his seriousness and sincerity, that his 'Kingfish personality,' developed when he was a salesman, was definitely a disguise which he could put on or take off at will.

## II

Huey Long would not have advocated the sharing of wealth had wealth not become so scarce among vast voting masses in the United States. He could



not have developed an important following during the Coolidge Boom, for transactions in the stock market were making kings of California merchants and retired Iowa farmers every day. He could not have replaced the Republican Party as the opposition in Congress if Republican Congressmen and Senators had not been frightened into inanity by the New Deal. He could not have become the bee in the elephant's ear if Franklin Delano Roosevelt had not played with dictatorial techniques. Huey Long could not have stolen the headlines of the American press had other members of the Senate not abnegated their constitutional rights and traditional prerogatives to maintain the equality between the legislature and the executive.

Impudent, intellectually gifted, daring, careless of the opinions of his colleagues, self-assertive, forgetting nothing and forgiving no one, he forged ahead to political leadership on the errors of his opponents. Those who sought to ignore Huey Long or to condemn him as a clown erred because neither his crassness nor his impertinences offended his own following.

New York may glory in the punch he got at Sands Point, but in Louisiana they believe that Morgan and Mellon's gangsters 'ganged up on the Kingfish when his guards were n't around.' Yet, after Sands Point, Huey was able to give up a lifelong habit of drinking heavily. A man who could gaze at himself in a mirror and, looking at his black eye, realize that what goes in Shreveport will not go in the rest of the United States, who could alter his ways of living by an act of will, who could hold his personal following in the face of what must be accepted as political bribery on the one hand and threats of imprisonment on the other, was no nincompoop.

Huey Long never could have been elected President of the United States,

but he forced one President to adopt an absurd fiscal programme, and he succeeded in balancing the political scale so accurately that he was, after Franklin D. Roosevelt, the most significant political personality of his day.

It is impossible to understand Huey Long or Talmadge of Georgia or Bilbo in Mississippi or the radicalism of Senator Black of Alabama unless the recrudescence of feudalism in the South is taken into account. F. Raymond Daniell ably described the South in the *New York Times*: —

Within it there exists a privileged class of noblemen and their retainers: the owners and managers of the great plantations which sprawl over the rich loamy soil of Mississippi and Arkansas, fling themselves across Alabama's Black Belt, and spread over the red earth of Georgia and Tennessee.

Another and much larger class, whose loyalty receives but scant rewards . . . is composed of humble peasants — sharecroppers, tenant-farmers, and farm laborers — who replaced the slaves. . . .

It is from this class, the 'poor whites,' that Huey Long came. The impelling fact of his life was that his youth was spent in poverty, that he had no opportunities for education, that, although he raised himself by almost superhuman efforts to become a lawyer, he and his relatives and his childhood friends in Mississippi as well as Louisiana were reared in the ugliness of 'poor white' environments. His extravagance, as some believe, in connection with Louisiana's educational establishment is a psychological compensation for his own lack of opportunities for book learning.

I was told by a lawyer in New Orleans that one day a young man came to his office to see him, impudent, pug-nosed, and earnest. He said, 'I am Huey Long.'

He complained that he could not get at the first principles of the law. He wanted a reading list that would give



him the philosophic background, the fundamentals, something more than he could learn from his teachers. The lawyer was so impressed that he prepared a list and Huey recalled the incident when I spoke to him about it. He read every book on that list.

Once, in a speech in the Senate, Huey said: —

There is not a set of farm workers on the face of the earth who receive as meagre a pittance for their labor from sunup to sundown and after sundown and before sunup as the sugar farmers of the State of Louisiana. . . .

If you have ever seen the work you know that it is the most laborious work done on the face of the living earth. Thousands and tens of thousands of poor devils have labored on the farms . . . drawing all the way from 30 to 50 cents a day, sometimes as high as 60 to 75 cents a day; but even in the good times, when there was prosperity among the Western farmers, the cane workers of the State of Louisiana have received wages not to be compared with the kind of wages that have been enjoyed in other agricultural enterprises of the country.

When Huey Long spoke of poverty, he did not deal abstractly with slums such as exist in New York City, with their settlements and their protective tenement-house laws. He spoke of the fearful poverty and ignorance of the South, rigidly fixed by social tradition, white poverty and black poverty, white ignorance and black ignorance, coolie labor and oppressive taxation. He spoke not of conditions social workers might describe, but of his own life experience. It is this fact that gave him power and strength in Louisiana and that made him a factor in Southern states, for he spoke the language that his relatives and friends speak quietly in the bayous of the Mississippi, in the canebrakes and the cotton fields.

To the Southern farmers who have never hoped for salvation he came as a savior. To Northerners he appeared to

be a freak of nature, a loud-mouthed, restless, dictatorial nuisance, a noisy breach of decorum. Yet in his own state he was able to weld together and hold together a powerful following which abided his leadership in spite of the opposition of the decent elements in New Orleans and the richly financed political efforts of the Roosevelt Administration. Farley, Ickes, Hopkins, income-tax inspectors, G-men — all the forces of the Federal Government not only cracked down on him, but cracked down on his state as well. Yet he held until a bullet hurled him down. He held because he gave his people schools and roads and jobs and money; because he relieved the lower strata of the heaviest burdens of taxation; because he made it possible for the poor to vote. The sum total of Huey's administration was that it accomplished something constructive. I asked the Kingfish about graft.

'We got the roads in Louisiana, have n't we? In some states they only have the graft.'

No matter how the cost is measured, the Kingfish could point to a fine road system, an excellent university, school-books for all school children, good hospitals, and relief from oppressive taxation for the poor whites and the Negroes.

A banker who was opposed to the Kingfish told me that if Huey had had formal education, if he had possessed poise and balance, if he could have been harnessed or could have harnessed himself so that he did not at times run wild, he would have been the most competent administrator that the South had ever known. These 'ifs' made a tremendous difference. The Kingfish was an inveterate cheer leader who always had to be the first to start the noise. In Washington he was encouraged by every agency of publicity to keep his show up. When he spoke, the galleries filled with applauding listeners

who found his snappy repartee a relief from the rounded, pedestrian wordiness of most Senators. No Senator was his match in sure thinking on his feet.

Huey Long is dead, and many a heavy-witted Senator and impatient public official will secretly breathe a sigh of relief. Often on my travels I heard men say that nothing would stop the Kingfish but an assassin's bullet. He dug out the nastiest facts in an official's life; he read into colleagues' conduct every cowardly motive; he blazoned the secrets of the cloakroom. Now he is dead.

But what these relieved gentlemen seem to forget is that Huey Long was the product of economic and social conditions in the South. His raucous voice had to be tolerated because he spoke for a mass of citizens who were entitled to relief from the cumulative errors of many administrations. The conditions which made Huey Long so important a figure in the United States continue to exist. In some respects they are worse to-day than they have ever been. Huey Long's assassination does not solve that problem; it aggravates it. The share-cropper, the poor white, the Negro who found a ray of hope in the Kingfish, are now voiceless. But other men will take his place. There must be other men, because so large a mass cannot and will not long remain voiceless.

### III

Huey Long's political creed is not at all clear. In Washington he was a Jeffersonian Democrat who denounced Roosevelt's dictatorship; in Louisiana he was a dictator who operated a state as he chose. In Washington he attacked Jim Farley as a corruptionist; in Louisiana his associates have been accused of corruption and some have been indicted and at least one has been found guilty of income-tax frauds. In

Washington he attacked the rich and the corporations; in Louisiana, where he could do as he chose, he did not introduce any genuine share-the-wealth measures, and there is ample justification for the suspicion that his attacks on the corporations did them little harm.

His share-the-wealth programme for the nation has been summarized as follows: —

He proposed the levy of a graduated tax upon property itself, not, as at present, upon the income from property. This tax, known as a 'capital levy,' would make it impossible for any person to own more than about \$4,000,000. If one had stocks, bonds, office buildings, factories, or any other wealth aggregating more than that amount, he would be forced to give it up. Thus Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller would be compelled to give up all of their holdings of any kind above a few million dollars.

Those persons now owning less than \$4,000,000 worth of goods would not have the means to buy up properties sold. The government would take over this wealth. Huey Long thought it would yield about 175 billion dollars' worth of property, which would be taken from the great industries and the great industrial corporations.

Next, this wealth would be divided. If a family possessed more than \$5000 worth of property free of debt, it would be left out of this part of the programme. If it possessed less than \$5000, it would receive part of the wealth taken from the rich. Each one of the country's 27,000,000 families would be assured a home, an automobile, and a radio, all clear of debt. That would use up about 100 billion dollars.

Left over would be 75 billions. The first call on this would be for the youth of the land. Every child would be guaranteed at least a high-school edu-



cation. Several billions would be needed at once to build schools to take care of these children. Then all worthy boys and girls would get a college education, and more billions would be needed to build colleges.

Huey Long sought to cut the work week to 30 hours or less and to guarantee at least one month's vacation every year to every worker. Then he promised a yearly income of \$2000 to \$2500 for each family. That would come to about 50 or 60 billions a year.

Obviously such a programme does not make much sense. In the first place, what percentage of the population actually has more than \$4,000,000? With that amount as his ceiling, he definitely limited his attack to a small class. Secondly, by what process could the government divide up wealth in factories, bonds, mines, and so forth? His programme would really mean that the government would have to take over the management of industry and then divide the profits — if any — so that every family had \$5000 a year. His objections to the NRA, the AAA, and to Secretary Ickes's activities in Louisiana, all argued on the basis of States' rights, negative the underlying theory of State Socialism, which this phase of his plan clearly is. But the Kingfish was not much of a political and economic theoretician.

He picked up the phrase 'share the wealth' from Mr. Roosevelt's acceptance speech. In a speech in the Senate Huey said: —

Why were we making all this fight? Because Mr. Roosevelt came out with a statement over his signature in which he said that he was in favor of the distribution of wealth among the people of this country so that the starving could be fed in the land of plenty, and because he had advocated taking it from the top and supporting the government and distributing it to those at the bottom.

We went out all over this country. I was one of those going. I did not go without proper authority; I did not go without reckoning with my host to begin with. We went out over this country, Mr. President, for a principle that was stated by the President of the United States. I will read what he said. I have it here. It is nothing that is going to be disputed. I will read you one thing he said. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, at Chestertown, Maryland, on October 21, 1933, said: —

'As I recall the words of a professor in my school, the wider a distribution of wealth there is in the proper way the more we can make it possible for the men and women of the land to have the necessities of life in such shape that they will not have to lie awake at night worrying where the food to-morrow will come from. Then, and only then, will we have the security necessary for the country.'

'Share the wealth' is not a principle; it is a slogan. It is a goad. It is a tease. It is a weapon against Mr. Roosevelt. It was designed to drive him to anxiety, to record against him broken promises, to turn on him invective and venom. It forced Mr. Roosevelt to propose an absurd and dangerous tax measure; it drove him to keep Congress in Washington during a dreadfully hot summer. It caused him to weaken his recovery programme by attacking wealth just at a moment when it appeared that capital was beginning to reënter the investment market. In a word, the Kingfish may have been utterly wild in his economics when he advocated sharing the wealth, but, in the give-and-take of personal politics that he enjoyed, the slogan and his use of it were utterly damaging to his opponents. He forced them to adopt measures which he advocated but in which it was very doubtful that he believed. He led them into a political morass. In his last filibuster speech he boasted of this power over the President.

His letter to the President of June 22



was characteristic of Huey Long at his worst. He frankly took the credit for the President's proposals. He attacked by innuendo and supported by ridicule.

You can leave your spoils of war in the hands of those who undertook to prevent your successful campaign; you can continue to oppose me in the Louisiana political arena with all the weapons and sinews which your public treasury now affords to my enemies. [So wrote the Kingfish to the President of the United States.]

Now there are many who credit you with having taken over the share-the-wealth movement. Even some say that my use in the undertaking has become emasculated because of your stronger and more capable support, and are even moved to say that the wind was swept from my sails by your pronouncement. I hope that such is true. It sometimes helps the political fortunes of one to have it shown that he has spent efforts and thereby accomplished the wreck and ruin of persons and politicians who elected him to the offices which he has theretofore held.

I say that because I have heard some say that when you went to unusual courses in the work that spelled doom and exile to the Tammany politicians who made you Governor of New York you brought many independent people to your support.

My elimination from politics would be the immediate and sure result of your enactment of the share-our-wealth legislation. You would thereby have another complete case for the public's admiration, which, cited in contrast with my support of your cause and policies, might give you a measure of added prestige.

What could Mr. Roosevelt say? There was nothing to say when the Kingfish went on the rampage because he could always make what he wanted to say sound so much better. 'Every man a king' — that appealed to those who lost their money and read in the newspapers of the activities of Barbara Hutton and other New York socialites. 'Share the wealth' — how, why, by what process? What cared the Kingfish! That slogan was jeopardizing

the Administration's programme. That was the maximum political policy of Huey Long.

#### IV

Why did the Kingfish hate Franklin Delano Roosevelt? (Long always referred to him in full.) He supported Roosevelt before and after the Chicago Convention. Why this hatred?

Some believe that Huey Long's opposition was due to personal ambition. I doubt if they understood him. As a matter of fact, when Huey supported Roosevelt at Chicago, he undoubtedly expected Roosevelt to hold office until 1940. Huey Long was a practical politician, and he knew that when Roosevelt took hold of the machinery of the government he would be able to manipulate his own reelection. Furthermore, he realized that a split in the Democratic Party, of whatsoever character, would result in the election of a Republican. He believed that that Republican would be Herbert Hoover, whom he did not favor. Huey Long knew how to count electoral votes as well as any other man, and he did not believe that the electoral votes of the big states would come to him. He made no play for them.

His ambition was not the presidency. It was revenge. From his standpoint President Roosevelt and Jim Farley and Hurja and Ickes and Hopkins 'did him dirt,' and he would fight them as long as he could.

Here are his own words on the subject:—

Now let us take up the record since the convention as to how we stood by this administration. Mr. Roosevelt needed money. He had to get money. We went out in Louisiana to raise it. . . . I think we raised first and last for the Roosevelt cause around \$69,000, with a quota of only \$30,000. When I was up in New York City I was called in and asked to raise a little more money at one time, and I did. When I went up through the State of North Dakota I



paid all the expenses we had in that state, and gave some money that we left behind. When I went through the State of South Dakota we paid all the expenses there and left some more money behind. When I went through the State of Kansas we paid the expenses there and left some more money behind that came out of the State of Louisiana that we had raised.

We got a great deal of thanks for it. The internal-revenue collector indicted one of the men the other day down there that was one of those contributors, without ever calling on him to pay a single dime and without saying he had underpaid, after one of his inspectors had reported that he could not find anything on him with which to charge him.

I quote this from the *Congressional Record*, but the Kingfish said the same thing to me in simpler language. He said: 'I gave Roosevelt money for his campaign and then he tried to throw me out of my own state.'

Can anyone imagine that Huey Long was a philanthropist who would raise \$69,000 for a presidential candidate without exacting a *quid pro quo*? That was the issue between these men. The answer may be that no one promised Huey anything, but in American politics the implications are altogether clear; patronage is controlled by the Senators and Congressmen of the party in power. Huey Long had every reason to believe, whether a direct promise was made to him or not, that his support of Roosevelt before, at, and after the convention entitled him to the control of Louisiana patronage.

When he found that this Administration was not handing out patronage on the good old American principle that to the victor belong the spoils, he kicked over the traces.

Democrats who opposed Roosevelt before the convention, — Al Smith Democrats, — Progressive Republicans like the La Follettes, Norris, Johnson, all got patronage, but not Huey Long. What he got was 250 agents, as he

liked to tell, sent into Louisiana to catch him on income-tax defalcations. Abe Shushan, Seymour Weiss, the Fishers, all his lieutenants were investigated and indicted. His most bitter enemies in Louisiana were appointed to office. What has been the political pabulum for so many politicians went to his enemies and social workers. Funds of the CWA, PWA, RFC, and countless others in his state were dispensed without consulting him and clearly with the objective of destroying his political power.

Had the Administration's plans succeeded, Huey Long would to-day be a gay memory of a rattling clown of a national Mardi Gras. His organization would have fallen to bits; supporters would have deserted him; he would have been thrown out of the Senate. The Kingfish acted with an audacity and speed that rarely succeed in American politics. He took over control of every source of patronage and revenue in his own state. He became a dictator, and saw to it that the state payroll was sufficient to take care of deserving followers. Then he thumbed his nose at Washington.

It was an amazing and disgusting spectacle. The use of patronage to destroy the Kingfish and his use of patronage to protect himself exposed the weakness of the entire American political structure. As long as Presidents appoint every official down to the veriest underling, and as long as the Senate has to spend days approving such appointments, there will be no decency in American politics. The need for a permanent civil service becomes extremely obvious in this particular row. It is criminal under the law to evade payment of the income tax; so is it indecent in political morals to employ the income-tax law for partisan purposes. If the Kingfish's followers failed to pay, they should go to jail. Certainly they are entitled to speedy



trials immediately after indictment. But when the income-tax law is employed as a political weapon to break up a political organization, such as Tammany Hall or Huey Long's, then the purpose of the law is extended beyond decency.

And they did not catch Huey Long. Whether he was a grafter or not, I do not know. I suppose the inheritance-tax collectors will discover the truth as to that. He owned a big house in New Orleans; he had a suite of rooms in the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans; he lived comfortably. But that is not evidence of corruption. Some say he had a bank account in Canada, but that has not been proved yet. There can be little doubt that his adjutants are well off, but so are the adjutants of most politicians.

Huey Long does not seem to me to have been a grafter. The accumulation of money did not mean much to him. His motive was power, sometimes the vindictive use of power, revenge, the accumulation and use of force. He was Oriental in his individualism. He sought to be a master. He enjoyed telling his lieutenants to go to hell. He dismissed his bodyguards like Napoleon or Chiang Kai-shek. He was essentially an exhibitionist who strutted about a hotel lobby reading dispatches. He called his secretary on the long-distance telephone and gave trivial instructions in the presence of onlookers with the aplomb of an emperor.

But money — what did that mean? 'Any hotel will give me a floor of rooms for nothing for the front-page publicity they get out of it,' he told me. And I believed him. Who knows whether he paid his bills? He probably forgot about many items and gave a man a job that covered everything. His campaign funds were collected without keeping books, but the money went, for it costs money to win elections. In spite of investigations and in-

quisitions, Huey Long was not put in jail for income-tax defalcations. That, after all, is the evidence of the moment.

Huey Long's reply to the Administration's income-tax activities against him was to go directly after Farley. The Senate refused to investigate Farley, and Huey's so-called evidence against the Postmaster-General was thin. Had there been an investigation, the Kingfish probably would have had little to offer. Nevertheless the Administration played right into Huey's hands. Instead of treating his charges against Farley as they treated Dr. Wirt's charges against Professor Tugwell, they refused him an investigation.

In the sacrosanct halls of the Senate, he repeated and reiterated his charges, and they appeared in the press of the country. They made news. Many Americans who disliked the Kingfish said that he would not dare say these things if they were not true. They do not realize that a United States Senator in the Senate Chamber can say anything he pleases, true or untrue, indecent, malicious, anything, just as long as he does not say it about another Senator.

And when the Kingfish picked Farley as a target he picked wisely, for, after all, Farley's job is to keep the Democratic Party going, and that is perhaps not an altogether scrutable job. All national chairmen make deals and hold conversations which had better not see the light of day. For instance, suppose Huey's investigation brought out all the details at present unknown of the Hearst-McAdoo-Farley interchanges which resulted in switching Texas and California to the Roosevelt column at Chicago. And it is altogether within reason that the Kingfish knew not only that but something more. He told me that if he had the ordinary 'fishing rights' of a Senate investigating committee he would be



able to spoil a lot of great men close to the Administration.

In the Senate, the Kingfish attacked by ridicule the principal Roosevelt supporters and he hit them hard where it hurt most — at home. Senator Pat Harrison was particularly in difficulties because his is an elephant's touch compared with Huey's rapier thrusts. Huey loved to tease Harrison. It was anticipated that Harrison's Bilbo would rise against the Kingfish, but perhaps after Gassaway's futilities the Administration thought better of giving Huey another opportunity to do to Bilbo as he did to Senators Harrison and Clark. They tried hard to trip him, but he took the laughs and the applause. He had the Senate laughing with him. Harrison and Clark used clubs, but Huey went into paroxysms of laughter. The Kingfish figured that back in the home districts the people laughed, too.

Huey Long might have ruined his political future by his tendency to over-talk every situation. Now that he is dead, will he become a symbol of protest against the un-Jeffersonian activities of the Administration? Thomas Jefferson lives in the South and the Middle West. Will Huey Long live as his modern apostle? Will he become the inspiration for a Jeffersonian revolt against centralized government? He liked the phrase: 'If we have to look to Washington as to when we shall sow and when we shall reap, some day we will be without bread.'

Huey Long had built himself a following even among Senators. Last year the cotton-silver Senators supported him. In the last days of the Seventy-Fourth Congress he developed a cotton-wheat coalition with stronger support in the House than in the Senate. Even during his last filibuster he did not stand absolutely alone, and attempts to force him to take his seat were futile.

## V

Was Huey Long a Fascist? I asked him about that.

'Fine,' he said. 'I'm Mussolini and Hitler rolled in one. Mussolini gave them castor oil; I'll give them tabasco, and then they'll like Louisiana.' With that he roared his infectious laugh.

Huey Long supported States' rights; he was opposed to the extension of the authority of the Federal Government. Once, in reply to Senator Nye, he said: 'Mr. President, I understood the Senator to suggest that General Johnson would amend the Constitution in order to make his power more complete. The Senator might better suggest a less cumbersome system. The General does not need to go that route to amend the Constitution. That is no longer necessary. An executive order has a great deal more effect than an amendment to the Constitution, especially more effect than a mere act of Congress. I think the Senator from North Dakota is not doing General Johnson justice, because an executive decree from the pen of Mr. "Hooley" Johnson, under the seal of NRA, wipes out State laws and State statutes, and at least shelves the Constitution.'

Again, in his debate with Senator Clark, he said: —

'No doubt if Jefferson could have foreseen all the results of this day and time, if Jefferson had known that he was taking in territory from which the people were going to send men to the United States Senate who were going to advocate taking all the power out of the hands of Congress that was created to represent the people and placing it in the hands of some board, in the hands of various and sundry persons, to be exercised on the *ipse dixit* and under the control and subject to the fancy and whims of one man, I would guarantee that Jefferson would not have wanted them in the Union if he had



known that among the other objections which were urged at the time.'

The point of the matter is that the Kingfish was not seeking a philosophic solution of the political, social, and economic problems of the United States. He wanted:—

1. To keep his organization intact in Louisiana so that he could dominate that state politically;

2. To be recognized throughout the South as the protector of the poor whites and even the Negroes, of the farmers and share-croppers and debtors, so that his influence would be extended throughout the South;

3. To build a bloc of farmer states which he would lead in the Senate, so that he could get the best political bargains with any administration;

4. Finally, but not least important, to do something for the class from which he originated.

Into this complex of selfishness and idealism entered his vindictive animosity toward Franklin D. Roosevelt and his associates. That definitely conditioned his conduct during the past two years. Had Huey Long been Mr. Roosevelt's floor leader, he would have supported administration measures as he opposed them, for he was essentially an organization man who was loyal to his gang. However, they threw him out, and he used his fine legal mind and his audacious tongue to castigate them.

It is as absurd to call the Kingfish a Fascist as it would be to call him a Communist or a member of the Kuomintang. He was an American local politician holding on to what he had and trying to get a little more.

Huey Long's methods were never more defined than during his last filibuster speech, when he held up the Senate until the moment of adjournment and succeeded in preventing the passage of the Deficiency Bill which would have given the Administration funds to implement the Social Security

Bill, the Guffey Bill, and so forth. That speech will be used in every Senatorial campaign this year and in the 1936 campaign. His statement of the single issue—Is the legislative branch of the government to remain independent of the executive as provided by the Constitution?—remained unanswered. He proved that the Senate and the House had no valid excuse for adjourning at the moment, except that it was the President's will that they should adjourn.

Had Huey Long lived, he would have gone into several states to defeat Senators and Representatives on that issue. He would have asked the electorate: Did you send these men to Washington to represent you or to obey the President? He believed that he could defeat Senator Harrison and even Senator Robinson on that issue. That, and his hatred for President Roosevelt, furnished the motive for the filibuster.

The Kingfish did not rise to such formidable power because he was a smart talker and a fast thinker. He rose because he dramatized the strengthening protest in the South and in many Middle Western states against centralized government in Washington, agrarian experimentalism, and wasteful extravagance leading to the increased impoverishment of the farmer.

Superficially, the appraisal is possible that Huey Long, having been killed and buried, will soon be forgotten. It might be said that he had had his day and had served some purpose. But the conditions which made Huey Long such a national figure continue to exist—and as long as they continue to exist is it not possible that his sudden death, his apparent martyrdom, his funeral, his burial in the park of the state Capitol, will conjure up for a decade a new and different figure of Huey Long, a political ghost to plague those who have forgotten the essence of Jeffersonian Democracy?



Copyright of Atlantic Magazine Archive is the property of Atlantic Monthly Group LLC and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.