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Fighter in a Fighting Year

(See Cover)

A free nation's decision is slow in the making, and no one knows certainly on what day of what month a people makes up its mind. Its decision is the slow growth of conviction in many minds, the slow swelling of resolve in many hearts. It is reached not at the green-topped tables of state, but at the corner store and the village market, at the tea table and the union meeting. It is taken by corporations examining their books, by housewives scribbling a market list, by farmers squinting at a crop of wheat. Until the voice of a free people is heard clearly, few major decisions of statesmen can carry the power of democracy's full force.

Firm Resolve. In the year 1948—a fitful year in a nervous century—historians could record that a mass of U.S. intentions, promises and pledges had hardened into resolve and action. In 1948, the world's greatest nation of free men finally resolved to meet Communism's deadly challenge with every weapon of peace that it possessed; and if the struggle against Communism required war, the U.S. would fight.

In 1948, the U.S. Congress passed and the U.S. President signed the Economic Cooperation Act, called by England's Economist "an act without peer in history . . . of inspired and generous diplomacy." What had been promised in the Marshall Plan became solid fact, and the U.S. moved into its massive counterattack against the enemy.

In 1948, under savage and provocative Russian pressure in Berlin, the U.S. refused to abandon Europe's helpless peoples. With that decision, the U.S. accepted the risk of war. Major General William H. Tunner's airlift blazed a roaring, dramatic demonstration of U.S. determination across

Europe's troubled skies. Not only to Berliners but to the world, the Berlin airlift was the symbol of the year: the U.S. meant business.*

No Dissent. Grimly and regretfully, the country shouldered the burden of a record peacetime rearmament. In little issues and big, the signs of the people's decision were clearly written. Congress authorized a peacetime draft and stamped its approval on a massive Air Force, Army and Navy—without a whisper of partisan dispute in an election year.

Through the acts of two widely disparate individuals, the last trace of doubt about the nature of the enemy had disappeared. In Czechoslovakia, Jan Masaryk jumped to his death, the tragic figure of thousands of men of good will who stubbornly held to the theory that the liberal can work with the Communist. In Manhattan, a distraught Russian schoolteacher leaped from an upper window in the Soviet consulate to escape return to Russia. More than speeches, reports or eyewitness accounts of life under Communism, her act nakedly revealed the bitter despair behind the glowing promises in Communism's workers' paradise.

Largely, in its observation of the ebb & flow of Communism's tide, the U.S. looked at the motherlands of Europe. For the rest of the world it found time only for the quick, uneasy glance. It knew there was trouble afoot in Southeast Asia, it had an uneasy conscience about China, where Communism was carving out a great political and military victory. Thanks partly to George Marshall's tactic of fighting Communism in Europe first, and partly to the influence of fellow travelers and gulliberals on U.S. foreign policy, the U.S. had never made up its mind to save China from Communism.

The Foe. As boss of all the world's Communists, Russia's Stalin was the free world's great single antagonist. On balance, Joseph Stalin had a pretty good year. He could score one minor and one major victory. In Czechoslovakia, he had openly seized what he had already possessed in fact. In China, his devoted apostles—Mao Tse-tung, leader of China's Communist Party, and Chu Teh, commander of China's Communist armies—were winning a victory for which they could thank the stupidities of their opponents as much as their own skill. History, which would be little concerned with the "whys," might still record the loss of China—if it was to be a loss—as 1948's major event and major catastrophe. Journalism could certainly record Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh as Communism's Men of the Year.

Elsewhere, Stalin was little more than holding his own. His Communists suffered electoral defeats in France and Italy; Yugoslavia's strong-willed Tito brashly challenged his absolute authority. The Western Allies moved forward toward setting up an independent Western Germany, and then stayed in Berlin as one gauge of their determination to get on with the job.

In the world's outer reaches, fighting and violence flickered menacingly. A series of military coups and attempted coups ran like a fever through Latin America. In New Delhi, Mahatma Gandhi was murdered; India's blood bath subsided in shocked dismay and its legislature legally abolished the untouchability which, in life, Gandhi had abominated above all of India's other woes. Under the purposeful hands of David Ben-Gurion, the new state of Israel was born on Judah's ancient soil. Its young armies whipped the Arabs into defeat, rested, and then at year's end renewed the fight

against their enemy.

Acts of Peace. There was little talk of peace in 1948. The U.S. had learned the price of endlessly talking peace with men who had no intention of concluding a peace. Talk meant only delay and delay was costly. But in 1948's troubled world, the U.S. had reason to be thankful. In the midst of hunger and want it knew unequaled prosperity. The year's harvest was the biggest in history. With few exceptions, everyone who wanted a job had one. Labor got a third round of wage increases, and strikes were at a postwar low. Prices inched upward and everyone worried, complained, and talked about them. But the U.S. citizen was earning more actual buying power than ever before. He also managed to save some money (personal savings were up \$4.9 billion over 1947). The year's crop of babies pushed the population to 147,280,000—up 15,500,000 since 1940.

Women & Shmoos. Undeniably, the U.S. had domestic peace and prosperity, even if it was made uneasy by the tension in the rest of the world. Its fads and foibles rang changes on those of other years, but they were unmistakably American. Bebop, a frantic, disorganized musical cult whose high priest was quid-cheeked Dizzy Gillespie, replaced swing; the Shmoo took the place of 1947's Sparkle Plenty.

Babe Ruth died, and true grief dropped into public bathos; a coal miner's daughter nicknamed "Bobo" married into the Rockefeller clan; Manhattan's nickel subway fare went to a dime; the year's most popular book on human behavior was by a zoologist named Kinsey.

In 1948, women took the family wash and their gossip to "Launderettes," which became a modern urban equivalent to the village well; they flocked to quiz programs where prizes reached a frenetic peak of absurdity. The world learned officially that man had flown faster than sound. In sport, the athlete of the year was a horse; Citation won everything worth winning, was probably the greatest horse of all time. Television became an accepted part of U.S. life.

The Man. In this year, which at home differed only in accidentals from other prosperous peacetime years, the U.S. also held an election. On the whole, the U.S. people did not pay much attention to it. There was comparatively little talk about it; it raised few heated arguments. To all except a hardy band of diehards (who are now trumpeting their clairvoyance), it seemed that there was almost no point in going to the polls; the result was in the bag. The election would prove to the world that the world's greatest democracy could change leaders almost as easily as its motorists changed gears.

But when the results were in, there was proof of another kind. It was this: in the mechanized U.S.A. there is one thing which does not yet work by buttons—the free will of the voters. With their ballots on Nov. 2, the U.S. people made Harry Truman the Man of 1948.

His election was a personal victory almost without historical parallel; a victory of the fighting spirit. Whatever their politics, the nation's common people found in his election a great emotional satisfaction. He had humbled the confident, discomfited the savants and the pollsters, and given a new luster to the old-fashioned virtues of work and dogged courage. The year 1948 was Harry Truman's year.

Man Nobody Wanted. Harry Truman began his year of triumph a sorely beset man. He was popular with almost nobody. The country grinned at the G.O.P. jeers: "Don't shoot the piano player, he's doing the best he can," "To err is Truman," "I'm just mild about Harry." Eastern wags even giped at his farmer's habit of rising early: he did it only to have more time to put both feet in his mouth.

When, in a New York by-election, the Democrats were trounced by the Progressive Party's Leo Isacson in Boss Ed Flynn's own Bronx, panic swept the Democratic ranks. Politicos began to desert the Truman ship. Anybody but Truman was the cry. Through it all, the man from Missouri kept his own counsel, and laid his plans. When he was asked to withdraw, he retorted grimly: "I was not brought up to run from a fight."

When Harry Truman, brisk and smiling in a gleaming white linen suit, walked into the steamy Philadelphia convention hall, he faced a sullen, demoralized Democratic Party. The delegates had kept him waiting for four hours while the South staged a last fight against his nomination. Mississippi's and half of Alabama's delegation had walked out. It was 2 a.m., delegates were sweaty, rumped and tired.

Minutes later, the bedraggled delegates were on their feet, yelling, applauding and cheering the man nobody had wanted. Harry Truman had announced that he was recalling the 80th Congress to demand that they enact their own Republican platform.

The call for the special session was a piece of political sharpshooting by which Harry Truman stood to benefit no matter what happened. To the hostile "Turnip Day" session, he sent an eleven-point program; Congress could not have passed it if it sat for a year. But politically, Harry Truman's point had been made. He had put the Republican Congress on the spot. When it adjourned (after twelve days), Harry Truman had a target of his own choosing.

He set out to "tell the people the facts." He was no orator. He stumbled over big words, made mistakes in grammar, got tangled up in his sentences. A man without pose or side, he was incapable of dramatizing an issue as Franklin Roosevelt had dramatized "The Forgotten Man," or William Jennings Bryan his "Cross of Gold." Much of Truman's program was a grab bag of well-worn New Deal projects. His attacks on the "gluttons of privilege" and "Wall Street reactionaries" struck no chords. His irresponsible implication that a vote for Thomas Dewey was a vote for fascism horrified his soberer followers. But Harry Truman succeeded in dramatizing himself; to millions of voters he seemed a simple, sincere man fighting against overwhelming odds—fighting a little recklessly perhaps, but always with courage and a high heart.

Few men have been able to communicate their personality so completely. He never talked down to his audience. He showed no shadow of pompousness. He introduced his wife as "my boss," sometimes as "the madam." "I would rather have peace than be President," he cried. He never had to remind his audience that he had been a Missouri farmer, a man who could stick a cow for clover bloat and plow the straightest furrow in the county, a small-time businessman who could still twist a tie into a haberdasher's knot. When he stumbled over a phrase or a name, he would grin broadly and try again. Newsmen snickered and politicians winced. But his audiences smiled

sympathetically. They knew just how he felt. "Pour it on, Harry," they cried, "Give 'em hell!"

Down on the Farm. There were many other reasons for Harry Truman's victory. Housewives voted for the man who promised to bring lower prices—by price control, if necessary. Labor remembered that he had vetoed the Taft-Hartley Act; labor worked hard & well. Tenants voted for rent control, veterans for more houses, which Harry Truman promised. The West voted for more power dams and irrigation. Said a farmer: "I wasn't voting for a man or a party. I was voting for the price of wheat."

In a moment of exuberance, Harry Truman declared that his biggest asset was his opponent, Tom Dewey, who had cried at Louisville, "Don't worry about me." The voters didn't.

"It Makes a Man Study." In his day of triumph, Harry Truman spoke in homely phrases from the north portico of the White House: "It is overwhelming. It makes a man study and wonder whether he is worthy of the confidence, worthy of the responsibility which has been thrust upon him."

Many a voter wondered too. Even in the flush of post-election emotion, few could mistake Truman for an inspiring leader in the pattern of Churchill or Roosevelt. Many remembered the bewildered, fumbling Harry Truman groping through the tumbling squalls of the postwar economy, often seeming to dismiss his problems as jauntily as the captain of the Walloping Windowblind. But not even his opponents doubted his essential integrity and simplicity and, in the calmer waters of 1948, that seemed enough. Said a young businessman: "He'll do what he thinks he ought to. Up home in North Carolina, we call him mule head."

To most, he had seemed as friendly and honest and likeable as the man next door and they were sure he was on their side.

The New Orthodoxy. What was their side, in 1948? It seemed to be the body of ideas, laws and generalized intentions which Franklin Roosevelt called the New Deal. It was no longer radical—it had been accepted for 16 years. As far as the Democratic Party was concerned it was the new orthodoxy, and Harry Truman, no original thinker but a man tempered with Missouri caution, was orthodox clear through.

It was a doctrine that held that the Government should be something like a modern, bureaucratic Great White Father to all its peoples. Government was expected not only to protect the helpless, but also to make full employment, regulate business and let labor run on a minimum of regulation. It was a doctrine that meant guaranteed security—for the farmer and the worker, and for the old and the sick. In 1948, the U.S. wanted a man who believed in that doctrine. It rejected the party—the Republican Party—which it suspected of wanting to change it.

New Load. The day after Franklin Roosevelt died, Harry Truman, the man who never wanted to be President, confided to reporters: "Did you ever have a bull or a load of hay fall on you? If you have, you know how I felt last night." In 1948, the load was bigger. But Harry Truman was not the abjectly humble man of 1945 who had begged every casual visitor to pray for him. He had the air of a man who felt he had learned his job. In an informal talk, he conceded recently that there were

a million men in the U.S. who would make a better President than he was or ever would be. But that was not the point, he said. He, Harry Truman, was President.

There was not a new Truman. At 64, he was the same brisk, gregarious, stubborn, artless man, the fanatically loyal friend who flew from Washington to attend the funeral of Boss Tom Pendergast, the same engaging Missourian who tripped over his academic gown and blurted: "Whups! I forgot to pull up my dress." Home in Independence for Christmas last week, Harry Truman tramped through the familiar streets with careless informality, dropped in on his friends, doffed his hat to neighbors. Like any well-trained husband, he carefully knocked the snow off his boots before going into the house.

A man who neither expects nor inspires pomp & circumstance, he still likes to sit up late over a poker table, drinks brandy water and bourbon, and roars when his military aide, Major General Harry Vaughan, tells an off-color joke. He has learned to duck embarrassing questions, but he is still capable of insisting stubbornly that the spy hearings are "a red herring" long after the charge has become ridiculous.

Harry Truman had said: "I bear no malice toward anyone," and apparently he doesn't. He has listened patiently, as is his way, grinning quietly and staring at the floor, while politicians flocked in to assure him that they had been for him all along. To labor leaders and A.D.A. liberals who demanded a whole new Administration, he retorted: "I think we are doing fine as we are." Newspaper attacks on his Cabinet officers only made him more determined to keep them.

Proof to Come. Harry Truman had still to prove himself to the nation's voters. He had run on a program, not a record. Some 680,000 who went to the polls had not cast a ballot for any presidential candidate. Truman had polled less than a majority, and his winning margin was the smallest since 1916. Many a voter had voted for him simply as a protest.

No one knew that better than Harry Truman. He was determined to carry out his program to the letter. That meant enactment of the social props and programs that comprise the new orthodoxy—with the significant addition of civil rights.

"Harry le Souriant." Abroad, Harry Truman's victory had raised spirits and stilled fears. Europe felt new confidence that the strong hand of the U.S. would continue to bear it up. To the French, the victory of "Harry le souriant" (smiling Harry) meant that the U.S. people had moved closer to them in spirit. In Greece, Athenian grey-marketeers renamed the street where they sell U.S. goods "Uncle Harry Street." Said a Tel Aviv newspaperman: "He is a simple human being, a man of the people. We would rather trust our fate to him than to the cool, calculating diplomats."

More Than Courage. Harry Truman had never pretended to a great grasp of foreign affairs. Unlike his predecessors, he depended heavily on his advisers. Since the humiliating Wallace fiasco, he had been grateful that he could leave policymaking more or less in George Marshall's hands. But Harry Truman's horizon was growing. A few months ago, at a private dinner, General Marshall rose in his place, looked straight at Harry Truman, and waited for silence. Then he said with deep seriousness: "The full stature of this man will only be proven by history, but I want to say here and

now that there has never been a decision made under this man's Administration, affecting policies beyond our shores, that has not been in the best interest of this country. It is not the courage of these decisions that will live, but the integrity of them." (Harry Truman, deeply moved by the tribute from the man he most deeply respects, stood with his arms half outstretched as he sought for words. Finally, he gestured toward Marshall and said simply: "He won the war.")

For the next four years the cold war would be Harry Truman's war. In all likelihood, Old Soldier George Marshall would not stay on to help him fight it. In his inherited term, Harry Truman, by painful experience, groping and pluck, had evolved a policy of containment and counterattack. In his new term, the man of 1948 would carry the full weight of driving that policy to a decision.

* Last week, completing six months of operation, U.S. and British planes had carried a total of 700,172 tons in 96,640 flights.

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