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Howard N. Lee

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POLITICAL TRENDS AND LIFE STYLES IN NORTH CAROLINA FOR THE DECADE 1970

HOWARD N. LEE*

The political life style of man, in many ways, may be compared to that of a mosquito in a nudist camp—that is—varied, unstable, frequently changing, painful to the nudes, and really not predictable until after the fact. Even as I attempt to deal with the subject of this article, I feel somewhat like a mosquito in a nudist camp; knowing what needs to be done but finding it hard to decide where to begin.

However on a more serious note, as we move farther into the 21st century and through the decade of the 1970's, man's political patterns are becoming more baffling and any effort to determine the real influencing factors becomes a frustrating experience at best. It is becoming increasingly difficult to determine what motivates man to make certain political decisions as relate to establishing priorities, setting goals, and solving problems. During the past few years, we have seen several developments which could be attributed to different factors; varying from candidates who have stirred emotionalism among certain groups and classes of people only as an attempt to create a sense of political panic to win votes; candidates who have tried to present constructive and important practical issues in an effort to appeal to a broad base of people, as well as attempting to bring some relevancy through the political system. In some cases liberal candidates have won elections in heavily populated conservative areas; black candidates have won over white candidates in some predominantly white districts, while losing embarrassingly in predominantly black areas; Democrats have defeated Republicans in high Republican registered districts and Republicans have enjoyed similar successes in Democratic areas. A greater majority of the populations seems to have shifted from a total trust in government. A majority of the citizenry would support a "preserving the best and changing the rest of our system" plan. However, there are two extreme groups existing in our society—one advocating a complete overturning of the system, while the other wants to maintain the system in its current form without any changes at all. In the meantime history is being made because blacks and women are being

* Mayor of Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

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elected to public office never held by members of either group before. Added to all this is the hopelessness and despair so prevalent among minorities, especially blacks, women, youth, and the poor. This produces the final results of a confusing impression and the inevitable question then arises "What and where is our political future?" In spite of this situation, it is possible to identify some political patterns of man and point to some political trends for North Carolina which can be predicted for the next decade.

There are at least five conditions that tend to have a direct bearing on the political life styles of urban man and man in general in North Carolina. These conditions are anarchy, apartheid, apathy, acquisitiveness, and governmental distrust. Without making any moral judgments, I shall elaborate briefly on each of these as preconditions to my making predictions about the political trends in North Carolina for the 1970 decade and the 21st century.

The first—*Anarchy*—may seem an inappropriate term to use in relation to areas whose jurisdictional maps are webbed with governmental entities: central cities, suburbs, rural and farm areas, and countless special districts. But the very proliferation of jurisdictions is perhaps the greatest contributor to metropolitan anarchy and urban anarchial development within North Carolina, since it inhibits the governance of the area as a whole. For example, air pollution is no respecter of jurisdictional boundaries, flowing over central cities, suburbs, and rural areas alike. Even though we know this, we allow the process of growth to continue in a way that adds more tiny jurisdictions, each with veto powers over area-wide problem solving efforts, yet none with sufficient powers to meet their residents' most pressing needs and none with enough money to provide the goods and services needed by the inhabitants. Decisions made by public office holders tend to be influenced more by political concerns than by the need to do what is right and workable. The setting of priorities is almost left entirely to each little jurisdictional area without any coordinated effort to bring about an overall design to benefit the broader area and the larger constituency. Monies are appropriated based on political pull and the amount of political handouts are based on political favors, rather than on need.

The second is *Apartheid*, which is an ugly word, but the ugly fact is that politics in North Carolina (as in the entire country) is directly affected by every conceivable division that exists: especially by race, class, age, and now sex. However, the most intractable of these divisions

center around race and class, and are direct results of the patterns of urban growth and politics as developed over the years. The story is all too familiar; the confinement of the poor and the minority to central cities; the flight of most whites and many middle class blacks to suburbia, and the restructuring of political districts to keep the "outs" weak and the "ins" strong.

The next two, *Apathy* and *Acquisitiveness*, are inseparably linked together. Public *apathy* seems to be moving toward becoming public enemy number one; especially as it relates to politics, because the general public seems to care so little about political decisions that are made until after the fact and/or until it is directly affected. For example, few people are concerned enough to become motivated to attend City Council meetings to find out what is being discussed until a decision has been made and a road is about to be cut through their own backyards. At this point, and only then, the public rises up in indignation and the apathy is broken only to relapse into its own comfortable state after this personal problem has been satisfied. Consequently, the big decisions about urban growth and development are made by default, by ad hoc and small private groups of selfish individuals. This leaves great latitude for the exercise of *acquisitiveness* on the part of those who make private profit from public resources. Both these factors work hand in hand to make it politically possible for the rich to get richer and the poor to stay poor; the weak to remain weak and the strong to get stronger.

The last condition—*Governmental Distrust*—is one that has become more prevalent during the past few years because of governmental failure and inefficiency. Too many politicians make promises and fail to carry them out even to the minimum degree. Beyond this too many politicians use their governmental positions, especially elected offices, for their own personal aggrandizement. Each election day citizens flock to the polls, vote and elect people to public office, who do not fulfill their promises. This creates distrust.

It would be possible to go on pointing out many other negative conditions which relate to the current system of urbanized politics in North Carolina. Yet it is not so much the conditions themselves that should demand our attention, but their impact on the political system, our political future, and what we can do to foster a better understanding and an ultimate reversal of such destructive trends. Because these conditions, in part, dictate political trend. I will in this article focus on those political trends which have emerged during the past four years in North Carolina.

I will further make some predictions about new ones I think will emerge in the future. I believe it will be these trends that will determine our political life style, during the next few years and throughout the 1970 decade. Some may seem unreal, idealistic, irrelevant, and ambitious; while a few may seem pessimistic or cynical. Even so I think it behooves us to begin making a greater effort to understand them and their effects on our lives. To make sense out of any political discussion one has to begin with people found today in cities.

Today and for the foreseeable future, the city is the frontier of American life, surplanting the 19th and early 20th century frontier rural America and North Carolina. For the past thirty years people have been leaving North Carolina to settle in the cities in search of a better life economically, culturally, and educationally. Some have left the state while others have congregated around the larger metropolitan areas within the state. Consequently, rural population has declined now for over three decades and the trend to urban living likely will continue for the remainder of this decade. However, during the last few years we have seen some decline in the mass exodus from both the small rural towns to the larger urban cities and from the state itself. This then requires a complete change and new approach to problem solving, citizen involvement in the decision making process, and community goal setting.

Within the next three decades this state's population will grow tremendously, depending on the increase in birth rate, the reversal of the exodus trend, and the death rate. Much of this growth will naturally occur in many of our major cities. But many of our smaller communities and towns will feel a tremendous increase also. A good part of existing cities must be rebuilt, and a good part of existing small towns must be re-evaluated. This will necessitate a state-wide effort greater than that required to settle the wilderness and conquer the frontier of this country.

The growth of North Carolina towns has been characterized for the most part by lack of planning. Even so, life in North Carolina cities and towns is still better than in most of our cities and towns. Our cities are cleaner and healthier. Greater progress is realized in education, the economic status of citizens is improving, recreation and cultural facilities have been expanded, most problems are solvable, and practically all of our cities are financially sound, even though they are financially strained.

On the other hand there is growing concern that the traditional approach to the problems of city and small town living will not be adequate particularly with the prospect that there could be several super cities

springing up within our state during the next decade. Two clear examples of this possibility are in the Durham, Raleigh and Chapel Hill area as well as the Charlotte, Greensboro, and Winston-Salem area. The vast growth in these cities' population alone during the next thirty years will compound the problems of urban life which are already confounding civic and governmental leaders and will have a tremendous impact on the political system. The present system of local government will not be able to solve satisfactorily the problems of foul and inadequate water, air pollution, poor public transportation, poverty, crime, problems dealing with recreation, health care and facilities, and the drafty houses in many residential sections. Creativity and innovation are needed to achieve social and political breakthroughs and to provide a new urban methodology capable of harnessing technical developments in meeting human needs. Science and technology can furnish the tools to do this. The central question is whether North Carolinians as individuals and their politicians have the determination and the flexibility to make the cities and rural areas pleasant, safe, and efficient.

As I view the political horizon in North Carolina, I see a political future that holds a great deal of hope for all people. I am encouraged that the old stagnant and closed political system that has been controlled by small minorities is being broken open and spread among a broader base group of people. The political values that once stood without question are now being questioned vigorously. Our entire political system and the organizations within it are being scrutinized from within and from without. The pressures being brought to bear on the party organizations, particularly the Democratic Party, the state's strongest, has triggered a trend toward party reorganization. This is aimed at guaranteeing the involvement of people who, in the past, have been systematically excluded from political activities and involvement on the official level. The Democratic Party having taken the lead has caused pressure to be brought on the Republican Party to take similar action. These are meager beginnings but beginnings they are. And even though there is still much to be done, these first steps have brought hope where a few years ago there was hopelessness. These first steps have created the atmosphere for the development of new political trends in North Carolina, especially as they relate to political party organizations.

Although the developmental roots for these trends can be traced quite a way back in North Carolina's political history, the real thrust came about

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in 1968. The great acceleration that we are now experiencing was caused, in my opinion, by at least six factors.

The first was the entrance of Dr. Reginald Hawkins into the political arena as a candidate for governor in 1968. In spite of the varying attitudes toward Dr. Hawkins as a person or the judgments made about his legitimacy as a candidate, the fact is that through his candidacy he spurted some new blood into the veins of the political system of North Carolina. He identified issues that were pressing on the minds of the people and proposed unconventional solutions that were reasonable, logical and possible. Where other candidates were cautious and smooth, he was straightforward and honest. Whereas, the young, the black and liberal had grown tired of the old political ways, Dr. Hawkins held a refreshing approach to politics and campaigning for North Carolina. Therefore, when the vote was in, approximately 130,000 North Carolinians had endorsed the Hawkins' approach to politics and in a sense had expressed a strong dislike for the old political system. This was an emerging populism which brought a new political sensitivity and a different trend, because one who is serious about politics in North Carolina does not ignore this number of dissatisfied voters. Another result of the Hawkins' effort was the election of a number of black candidates to public office including the historic election in Chapel Hill where I became the first black mayor of that city.

The second influence was the presidential candidacy of Senator Eugene McCarthy, which caused a new group of political and spirited people to become actively involved in North Carolina politics. New dynamic leaders emerged to take the platform and challenge the conventional party candidates. The issues as set forth and embraced by this group created a great base for the development of the first real coalition in North Carolina as did the Hawkins' effort. For the first time in recent North Carolina history it was clear that there was widespread discontentment with the political system among both black and white. This brought a new political mood to North Carolina as the McCarthy and Hawkins coalitions took over many precincts and county organizations and enjoyed a number of successes which influenced and set new political trends for the state.

The third influence came at the 1968 State Democratic Convention, when all of these forces came together to make the first real challenge of the North Carolina political system in some organized systematic way. Dr. Hawkins as an individual came prepared to do battle on the floor. The McCarthy Democrats had their forces lined up and rejected outright

the predecided and predetermined party platform. Labor was beginning to pick its nose up and challenge the lack of concern demonstrated by the politicians in the past for the plight of workers throughout the state. But the old party bosses maintained control of the Convention even though they were caught by surprise. Although the coalitions left the State Democratic Convention thoroughly beaten, the momentum was launched and carried over to the 1970 State Convention where tremendous gains were made and some new directions for the Democratic Party had been set.

The fourth influence on the North Carolina political system has come from the Republican Party which has been growing stronger and more vivid since 1968. With the recent election of its vocal chairman and the strong involvement of blacks on the official level of this party, the Democratic Party is finding Republican Party growth an increasing threat. This has created a new sense of urgency on the part of both parties to work harder to be more responsive to people regardless of race, economic status, or religious background. As a result, we can look for new trends of greater movement toward a two party system in North Carolina within the next decade. Such a two party system has a tendency to cut away at apathy, break down anarchy, dissipate apartheid, expose acquisitiveness and create governmental trust through competitiveness. This is a welcomed influence and should be encouraged and supported by a broad base of people.

The fifth influence on North Carolina politics and the setting of trends within the state came from the development of the activities of the American Independent party in 1968 as led by the Presidential candidacy of Governor George Wallace of Alabama. Governor Wallace in this organization reached out to what some have described as the "forgotten American," the poor whites. This took votes from both parties in the 1968 election campaign, but hurt the Democratic Party more. This in a sense was a protest on the part of working class white people who felt the North Carolina political system was not being responsive to their needs. The actions of this group were not totally motivated by any racial prejudices or racism, but by their own economic instability and insecurity which were being fed by the existing political system or either party. Just as the Dr. Hawkins and McCarthy followers, the Wallace followers are no longer prepared to remain silent and will not remain silent in the decade to come.

The sixth and final influence that is just now beginning to have some impact on the political system in North Carolina, and which probably

will not be measured until late 1974, is the development of a fourth party called the Black People's United Party. This organization is being developed and led by Mr. Howard Fuller, and is proposed to unify and stimulate black voting power in order to pressure the existing political system to be more sensitive and responsive to the needs of blacks throughout this state. It is without question that the political system in North Carolina has not been as open and as responsive to the needs of blacks as it should. For example, there are now in the state government of North Carolina twenty-three (23) all white departments, with no blacks employed. Though one may question the development of a separate political organization, the fact that this influence exists means that the political system will have to recognize and reckon with any impact it may personally have upon the political system. This does not mean that I personally endorse this organization.

It has been these six factors which have influenced the development of new political trends in North Carolina. It is much too early to say now what will be the outcome and where these trends will really take us, but the fact that they exist is a healthy sign. Therefore, for the purpose of discussion I have identified six political trends unfolding that are extremely significant and deserve closer examination. These trends are as follows:

I. INCREASED PARTICIPATION OF BLACKS IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM: As the political system in North Carolina has opened we have seen an increased number of blacks taking part in political activities. In the future, I believe we will see black political participation increase at a very rapid rate. With the election of new governors I suspect we will see an increased number of blacks in the governor's office, heading up departments, and occupying various levels of government that have never been occupied by blacks in the past. However, to talk of black political participation, one has to talk about it in relation to at least four levels.

A. *Elective Office*: During the past two years there has been a tremendous increase in the number of blacks seeking public office and, in greater number, succeeding. I have been elected Mayor of Chapel Hill, two blacks now serve in the State House with the possibilities of the first black Senator being elected in 1972. Blacks are holding such offices as County Commissioners, City Councilmen, there are more black mayors pro-tem in the history of the State of North Carolina, and the first black woman legislator has been appointed. In most cases, blacks are being

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elected with both black and white votes. I encourage blacks to seek every level of public office, because there are two ways for a black candidate to win. The first is to get elected and the second is to exhibit the ability to analyze and propose solutions to problems that white candidates may have a tendency to overlook. In the future I hope to see blacks running for more state offices and expect a greater impact to be made by the young black voters in this respect. Any black candidate, however, must run as a symbol of equality and wage a campaign to focus on the needs of people regardless of race, sex, age or economic status.

B. *Appointive Offices*: As blacks have sought public offices through the elected process, this has given rise to stronger political organizations among blacks, which could bargain with candidates before elections. This has led to more blacks being appointed to various political offices. Although this picture is still dim, this trend will continue and as it does, we will see more blacks being appointed by white politicians throughout the state. Within the next few years, other blacks will be appointed as judges, department heads, and to many other state level boards and commissions, to mention only a few.

C. *Increased Black Vote*: During the past few years blacks have been paying more attention to black voter registration in North Carolina. With the help of foundation funds and the efforts made by various organizations, the black vote has steadily increased since 1960, with a slight decline in 1969. In 1960 there were 210,450 black voters as compared to 1,861,430 white voters; in 1969 there were approximately 296,000 black voters as compared to 1,572,000 white voters. Currently there are approximately 364,000 unregistered black voters in North Carolina, not including the eighteen to twenty-one year olds. Since the dropping of the literacy test one would expect that there would be an increase in the number of blacks participating in the political system. However, there is still one problem plaguing blacks, and that is the economic enslavement which continues to be a big problem in small towns and rural areas. This causes many blacks not to be able to vote their conviction, but vote as they are told. More attention will have to be given to the area of economic development, in order to create economic independence in order to free people fully to participate in the political system.

In the past blacks have not seen much hope for themselves through the political system. This seems to be changing now and there are many more blacks utilizing the political system as a means for satisfying their needs. This new attitude within the black community will cause blacks to look

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closer at candidates seeking public office, push for attention to problems unique to blacks, and use their political power to their best advantage. Generally, blacks will develop in time a greater political sophistication of bargaining with candidates before pledging their support. I predict this will be done through a coalition of organizations throughout the black community within the next decade.

II. INCREASED YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND INTEREST IN POLITICAL SYSTEMS: Before the Supreme Court ruling the eighteen to twenty-one year olds were told to work through the system, but they were denied the opportunity. Our state did more harm than good setting out to apparently prevent this from happening. However, the eighteen to twenty-one year olds have been granted the vote in National elections and should have it in state and local elections. There has not been a mad rush on the part of youth to register or participate in the political system. This is no indication that they are not interested but it means that we are still making it too difficult for them to register in this state. If we are really serious about allowing young voters to participate in the political system and if we expect them to become interested, then we must grant them this right on every level. I predict that this will be done and when it is the voting books will swell with the names of young voters who can and will make a difference in the political ball game.

III. CIVIL RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS: The days of street protests and marches in my opinion are over and Civil Rights organizations now must turn to utilizing the political system in order to satisfy their grievances and fight segregation and discrimination. There are a number of Civil Rights organizations which have been moving in this direction: leading Voter Registration Drives, providing Voter Education seminar opportunities, as well as running, endorsing and supporting candidates. This I believe is the direction that Civil Rights organizations would take within the state within the next decade. Any and all efforts ought to be used now to gain some control over the system rather than continuing to waste our time protesting against those who sit in the seats of power.

IV. COALITIONS: Within the 1970 decade this state will see many kinds of coalitions developing both within and outside the political parties. These coalitions do not seem to be geared toward forming around candidates, but around issues. Although there will be many, they will tend to support each other on issues of mutual interest rather than fight each

other over differences. They will tend to cut across party lines rather than be confined to any one party.

Poor whites seem to be coming to a realization that their problems are not so different from the problems of the black, the young and the female. As each of these groups moves closer to the political system, coalitions and coalition relationships seem to be much more possible and profitable. Poor whites and working class whites are more open to working with blacks than in the past. I see this trend shaping coalitions within class structures and predict that the working classes will come together before the end of this decade.

V. CHURCH AND POLITICS: The old belief of separation of church and politics seems to have been taken too far in the past and is now being reversed and thrown out of the window. The church today seems to be moving more toward participating in the political process and getting involved in the political arena thereby playing a greater and major role in influencing political decisions. Such potent issues as legalized abortions, liquor by the drinks, and others have caused the church lobby to swing into action. This to me is the most refreshing trend of all, since I hold that the church belongs in the middle of politics. However, I am concerned that the church political involvement appears to be too limited in that the same kind of effort put forth against such issues as mentioned above, has not been put forth for more humanizing legislation in the area of Civil Rights and Human Relations. This effort has also been missing in relation to voter registration and the evaluation of campaign issues. I see churches becoming much more politically involved during the next decade.

The black church in this respect has a special mission to perform within the black community, especially the black minister. The black church has a definite role to play in pushing good black candidates and supporting them through the churches' pulpit as well as providing a forum from which they may be able to communicate with the people within the community. Black churches have a greater responsibility for pushing and leading voter registration, voter education, and the more humanistic efforts being made to bring about a fair and impartial political system.

VI. CANDIDATES WILL BE CANDIDATES (Black or White): A new trend is developing in North Carolina where black candidates are having to present themselves before the public just as white candidates for consideration, and white candidates are having to come forth with

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progressive programs before the general public to be examined. No longer can a white candidate expect to be elected purely because he is white, or a black candidate adopt the pessimistic view that he will automatically be defeated because he is black. There appears to be a greater open-mindedness developing among the Populist of North Carolina to the extent that candidates, whether black or white, who can come forth with a progressive and relevant program stand a good chance of being elected to almost any office within the state regardless of the economic status, sex, or age. Of all the trends this is the ultimate goal. When we have finally reached this plateau, our political system will be close to excellent health.

These are the political trends as I see them developing or have seen them develop within the past few years in North Carolina. Between now and the end of the 1970 decade there will be other emerging trends and some of the ones mentioned in this article will have probably disappeared. But regardless of what happens, the political system should and must have been changed so there can be no turning back. I predict that the 1970 decade will be the most exciting politically that North Carolina has ever experienced.

No politician can expect to be elected to public office without directly speaking to the main issues prevalent at the time of his running. He must present specific solutions to problems and seek to represent all of the people fairly. I believe that as far as developing a relevant and responsive political system is concerned, we have reached the peak of the mountain in this state and the problem from this point on will be to try to keep the horses from breaking away from the wagon as we start down the hill. However, our greatest concern should not be whether we are moving too fast, but whether we are moving in the right direction. Only the people breaking the apathy, being concerned about anarchy and being made to rise up against apartheid, acquisitiveness and creating a new governmental trust can determine this new destiny for our political system. Our old political habits and attitudes as individuals will have to be changed. Those of us who are beginning to get an understanding and a new foothold in the political system will have to dedicate ourselves to making a difference. We cannot, as those who have gone before us, use our political positions to advance our own personal interests. We must instead begin to chart a new course for politics in North Carolina—*politics for the people*. Our responsibility, yours and mine, is to make sure the

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positive and constructive winds of tomorrow continue to blow and that the negative and destructive gales of yesterday never return.

This decade is affording us the opportunity to build a good system of politics and a chance to expand our political life styles in North Carolina. We in this state, we in the South in general, are young enough and unstructured enough that we can make a difference in our political system now and not make the same mistakes that our brethren in the North have made in the past. During this decade we either build a system that makes it possible for us to survive politically as brothers in a true democracy—or die together as fools living a democratic lie.