



<--PREV
Doc #1146

Memorial Commission
Home Page

First Term
Table of Contents

Presidential Papers
Home Page

Doc#

1

Go

NEXT-->
Doc #1148

Document #1147; November 8, 1954

To Edgar Newton Eisenhower

Series: *EM, AWF, Name Series* ; Category: *Personal and confidential*

The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, Volume XV - The Presidency: The Middle Way
Part VI: *Crises Abroad, Party Problems at Home; September 1954 to December 1954*
Chapter 13: "A new phase of political experience"

Dear Ed:¹ I think that such answer as I can give to your letter of November first will be arranged in reverse order--at least I shall comment first on your final paragraph.

You keep harping on the Constitution; I should like to point out that the meaning of the Constitution is what the Supreme Court says it is. Consequently no powers are exercised by the Federal government except where such exercise is approved by the Supreme Court (lawyers) of the land.²

I admit that the Supreme Court has in the past made certain decisions in this general field that have been astonishing to me. A recent case in point was the decision in the Phillips case.³ Others, and older ones, involved "interstate commerce."⁴ But until some future Supreme Court decision denies the right and responsibility of the Federal government to do certain things, you cannot possibly remove them from the political activities of the Federal government.

Now it is true that I believe this country is following a dangerous trend when it permits too great a degree of centralization of governmental functions. I oppose this--in some instances the fight is a rather desperate one. But to attain any success it is quite clear that the Federal government cannot avoid or escape responsibilities which the mass of the people firmly *believe* should be undertaken by it. The political processes of our country are such that if a *rule of reason* is not applied in this effort, we will lose everything--even to a possible and drastic change in the Constitution. This is what I mean by my constant insistence upon "moderation" in government. Should any political party attempt to abolish social security, unemployment insurance, and eliminate labor laws and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history. There is a tiny splinter group, of course, that believes you can do these things. Among them are H. L. Hunt (you possibly know his background), a few other Texas oil millionaires, and an occasional politician or business man from other areas.⁵ Their number is negligible and they are stupid.

To say, therefore, that in some instances the policies of this Administration have not been radically changed from those of the last is perfectly true.⁶ Both Administrations levied taxes, both maintained military establishments, customs officials, and so on.

But in all governmental fields of action a combination of purpose, procedure and objectives must be considered if you are to get a true evaluation of the relative merits.

You say that the foreign policy of the two Administrations is the same. I suppose that even the most violent critic would agree that it is well for us to have friends in the world, to encourage them to oppose communism both in its external form and in its internal manifestations, to promote trade in the world

that would be mutually profitable between us and our friends (and it must be *mutually* profitable or it will dry up), and to attempt the promotion of peace in the world, negotiating from a position of moral, intellectual, economic and military strength.

No matter what the party is in power, it must perforce follow a program that is related to these general purposes and aspirations. But the *great difference is in how it is done and, particularly, in the results achieved.*

A year ago last January we were in imminent danger of losing Iran, and sixty percent of the known oil reserves of the world.⁷ You may have forgotten this. Lots of people have. But there has been no greater threat that has in recent years overhung the free world. That threat has been largely, if not totally, removed. I could name at least a half dozen other spots of the same character.

This being true, how can anyone be so unaware of what is happening as to say that this Administration has conducted foreign affairs under the same policies as did the former Administration? As a matter of fact, if you will press any individual who brings to you all these strictures and comments, I venture that your experience will be the same as mine. That experience is that these individuals have no idea of what the "foreign policy" of the previous Administration was and what the present one is. They have heard certain slogans, such as "give away programs." They have no slightest idea as to what has been the effect of these programs in sustaining American security and prosperity. Moreover, they have no idea whatsoever as to comparative size of them now as compared to even two or three years ago.

You say that these critics also complain about the continuance of "controls," presumably over our economy. There is nothing in your letter that shows such complete ignorance as to what has actually happened as does this term. When we came into office there were Federal controls exercised over prices, wages, rents, as well as over the allocation and use of raw materials. The first thing this Administration did was to set about the elimination of those controls. This it did amid the most dire predictions of disaster, "run away" inflation, and so on and so on. We were proved right, but I must say that if the people of the United States do not even remember what took place, one is almost tempted to regret the agony of study, analysis and decision that was then our daily ration.

You also talk about "bad political advice" I am getting. I always assumed that lawyers attempted accuracy in their statements. How do you know that I am getting *any* political advice? Next, if I do get political advice, how do you know that it is not weighted in the direction that you seem to think it should be--although I am tempted at times to believe that you are just thrashing around rather than thinking anything through to a definite conclusion? So how can you say I am getting "bad" advice; why don't you just assume I am stupid, trying to wreck the nation, and leave our Constitution in tatters?

I assure you that you have more reason, based on sixty-four years of contact, to say this than you do to make the bland assumption that I am surrounded by a group of Machiavellian characters who are seeking the downfall of the United States and the ascendancy of socialism and communism in the world. Incidentally, I notice that everybody seems to be a great Constitutionalist until his idea of what the Constitution ought to do is violated--then he suddenly becomes very strong for amendments or some peculiar and individualistic interpretation of his own.

Finally, I must assure you again that I am delighted to get your own honest criticisms, particularly if you will only take the trouble to lay down the facts on which you reach what seem to me to be some remarkable conclusions. But the mere repetition of aphorisms and political slogans and newspaper headlines leaves me cold.

I am sorry you are not going to be at Abilene.⁸ It would be easier to tell you these things than to write them--except that by this method I hope to make you do a little thinking rather than devote yourself just to the winning of a noisy argument. *As ever*

P.S. I attach a paragraph and a cartoon that came to me in the same mail as did your letter. At least it represents a different viewpoint. Incidentally, it comes from one of the most successful businessmen in the nation.⁹

¹ A draft version of this letter, with Eisenhower's handwritten emendations, is in AWF/Drafts.

² "I have faith in your inherent desire to operate this country on a constitutional basis,"

Edgar had written, "giving to the states what are legitimately their rights, and assuming for the Federal Government only those limited powers which the Constitution intended that it should have" (AWF/N).

³ On June 7 the Supreme Court had ruled that sales of natural gas by the Phillips Petroleum Company to pipelines that distribute it in interstate commerce were subject to regulation by the Federal Power Commission. This decision gave the FPC control of a domain traditionally reserved to the states (*Phillips Petroleum Co. v. State of Wisconsin et al.* 347 U.S. 672 [1954]). Eisenhower deleted from this section of his earlier draft the following sentence: "I think there has been some tortuous reasoning applied."

⁴ See for example *Wickard v. Filburn*, a case that upheld the federal government's power to regulate farm production even when no part of the product was intended for interstate commerce and the product was consumed on the farm where it was grown (317 U.S. 111 [1942]).

⁵ Haroldson Lafayette Hunt, billionaire founder of the Hunt Oil Company, had often been a champion of conservative causes. For background on Eisenhower's relations with Hunt see Galambos, *Columbia University*, vol. X.

⁶ "For your information," Edgar had written, "there are a great many people in all walks of life with whom I have talked, who have made the statement that there is very little difference between the policy of your administration and that of the former administration" in the handling of foreign relations and many domestic programs.

⁷ For background on the Iranian crisis see nos. 281 and 457.

⁸ Eisenhower would be in Abilene on November 11 for the dedication of the Eisenhower Museum (see no. 1144).

⁹ We have not found these items in AWF.

Bibliographic reference to this document:

Eisenhower, Dwight D. Personal and confidential To Edgar Newton Eisenhower, 8 November 1954. In *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, ed. L. Galambos and D. van Ee, doc. 1147. World Wide Web facsimile by The Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Commission of the print edition; Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, <http://www.eisenhowermemorial.org/presidential-papers/first-term/documents/1147.cfm>

<--PREV
Doc #1146

| Memorial Commission
Home Page

| First Term
Table of Contents

| Presidential Papers
Home Page

| Doc#

1

Go

| NEXT-->
Doc #1148



Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Commission

1629 K Street, NW Suite 801

Washington DC 20006

Phone: 202.296.0004 Fax: 202.296.6464