

- 2— The basic principles relative to speech composition on a broad basis have remained unchanged from Aristotle to the present.
- 3— Aristotle wrote only about persuasive speaking; and although persuasive speaking is given prominent attention in modern texts, other types of speaking are recognized and included as vital in contemporary life.
- 4— Public speaking has expanded through the centuries since Aristotle to include not only additional classifications, but also special types for special occasions.
- 5— Terminology to describe various parts and processes of speech composition have changed very little.
- 6— Elements of composition are more detailed in Aristotle and Brigrance than in Monroe, indicating that the difference depends more upon the purpose of the book than upon the age in which it is written.
- 7— While Aristotle's *Rhetoric* would not be recommended as a textbook for beginning courses in public speaking, "Yet any good current textbook is a modernized version of classical principles, and the sooner students realize that they are dealing with a subject with a noteworthy tradition, the greater the respect they will have for it."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> K. E. Montgomery, "How to Criticize Student Speeches," *The Speech Teacher*, VI (1957), 203.

## Harold L. Ickes: New Deal Hatchet Man

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AT THE 1956 Democratic National Convention the keynote speaker referred to Vice-President Richard Nixon as the "vice-hatchet man" of the Republican party. This reference was but a new play upon an old epithet, for Nixon is only one of many campaigners to whom the "hatchet man" label has been applied. Perhaps the most interesting American political figure to be so designated was the late Harold L. Ickes, the fighting Bull Moose Republican who for over a decade served as the Democratic party's chief orator of attack.

The political career of Harold Ickes was one of the most unusual in our nation's history. In 1933, when he was appointed Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior, Ickes was virtually unknown outside of Illinois, had never held an elective public office, had never met Roosevelt, and had always been a Republican.

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From such an unlikely beginning, he became one of the strong men around Roosevelt and a power in the New Deal. In addition to his cabinet position, Ickes was head of the Public Works Administration and served as Petroleum Coordinator during World War II. In his thirteen years as Secretary of the Interior, Ickes carved such an important niche for himself that when he died in 1952 President Truman, with whom he had often battled, said:

A unique figure in American public life is lost to the nation and a phase of the New Deal comes to a close with the death of Harold Ickes.<sup>1</sup>

But Ickes was more than a New Deal administrator and a colorful national figure; he was one of Roosevelt's leading campaign orators, both at election time and during interim political battles. According to Corcoran, a Roosevelt speech-writer and close adviser, many New Dealers referred to Ickes as "the king's champion."<sup>2</sup> This reference to the special knight whose task was to do the sovereign's fighting for him is an apt one. That Ickes filled such a role has been suggested by many writers and confirmed by interviews with New Deal associates. Richberg, one-time administrator of the NRA, says of Ickes:

His intense partisanship made him the anointed "hatchet man" of the Administration. He could be relied upon to attack any opposition with a vehemence which would insure bruised, battered, and angry opponents wherever he swung his war club.<sup>3</sup>

Gosnell in his biography of Roosevelt also pins on the "hatchet man" label.<sup>4</sup> Opposition newspapers and campaigners described the same role in varied but clear terms. During the 1936 campaign, the *Kansas City Times* called him the Administration's "catch-as-catch-can" fighter;<sup>5</sup> the *San Diego Tribune* labelled him the Administration's "dragon hunter";<sup>6</sup> and Congressman Joseph Martin designated him as the "chief mudslinger" of the New Deal.<sup>7</sup>

That New Deal strategists made calculated use of Ickes as the spearhead of attacks on the opposition has been confirmed by interviews with such New Deal figures as Corcoran, Cohen, Tugwell, and Farley.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, several entries in the Ickes' diary clearly suggest the Secretary's political role. Among them is this entry covering July 1, 1936:

I asked the President what part he expected me to play in the campaign and he said he wanted me to attack. I told him that I hoped he would feel free to call upon me for anything that I could do at any time and he said again

<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, February 4, 1952, 18.

<sup>2</sup> Personal Interview, January 28, 1955.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Richberg, *My Hero* (New York, 1954), p. 238.

<sup>4</sup> Harold F. Gosnell, *Champion Campaigner: Franklin D. Roosevelt* (New York, 1952), p. 181.

<sup>5</sup> *Kansas City Times*, August 4, 1936.

<sup>6</sup> *San Diego Tribune*, August 29, 1936.

<sup>7</sup> *New York Times*, August 29, 1936.

<sup>8</sup> Corcoran, Cohen, and Farley were interviewed in January, 1955; Tugwell in December, 1954.

that I made such a grand attack that that was what he wanted.<sup>9</sup>

And Ickes did attack. In ten major campaign speeches in 1936, five of which were aired over national radio networks, the New Deal's hatchet man attacked almost every Republican candidate or Republican supporter in sight. Chief among his targets were Landon and Knox, the presidential and vice-presidential nominees; Herbert Hoover, former Republican President; Alfred Smith, defected Democrat supporting the Republican ticket; and William Randolph Hearst and Colonel Robert McCormick, publishers who vigorously supported Landon. Others subjected to rhetorical scorn included financier Andrew Mellon, conservationist Gifford Pinchot, columnist William Hard, politically-active priest, Father Coughlin, a wide assortment of duPonts, and as well the Republican platform and the Republican party in general.

Ickes' acid tongue was not stilled after the successful 1936 campaign. In 1937 he was active in the Supreme Court fight; in 1937-38 he was a leader in the crusade against big business; and in the 1938 off-year elections he was used often in Roosevelt's alleged "purge" of conservative Congressmen. Then in 1940, the President, who according to Rosenman "loved to listen to him lay it on," gave his Secretary of the Interior the same task he had been given in the previous campaign. Before the campaign began the President told Wallace to "see Harold, who will have to be our spearhead in the campaign."<sup>10</sup> In that role, Ickes launched caustic attacks against Willkie, one of them a network broadcast reply to Willkie's speech of acceptance.<sup>11</sup> In 1944, Ickes devoted to candidate Dewey the same attention accorded his two predecessors. When he retired from office in 1946, the former Secretary probably could look back upon the most active career as a hatchet man in our nation's history.

No study of a political hatchet man would be complete without some inquiry into the nature of the forces which projected the man into the role. In Ickes' case, several causative factors emerge. One reason for Ickes' use as a hatchet man in 1936 was that the type of personal campaign Roosevelt wanted to conduct made it politically expedient to use someone in that role. The President's strategy was to delay his own ostensibly political activities until the final month of the campaign. At that time he conducted an extensive, whirlwind speaking tour. Until that final month, however, he busied himself with non-political activities which would return political advantage. For example, he made a purely "non-political" inspection tour of the drought-stricken Midwest. Some Republicans were unkind enough to suggest that Roosevelt was playing politics with his office, but Farley replied that the President merely was engaging in "legitimate duties."<sup>12</sup> However, observers might appraise its ethics, Democratic strategy required that some-

<sup>9</sup> Harold L. Ickes, "The First Thousand Days," *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, I (New York, 1953), 627.

<sup>10</sup> Harold L. Ickes, "The Lowering Clouds," *Ibid.*, III, 268.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>12</sup> James A. Farley, *Behind the Ballots* (New York, 1938), p. 309.

body in the New Deal camp keep pressure on the Republican candidates while the President took political advantage of his "non-political" tours. Farley, in *Behind the Ballots*, has described the tactics employed:

A careful study was made of Landon's record as Governor of Kansas and a vigorous fire was directed constantly at his official acts.<sup>13</sup>

The man assigned to do most of the firing was Harold Ickes. According to Corcoran, the Secretary's role in the campaign was determined, in part at least, as a result of this delaying action in the President's personal campaign.

Another facet of the Roosevelt campaign technique also made it expedient for him to use Ickes' talent for attacking the enemy: the President pursued a policy of never making personal reference to the Republican candidate. Rosenman has stated that this was a policy from which Roosevelt never deviated.<sup>14</sup> This facet of the President's strategy undoubtedly increased the need for at least one campaigner high in the Administration who would not only refer directly to the Republican candidates, but who would do so forcibly and often. Ickes was not only willing to mention names, it was his habit to do so. He was a blunt, direct man who neither minced words nor shrank from an encounter. The statement with which he introduced his *Autobiography of a Curmudgeon* is, perhaps, typical:

If, in these pages, I have hurled insult at anyone, be it known that such was my deliberate intent, and I may as well state flatly now that it will be useless and a waste of time to ask me to say that I am sorry.<sup>15</sup>

Such a self-styled curmudgeon was an obvious prospect for the assignment to deliver the most direct attacks on the enemy.

The Secretary of the Interior had other qualifications too. Not least among them was the fact that he was a Republican. The Democrats were in the fortunate position of having a Republican cabinet officer to attack the Republican candidates. Moreover, Ickes had been a staunch Bull Moose Republican in the 1912 campaign of Theodore Roosevelt. Since candidate Landon's claim to progressive Republicanism rested in large part upon his own affiliation with the 1912 Progressive party, this placed Ickes in an especially strategic position. He directed much of his campaign oratory toward contrasting Landon's recent record and the conservative record of his 1936 supporters with the adherence the Kansan professed to Progressive principles. When considering Ickes' Republican background as an asset in his attacks on Roosevelt's opponents, it is interesting — and perhaps significant — to note that the Secretary in his thirteen years in office at no time allowed himself to be considered a Democrat. Nor does it appear that the Democratic Administration ever urged him to switch his nominal party affiliation. Aiken, director of the Democratic Speakers Bureau in 1936, has indicated that

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 310-311.

<sup>14</sup> Samuel I. Rosenman, *Working with Roosevelt* (New York, 1952), p. 128.

<sup>15</sup> Harold L. Ickes, *The Autobiography of a Curmudgeon* (New York, 1943), p. xi.

Ickes' Republican background was partly responsible for the Administration's extended use of him as a speaker.<sup>16</sup>

Another Ickes' asset as a political hatchet man was his relative invulnerability to counter-attack. The Republicans never were able to find cause for criticism in his administration of either the Interior Department or the PWA. Ickes was a tireless administrator, and opinion polls revealed the PWA stood much higher in public favor than did such other agencies as WPA.<sup>17</sup> Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor, noted in her volume, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, that PWA was a definite campaign asset.<sup>18</sup> Ickes' reputation for personal honesty and administrative integrity were never effectively challenged. The rather vulnerable nickname "Honest Harold" was never seriously attacked by Ickes' enemies, Republican or Democratic.

Several reasons for Ickes' initial activity as a political hatchet man have now been suggested. None of them, however, would have proved sufficient to continue him in that role if he had proved ineffective. How effective was Ickes at his assigned task? On December 21, 1936, Hamilton, Landon's campaign manager, told Ickes that he, Ickes, had "hit him harder than anyone else during the campaign."<sup>19</sup> From Hearst's *Chicago American* came this comment: "In fairness it should be recorded that Harold Ickes proved an ace among the New Dealers."<sup>20</sup> And New Deal associates, including all of those interviewed by us, felt that Ickes had effected considerable damage to the Republican opposition he had been assigned to hit. Perhaps the best testimony to his apparently successful performance, however, was his continued use in succeeding campaigns by the politically-astute Roosevelt.

We do not propose to include an extended analysis of the methods and techniques which the New Deal's hatchet man employed. However, let us examine briefly the one factor which perhaps contributed the most to Ickes' effectiveness: his colorful, and often humorous, use of invective. It was this aspect of his oratory which, according to Truman, "made him a formidable opponent in public debate."<sup>21</sup> His ability to apply colorful epithets to his opponents made him good newspaper copy. Pearson and Allen in their "Washington Merry Go Round" said "Not only is Ickes the boss of an outfit that makes news by its activity, but also the sardonic turn of his mind produces words that make headlines."<sup>22</sup> The ability to reach beyond his immediate or radio audience by getting his speeches into print was one of Ickes' chief assets. The President expressed this as one reason for the extensive use of Ickes as a campaigner.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Personal interview, February 1, 1955.

<sup>17</sup> Ickes, *Diary, op. cit.*, I, 598.

<sup>18</sup> Frances Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew* (New York, 1946), p. 275.

<sup>19</sup> Ickes, *Diary, op. cit.*, II, 21.

<sup>20</sup> *Chicago American*, November 11, 1936.

<sup>21</sup> *New York Times*, February 4, 1952.

<sup>22</sup> *Washington Post*, November 19, 1935.

<sup>23</sup> Ickes, *Diary, op. cit.*, I, 659.

A few samples of the invective he employed will, perhaps, indicate what caused the *Philadelphia Record* in 1936 to call Ickes' "the New Deal's most acid-tongued fighter."<sup>24</sup> To Landon the New Deal's chief denouncer applied some of his choicest verbal scorn. He referred to the Kansas Governor as "that friend of the common millionaire," "the strong but silenced man of Topeka," and the "New Political Messiah from the West discovered by William Randolph Hearst and his fellow wise men from the East." Knox was referred to as the "windmill-tilting gentleman of grotesque and absurd statements." Supporters of Landon and Knox also felt the invective of the sharp-tongued Ickes. Hard, paid Republican radio commentator, was called the "water boy and jeer leader" for the Landon forces. After Alfred Smith turned against Roosevelt, Ickes referred to him as "the late Al Smith" and scored his "intellectual nakedness." The Republican party was called the party of "Hooverism," "reactionaries," "vested interests," "economic royalists," and "Old Dealers." Ickes also had a few choice words for the Republican convention and the platform it adopted. He said it was a "weasel-worded" platform adopted by "phrase mongerers" and "verbal tight-rope walkers" at a "marionette show."<sup>25</sup> In later campaigns, Ickes continued in the same vein. In 1940, he described Willkie as "the simple barefoot Wall Street lawyer." In 1948, he referred to Dewey as "Mr. Thomas Elusive Dewey, the candidate in sneakers."<sup>26</sup>

It would be unjust to infer that Ickes' abilities as a speaker, or as a hatchet man, rested solely upon his effective use of the dubious technique of "name-calling." Many of his philippics were well-organized, carefully-documented efforts. His psychological proofs, particularly his use of invective, however, received the most notice from his auditors and from the press; and it was this aspect of his political oratory which most nearly characterized his role as political hatchet man for Roosevelt and the New Deal.

We have made no effort to evaluate, upon an ethical basis, either the role of the campaign hatchet man or the rhetorical methods employed by Ickes in that role. The apparent paradox posed by "Honest Harold" Ickes, a man who possessed an unchallenged record of personal and administrative integrity yet a speaker whose effectiveness rested in great measure upon rhetorical techniques, which are, at best, questionable, would appear to warrant more than casual treatment. Within such a study should be found ethical questions pertinent, not only to Ickes but to some broader considerations of popular public standards for political rhetoric.

<sup>24</sup> *Philadelphia Record*, October 4, 1936.

<sup>25</sup> These phrases are all cited from speech manuscripts in the *Ickes Papers* in the Library of Congress.

<sup>26</sup> *New York Times*, February 4, 1952.

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