

NORTH COAST

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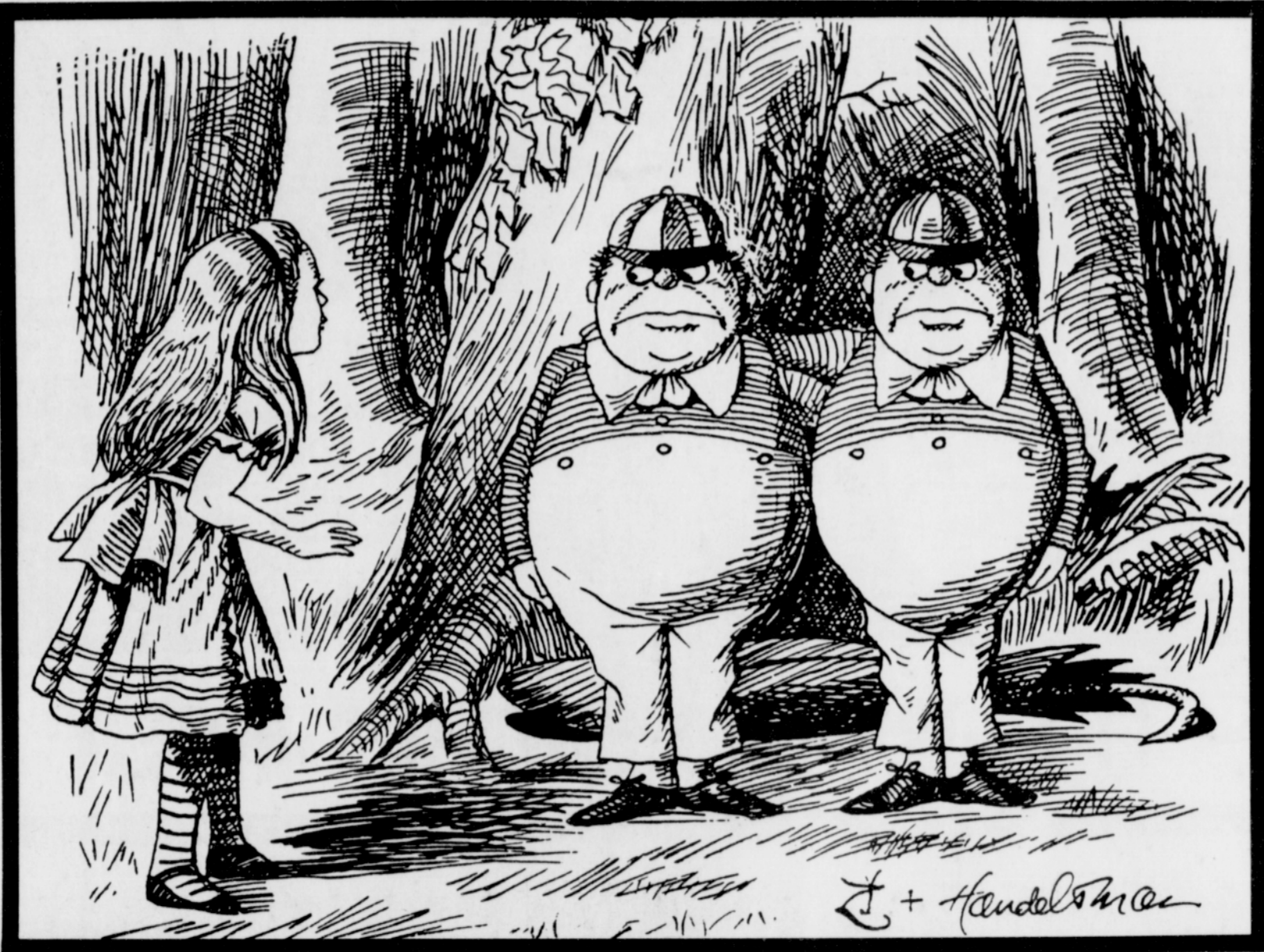


TIMES EAGLE

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In a dark time the eye begins to see.
- Theodore Roethke

J. B. HANDELSMAN



"I beg your pardon," said Alice, "but which of you is the Democrat?"

DOWN THE MILKY WAY

BY NORMAN CRAIG

The day after the elections I was talking to my friend Raymond who was born and raised in Tillamook County but still keeps his sense of humor. When we realized that C/Span wasn't going to analyze our local returns Raymond said:

"There's more cows than there are people in this county. What we ought to do is run a cow for county commissioner. We've got the votes to put one in office."

The idea had an immediate novel appeal but it seemed to me I could foresee some problems.

"What about qualifications?"

"Shucks," Raymond replied, "so long as she's a bona fide resident of the county that's all that matters. Voters don't care about qualifications. The records show that."

Well, I had to admit he was right on that one, but I had to ask:

"Just how do you see this working? I mean, to start with, how do we decide on a candidate?"

"Off the top of my head I would say it should be one of those black and white cows. In all the years I've been driving around and through Tillamook County it seems to me there are more of the black and white ones than any other color. I figure the smart thing to do is pick the color that will get the votes and a black and white cow will vote for another black and white cow rather than any other kind. It's the same as the Democrats and Republicans."

"Wait a minute," I blurted. "I've driven a lot around here myself and I know there's lots of black and white cows but I've also seen a fair number of those black and brown and red ones, and there's a kind of fawn-colored one that might have some voter appeal. How are those different colored ones going to feel about having a black and white cow represent them?"

"Doggone it," he said, with a note of irritation in his voice. "Sometimes you act like you don't watch television. Cows are just like people.

They know that the cow that gets the votes is the one that gets the office. If there's more black and white cows and they swing the votes then it doesn't matter about the other sets of cows. That's democracy."

I guess I had forgotten my eighth grade civics class or else I wouldn't have let myself get caught on that one. Still, I couldn't help but feel I ought to push a little bit more...

"One thing that bothers me, Raymond, is it seems to me there are more cows in the area right around Tillamook City and that means more black and white cows. Doesn't that mean the chances are a cow from down there will get swept, or maybe I should say herded into office?"

"So?" he said, raising his eyebrows slightly.

"Well, it seems to me that means the power will be concentrated down around Tillamook City and the cows around here won't have anything to say about what goes on down there in the courthouse."

"How's that different from what goes on now?" he asked.

Of course he had me there. I even found myself wondering whether there wasn't something to be said for not having anything to do with what goes on in the courthouse.

"Let me tell you something about cows," he continued. "The best thing about a cow is that it knows it's a cow. You won't find no cow getting uppity and thinking it knows how to do more than just be a cow. You don't ever hear of any cow going in and trying to tell folks how to run the cheese factory or suggesting a new system for milking or changing the way the hay is stacked or any of that nonsense. No sir, a cow just goes about the business of being a cow and leaves the thinking to them that're supposed to do it."

"So what you're saying is that so long as you have people with know-how in the important jobs and don't interfere with them it doesn't matter what kind of cow you elect?"

"Exactly," he said. "But of course you want to pick a cow with a pleasant disposition. Folks generally like a cow that won't go around picking fights and riling up the electorate. That just makes it hard on the next cow that runs. That's a rule that works from the President right down to county commissioner."

I began to see that Raymond's suggestion wasn't just off the top of his head. He had evidently thought his way through it pretty well. One more thing occurred to me:

"What about campaigning? I don't know much about cows but from what I've heard they have to stay on the job. They can't come up here to campaign."

I guess this was the opening he had been waiting for.

"Heck, man! That's the beauty of this plan. They know it's already been decided down in the city. This way we don't even have to put up with that quick visit they usually make a week or two before election day. Why, don't you see this is as close to an honest campaign as we're ever likely to have! Running a cow will cut out all that bull."

"You said at the start that it could be one of those black and white cows like as if you didn't have any particular cow in mind, but I'll bet you have some idea."

"Well," he said, blushing slightly, "as a matter of fact I did see one up on the Wilson River highway just last week. Nice soft eyes, no horns at all, and a great record on milk production. I just know if we nominated her it would be in the bag."

"Udderly ridiculous!" I snorted.

"Cowabunga," he replied.

Norman Craig lives in Manzanita.