

strength to a cauldron of virulent anti-Westernism, its oil treasures lying provocatively exposed to lustful Russian eyes." Then there are the world-statesman touches:

The King of Afghanistan recalled for me .... Alexei Kosygin confided to me .... Charles de Gaulle told me .... Ayub Khan of Pakistan told me .... Herbert Hoover and Douglas MacArthur referred to the Chinese that way in conversations with me. So too, for that matter, did Leonid Brezhnev .... Harold Macmillan, then the British Prime Minister, astutely commented to me .... I vividly recall a conversation I had with Whittaker Chambers....

Nixon remains, above all, the master of the sententious generalization. "There is a sort of Gresham's Law that applies to public discussion: bad ideas drive out good, and attention given to empty posturing shuts the door on serious debate." The empty posturing of *The Real War* will put Nixon's Law to test. I am sure that the old trickster, as usual, underrates the intelligence of the American people.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., is currently working on the fourth volume of *The Age of Roosevelt*.

## The Famished Future

**The Lean Years: Politics in the Age of Scarcity**

by Richard J. Barnet

Simon & Schuster, 317 pp., \$12.95

Reviewed by Axel Madsen

A SENSE OF transition pervades the body politic. Recession, diminishing national power and influence, and shrinking resources in a standing-room-only world make us feel, very intensely sometimes, that the political system is drawing to a close, that something *should* happen. The era that began in the ashes of World War II 35 years ago now seems to be coming to an end and already begins to look like an extraordinary, if brief, epoch of optimism, expansion, and affluence. The new mood is a loss of faith, sometimes rooted in a sense of betrayal. We worked hard; we believed in the future; we followed all the rules of success.

What is happening? We are relentlessly questioning our civilization, both fearful of tomorrow and hopeful. As André Malraux said toward the end of his life, "Nobody announced the end of Rome. Saint Augustine talked very seriously about it but when he did Rome had already fallen. We, on the other hand, are engaged in wholesale chal-

lenge and are aware of a civilizational crisis." Enemy truths square off. Contemporary Cassandras are turning doomsaying into a sizable cottage industry while latter-day Panglosses, incurable and often misleading optimists, think human ingenuity, in the form of leading-edge technology, will save us.

*The Lean Years: Politics in the Age of Scarcity* announces the end of our Rome. Richard J. Barnet's hindsight is 20/20, but the powerful political vision he wishes were the possession of our leaders (in the largest sense) eludes him too. Inevitably perhaps, since a spiritual revolution—which, in the end, is what he demands of us—is hard to program. Change of this kind is, by definition, subterranean and the major facts of our times are not events but shifts in concepts. *The Lean Years* is nevertheless a forceful summing up of where we are.

Pulling all his strings together, Barnet comes to the disturbing conclusion that scarcity is threatening the basic building block of the current world order—the nation-state. Too small to plan global distribution of resources, yet too large to respond to local and individual needs, the nation-state is caught in a political tug-of-war. As shortages appear and the struggle for food, water, and natural resources intensifies, regional and ethnic loyalties surface. Antipathy toward central authority is on the rise everywhere and separatism is a worldwide phenomenon. The Great Russians who run the Soviet Union are about to become an ethnic minority. Scotland, Quebec, Catalonia, Brittany, and Kur-

destan seek "devolution" from London, Ottawa, Madrid, Paris, and Teheran respectively while parts of India, the Middle East, and Africa are torn by language strife and resistance to dominant national cultures. In the United States, geographic, economic, and ethnic splintering is beginning to overwhelm the melting pot as Sunbelt and Frostbelt fight for much more than federal allocations. "The promise of governments to create an affluent society that embraces the whole national territory is losing credibility everywhere," Barnet says. Between nations and within nations the perception of scarcity leads to naked class war and the costs of maintaining islands of affluence are escalating:

To support the military and police, there is a steady drain of money, oil, copper, manganese, cobalt, and other resources. The defense of privilege now requires a style of life that robs it of its pleasures. Double locks, armed guards, and healthy fear of kidnaping and assassination are the rewards of achievement almost everywhere.

What can we do? If we discard both the Malthusian idea of a world order regulated by famine and the attitude of mindless technological assault on nature through indiscriminate industrialization, rapid evolution is the only answer. With the six billionth human being about to be born, Barnet says we must accept the notion of truly universal, yet limited rights for each individual because only "human beings with a sense of their own value and a minimum sense of security can make responsible deci-



CHENEY

"I'm afraid, gentlemen, that this is a valid Get Out of Jail Free card."

sions about how many children to have. The second survival principle is the protection of communities." This would require an economic devolution, a shift away from the "balance" of both global and national economies to a kind of revived Middle Ages where communities achieve internal balance and sever their life-and-death dependence on distant economies beyond their control. Barnet admits that the superpowers are far from accepting this even in principle, and interdependence of one sort or another is unavoidable, but he wants us to increase the self-reliance of local economies both within nations and worldwide. To emphasize his point, he says that national security has little meaning if the local economy cannot provide jobs, if food, shelter, energy, health care, and transportation are not available at prices people can afford, "and if people are afraid to walk the streets."

Five years ago, Barnet, a distinguished economic and political analyst, wrote, together with Ronald Müller, *Global Reach* and gained a measure of notoriety with this frontal (and, at the time of the Gulf Oil, Lockheed, and ITT scandals, predictable) attack on global enterprise. Barnet and Müller

wrote that the internationalization of business—indeed the increasing integration of the world economy—was the root of much postwar evil in both the industrialized West and the Third World. Since then Barnet's vision has darkened and if multinational corporations are still wicked, he sees little hope in federal governments as economic leaders. For most of his 317 pages, Barnet looks back and explains too much (after Anthony Sampson's *Seven Sisters* we don't need another retelling of oil company imperialism), but when he gets to his central thesis on page 295 he hits the stride of classical stoics—Zeno, Epictetus, and, especially, Marcus Aurelius, the emperor who year after year witnessed the gradual crumbling of Rome's frontiers and keenly sensed the end of his age.

*The Lean Years* is about physical resources and political power. Whoever controls world resources controls the world in a way that mere occupation of territory cannot match. Besides oil, Barnet takes us through the scarcities of minerals, food, and water, the globalization of enterprise and labor (from "export platforms" in go-go Third World countries to illegal immigration in West-

ern Europe and America) to interdependence, a favorite word of politicians in recent years. Barnet cannot quite make up his mind whether certain shortages are fabricated. Like many people he wants to believe that the oil crisis is manufactured by the oil companies and OPEC, and he goes to some lengths to tell us that "proven reserves" merely means a company has determined it can pump out the oil and that the expression has nothing to do with the level of ultimately recoverable resources. Much of this has been said before, but Barnet manages to touch important bases:

When a society buys an energy system, it is also buying a particular path of development. By choosing to burn up imported fossil fuels, to develop new coal technologies, to take the nuclear option, or to develop new alternatives—solar energy, fusion, harnessing of the ocean winds—leaders are also making decisions about how dependent society will be on scarce minerals, how much water it will use, how many jobs will be created, which cities and regions will rise and which will fall, and who will hold political power.

He reminds us that attitudes toward scarcity don't follow traditional left-right ideological splits. Marxists and capitalists alike reject Thomas Malthus's notion of biological determinism and demand uncontrolled development, while conservationists and antigrowth proponents despair of ever making the pie big enough. Spaceship Earth and "lifeboat" ethics tend to be rich people's metaphors. He mockingly says, "A gentle shove, and those who were doomed to die anyway because of their history of reckless reproduction, will make it possible for the rest to survive in comfort."

Democracy may have to be scrapped. Barnet quotes Robert Heilbroner and other spokesmen for the liberal left who wonder whether democracy can be reconciled with political and ecological stability, and admits that such views provide the ideological rationalization for dictatorships, but he himself says the choice is more democracy or much less.

The effective participation of people in making the decisions that most directly affect them is the precondition for economic, political, and spiritual liberation .... When masses of people come to see themselves as either extensions of machines for making things they can never have, or as surplus population, or as the inmates of a zoo where things called "basic needs" are periodically dumped into the cage, they lose the incentive to create. They lose and the world loses immense resources—imagination, creativity, love, and power."

Barnet concludes, a rational system of sharing and a renewed sense of our deepest collective folk wisdom are the keys to survival in an age of scarcity. We must become conscious of the collective



"His leg appears to have been broken in two places:  
Eddie's Lounge and Al's Bar and Grill."

unconsciousness of the human race so we can invent the institutions that will allow us to do what we must do. If only *The Lean Years* had gone on from here!

*Axel Madsen's tenth book, Private Power, will appear in the fall.*

## Father of the Bomb

**Robert Oppenheimer: Letters and Recollections** Edited by Alice Kimball Smith and Charles Weiner

Harvard University Press, 376 pp., \$20

Reviewed by Michael Brown

ONE WOULD THINK that anyone who could dazzle all of Harvard as a chemistry student, greatly impress his most sophisticated friends with a deep knowledge of literature and philosophy, and direct the secret laboratory in which the atomic bomb was created must have been a strongly independent personage, with a view of the world that was at once unique and severe. But after an exhaustive search of archives and personal desk drawers, Alice Kimball Smith and Charles Weiner have pro-

duced a hitherto unpublished series of correspondence showing, in fact, that Robert Oppenheimer, the father of the A-bomb, was not of that kind. To the contrary, this important collection of Oppenheimer letters, written between 1922 and 1945, displays a highly vulnerable and at times embarrassingly obsequious man whose brilliance was like that of a laser: strikingly intense but, alas, frequently narrow as a pin.

Thus the book will be of as much interest to the psychologist as it is to the physicist. For the student of physics, it presents some fascinating if rather abbreviated technical communication that evolves from Oppenheimer's interest in cosmic rays and his attempts at entering mainstream quantum mechanics, to his later duties of estimating such things as the critical mass of material needed for nuclear fission and the efficiency of the devastating new weapon. But the most telling glimpses are those involving Robert Oppenheimer's remarkable insecurities. They demonstrate not only the instabilities nurtured by genius, but also the mentality that would lead a most sensitive man to fall in love with a most insensitive new technology.

Born in 1904 on New York's West Side, to a family made wealthy by the textile trades, Oppenheimer was a predictably

precocious young student at the prestigious Ethical Culture School. His interest in science developed in his preteen years when his curiosity was piqued by a collection of minerals given to him by a grandfather. As we find through his letters, however, Oppenheimer's main love, in his initial days at Harvard, seemed to be literature. From 1922 to 1925, his voluminous correspondence to Herbert Winslow Smith, who had taught him English in high school, clearly shows the burning ambition to write. Why he did not may also be found in these letters, which many times were cleverly phrased but just as often burdened with a thick, rambling prose. He sent his poetry and stories to Smith, who, it appears, found little to praise. "With most of what you have to say about my filthy stories I agree quite absolutely," wrote Oppenheimer to his teacher on May 15, 1923. "I think, though, that what, in *Conquest*, you so magnanimously consider carelessness, is in reality ineptitude...."

That was perhaps the first sign of Oppenheimer's fawning dependence on others, but by no means the last. Receiving word from a distant friend, he reacted, to use his own verbiage, with "a violent schoolgirl flutter of excitement." And he literally begged for further correspon-

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