

BOOKS:

From Clean to Antiseptic

A review by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

The Year of the People

by Eugene J. McCarthy

Doubleday, 360 pages. \$6.95.

Like everything else Senator McCarthy has done since the Chicago convention, this book is an anti-climax. In the author's defense it must be conceded that political autobiography is not one of the higher art forms. How many really honest books can one recollect from politicians, especially from those still in the game? Yet McCarthy had displayed sufficient originality, both as a man and as a campaigner for the Democratic nomination, to encourage the hope that, when he wrote his book, he might again break precedent. Even those, like this reviewer, who had reservations about him in 1968 have never doubted the force and sharpness of his mind nor his ability to make a lasting contribution to the literature of American politics. Perhaps some time he may; but this perfunctory work, alas, is not it.

The Year of the People is a routine recital of the circumstances which led McCarthy to run, the evolution of the campaign, the dénouement in Chicago, and the significance of the effort. As a friend of poets and a poet-aspirant himself, McCarthy has shown concern with the use of words and the integrity of language. But, except for a few "lyrical" nature passages, the writing is bland and flat—hurdy-gurdy narration interspersed with digs at politicians and reporters who displeased him, with paraphrases of his speeches, and with excerpts from his favorite poets (ranging from Whitman, Yeats, and Frost through C. Day Lewis, Robert Lowell, Robert Bly, and Philip Booth to Thick Nhat Hanh, John Haag, William Stafford, Sue Brown, Gladys Johnson, Caroline Kandler, Annette Williams, and Eugene J. McCarthy).

The general effect is one of those famous McCarthy campaign addresses in which he seemed increasingly bored himself and left his audience baffled and disappointed.

It is too bad. Eugene McCarthy showed himself in 1968 to be not only a brave but an impressively astute political leader. One could wish that he had been stimulated now to discuss the changing environment of American politics that he seemed to understand so well as a campaigner—the impact, for example, of education, television, and suburbanization on the traditional political structure. He offers some heated but not very illuminating passages on the need for party reform; but, beyond this, all we get are some commonplaces about "participatory politics" based on the apparent assumption that "members of the academic community, a large number of nuns, a great many educated young women...business and professional men" and so on had never taken part in political campaigns before 1968. McCarthy himself was around and active when precisely these people (he was one of them) took part in the campaigns of Franklin Roosevelt, Adlai Stevenson, and John Kennedy; and it would have been interesting and useful if he had explained the ways that the "participatory politics" of 1968 differed from that of 1936, 1952, or 1960.

Another striking aspect of McCarthy's 1968 campaign was his fidelity to his own sense of himself—his refusal to say things out of character in order to please an audience or gratify the mass media. One could hope that this would have led to comparable candor

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in his retrospect of the campaign. But *The Year of the People*, so far at least as the author's intention is concerned, is not a very revealing book. It has no surprises for the journalist and not much substance for the historian. The author elects to keep his personality veiled and enigmatic. Yet the book does reveal a good deal inadvertently about the hierarchy of his preoccupations. Having chosen to write about a gallant campaign which enlisted so much hope and emotion among many Americans, McCarthy might have concentrated, for example, on the ideas he was trying to put over or the people who worked with him. Instead, he has chosen to emphasize the things about the campaign that still rankle in his memory.

He spends, for example, an unconscionable amount of space complaining about the press. All the politicians I have known have raged from time to time about their treatment in the newspapers, but generally they are slightly ashamed of themselves in the morning. McCarthy, however, sets it all down in cold blood a year later, icily awarding merits and demerits to everyone who covered his effort. Thus: "Of all the papers that I read regularly during the campaign, *The Washington Post*, day in and day out, was the least accurate in reporting the campaign and in interpreting it" (he still has not forgiven Richard Harwood for the offense of having seen a "doomed look" on his face the day after the Nebraska primary). On the other hand, Paul Wieck was "objective," Harry Kelly "good company," Haynes Johnson "straight"; and "I found the reporting by foreign correspondents—particularly the British reporters—more accurate than the work of the American press."

One sympathizes more with McCarthy for his resentment over distortions of his voting record. But he does spend inordinate space worrying this issue too—rather more than he spends ex-

plaining what, in fact, he stood for. He is quite right, for example, to protest misrepresentations of his position on civil rights. Yet I doubt whether his most devoted followers will be able to find much in this book, apart from a single speech in Boston in April, conveying a very intense concern with racial justice or even much of a recognition of the centrality of this issue in our national life. However virtuously he voted, he simply does not communicate the feeling, at least in this book, that the question greatly interests him.

The justification of his voting record is part of a series of rancorous recriminations about the primary contests with Robert Kennedy. McCarthy's bitter dislike of Kennedy is hardly concealed by a few stiffly kind words. "My final judgment," he writes, "was expressed in a press interview on May 21 when I said that I could support Vice President Humphrey if he changed his position on Vietnam and possibly Senator Kennedy if there was a change in his campaign methods." Actually McCarthy was not quite the saintly, turn-the-other-cheek figure his own pious account suggests. He made repeated personal attacks on Kennedy and his supporters; Kennedy, so far as I know, never replied in kind. And one heard far more vicious things said by McCarthy backers about Kennedy than by Kennedy backers about McCarthy.

At Chicago McCarthy told Stephen Smith, in making an offer to support Edward Kennedy after the first ballot, "that because of the campaign which had been run against me, I could not have done the same for Robert Kennedy." He seems puzzled that, after this gratuitous comment about a man who had been cruelly murdered a few weeks before, he did not hear "either directly or indirectly from Steve Smith or any other spokesman for Edward Kennedy again during the convention" and that the next morning Smith was

making phone calls on behalf of George McGovern. The neatest example of McCarthy's attitude toward the Kennedys, with its mixture of ostensible friendliness and inextinguishable venom, is this:

There was also one pleasant short meeting with Mrs. Joseph Kennedy in the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. When I introduced myself, she smiled and said, "Have fun in the campaign"—a remark which reflected her openness of spirit and the honesty she had shown in her earlier frank response to criticism about campaign spending: "It's our money and we're free to spend it any way we please."

The author is, I am sure, a more serious man than one would gather from his book. Why, for example, these arch and pointless recollections of chit-chat with Robert Lowell?

After I had pointed out that the land over which we were traveling had once been under the great glacier and had made several references to terminal and lateral moraines, the poet commented that I was becoming a glacial bore. I dropped the subject and listened instead to his comments on wayside taverns selling beer and his observation that windmills had suffered a great deal in Wisconsin.

Thanks a lot. Yet McCarthy, after all, did raise interesting issues in his campaign—not only the inescapable ones, like Vietnam, but subtler questions, like the nature of the American Presidency and the character of the Democratic coalition—and one wishes that he had taken the opportunity now to develop his thinking on these points.

His comments on the Presidency, for example, remain tantalizing but incomplete. He speaks of his "effort to depersonalize the presidency"; of his "concern over the personalization of the office of the presidency which had taken place in both the Johnson and Kennedy administrations, and...over a growing

disregard of constitutional lines of authority"; he expresses his disapproval "of the seeming transfer of power to the executive branch"; and he reprints a speech he gave in Milwaukee in which he said that Presidents should not say "my cabinet" but "the cabinet," not "my ambassador to the United Nations" but "the United States Ambassador to the United Nations." McCarthy added in this speech:

[The President] should understand that this country does not so much need leadership, because the potential for leadership in a free country must exist in every man and every woman. He must be prepared to be a kind of channel...perhaps giving some direction to the movement of the country largely by the way of setting people free.

This view, as the editor of *The Crescent Dictionary of American Politics* must certainly know, is in direct opposition to the Jacksonian theory of the Presidency, especially as developed in the 20th century by Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt. Indeed, it must be said that McCarthy is the only progressive aspirant for the White House this century who has campaigned against the Presidency. After Lyndon Johnson's demonstration that a strong Presidency was not necessarily good for the country, McCarthy's view that the powers of the Presidency should be decentralized has rightly attracted sympathetic attention. But what in fact does he mean? What did he mean when he said in Cleveland, "Has the integrity of Congress, of the Cabinet, and of the military [my italics] been impinged upon by undue extension of the executive power?" If McCarthy's effort is to adapt the Whig theory of the Presidency to progressive purposes, this effort may well be worth making; but surely the reader is entitled to a little more from so thoughtful a politician than a few cryptic and ambiguous

phrases.

McCarthy is equally obscure about his conception of the progressive coalition of the future. His campaign suggested a sense that the new division in our politics was between the educated and the uneducated and that his own effort was to rally the educated and bring about a revolution 'against the proletariat': hence, no doubt, his relative success in the suburbs and among Republicans. But he tells us very little about his own present thoughts on this question, except to say that, if party procedures are not reformed, "I anticipate that a third party or a fourth party will develop on the liberal side with the same strength and thrust that the George Wallace party had on the conservative side in 1968." As to where such a party would find its political base, McCarthy remains silent.

The book has more than its share of errors. The United States did not become

an urban society "between 1938 and 1945" but by 1920. Senator Joseph McCarthy was not a strong force in Washington "after the second defeat of Adlai Stevenson." Lyndon Johnson spoke not of "the tattered sky of Texas" but of "the scattered sky." McCarthy's Fenway Park rally in Boston was not "the first time in the history of Massachusetts politics that people had paid to attend a political rally"; Henry Wallace charged admission in 1948. And so on.

It is a thin, careless, and self-indulgent book. This is regrettable because Eugene McCarthy has shown himself a formidable figure in our politics. His courage in challenging Johnson in 1968 released energies of political change. He has tough and interesting views, both on techniques and on issues. He is a civilized and witty man. His effort in 1968 will remain a monument to political independence and nerve that not even *The Year of the People* will deface. ■

Reprivatization: The Nixon Battle Cry?

A review by Josiah Lee Auspitz

The Age of Discontinuity: Guidelines to Our Changing Society

by Peter Drucker

Harper & Row, 394 pages. \$7.95.

Peter Drucker's tenth chapter on "The Sickness of Government" is neither the best nor the most original in his latest book; but it is likely to be the most influential. It has already become scripture around the White House. Last spring President Nixon gave several members of the White House staff carefully underlined copies of the essay as it appeared in its pre-publication form in the Winter 1969 issue of *The Public Interest* magazine. And both the conservative and liberal bards of the Republican Administration, William F.

Buckley, Jr., and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, have sung Drucker's praises.

The tenth chapter is notable for its sketch of the concept of "reprivatization," a misleading term if it is taken to imply exclusive reliance on the private sector. Drucker uses reprivatization simply to mean the contracting out and devolution of governmental activities to non-governmental bodies, and he doesn't care whether these outside institutions are business, universities, foundations, cooperatives, or semi-public corporations. The important thing is that they

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