

the ALTERNATIVE *to bare the witness and the truth*

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Published remarkably without regard to race, color, creed or (most redundantly of all) national origin — and yes, sex, even sex.

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The Continuing Crisis

• Taking advantage of a relatively tranquil summer, the politicians gathered in Miami Beach on two separate occasions to hold what they call presidential nominating conventions. The Democrats held the first from July 10 to July 13. The Republicans held the second from August 21 to August 23. At the first convention the party whose mascot is a jackass allowed the protesters to frolic within the convention hall proper. At the second convention the party of the elephant insisted that the protesters confine their antics to areas outside the convention hall. The results of the first convention were ambiguous and became more so. The results of the second convention were more palpable, eventuating in the renomination of Mr. Nixon and Mr. Agnew and in the arrest of some 1200 protesters, geniuses, poets and heralds of the New Age.

• The atmosphere of the Democratic convention evoked visions of the frowzy street bazaars of what were once indelicately called "bad neighborhoods." While the Republicans assumed a motif of country club chic, celebrating the marvels of George Babbitt, who — contrary to Walter Cronkite's testimony — was not present.

• Naturally television news covered the conventions as though they were national catastrophes by sending the usual mob of nitwits and floor walkers, whose ceaseless torrent of inanities awed viewers and entertained many

small children. The impresarios of television news also imported scholarly commentators like Theodore White, William Buckley and John Galbraith for their English speaking audiences. Of course better choices for the Democratic convention might have been Felicia Bernstein and Masters and Johnson with Upton Sinclair explaining the mysteries of the Republican jamboree.

• In spite of all the show boating it was Senator George McGovern, Ph.D. who made the most stunning gouge at history by becoming the only presidential candidate ever to have asked his running mate to resign. Fearing his running mate's past behavior might imperil the ticket's popularity, the great man sought a running mate with a more respectable past. He turned to Senator Edward Kennedy and five other possible victims before R. Sargent Shriver, an unemployed landlord, agreed to take the job.

• But there were other historic milestones passed this summer. During July casualties in Northern Ireland topped the five hundred mark when William Henry Creighton passed away as he walked toward his home. In Murillo De Rio Leya, Spain, Pepe, a Spanish-trained snail, set a world record of three feet eleven inches to beat Grand Prix competition from eight countries. In Washington, D.C. the House passed a rigorous

(continued on page 27)

Clod Populism's Man of Change

Politics is hard work. Whenever elections are utterly unavoidable politicians have to conjure up new potions, regardless how lucrative their present swindles seem to be. Citizens are a finicky lot who demand from their politicians not only magic but variety. They can tolerate only so much of a politician's wizardry before they begin to snore or to play with their toes. Then it is time for what pundits are given to calling a New Politics. In the past our really superior politicians realized this and deftly stirred up the citizenry with New Deals and New Frontiers. In the last election Mr. Nixon even tested the winds with something called a New Federalism, and from time to time he has attempted to rouse his dozing majority with something he calls a New American Revolution.

This year the Barnum and Baileys of political science have had to whip up a new show. So they have rummaged through the fossils of American political theory and retrieved that pernicious old species of flimflammy: populism. It is an appalling choice in this Age of Idealism, for populism has never amounted to much more than the politicalization of baseness.

The clod populists of yesteryear promised to beat the bushes for hyphenates, Jews, Afro-Americans, and agents of the Pope. They would spin fanciful yarns about the mysterious puissance of eastern bankers and insist that there were dark schemes being hatched in the back rooms of Chinese restaurants. According to the populist intelligentsia most Framers of the Constitution spent their lives philosophizing with cows and shedding tears over the arrival of every shipload of "foreign borns." To hear them tell it, the only real Americans left dwelt out where the pollen blows freely and where all dignitaries wore Oshgosh overalls exuding a fragrance of fresh cow manure. Naturally the citizenry soon lost interest in such a preposterous act, and the clod populists gave way to sleep-inducing Republicans and unctuous Democrats.

Now, it is claimed, the New Clod Populists are about to have their day. I doubt this will happen, but their brief reappearance on center stage should be good for a laugh. As with the clod populism of the past, our present prodigies marshal the nation's pent-up envy and greed by bawling about the achievements of superior men, whom they deprecate as "the rich and the powerful." By "the rich" they mean those men whose numbers are so trivial that they can easily be ganged up on by a mob — especially a mob of legislative quacks. And "the powerful" seems to mean anyone else who has distinguished himself by attracting the lusts of the yokels and their keepers. Once again mean-spiritedness is being raised to the level of political

philosophy. And clod populism's traditional racism and bigotry is even being fitted out in a modern snakeskin called quotas or proportional representation — two tortured readings of democratic theory which commission a handful of scoundrels to dictate the value of every other citizen, both in matters of law and in matters of employment.

But to be a successful American politician these days, one must be something more than a bigot, a demagogue, a barbarian or a moron. And it is not even enough to be an adroit quick-change artist. As every clever political orator in America will tell you, that which separates the charismatic man of destiny from the general mob of wheezing tub thumpers is the ability to speak in elevated and even inspirational terms about a nullity, a platitude or an imbecility. A true masterpiece embraces all three. Accordingly, this century has had two titans. One was John Kennedy. The other was W.G. Harding. William Jennings Bryan would have made it, but for the reassuring fact that our illustrious ancestors in their wisdom boxed his ears every time he stalked the White House. Nevertheless, at this very hour, one clod populist sweats furiously to surpass these great men of the past, and he stakes his sublime ambition on the same contrivance which served him so well in last spring's primaries. I speak of Pious George from the Praires and the surprisingly potent, if not very original, issue of Change.

Last spring Change became clod populism's special appeal. So also was it a special proclamation, priority, belief, promise and magic wand. It was an oratorical hallucinogen, relied upon by every clod populist from Chisholm to Lindsay. But for Pious George, Ph.D. it became something more. It became the leitmotif of his crusade.

At one point he agglutinated all the razzle-dazzle change beheld for him into one gorgeous passage: "It is the people who have been passed by in American life and are frustrated that they have not had a voice in bringing about the changes that they think would improve their lives. This is a coalition of change, a coalition of conscience, a coalition of progress. It is against the status quo, and I think it represents a majority of the American people!" Now, of course, this is an example of practically unsurpassed campaign spoonery. Not only is it a tushery upon a tushery; it is also wrong-headed and deceitful. Surely not even George believes that the ominous forces opposing him are going to rescind change. As this spinning globe of some three billion passengers careens through the vast reaches of space we had all better hold on tightly and we had best expect some changes. Certain of these changes are bound to be benign, and others will multi-

ply our miseries. But no one with a dash of intelligence will seriously question the ceaselessness of change, not even a presidential candidate. What Pious George really means when he purrs on about change is that under his administration change will have a special character, ushering us into an era of milk and honey. Unlike Mr. Nixon, Mr. Pious feels he has a special relationship with history. He is riding its wave. He will keep America "on course." And somehow he will prevail, abreast with and at home with change. For intelligent thinking persons this would be the ancient sin of hubris, but for a prairie sphinx it is merely presumption refreshed by confusion. Poor George just is not bright enough to be guilty of sin.

Only a pedant or an ignoramus would overrate his intelligence. His dedication to change may bring blood to the cheeks of the moony-eyed in the press corps, and it may summon goose pimples amongst the intellectualoids now so abundant on college campuses and in suburbia. But for a moderately intelligent fellow it has no more impact than moon spots or television advertising. Golf caddies have learnt to treat such incantations with a snort.

Still George believes. For he is unique even amongst clod populists. When the rest of them declared their allegiance to change one suspects they all knew what they were about. Realizing that most voters are inherent grumblers, given to the gambler's blind optimism, the clod populists uttered the ritualistic assurances that they would bring change and change would be rosy. After all just possibly there will be a few dullards enfranchised and eager to vote for a candidate who promises to lighten their loads. The clods might be crude, but they are a savvy lot.

George really does believe. He thinks he is on to something wondrous. How excruciatingly he labors to express it in hues of quaint magniloquence, his face a curious surface of muscles and lumps, his big bovine eyes rolling in their sauce. Innocently he intones his promise and his covenant — change...and nowhere do we glimpse the vagrant grin, the saucy wink, that would indicate a knowing design.

He actually believes that these frowzy sonorities about change mean something. Of course, he also seems to believe that by bolstering their budget the bureaucrats at HEW will be able to defend Israel and that his New Age economists need not be initiated into the mysteries of addition and subtraction and that the voters are going to elect a presidential nominee whose key argument is that if elected no one will take his proposals seriously, not even Congress! Yes he believes all this and more. Propositions so preposterous it would be an impropriety to mention them in this sophisticated journal. Fairy tales that would bounce off little children, and absurdities that would bring waves of glee to a man on his death bed. In the last analysis the most ridiculous thing about Pious George's crusade is not that he is a clod or that every sensible politician in the country left his phone off the hook when George thrashed about looking for a running mate or that he is not able to utter a complex sentence without