

tarian tendencies in present-day West Germany. Third, what its opponents term the *Berufsverbot* is simply not disappearing as an issue that arouses the left—particularly students, who are already facing the prospect of unemployment when their studies are over. One can point out that in West Berlin, where anti-government feelings have run highest, 34 of 12,486 applications for civil service positions were turned down in 1977—a figure that officials consider insignificant but which critics view as dangerously large. Finally, the possibility cannot be ignored that new terrorist outrages would leave the government little alternative but to yield to popular demands for draconic countermeasures.

Although there is at this point little likelihood that the Federal Republic will succumb to any of these dangers—terrorism itself will push West Germany over the brink into reaction just as little as it will engender a leftist revolution—a climate of uncertainty persists. How, people ask themselves, can we stop terrorism once and for all? How seriously should we take charges that nonconformists are being persecuted for their political views? What should one make of the self-censorship exercised during the recent crisis by the media, which cancelled police shows that seemed too provocative and accepted governmental requests not to air videotapes provided by the terrorists? What can we do to make our allies abroad understand and cooperate in resolving the terrorist problems faced by West Germany?

Doubtless the greatest uncertainty concerns the future relationship between intellectuals and the rest of the country. Politicians are for the most part dedicated to the preservation of predictability

in public life and the promotion of an even higher standard of living, values shared by the population at large. In contrast, a certain anti-political bias and idolization of those who break society's rules in the pursuit of some absolute end have always characterized the German intellectual scene. This latter stance was bolstered by the lesson drawn by many from the Nazi experience: that the intellectual above all must be prepared to risk everything to defend the individual and the masses against state encroachments and demands for conformity. The reality is that the masses are not much interested in the kind of defense offered by intellectuals. What is more, they are inclined to see the latter as being largely responsible for kindling student unrest in the first place and then, through their excessive criticism of the Federal Republic, nurturing terrorism while proclaiming their innocence.

In a society in which intellectuals play a major role in setting the tone of political discourse, this conflict is highly significant. Central to it is the difficulty of, first, finding means of political expression that are not destructive of the social and political fabric and, second, learning to see critical views as not necessarily subversive. Historians will not find this a new conflict in German society. The problems of the last decade have nonetheless made it particularly acute; and terrorism has so heated the atmosphere as to render difficult any rational discourse on basic conflicts. The explosiveness of this atmosphere, if not defused, could lead to a serious breakdown of the political consensus that the Federal Republic has worked so hard to obtain. Therein lies the real danger to West Germany of the current wave of terrorism. □

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Eleanor Lansing Dulles

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## The Historian as Gossip

With its misleading assumptions, echoes from past fiction, and unverified anecdotes, Leonard Mosley's *Dulles*\* fails to qualify as history—even though it has been described as serious biography and “invaluable to an understanding of America in this century.”† The multiple defects of Mosley's book are not unique. They are symptomatic of the recent tendency to publish for the large number of curious people who do not wish to make an effort in reading history but who want sensation and relaxation. The aim is to capture the imagination of thousands and thereby enlarge the market for material which is by nature complex and often obscure.

One way to find out how careful a writer has been in preparing his text is to examine his sources. Mosley's twenty-page appendix, “Source Notes,” is revealing. At first glance it seems comprehensive, but on examination it proves to be unsubstantial and vague. There are frequent references to “sources close to the family,” “confidential sources,” “CIA documents,” “British intelligence sources,” “archives,” and other ill-defined points of origin. There are references to the “Allen Dulles papers” which, I am told by the librarians at Princeton, were not made available to Mosley. Parts of the oral history material at the Dulles Diplomatic Library at Princeton were given to Mosley to read subject to definite restrictions designed to protect the people interviewed and the eventual reader of the material. But because Mosley does not identify exact sources, and does not say what specific transcriptions of oral history he used for any particular fact, it is impossible

for the reader of his book to retrace the steps and judge the applicability of alleged quotations to the context in which they are found.

In order to determine when the quotations in Mosley's book were taken from recordings in face-to-face conversations, and when from oral histories taped by experts and always checked back to the person interviewed, I have made many inquiries. I have discovered that in the majority of cases, old and frozen conversations from the oral histories were used. These sources have the advantage of having been corrected by the speaker according to proper oral history standards. They have the disadvantage of having been made long before Mosley's text with its special thesis was outlined. Many of those whose words sound responsive to the author's questions never in fact met him and did not know of his proposed biography—they spoke in general terms and not in the context of the questions raised by Mosley. Distortion inevitably results.

In *Dulles*, the appearance of authority is accentuated by the author's listing dozens of people as primary sources, but the impression fades when questioning discloses that some of these people were not consulted. Moreover, there is what appears to be an adroit attempt to gain added credence by thanking certain people for assistance who actually did not have any interviews with Mosley.

The “Prologue” is especially interesting in this connection. For those who know the facts, it reveals the fictional approach of the book. But this difficulty is not evident to those who cannot check,

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\* *Dulles: A Biography of Eleanor, Allen, and John Foster Dulles and Their Family Network*, The Dial Press/James Wade, \$12.95.

† John K. Hutchens, *New York Times* advertisement.

so they assume the story is accurate. Four individuals are named as "responsible for the account"—along with others unnamed. None of the four was at the Christmas Eve party described. None of them told Mosley about it. There was indeed a small party but the conditions—Allen Dulles' illness and his wife Clover's concern—and events were not those described. The source is said to be interviews, but these interviews never took place.

Chapter one, "Cradle Marks," blows up a minor episode as psychologically important to Allen's character development and the relation between him and the other protagonists. The story could not originate, as Mosley claims, in "sources close to the family." Where it comes from is hard to imagine since it was not in the record. One must conclude that it came out of thin air. At best, it is a wild exaggeration of a long-past event—the successful operation on Allen's foot when he was a baby, forgotten by family and friends in a few weeks.

In the early chapters, the five children, their parents, and other relatives are displayed as representative middle-class characters like those in a soap opera—loving the outdoors, swimming, sailing, fishing, standing about by the lake, often in church, in small, New York State towns. They are described as somewhat sadistic, always competing with each other, and inordinately ambitious. Then, with their education well-advanced, the text exhibits the three main characters after 1914, reacting to the threat of World War I. This material is apparently from scraps of tape recordings.

There follows the parade of great figures at the Paris Peace Conference that produced the Treaty of Versailles. Wilson ill and in hiding, Colonel House maneuvering, Lansing sulking, the Dulleses living it up. All this is spicy reading, some from scattered oral history sources, but does not add one cubit to our understanding of the complex and disastrous international forces at work at the conference. It confuses those who know a little, disturbs those who know more.

Later chapters bring forward the negotiations over German reparation in the interwar years. There are familiar references but the historian is confounded by the roles assigned to Charles Evans Hughes, Charles G. Dawes, and Foster and Allen Dulles. There is also no discussion of Owen Young and his major contribution in the Young Plan. What help is this assortment of people and ideas to the perplexed person seeking to understand the sad story of the pre-Nazi years?

The narrative moves to the momentous question of isolationism and United States entry into World War II. Who thought *what* and *why* becomes unfathomable—a mix of retrospection, allegation, and imagination. Similarly, those who wish for a dependable account of Allen Dulles' intelligence activities in Bern—in 1917 and in the 1940s—must wait some years, since it has not yet been written. In any case, judgments as to Allen's "amateurish" methods and naivete (pp. 45, 48) are not convincing from an author who confuses Jan and Thomas Masaryk, and who implies that CIA personnel had views of events in Paris in 1919, 18 years before the organization was established (p. 61).

Mosley's bizarre account of Foster's return to the State Department in 1950—he had, of course, been associated with Truman and Acheson in connection with the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) meetings and as a delegate to the United Nations—is confused and biased (pp. 249-252). It was natural that Lucius Battle, a young man with no experience in politics, who did not know the key senators or Thomas Dewey or Dean Rusk, should have seen his own role as primary; with the zeal of youth he later wondered "whether I had given birth to a monster" by bringing John Foster Dulles into the State Department... (p. 259). Mosley, by relying heavily on Battle's account, underestimates both the wisdom of the President and the importance of having support in the Senate in these crucial months. Foster had told me that he was reluctant to go back to the State Department but that the President had said to him, in effect, "We can use you, though we realize you remain a Republican and when the elections are at hand you will want to resign and give us Hell." Unfortunately, Mosley fails to consider seriously the issues involved in bipartisanship and the art of getting broad political support for foreign policy.

Perhaps the most significant and pervasive distortion, which can be traced through a series of seemingly unimportant remarks, minor episodes, and major actions, is found in Mosley's account of Foster's attitude towards the Nazis, the Jews, and the German nation. The theme is too important to be handled fitfully, casually, and without careful examination of the record. Mosley seems to be aware of inconsistencies in his assertions but merely relates these to a prevailing sense of guilt over the mistakes in dealing with Germany in the 1920s.

These were matters which I discussed with Foster over a period of years beginning in 1919. They are also matters on which he had written clearly and succinctly in his book, *War or Peace* (pp. 132, 220-223), and in many speeches.

Concerning the Nazi persecution of Jews, Mosley asked me to clear a statement attributed to me (p. 90) but did not take my correction—which stated that in the mid-thirties Foster realized that the Jewish question was the major one. Foster's friends, Max Warburg and Carl Melchior, had told him of their apprehension. He closed his Berlin law office in 1934.

The record is also clear that Foster advocated a strong Germany in an integrated Europe, not a Germany "carved up" (p. 167). And it is noteworthy that Mosley fails to give a correct account of Foster's support for the Marshall Plan and NATO (p. 198).

In this running sketch of history many anecdotes are assembled. While not in themselves important, they are intended to explain the character of these three "ambitious," "powerful" individuals and to explain later views which are ascribed to them in connection with war and peace, Austria, Germany, France, Great Britain, and other nations. These episodes weave the tapestry against which are projected decisive policies and action. The errors of fact continue throughout the official lives of the trio. Corrections now are difficult because of the multiplicity of mistakes.

The thesis that there was a family "network" to run foreign policy presents much lively and often inconsistent detail certain to confuse the careful reader—though some who skip and skim may not worry. The family-network thesis implies the existence of a common view and functional relationships that would make it imperative to contribute to a common goal. It also suggests a conspiratorial attitude which does not survive long unnoticed in Washington.

In my early years in government I spent most of my time with liberal New Dealers; occupied with the development of the Social Security Program. Gradually, in the war years, I became increasingly involved in foreign policy and moved more toward the middle of the political spectrum. By the time Foster became Secretary of State, Allen was fully occupied with the responsibilities of guiding American intelligence. I was busy with clearly-defined tasks designed to strengthen Berlin. The various channels and methods of operation were all within an established framework. My contacts with the office of the Secretary of State were rare.

Neglect of the standards of responsible scholarship confronts the researcher who chooses to turn to this text. Indeed, the problems in this book run so deep that I believe it would be more acceptable if the "source notes" were omitted. Other, well-researched books on Dulles and Acheson by Michael A. Guhin, Gaddis Smith, David S. McLellan, and Louis L. Gerson—based on manuscripts at Princeton and, in most cases, oral histories—have date indications for sources so that one can check the authors' accounts against the primary material and arrive at solid judgments. When exact sources are not given, as with Mosley's book, the whole account becomes illusory, intangible, and without depth.

Oral history libraries provide rich mines for research which become more and more important; but they also present dangers which call for special precautions. In most cases the transcription is done by experts and submitted to the person interviewed for correction. The record of the more carefully conducted histories is reliable. The more casual taping of conversations by untrained writers is less dependable, particularly when the transcript is not checked by the person interviewed. If a transcript is not submitted for verification how can it be trusted as a source?

Perhaps the most likely cause of distortion is the temptation to fragment the interview. Bits and pieces of a coherent discussion are assembled as building blocks of a structure not anticipated by the interviewee and interviewer in the original exchange. Thus an author can tease opinions out of the transcript that are not representative of what the speaker actually believes or said.

Another consideration in relying on tape recordings to fill out history is that some people refuse to be taped and others rush to the recording machine with great alacrity. This introduces a bias which is difficult for the writer to discern. He may take the easiest course and fail to consult other persons who could give interesting insights. In the case of the Dulles Diplomatic Library, for instance, Foster's older son did not wish to contribute. As a result, at least in part, Mosley does not pick up the fact that John Dulles is a professor and writer on Latin America. Moreover, he did not "drop out of college"; and, in devotion to his parents, he established a permanent memorial to them at the University of Texas. Although I informed Mosley of these facts, he did not include them in his records, and so distorts this phase of family relations.

Moreover, it is worth noting that some people who give taped interviews make them concise and balanced. Others are stimulated by the experience and let their memories run away with them. Almost all, however, tend to tire and to wander after twenty or thirty minutes. They become speculative and even confused after the first fine effort and may make mistakes which they have no good chance to correct. There is rarely enough preparation for the interview or verification of the details of past events which are discussed. Recollections recorded tend to become facts.

A few practical conclusions can be derived from these observations. One is that the sessions of recordings should be broken into short segments. More important, those who use transcriptions of recordings should check them against sources wherever possible.

Third, quotations used as excerpts, or even as background, should be checked with the interviewee. The reason for this precaution is clear. In its absence, the repudiation of inaccurate quotations by those interviewed can only come after publication, as in the case of *Dulles*.

The use of tape recordings without checking has led to a rude encounter in the case of the biographies written by Leonard Mosley. His story moves swiftly from one episode to another. There is a wealth of anecdotes and a flood of emotions, feelings, conflicts, rivalries, and exposure of hidden—and never articulated—thought.

The conditions under which readers have had access to the papers of the oral history collection at Princeton are clearly set forth: "the reader (1) will not publish, quote, cite, or refer to any part of the papers without written permission from the Librarian of Princeton University or his deputy and (2) will submit to the Librarian prior to publication all quotations, citations, or references in the context of their intended publications."

In the preparation of *Dulles*, Mosley, I am informed, did not abide by those conditions. This breach of agreement raises serious

questions as to the future use of oral histories at Princeton and elsewhere. Sadly we note that the barn door can be closed, but the horse has been stolen.

Many people have said to me: "It must be as Mosley wrote it, since he taped your conversations." My answer is: "He says he has the tapes, but was the transcription accurate? Was the meaning of the statement as he has given it in the excerpt, or was the intent of the original conversation different? How can the reader judge it is a fair use of the whole conversation?"

Some who were quoted by Mosley without their knowledge (John W. Hanes, Jr., William B. Macomber, Roderic L. O'Connor) have raised eyebrows; Foster's son, Avery Dulles, has written of "dozens of errors." For my part, if Leonard Mosley had shown me the text of what he used, or a considerable part of it, I could not only have saved him from his many misspellings and minor, though still disturbing, mistakes, but have set right some of the background narrative.

The dilemma apparent in the growing use of tape recordings to enrich history raises the question of whether it is wise for scholars or public officials or family members to refuse to participate. My answer is "no," but the writer using the tapes should, as is often the case, be required by custodians to check back before quoting, even if the person interviewed does not make this a condition. If he is not, the compounding of error may continue.

These new biographies would be entertaining but we need the lessons of history, particularly the development of foreign policy, for in the years ahead there will be survival decisions. Since a proper understanding of policy is urgent, resort to the wax-museum type of history is questionable.

In Mosley's book, scores of prominent figures are on display; many of them he actually met. A few, but not all, of those he cites gave him their personal views. Faced with this exhibit of Foreign Policy, the scholar

has an obligation to identify this type of writing for what it is: entertainment, not, as some reviewers say, a genuine contribution to understanding the national past; popular, perhaps, but contribution to understanding, no.

What measures can be taken to further solid research and dependable history? Perhaps, if some of the foundations and benefactors of the arts and sciences set up a fund to guarantee the purchase of a stated number of books published by the non-commercial publishing houses, significant support would be at hand. Foundations could make books available to the hard-pressed colleges and libraries here and abroad—a special aspect of this program could be contributions to the developing nations. It might make possible expansion by the university and other quality presses without fear of bankruptcy.

Other measures could be devised, but money is definitely part of the reason even high-grade publishing houses do not publish sound history. Money is also the problem facing the hard-pressed scholar. Serious publishers should somehow be put on a more even footing with the commercial houses, some of which appeal to a sensation-hungry public.

The times call for more quality in history. □



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## THE PUBLIC POLICY

by Marc F. Plattner



### Electoral College Reform: Benjamin Harrison Never Again

Although few Americans may be aware of it, the nation is currently in the midst of the latest in a long line of attempts to abolish the electoral college. Last year, with the support of President Carter, Senator Birch Bayh introduced a resolution that would amend the Constitution to provide for direct election of the President. That resolution passed the Senate Judiciary Committee by a narrow margin in September of 1977 and is expected to reach the Senate floor sometime this year.

Much of the impetus for the current effort at reform was provided by the close outcome of the 1976 presidential contest, in which a shift of about 8,000 votes to Gerald Ford in Ohio and Hawaii would have given him an electoral vote majority, despite Jimmy Carter's 1.7 million advantage in the popular vote. The main argument of proponents of direct election has been that such a reversal of the popular-vote verdict would cause consternation among the American people and severely weaken the legitimacy of a president elected under these circumstances.

Another danger in the present system is the possibility that a strong, regional third-party candidate may gain enough electoral votes to prevent either of the major-party candidates from winning an electoral college majority. In that event, the third-party candidate would be in a powerful bargaining position, whether the election were thrown into the House of Representatives or he chose to cut a prior deal in the electoral college itself. This of course was George Wallace's strategy in 1968. Although the attempt failed, the specter of another Wallace candidacy in 1972 spurred efforts at reform in the 91st Congress; a direct-election amendment passed the House by a substantial 338-70 margin in 1969, but

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fell victim to a filibuster in the Senate.

Public opinion polls show that a large majority of the American people do not really understand the workings of the electoral college system and would favor a change to direct election. In addition, direct election has been endorsed by a wide range of interest groups (including the AFL-CIO, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the League of Women Voters, and the American Bar Association) and politicians (including Gerald Ford and Robert Dole, as well as President Carter and Vice-President Mondale). Yet many of America's most distinguished political scientists are opposed to direct election, fearing that it will bring certain consequences—largely unforeseen by its proponents—that would weaken the two-party system and the federal balance.

Most direct election proposals, including the Bayh Amendment, require that the leading candidate obtain at least 40 percent of the total popular vote in order to win the election; if no candidate receives that much, a runoff election is held between the two leading vote-getters. This provision is likely to offer an incentive to new minor parties to enter the presidential race in hopes of forcing a runoff and thereby extracting concessions from one of the leading candidates in exchange for support. The 40-percent threshold would also provide a greater incentive for "splinter" candidacies of major-party factions that lose (or choose not to contest) their party's nomination. Under the present system a splinter candidate would find it difficult to win many electoral votes, but under direct election he might realistically hope both to come in second in the popular vote and to prevent the winner from reaching the 40-percent threshold, and thereby have a chance for victory in the runoff.

Direct election would deprive the states of any formal role in presidential elections. It might consequently lead candidates to focus their campaigns on relatively undifferentiated national constituencies and pay less attention to local concerns and ethnic

or interest groups concentrated in particular states. The result would be a more plebiscitary style of presidential elections, with less of the coalition-building across ethnic and regional lines that now characterizes the campaign process. This would prompt an even greater reliance on the media and a corresponding decrease in the importance of state party organizations. Moreover, the logic of direct election seemingly calls for a shift to national presidential primaries as well—a development that would further weaken the political importance both of the states and of state party organizations.

All these arguments in favor of and against abolishing the electoral college were recently debated by a Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Reform of the Presidential Election Process. This group, co-chaired by Jeanne Kirkpatrick of the American Enterprise Institute and Stephen Hess of the Brookings Institution, was composed of a diverse and bipartisan mix of political scientists, journalists, and political strategists (including Reagan advisor John Sears and Carter advisor Patrick Caddell). Throughout most of its deliberations, the Task Force was more or less equally divided between supporters and opponents of the electoral college; but then the group hit upon a new compromise proposal, subsequently dubbed the "national bonus plan," which, remarkably enough, gained almost unanimous support and became the featured recommendation of the Task Force's report.\*

The national bonus plan, in the words of the report, "calls for adding a national pool of electoral votes to the existing state pool of electoral votes. The national pool would consist of two electoral votes for each state (plus the District of Columbia), which would be awarded on a winner-take-all basis to the candidate with the most popu-

\* The report, along with a background paper by William R. Keech, will be published late this spring by Holmes & Meier.