

POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

Attlee. Kenneth Harris. *Norton*, \$25. A Labour party leader, widely considered a political liability, topples a conservative prime minister who's coming off a brilliant war victory and goes on to further the cause of British socialism. This may have been Michael Foot's dream, but it was Clement Attlee's reality. Attlee led Labour to a landslide of Thatcher-like proportions in 1945 and held office until 1951, presiding over the destruction of the British empire and the construction of her welfare state.

Given the flood of biographies of Attlee's rival, Winston Churchill, it is surprising how little attention has been paid to the man who, for the first time, established Labour as a plausible party of English government. Harris's fine portrait helps redress the balance. One of England's best journalists, Harris strikes the right mixture of praise and criticism. He properly credits his subject for the British withdrawal from India while documenting his faults in handling the withdrawal from Palestine. And he understands the irony in Attlee's decision to develop an independent nuclear deterrent for Britain, a choice the Tories now must defend vigorously against Labour's unilateralists.

Unlike his successors in today's Labour party—who have sold out their constituency for the sake of sloganeering ideology—Attlee appreciated that a compromising socialist government would achieve far more than uncompromising socialist opposition. Harris has this moving conclusion: "Aiming for radical change, [Attlee was] ready meantime to accept reform. . . . A moral society was the end—socialism was only the means. Attlee would have preferred to live in a moral society led by aristocrats rather than live in an immoral society led by collectivists. . . . But he led the Labour party on the

principle that unless you can carry opinion with you the party, its programme, and its principles will perish."

This reads beautifully. It also reads like an epitaph for the contemporary British Labour party.

—*Laurence Grafstein*

Flashbacks. Timothy Leary. *Houghton Mifflin*, \$15.95. This book will confirm Midge Decter's worst fears about the sixties. Leary unintentionally reveals the central motive behind the cultural upheavals of that decade: the desire to get laid.

The guru of psychedelics recounts the drug sessions he pioneered at Harvard and his subsequent expulsion from the university, arrests by federal drug authorities, escape from prison, and exile overseas. But what comes across clearest in this interesting but gracelessly written memoir is the ease and regularity with which Leary picks up gorgeous strangers. Frankly, it's hard not to get a wee bit jealous of Leary's descriptions of lolling around stoned on swank Mexican estates or jetting off to Tangiers to turn on William Burroughs.

What's truly astounding is how Leary justified his LSD parties as "research" to academic authorities for so long. But Leary was no hypocrite: he appears to truly believe he was a scientific pioneer exploring "inner space." He thus resembles a middle-aged professor from a Peter DeVries novel, chasing after women for his Harvard Psychedelic Drug Research Project sponsored by the Center for Personality Research.

Despite his claim that he supported only responsible, controlled drug use, Leary's Pied Piper role was a double-edged sword: acid experiments brought a welcome challenge to conventional institutions for many young people, but tipped a significant minority into

madness. It's a legacy he doesn't acknowledge here.

—*Art Levine*

Miranda: Crime, Law and Politics. Liva Baker. *Atheneum*, \$22.95. In her examination of the case of *Miranda vs. Arizona*, Baker assumes that every right-thinking person knows that the decisions of the Warren Court were not only correct, but inviolable constitutional principles. Her subsequent portrayal of all opponents of the excessive protections of criminals as narrow-minded, 19th-century thinkers who advocate interrogation-room torture belittles the subject and fails to address seriously such questions as why not punish those who obtain evidence illegally, instead of freeing the guilty who were convicted by such evidence?

—*Kurt Eichenwald*

Politics and Money: The New Road to Corruption. Elizabeth Drew. *Macmillan*, \$11.95. In this expanded and revised version of her two-part series in *The New Yorker*, Drew details the recent explosion of federal campaign spending that has become "the domestic equivalent of the arms race."

Every reader may not come away convinced the Republic is about to crumble, but Drew's detailed reporting leaves no doubt that there are enormous problems created by the growing rivers of money flowing to congressional and presidential campaigns. For instance, she takes readers behind the closed doors of the Ways and Means Committee, where last year Democrats argued in caucus against taxing an industry— independent oil—that had promised contributions to Democratic candidates.

One wishes for the sake of balance that Drew would discuss the disappointment of some of the

big-spending lobbies over their disastrous performance in the 97th Congress. Despite expensive, well-coordinated campaigns, they lost efforts to water down federal insecticide regulations, the Clean Air Act, and the Clean Water Act. They also lost fights for regulatory reform legislation and a bill to exempt professional associations from FTC jurisdiction.

Drew's final chapter briefly sketches possible solutions to the vicious campaign spending spiral: federal financing, further limitations on PAC contributions and spending, and prohibition of paid political advertising on television combined with providing free air time to all candidates. Though they may have some value, these proposals, gleaned from interviews with Archibald Cox and Fred Wertheimer of Common Cause, are subjected to little scrutiny. One wishes Drew relied less on her tape recorder and applied more of her own analytical skills in exploring their complexities.

—Tom Hamburger

Short Circuit. Michael Mewshaw. *Atheneum*, \$13.95. "Although I had no desire to retreat to the childish myths that dominate most writing about sports," writes Michael Mewshaw early on in *Short Circuit*, "I expected to discover a less complex world than the one I inhabited. I imagined a career in tennis. . . involved little compromise, no ambiguity, no troubling shades of gray, just stark yet reassuring black and white. The ball was in or out. . . . You won or you lost. If you were better than somebody you could

prove it. . . . Reputations weren't bestowed by friends, connections, and tax-free endowments. . . . What purer, more straightforward meritocracy could be imagined?"

Well, that's not quite the way it is, as Mewshaw discovers to his (allegedly) growing shock and disillusionment. *Short Circuit* is, more or less, a diary of six months spent on the men's professional tennis circuit, but there is surprisingly little in it about the actual matches Mewshaw saw during those six months. Instead it is full of revelations of players' "tanking" (i.e., throwing) matches; of under-the-table appearance money for the top stars; of purse-splitting; and, most shameful of all, of preferential treatment—both on and off the court—given to the handful of players who can draw crowds. This treatment includes the decidedly unmeritocratic practice of making sure that the stars get the benefit of any close calls (and some that aren't so close) so that they'll be back to play another day (and tournament officials will be assured that the stands will be full). Tennis, it turns out, is a pretty seamy sport.

This is not Watergate, to be sure, and Mewshaw does not attempt to portray it as such. For one thing, his portrait of himself is not as a relentless muckraker, in the Woodstein mold, but rather as a wandering naif, who just happens to stumble into corruption when all he wants to do is watch some good tennis. He has written this book in such an engaging manner that it becomes fun to watch the scales slowly fall from his eyes. I don't know how much of this persona is

for real and how much is literary device, but the result is that Mewshaw has given us a first: the charming expose.

On the other hand, even if it isn't Watergate, if you care at all about sports, you can't help being offended by what Mewshaw has stumbled into. (You also can't help wondering why it took a non-tennis writer to tell us about it.)

—Joseph Nocera

Three Plus One Equals Billions: The Bendix-Martin Marietta War. Allan Sloan. Arbor House, \$15.95. This book goes beyond the usual criticism of "tiers-of-tender" offers and "scorched-earth" strategies to scrutinize the corporate culture that lay behind last fall's Bendix-Marietta-Allied merger war. The villains here are William Agee, the former Bendix chairman, and his wife, Mary Cunningham—two people who seemed determined to embody corporate America's worst aspects. Agee once actually ordered the Bendix financial staff to prove through a cost-benefit analysis that it was cheaper to take a helicopter to the airport than to drive. Another telling anecdote: When Agee's sister was out of work and ill and had fallen behind on her mortgage payments, she made the mistake of asking her millionaire brother for a loan. Agee put Cunningham on the phone, and she advised her, "Go to the local press and plant a story about how the bank is taking advantage of a young woman with an illness." Cute couple.

—Timothy Noah

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