

Copyright by Jack Minnis,
1965.

We think we need not state, at this late hour, that it's our opinion that Lyndon's Great Society comes closer every day to the classic pattern of the fascist state. (We use the term "fascist" not as a bad name to call someone with whom we disagree, but as a concept which implies a certain definite and specific pattern of basic politics-economic relationships--in plain words, who controls the economic wealth and power of the society, how they control it and what they do with it because of that control and the necessity, from their point of view, of maintaining control at all costs.)

We realize that, to most Americans, this is a bizarre, not to say treasonous, view of the Great Society. To accept this view is to accept also the necessity for withdrawing from the Great Society all forms of political support and cooperation--if, that is, one really believes in the basic political ideals the official spokesmen of the U.S. have always preached but seldom practiced. Indeed, to accept this view, and to believe in these ideals, requires more than withdrawal; they require active and effective opposition, not just to one of the major parties in favor of the other, but to both the major parties and everything that, in practical political and economic terms, they stand for.

To say that this is a radical position is to state the irrelevant. The only consideration, really, which arises, is whether or not the facts, the reality, of American society, support the position. If they do, then we are left with only two alternatives: (1) to continue support and cooperation with developing fascism and; (2) to begin and to maintain practical political programs in opposition to the status quo of America. And such programs cannot begin at the national level, or at the state level. The president and the vice president of the United States, the only two public officials in this country who are elected by the nation at large, are elected (or defeated) because of what takes place in the 3,000-odd county courthouses and many more thousand city halls in the country. The reason for this is that the man who wins an election does so not because of his superior ability, or the honesty of his motives, or the greater benefits he offers to the people (though all these may have more or less of an effect on an election) but because more votes were counted for him in those courthouses and city halls than were counted for his opponent.

This is only to say that the election machinery of the country is controlled in the county courthouses and

page two

city halls, not a particularly acute observation, but one which reformers and electoral revolutionaries often overlook. And, of course, that control extends not just to elections involving the glamorous and highly visible offices such as president, but to every office, county, city, district and national, to which persons are elected.

Now let us suppose that fascism can be stopped, that control of the political and economic power in the country can be wrested from those who presently have it, by electing people to office who understand what must be done to change the country and who are unalterably committed to bringing about that change (and we think, for a variety of reasons, that this is a most risky assumption). What elections would an effective, practical political program focus on? The presidential elections? The congressional elections? The governor's elections? We think not. None of these elections are directed at the structures which control the electoral machinery--which count the votes. Therefore, while there may be an apparent victory occasionally, which puts into a minor legislative or administrative job an individual who would change things if he could, there can be no real victory, no real change, until, county by county and city by city, the electoral machinery falls into the hands of those who are determined to bring that change about. And this control of the election machinery can only be achieved through elections that are focused on the source of the control--sheriffs, tax assessors, tax collectors, boards of aldermen, mayors, county commissioners, school boards, county prosecutors, local and state judges, etc.

One reason we think it is risly to assume that this procedure will eventually lead to basic change in the society is this. The whole theory is based on the belief that these county and city public officials actually are the functional power in their communities. That is, the belief that local taxing authorities could tax the banks, the big property owners, the electric utilities companies if they chose to do so; the belief that if such taxes were imposed, the ultimate enforcement machinery of the community--the men with the guns on their hips--would do their jobs. Too, the theory is based on the belief that if persons were elected to the congress, the state legislatures, the white house, who were determined to bring about a change in the control of society, those presently in control would permit them to function--would abdicate control merely because, legally and philosophically, they had lost. They would have the alternative, obviously, of using the police and military machinery of the country to invalidate the results of such elections in precisely the manner the ruling clicqu of Brazil, with vast U.S. support, is doing today. The odds are, we think, that the financial and corporate elite which controls this country would do precisely that, if they were faced with the prospect of a total loss of

page three

their power to run the country as they see fit.

The people of this country will never actually know whether the theory of control by the people actually works, until they make an effective and practical effort to take control. And if the above analysis is correct, they'll never be able to take control until a significant proportion of the county courthouses and city halls in the country are with them, instead of against them, as is presently the case.

This may sound like an impossible task. We're not sure that it is. The prospect of county control in many of the black belt counties of the South is a very real one. There are thousands upon thousands of new black voters in these black belt counties who will be voting for the first time in elections next year. Of course county and city officials are not elected next year in all the southern states. But, in some of the Southern counties, there appears a very real chance of these new voters' organizing into effective political blocs and accruing at least partial control of the political machinery of their respective counties next year. We think these new voters can find out, next year, once for all, whether the vote is a real tool of change, or whether it's the ultimate realization of P.T. Barnum's axiom: "There's a sucker born every minute." Their experience should then be instructive to the people throughout the country who see the development of fascism, and who wish to stop it.

Such an opportunity has not occurred, so far as we know, since the reconstruction days when there was a sudden influx of new Negro voters in the South. We all know what happened then--aghast when they saw what they had done, the rulers in the north withdrew all protection from the new Negro citizens, leaving them to the tender mercies of Southern racism. We'll not know whether that will happen again, unless the new voters off the 'Sixties make the try to take over real political power. And this can't be done through salavation-army type tactics such as the poverty programs and the rest of the pseude-welfare mess of the Great Society. It can only be done by people who understand what they are doing, why they are doing it and the risks and rewards involved. Furthermore, it cannot happen if the new voters of the South permit themselves to be sucked into the same old "better of two evils" concern about who is governor, or who is U.S. Senate. We're convinced that it makes little difference who is governor, or who is U.S. Senator, so long as the same old fascist crowd remains in control of the county courthouse and the city hall.

What all this means is that civil rights workers in the South, and the new voters of the South, may be the last remaining segment of the American people who

page four

have an opportunity finally to establish whether electoral democracy is a real possibility, or just an elaborate con-game which keeps the suckers happy while their pockets are being picked.

So much for what 's going on at the bottom of the Great Society. Let's take a look at what's going on at the top.

*

*

*

General Creighton W. Abrams was talking to one of the Army's principle civilian support organizations the other day--the Association of the U.S. Army. The general told his throng of industrial admirers that insurgency (like, in Vietnam) stems from "the frustrations of the underprivileged who were struggling to modernize themselves under the pressures of modern society." What the United States has to do, said Abrams, is "promote that condition of stability needed in the world for the orderly progressive development of nations under their lawfully constituted government." Well now, that was a mouthful, wasn't it?

Right. So there we are in Vietnam, concerned about the "frustrations of the underprivileged" and promoting "stability ...under lawfully constituted government." Right? We know the government is lawfully constituted 'cause we constituted it. Just a week or so ago Neil Sheehan, of the New York Times, described the results our "lawfully constituted government" in Vietnam has achieved in relieving the "frustrations of the underprivileged," in Saigon: "Well-dressed women sitting contentedly behind chauffeurs, are a sharp contrast to the growing numbers of destitute beggars from the war born countryside and the ragged children who crowd the sidewalks hustling taxis and selling flowers and trinkets to GI's."

*

*

*

Hanson W. Baldwin, the military expert of the New York Times, wrote last week from the island of Guam. He'd been talking to the pilots and crews of some of the B-52 bombers which daily leave that peaceful island to fly the several thousand miles to Vietnam and bomb away the lives and fortunes of the Vietnamese people. Baldwin described the pilots as "a new breed of young men, philosophic and intellectually curious as well as technically proficient."

Baldwin says that the "philosophical quiries" of the pilots have nothing to do with whether or not they should be bombing the Vietnamese people--"they are convinced they are helping their country"--but, rather, with their remoteness from the war. The pilots suffer, says Baldwin, from "lack of concrete information about results." He quotes one pilot, perhaps a bit more articulate than the

page five

rest: "wedon't feel close to it; we'd like to see what we have done." Thus does intellectual courage come to the U.S. fighters for freedom in Vietnam.

What a pity these "philosophic" and "intellectually curious" pilots could not have been with one observer whose description of the bombing the pilots are so intellectually curious about was quoted in I.F. Stone's Weekly of November 1, 1965: "I heard some planes. The first bomb fell at 6:05 on my church. There was nothing left of it. I ran for shelter to the presbytery, a wooden house adjoining the church. A second bomb crushed it and I was pinned under the beams. Children cried, women shrieked and the wounded moaned....I buried seven of them completely torn to bits....Today nothing remains of all that region. All is razed. As for the poor mountain people whose villages and rice granaries have been destroyed, they can live only as wild bears in the forest. Before the bombardment the loud speakers, in the planes above them, told them not to go into the fields and to stay in their huts. They stayed in their huts and the huts were bombarded anyway....I have seen my faithful burned up in napalm. I have seen the bodies of women and children blown to bits...."

Such are the philosophers and intellects of the Great Society.

Some time ago we reported on the lavish "coming-out" party arranged by C. W. Engelhard for his daughter. We pointed out that the thousands of dollars spent by Engelhard on the dear girl's party came from the sweat, labor and blood of the South African black men whose own daughters are lucky if they do not die of starvation before they reach "coming-out" age.

Now one of Engelhard's colleagues in the exploitation of South African blacks announces another such lavish affair for his daughter. Harry Oppenheimer operates the De Beers diamond mining syndicate, as well as other vast mineral and financial affairs in the racist state of South Africa. Oppenheimer's principal holding company is Anglo-American Corporation of South Africa, of which he is Chairman. C. W. Engelhard owns at least 6,000 shares of Anglo-American stock and is a director. The operations of these two fine white gentlemen are backed by various American and British financiers, among them the Morgan banking house in the United States.

Oppenheimer's daughter, Mary, married yesterday one Gordon Waddell, the son of a Glasgow, Scotland, stockbroker. Mary had her wedding at the Anglican Cathedral in Johannesburg, South Africa. The reception was to be at her parents palatial home. The family imported "thousands of bottles of French champagne for the reception. More than 1,000

page six

guests were expected at the reception, where "more than 100 waiters / black, needless to say / will serve salmon flown Scotland. Caviar from the Soviet Union, shrimp, crayfish, chicken, asparagus, wedding cake" and other delicacies were also to be served to the guests (New York Times, 10-29-65).

There was but one cloud on Mary's happy nuptial horizon (the same cloud, one might say, to which U.S. Judge Harold Cox of Mississippi once referred in a voting rights case). It seems that Mary met a number of black Africans when she was doing social work in Johannesburg and wanted them to attend the wedding and the reception. A family spokesman said they'd have no trouble permitting the blacks in the church--despite the segregation laws of South Africa--but they didn't know what could be done about the reception. South African law forbids not only integrated social functions, but more stringently enforced law prohibits the serving of alcoholic beverages to integrated groups (obviously on the theory that the primitive blacks, crazed by the "fire water", might attack the white women; or, possibly, on the theory that the white women, equally crazed by the "fire water" might attack the black men). "It would be rather discourteous," said the family spokesman, "to invite African guests and decline to give them a glass of champagne with the others."

Such tender sensibilities deserve, doubtless, some kind of award. And, of course, Mary's insistence upon the right of black friends to attend her ceremonies is a much more human and acceptable attitude than that of most of the whites of South Africa. But look at this.

One of the economic mainstays of the South African Government is the complex of financial and industrial companies headed by her father. Just last week the South African embassy in the U.S. announced with great pride, that Harry Oppenheimer had arranged a loan of \$56 from unspecified European banks for the building of a new steel plant at Witbank, South Africa.

Furthermore, Mary and her father and her friends, black and white, must know that those black servants who serve the champagne, salmon, caviar, and assorted goodies, will go home to the incredibly squalid living quarters which South African apartheid forces upon them. All those whites must know, as most of the blacks must know, that Harry wouldn't have the money to fly in champagne from France for his darling Mary's wedding guests, if he didn't use the South African race laws, and the South African police and army, to keep the workers in his mines on the job at the pitiful wages he pays them. (about \$38 per month).

This is just one more prime example of what it costs all the people for a few to be wealthy and powerful; and

page seven

and of the criminal irresponsibility of those whom the people thus permit to reap the economic benefits of that power.

*

*

*

Finally, from the top of the Great Society, on October 22 in Baltimore, U.S. Judge Rozcel C. Thompson sentenced a conscientious objector to three years in Federal prison. Explaining the severity of the sentence, the good Judge said: "The court feels it has a responsibility to the country to be **severe with** sentences," because of the necessity that everyone pay his military dues to the Great Society in Vietnam.

On the other hand, last August when U.S. Judge Sylvester J. Ryan was **sentencing** a group of steel companies for conspiring together to overcharge the U.S. government for railroad wheels, he reduced the fine against Erie Forge and Steel Corp. from \$35,000 to \$25,000 because, said the judge, Erie was in a "precarious financial" situation.

Thus do Lyndon's judges mete out even-handed justice in the courts of the Great Society.

*

*

*

Jack Minnis

November 4, 1965