

## *The New Conservatives*

IN THE EARLY years of the twentieth century William Graham Sumner wrote an essay which has become far better known by its title than by its content. It was called "The Forgotten Man" and it referred to the part of the nation that uncomplainingly went about its business, paying taxes and bills, doing its job, demanding no hand-outs or government subsidies either directly or in the form of high tariffs—the people in short who never got into the newspapers or the halls of congress with their petitions and lobbyists, but who carry the charities, the work load, the lame, the halt, and all those in need as well as free loaders and those who live by good deeds and a fast buck. Franklin D. Roosevelt liked the title of the Sumner essay and used it in a speech referring not to the patient citizens Sumner was writing about but to the third of a nation which then in the deep depression he declared to be ill housed, ill clad, and ill fed. In the election of 1968 the phrase was revived again, this time by Mr. Nixon who said it applied to the hard

working people of the suburbs, those who joined no television demonstrations, took part in no riots, who presumably mowed their lawns and washed their cars and themselves. Nixon was closer to the original text than Mr. Roosevelt had been and he was in fact praising a segment of the population that is vastly larger than a suburban habitat would support and that represents in its power and influence a revolutionary change in American life.

The 1968 presidential election made manifest in the combined Nixon-Wallace vote and in shifting emphases in the Democratic party as well a new pattern not only of voting but also of social-economic stratification and habits of thought. What had been for years a seemingly unbreakable alliance of ethnic, racial, and religious minorities, plus labor unions, plus the liberal intellectuals of the media and the universities has been broken into by long dammed up torrents of public sentiment that have swept aside many of the leaders and policies dominant since 1932. It is an

*ad hoc* coalition that has replaced this old alliance, a coalition of millions of blue collar workers and Southern agrarians, of people from small towns, clerks, storekeepers, Middle and Far West farmers, employees, enterprisers and pensioners, a vast, partly new middle class that is rapidly becoming for the first time in history the class of a majority of those who have taken pride in being gainfully employed. It is a class that cuts across historical cleavages and symbols of status and color and in its proportion to the population and in its potential influence it may be far more powerful than the massed activists of the Kremlin and Mao Tse-tung. For these are the legions of the wage earners, the working people, the makers, they are the squares, the anti-hippies, the anti-pot and acid heads and millions of them have had it up to here with the give away programs and the burnt offerings of the liberal voodoo. Not all of them have broken with their traditional political allegiances but the yeast of change is in them all.

Although many of them are critical of the Negro, they include Negroes and a respect for Negroes who have joined their ranks. And make no mistake about it, Negroes have joined their ranks in increasing numbers as the opportunity has been open to them. A recent newsreel of a housing development on the outskirts of Cleveland recorded interviews with a number of the Negroes who live in a well-kept suburban middle class section they had created. Their indignation at Mayor Stokes' plan to move slum Negroes out from the city to a government subsidized housing development that would be next to their tidy home sites would have matched any backlashes in Cicero, Illinois or London, England. The interviews were most revealing, one neatly dressed Negro woman said flatly: "We don't want any of those project people in this neighborhood,

we've come away from the project by the sweat of our brows, we know what it means to have the handout people at your doorstep." Or words to that effect. These Negroes may still follow the voting habits established during the depression but their sentiments are different now and they too are the unmistakable signs of the new wave, of an artisan middle class that has spread out over the stratifications of the nineteenth century and over the educational gaps that were often more apparent than real, for the children who use the going vocabulary of easy learning with its words like dialogue, communication, power-structure, charismatic, alienation, cultural deprivation, and such are not so much better educated than their parents as they are the parroters of a vocabulary diffused by a swinging technology.

All this is not to be explained in purely economic terms. Many, most in fact, of the rioters in Detroit and Watts were employed, some of them at high wages. The disaffected youth have come from all strata of society; the battle in Chicago was fought far more by the sons and daughters of the conventional middle, middle class people in the suburbs than by the inhabitants of the ghettos. It is the rich who have been conspicuous among the leaders in the fight for bussing, for integration, for open housing, for increased benefits to the fecund mothers of dependent children. It is also the rich, and the comfortably affluent liberals who, having paraded in the civil rights demonstrations and agitated for all the benefactions of the Great Society from bussing to Black Power, continued to live untouched by them in their personal and domestic life. A few years ago one of my liberal friends, an historian, who was doing research in Germany and slowly making his way back home to the city of Washington, told me he was dreading his return. His children were of school age

and most of the liberals he knew—this was in 1962 or 1963—were taking their children out of the Washington public schools, including those who a few years before had been most enthusiastic for integration. And this remark of my historian friend has long since been borne out by the statistics which show that only two or three of the children of members of the House of Representatives or of the Senate now attend Washington public schools which became black far more quickly than the general population of the city as parents voted one way in public and another in private.

An even more striking example of this is to be seen in the behavior of the very rich liberals, especially of those in public life. The Kennedys and Rockefellers have no immediate prospect of being forced by open housing laws to accept Negroes as neighbors or by the policies of school integration to bus their children to a school in the slums. Their passion for the integrated society can be expressed on their own terms and in graceful ways with chosen representatives of any of the races that meet their fancy. Otherwise they are threatened by no invasion of project housing or of people furnished with rent subsidies; their children are not forced into schools where they are regularly chased home at the end of the day by gangs demanding money as has happened day after day in integrated schools in Chicago.

But things are different with the blue collar workers and with the moderately well-off middle classes. Much of what they have in the world's goods and in pride is centered in the house they live in, in their neighborhood. They have fewer options, be they black or white, than the people with the acres of rolling lawns and a wide choice of private boarding or local day schools. It was the way of life of this middle group that was being threatened at every hand by the coercive society of the liberals

who told them through the courts and federal and local governments they had better get to like the new era or else. And it may be noted too that the rich and the very affluent were not in the least affected in their standard of living by the costly enterprises of the Great Society. The rich liberals suffered the deprivation of not one trip abroad or one ball less; they were no Lord Buddhas retiring from the fleshpots of the world; no St. Francises or Simone Weils sharing the life of the poor and distressed. However high their pulses beat for the *Lumpenproletariat* and all the dispossessed they made not the slightest move to dispossess themselves. It was the middle class they called on to bear the burden of their welfare state and it was millions of the members of the middle class that said they had had enough.

This enormous middle class is a truly modern phenomenon; more modern than the hippies who in other disguises have long been with us, more modern than the pot and acid heads, for the drug takers too have a long and disorderly history. But for a great class of wage earners to live well, even opulently with short work weeks, the opportunity for a higher education open to them, aided if they have any talent for the higher learning or technology by private corporations that will pay their way; with art, literature, music, theater on their dials or down the street if they want them; this is something the planet has never seen before. Luxuries that a few years ago were available only to a handful now are taken for granted by the masses who have earned the right to have them. And it was these hard earned material goods that were being defended together with the even more important feeling of having made it, of status, of being a full-fledged citizen who also had the right to say no, to dissent from union leaders, from politicians who had given them little enough choice among all

the legislative panaceas and court decisions that had cascaded over their heads. They wanted no more of the facile promises that bigger doses of spending and more welfarism would at long last make it safe to walk on the streets, to use a park, or public transportation after dark. They were not on the receiving end of the public cornucopia; it was mainly they who were pouring in the taxes on behalf of a war for which they had no enthusiasm and for the welfare programs they knew were supporting too many people as able to work as they were. Their revolt was based on a revulsion against the collapsed liberalism that has been dominant over so many decades far more than it was a crusade for a new politics, a new society, or the call of new leadership toward a transcendent order.

The conservative alliance is a loose conglomerate of many factions, sentiments, and beliefs. Like many other mass movements it is mainly an alliance against something, a repudiation of measures that have not worked and could not work, a denial of the proposition once overwhelmingly agreed upon that it is the state that should provide, the state that must create the great and good society, and the conviction that if enough money is shoveled out on the public sector we may have it. The fallacies in these arguments have been long exposed in a few places; in a few, very few universities, in scattered publications, by a relatively few economists, and still fewer social scientists and writers. The overwhelming majority of these pundits were on the other side but they too have been disenchanted, many of them, and from their advance guard curiously enough have come recently the most vehement denunciations of the facile liberal formulations of the last years. Some of these disillusioned liberals have joined this precarious conservative coalition, but only a few be-

cause it is always the intellectuals who are most reluctant to give up their prejudices or to admit that they exist. An interesting example of this myopia was to be seen when President Johnson to the vast distress of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. appointed Senator Hruska and Eric Hoffer to the commission investigating violence in the United States. Schlesinger said indignantly on learning of these appointments that both these men should disqualify themselves, for Hruska was opposed to gun control and Hoffer had said that the slaying of Robert Kennedy was not symbolic of the sickness and violence of America so much as it was typical of Jordan from whence the alleged gunman had come only a few years ago. Such opinions in Schlesinger's view disqualified these two men, but their real disqualification came from disagreeing with Mr. Schlesinger's prejudices or, if you like, opinions on what to do about guns and on the nature of such political assassinations as that of Senator Kennedy. There has been little evidence that Mr. Schlesinger has been willing to disqualify himself from any commission whatsoever because of his own *partis pris*.

This middle class of the new conservatives may not be cast in a heroic mold. It has engaged in no Long Marches nor does it aspire to, nor in fact did those who followed and fought with Mao over the six thousand miles of the March want to do that either. It could be that the heroic demands of the modern world are of another order although these people too may be called on to fight and die as they have been before in the recurring wars in Europe and the Far East. But another kind of virtue may be needed to live and do one's job in this world of the Great Technology—it may demand above all the ability to participate in the automated society as its master with something more, much more than the satisfaction of spiralling material

wants as the goal to be sought. The United States continues to be the leading power among those who keep communist imperialism from further conquests, the crisis of the cities and of other enclaves of poverty has still to be met, the plight of the *Lumpenproletariat* to be dealt with, and aid afforded to those who cannot provide adequately for themselves without depriving these recipients of the incentives and means for climbing out of their dependency. The United States must refashion a domestic policy based on individual responsibility and a foreign policy based not on collective security, which does not and cannot exist in the present real world of international conflict and divisions, but on regional alliances of nations that have similar interests and the same desire to de-

fend themselves. This middle class conservatism is basically a reaffirmation that a society is made not by government but by its people and its institutions and that the individual not the government is responsible for his actions, that it is to his own efforts he must turn and that law and order must invoke the sanction of force when the other sanctions fail and the burnings begin. But whether this loose coalition will provide more than a stop gap against the forces set in motion in this century under the banners of the Left will depend on the fortitude and integrity with which it proceeds. It is one kind of victory to take over from a specious liberalism; it will need more than the notion that what is good for General Motors is good for the United States to go on from here. —E. D.