

## *A Giant in Lilliput*

**Enoch Powell: Tory Tribune**, by Andrew Roth, *London: Macdonald, 1970.* 393 pp. £2.25.

**Powell and the 1970 Election**, edited by John Wood, *London: Elliot Right Way Books, 1970.* 124 pp. 20d.

IN 1965 the British Conservative Party elected a new leader. Edward Heath, the winner, received 150 votes; Reginald Maudling, his closest rival, received 133; and Enoch Powell, the only other candidate, was far down the field with 15. In office Mr. Powell, unlike both his rivals, had never reached the high peaks. His most senior post had been that of Minister of Health, an office of no more than medium grade, and during the greater part of his tenure he sat below the salt as a non-Cabinet Minister. After the Labor Party's victory of 1964 he became a member of the Conservative Shadow Cabinet, but he was put to field in one of the less important parts of the ground, where points might be scored but games could not be won or lost. Then in 1968 he was ejected from the Shadow Cabinet and relegated to the back benches of the House of Commons.

This reads like an account of a political career of barely relieved mediocrity. Yet there is no more prominent politician in Britain than Mr. Powell. No one else, be it Mr. Heath, Mr. Wilson, or any of their lieutenants, grips the public mind as he does. No one else can command audiences as great as his, except when the bully boys of the Left, especially on university campuses, make it physically impossible for him to speak. He is admired; he is hated; but he is never ignored. Some, though perhaps not yet many, see him as the only hope for a regenerated Britain; others regard him with bitter detestation; no one thinks of dismissing him as the minor politician which the record of place and office might suggest that he is.

Is this of more than parochial British interest? Does it matter to the world in general that the British political scene—set in a country which is now of less than major importance—has thrown up a man of extraordinary caliber? I believe that the answer is clearly Yes. First, in the desert of modern democratic politics, where only pygmies appear to flourish, the emergence of a man of genuine excellence of mind and character, if Mr. Powell be such, is an event of importance to political life everywhere. Secondly, Mr. Powell has principally made his mark in fearless exposures of the emptiness, self-contradictoriness, and falsehood of the collectivist notions which dominate our time. Now the labor of rolling back the collectivist flood in the world of politicians and men of affairs is fit for a super-Hercules. Some of us may look with sympathy and respect at men like Senator Goldwater and Governor Reagan but conclude that the task is beyond them; indeed that if they are the free society's best available champions, it is lost. The distinguishing mark of Mr. Powell is that even his enemies recognize him to be a champion of unique quality. It is no fantasy to believe that he has it in him to turn his country's footsteps back to its one time moral greatness. If that happened it would mean the end of our monstrous Welfare State and socialist interventionism, and the reverberations would spread from Chile to the Oder-Neisse line. There is, I believe, no other man in the Western political world for whom such a claim would not be obviously silly.

What differentiates Mr. Powell from all other contemporary politicians? His admirers would say intellect and integrity. His enemies would say intellect and a skillful but fraudulent show of integrity which other politicians would not dare to make.

Consider the evidence. That he was in his early days an outstanding Greek scholar—a full professor at 25—is sometimes made much of, but for the student of public affairs it is not the most cogent evidence of truly exceptional intellect. There have

been other men of high academic achievement in British politics—Balfour, Haldane, perhaps Asquith, and in World War I, Smuts—who, at least in retrospect never shone in quite the way that Powell does (though it is interesting to note that, like Haldane, he was at one stage too easily taken in by nineteenth century German philosophy and hence regarded Germany—ante-Hitler—as his spiritual home). Nor is the brain power that took him from private to brigadier in the war, or enabled him to master numerous languages other than those of the ancient classics, or sustained him in the production of the definitive history of the medieval House of Lords in the midst of busy political activity.

What in my opinion is truly remarkable about Powell is his capacity, without academic training therefor, to examine the intricate complexities of political and economic problems and, whether right or wrong in his conclusions, reach unerringly the essence of the matter in hand. He has in my experience never made a speech, in or out of Parliament, in which he has not shown his hearers how a fine mind reasons, or has not displayed for them the underlying issues which ought to determine the verdict of the debate. No cliché falls from his lips; nor any slurred argument which would arouse the enthusiasm of his supporters merely because its conclusion appeals to them. Untrained as an economist in the lecture room or tutorial study, he produced an analysis of the national incomes policy (i.e. wage and price guidelines) which was a masterpiece of pithy, acute, and penetrating reasoning. He speaks and writes as if his countrymen were capable of serious thinking, because he himself is incapable of anything else. Hence, unlike some others of academic bent, he never talks down to an audience. For if his hearers are assumed to have minds to think, he does not need to do so.

So much for intellect. What about integrity? Is it genuine or sham? Is it what we may reasonably expect from a decent politician, or is it something out of the or-

dinary? Even Powell's enemies concede that in his speech to the Commons on the scandal of the Hola Camp (where some Mau Mau detainees were done to death), in his resignation from the Treasury in 1957 on a point of principle (mocked with typical flippancy by Mr. Macmillan), and in his refusal to serve in the Douglas-Home Government (because of the way in which Macmillan maneuvered Sir Alec into the Premiership), he displayed a genuine integrity of a high order. How then can an allegation of sham be made?

The answer springs from his famous speech of 1968 on the danger to Britain of continued non-white immigration. Nothing else could have been as well fashioned to arouse the frenzied fury of Britain's "liberal" Establishment. "Racist," "demagogue," "British George Wallace," were among the less vituperative descriptions immediately flung at him. Here, apparently, was a politician of high talent but disappointed by mediocre achievement, who had sensed the deep anxieties aroused by the flow of colored immigration and had decided to ride to popularity by dredging up and stimulating the ugly racism and xenophobia latent among white Britons. Where now was the much-admired Powellian integrity? What more debased demagogy could there be than to choose, obviously cynically for a man of his intelligence, such a means to public acclaim? Just so, we are told, did Joe McCarthy choose the communist witch-hunt as the road to power. And when the London dockers marched against Heath's dismissal of Powell from his Shadow Cabinet, was not this view confirmed? For are we not all presumed to know that our dockers are as selfish and bigoted as any poor white in Alabama or blue collar worker in Cicero, Illinois?

The facts suggest a different verdict. First, Powell has never suggested the faintest discrimination in any form between black and white citizens, and in his own constituency his scrupulous attention to the needs of men of all colors is celebrated. One can easily imagine the searing anger

of the speech which he would make in the Commons if Britain ever descended to such discrimination. Secondly, the allegation of a cynical search for a popular line is negated not only by his proven readiness to espouse unpopular lines but also by his surprise at the attention that his speech received. In fact he was in essence enunciating established Conservative Party policy. It was hardly his fault that enunciation by him, rather than by Heath, was naturally of such outstanding force and clarity as to produce a mountainous wave, instead of a ripple, of comment. Thirdly, to foresee disaster, to warn against it, and to propose action against it, is the surest way to attract the accusation of causing it or wishing it. We hate the man who forces us to look at dangers which we wish to ignore, and we attribute base motives to him. Fourthly, Powell's allegedly exaggerated statistics of the future colored population, which were adduced as special evidence of recklessness amounting to mendacity, have proved to be right, or perhaps even an understatement; and it is his critics' statistics that merit the scornful treatment applied to his. In fact the worst that can be said of his famous speech is that he used some tales of immigrants' misdemeanors which he could not substantiate, and that though he presented them as hearsay he ought to have known that the public would take them to be tested evidence to support an indictment.

If the world seeks to know how the mind and character of this remarkable man have been fashioned, it will not do better than to read Andrew Roth's *Enoch Powell: Tory Tribune*. Mr. Roth is a political journalist whose views, as far as they are known, are almost certainly opposed to most of Powell's. Yet it is impossible to tell, in his amply detailed account of Powell's intellectual, professional, and Parliamentary development, whether he is for him or against him. Infinitely scrupulous in its detachment and painstaking in its search for accuracy, Roth's book is a model of its kind. I know of no other biography written by the con-

temporary of a controversial subject which is so punctiliously careful to give the reader a faithful picture, with no features smudged, and no warts added or deleted.

*Powell and the 1970 Election* is concerned with the question "Who won the election? Was it Heath or Powell?" The answer may appear to be simple: it was Heath, of course. Did not Heath battle manfully against the opinion polls' confident forecasts of defeat, and by sturdy insistence on the true issues ultimately bring the electorate round to his side? Perhaps he did. Yet one may have doubts. For all the time there was Powell in the wings, attracting votes to Heath from those who hoped that in victory the Conservative Party would see that it was Powell that the country needed. *Powell and the 1970 Election* shows conclusively that there were many such voters. What we shall never know is how many, and how decisive, if at all, they may have been. Decisive or not, their views will make an impress on policy which will not be erased. It is possible that Powell will be excluded from office to the end of his time in politics. What will not be excluded from the determinants of policy will be the influence of his mind.

Reviewed by ARTHUR A. SHENFIELD